

## **Squeeze: Frank (1989) Album Review**

*Frank* is infamous for being the Squeeze album that sold poorly, and resulted in the band being dropped from their long-time record label A&M. Despite this fact, those in the know realize that this is one of their greatest and most enduring albums, my personal favorite even, and is comprised of effectively timeless tunes, and some of the bands best work to date. To add to its greatness there is a wide variety of styles and ideas that make Squeeze fans remember why they enjoy the writing duo of Difford and Tilbrook so much, and why this lineup of the band may be the strongest and the most fun to listen to. This album is also famous in Squeeze history for being the great Jools Holland's last record with the band before he would go off to be his iconic self in his own regard. He delivers an overall stunning performance on this album and definitely does not disappoint... not only in his keyboard playing, but even in his singing on one of the tunes towards the end titled, Dr. Jazz, more on that later of course. That all being said, the best way to dig into this album is to go song by song, lets continue in that direction...

### **Side 1, Track 1: *Frank***

*"... who counts?" ... "Fatty" ... "somebody count," ... "I'm not fat." ...*

A bit of lighthearted banter between the engineer in the booth, who I presume is Eric Thorngren, Jools and Gilson. Jools of course poking a bit of fun at Gilson, a big guy admittedly, but immediately backing away from his "fatty" allegation after Gilson becomes slightly angered it seems. A bit of an interesting start to the album... odd honestly, but a light laugh before we get into the first "real" track...

### **Side 1, Track 2: *If It's Love***

*"If it's love ... I'm inspired ... I'm up late, I'm not tired"*

What a start to this album! Of course, excluding "Frank" ;) This tune is just excellent, and straight off the bat from that excellent guitar intro with Keith's bass sliding around, you know it is going to deliver a good time. Chris's lyric here takes us all back to our first true love, the many emotions, and the overall innocence of not really knowing what exactly is happening. He captures something really special here, and I believe it to be one of the strongest lyrics he had done to date for the band. Glenn of course delivers an exceptional vocal performance, and the tune/arrangement he has put together is very cool, some interesting chords happening around 30 seconds in and the somewhat "droning" (in a good way!) Organ is a subtle, but very effective touch on the top of this cake. To the vocal performance itself, Glenn shows off some great high notes and really digs into that shouting of the title at the end, while being backed up by a great gathering of voices underneath of course. One of my favorite sounds of this Squeeze era is the background vocals, whether it be the other guys in the band, or the random others they would get involved in the recordings; the sound is always so good. Really strong start to the album, and, in my opinion just gets you pumped up and ready for the next tune, and though it is very different in many ways it is one of my absolute favorites of all time ... *Peyton Place*.

### **Side 1, Track 3: *Peyton Place***

*“I watched her lips I wanted to kiss them ... My train of thought went off the rails”*

This intro just drops you into the drama... those little piano grace notes at the beginning are so effective and really put us into a different realm than that of *If Its Love*. Jools' great piano sound blended with Gilson's cymbal bell work and some messing around on the toms create a great pad for Glenn to proclaim on top of, again, setting up a real, dramatic introduction for this song. Give it a few seconds though, and Keith will lay down a fresh, solid bass groove, and Matt Irving will show us how tasteful an accordion can be, a difficult feat honestly! It is right after all this that another strong Difford lyric begins, so strong is the start of “Her hair hung across her face, Like a bush hangs across a wall,” the imagery is not lost on anyone, and he paints an excellent picture throughout much of these lines... one of my favorites comes a little later though in – “So she gave me a lift back home ... Somehow I felt so nervous She drove so slowly on the road,” I can just see this scene in my head, so great, and so intimate. Also of note is the iconic Chris and Glenn octave singing that is present in the chorus, while they seem to get to do this less and less as the band goes on, I have found, it is always exciting to hear and despite having heard that sound so much, is still fresh to me with each listen. While this is almost a perfect track in my opinion, two standout performances just take it to the next level really, Keith Wilkinson's bass, and Jools on a rather important piano part... these both bring me much joy, but beyond that, just make this tune so fun to listen to. Keith jumps around with agility through some cool chord changes, and shows off his really unique bass sound here, just great stuff all around. To the Jools end, it would be impossible to talk about this track without mentioning Jools' piano solo... it is just astonishing and is almost a final little love letter to his whole Squeeze piano career. The solo itself is almost perfect, builds very nicely and the energy radiating off of it is immense, each time I hear it, I feel like a kid on Christmas... enjoying every little bit of it, what a solo! A short coda ends off the tune and recalls the beginning, and the final, almost chiming of the piano ends this tune with grace and style. A masterpiece of the entire Squeeze catalog, and it is possible this is the best track on the album.

