



Photo: Getty Images/Ross Marino

THE BIZ SUCKS!

Billy Squier was a huge rock'n'roll star in the early '80s, notching up three successive US platinum albums and coming up with a drum sound that inadvertently influenced a generation of rap stars. But he claims that a dodgy video then sent his career into a downward spiral, effectively leading to his decision to withdraw from the music business. *Malcolm Dome* talks to Squier to find out why he really can't see himself coming back...

HERE'S A QUESTION TO start us off. Is Billy Squier undervalued? For what it's worth he's in two minds on the subject...

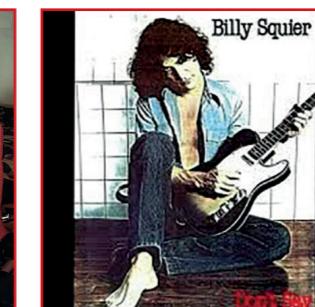
"There are times when I do feel underrated," says the songwriter, guitarist and vocalist. "But on other occasions I feel very highly valued because of the career I've had, and the success I've enjoyed. So I guess that both views are correct."

Wikipedia certainly gives the 70-year-old his due. According to that online font of all knowledge Squier's biggest album, 1981's 'Don't Say No', "is considered a landmark release within the arena rock genre, bridging the gap between power pop and hard rock." His hit singles from the album, including 'The Stroke' and 'In The Dark', helped lift the album to number two on the *Billboard* US album chart where it stayed for an astonishing 111 weeks.

"I was never interested in making a lot of money," Squier insists. "For me, what mattered was always the quality of the music I was producing."

BORN IN Massachusetts on 12 May 1950, though he now lives on Long Island, New York, Squier first made a few waves in the late '70s when he was a member of Piper, a rock band managed by Kiss supremo Bill Aucoin. Despite the patronage of the men in make-up that included a support slot on their 1977 tour, and two A&M albums released that same year, namely 'Piper' and 'Can't Wait', the band couldn't keep it together and split in 1978.

"I never wanted to be a songwriter or a singer," says Squier. "All I ever wanted as a kid was to be like my hero Eric Clapton and be the guitarist on the left side of the



stage in a great band. But when I put Piper together with Bill Aucoin I ended up writing most of the material, which was a significant step for me. By the time the others in the line-up wanted to contribute to the writing I knew that to democratise the situation wasn't the answer. So for the sake of my evolution I had to go solo."

The music Squier made when he was finally out on his own was rock in the broadest sense; big, brash, full of hooks, and with an obvious attention to detail in song construction and arrangement. When I say that his approach somehow reminded me of Queen Squier doesn't drop a beat.

"I was a fan of Queen from their first album and had met them when they were working in America. Freddie Mercury taught me a lot about how to create music. He always treated me with great respect and talked me up to loads of people, and that helped my career no end. Freddie was the person who gave me confidence in how I performed. I'm not a natural entertainer like Freddie or David Lee Roth. I never considered myself a great frontman and I had to work hard to command a stage."

But in Queen it wasn't just Freddie who Billy knew...

"I originally asked [Queen guitarist] Brian May if he'd produce my first solo album [1980's 'The Tale Of The Tape'] and he was very keen to do it. But at the time Queen were hard at work on their album 'The Game', and it took so long to record that in the end Brian had to pull out. Eddie Offord [famous for his work with Yes] ended up co-producing with me."

DESPITE ONLY climbing to 169 on the *Billboard* US album charts the record nonetheless hung around for