### **Side 1, Track 4: *Rose I Said***

*“The thump thump of her footsteps went right up the stairs ... The cat ran for cover to the living room chairs”*

This track to me is one of Gilson's greatest drum performances ever, period, and a very great Chris lyric as well, lots of fun. The guitar intro brings us back to a similar feeling of *If Its Love* and Gilson's machine gun like snare gets us kicking into the groove, him and Keith really lay this down well. It is here I will mention that the drums on this album sound perfect, the tuning, the weight they carry, etc., it just all works very well for each and every tune. Without too much thought on it, I am wanting to say this is one of Gilson's greatest album performances from his entire career, so killer. Anyway, back to the tune, the lyrics begin and so start a new Chris Difford kitchen sink drama, there is so much great stuff happening lyrically that it would be

effectively impossible to cover it all here, but fellow Squeeze fan and friend James Griffiths covers the lyrics pretty well in this video...

Link: [https://youtu.be/qpjsNoPT0g0?si=tD\\_MDo4k-c3pQcIx](https://youtu.be/qpjsNoPT0g0?si=tD_MDo4k-c3pQcIx)

Anyway, this musical drama unfolds like a stage play, and once again the imagery is heavily present, cats running for cover... sandwiches being swallowed... and the flaring of noses even. There are some really cool samples of background noise and talking that happen right before the third verse that are very different for Squeeze, but at the same time very, very effective in this case, and particularly for this song. Right about here in the track, when the samples show up, there is also one of the greatest Gilson drum fills ever, ever! A somewhat raucous snare/tom “thing,” that just takes over, and backs off as fast as it became prominent – with the single hit of a snare; so much fun to hear for the first time. This fill literally leads immediately to a great countermelody type idea in the organ under Glenn singing of “I admit that I liked her but that's all it was...” and it is a cool new texture/flavor we have not heard yet, things like this make this moment really fresh, in a great way, despite the fact that we are in the middle of the third verse of the tune. The intensity only builds from here and is just infectious... cannot help but dance along, or air-drum along even when this one comes on... the outro is simple and fades with some background noise and talking sampling as before... bringing this kitchen sink drama to an excellent close.

### **Side 1, Track 5: *Slaughtered, Gutted, and Heartbroken***

*“Patience on the verge of breaking ... I'm kicking cans around the street ... Like a bad cold I need shaking ... Like a fool I have to cheat”*

We have arrived at our first Chris lead vocal on the album, and it is one of his strongest performances ever in my opinion. When I think of Chris's vocals usually... I think of that deep croaking that we know so well for singing an octave under Glenn, but here, it is very cool to hear him start stretching his range a bit more, and it sounds great, do not be alarmed though, he hits some great low notes here as well that just have so much great weight to them, a real crispy and substantial performance from him. Another element that shines on this track is the music itself. We are in this slightly bluesy, shuffle type thing, with a really cool Freddy Green style four-to-a-bar comping in the guitar, total jazz pad for Chris to sing on, really cool style to hear the band vamp on. Once again, and effectively always, Chris's lyrics paint a very distinct picture here of a man down on his luck, singing an overall depressing lyric. There is a slight added contrast in that the music is not necessarily “sad,” or “depressing,” to accompany this somewhat dark lyrical mood, and instead it really is basically neutral. Great guitar solo here from Glenn about halfway through which is just tasteful as can be, again, this little odd jazz vibe they have acquired for this is just fascinating, and you can tell its being taken serious with the amount of charm and style present. It's an overall simple track and contains some Squeeze essentials; the usual great lyrics, tasteful guitar work, good piano work, that adds a lot to the bluesy vibe, and a solid style that is only enhanced by Keith and Gilson's solid keeping of time.

### **Side 1, Track 6: *(This Could Be) The Last Time***

*"I'm in tune and I'm in love ... I'm a piano that's made out of fruit"*

Admittedly, this is just about the only tune on the album I do not find myself completely enthralled with as I do all the others when I listen to the album, it's unfortunate but there are just some things that do not stick for me. The lyric is just about the only standout for me, some great lines in "I'm the salmon who made it back upstream," and "I'm a slightly chipped antique ... In a market going cheap ... That someday will be worth a thousand pounds," but even among the other lyrics on the album, which are mostly incredibly strong, it is a bit of an odd one, and I find it a little hard to follow. This is not helped by some of the musical choices, I overall enjoy the arrangement of the verses with some great drumming by Gilson and some nice subtle guitar work underneath, but the music going into the chorus... "If I fall in love again it could be the last time ... If I fall in love again will I repeat" ... with the voices almost sounding in slightly percussive "hahs" is not really attractive to me as such a core part of the arrangement, the introduction shows of this idea as well. There is a guitar solo in this tune that feels a bit too short and is flavored with a bit of interesting sounds to start it off that feels a bit muddy, again not bad, but just a bit of an oddity. We do get to hear some Chris and Glenn octave singing which is always a treat so you cannot go wrong with that really. Overall, this would be the one dud for me on this entire album, and it is a real shame. That being said though, the lyric is overall good, the vocal performance of Chris and Glenn is present and fresh, and really the music is just lacking a bit, and that is a hard thing to hear when the rest of the album is just so, so above and beyond in terms of musical content and substance.

### **Side 1, Track 7: *She Doesn't Have to Shave***

*"Cry as much as you like, I'll do the dishes ... Tell me what's on your mind"*

We close out side one of the album with a cool, pretty subtle tune that is overall very underappreciated in the Squeeze catalog, a title that at first glance, is questionable, (at least that was my first thought!), but then, upon hearing the lyric it all makes great sense as we once again are privy to a great musical drama. Here we get put into an excellent kitchen sink story, and this time very literally, as "she" washes the dishes, and our male character recounts this story of a woman going through her "time of the month," as he tries to console her, just excellent storytelling. The music itself is on par with the other classic Tilbrook tunes, nice vamping bass line with clean drum work as per usual, cannot understate how excellent the drums sound on this whole album really. We also get a great guitar solo from Glenn yet again, very short and sweet, leaves you wanting more, this is a great feeling to get! Towards the end we also get some great vocal harmony from the group, and this begins a rather nice vamp idea, kind of similar to the beginning, leaving great room for Glenn to vocally start wailing on. Only just a little bit though, really subtle excellence happening in this track, and it is just a great, almost "chill" way to end the first side of this wonderful record.

### **Side 2, Track 1 (8): *Love Circles***

*“And so domestic you become ... you’re wearing matching dressing gowns ... You think your lifetimes just begun You cut the cake but just the one slice”*

We have reached the only other Chris Difford vocal lead on this album, another great one of course, but also of note in that regard is that this is the only other song (besides Cool for Cats) that was released as a single that Chris sang lead the entire tune for. The chiming piano sets us up well and the flourish of the guitar is a nice touch underneath. Once again Gilson’s drums really get us propelled forward and help throw us into the first verse. These lyrics are excellent and fit Chris’s voice really well again, as was the case on *Slaughtered, Gutted, and Heartbroken*. The topic of love is on display again, and as far as Squeeze tunes about the topic go, this is one of the best. Ever present imagery and relatability really help this one out... “You’re staying in and don’t go out” ... “You fall asleep or read a book ... The phone goes back upon the hook,” just beautiful really. The chorus of this tune is also of importance, the harmonies are not only great, but again, to hear Chris leading with his voice, on his lyrics is so awesome, feels great. You really could tell he was stretching his voice a little bit on this album, and it is one of the most excellent payoffs ever, so much fun to listen to. Some muddy guitar work comes around after the bridge, and admittedly this is the weakest point of the track for me, but they bring it back with another great vocally substantive chorus right after. A fade out occurs, and we are met with around ten seconds of straight silence, until the tune fades back in for a final few moments as we are left to really ruminate on what we have just heard. Again, this lyric speaking on love as some sort of bird circling above is just beautiful, and I am sure makes every listener think about something, or someone in their life...

### **Side 2, Track 2 (9): *Melody Motel***

*“His wife was cooking chicken With a baby in her arms ... The smell of home cooked dinner Filled the air at home that night”*

This tune, and probably Dr. Jazz, which is only a few songs away, is one of the reasons that this album is just so diverse and fun to listen to. The wide variety of styles present is just so cool, and makes this album a real treat to listen to unfold. Surprisingly as well, not only on the first listen, but on any given listen after, I still find myself amazed at some of the things going on in this album that they were able to pull off. Anyway, here we are at the Melody Motel, a bit of an up-tempo country style that gives Glenn some great vocal moments, the guitar sound here is a nice touch as well, a little dirty. Chris’s lyrics here are a cool little story once again, in my opinion less dramatic than the previous few, but more fun, lots happening, almost to where it is a little difficult to follow, but I thought the idea still comes across and is effective. Important to mention an almost honky tonky piano solo from Jools here, and once again, nice, charming accordion work from Matt Irving. Melody Motel may not be my favorite on the album, but its unique sound, and the wonderful elements of piano, accordion and fun lyrics make this one of the standouts on the album for sure.

### **Side 2, Track 3 (10): *Can of Worms***

*“Sometimes can't understand That there's so much to learn when you open a can of worms”*

Another beautiful Chris lyric here, and so effective it is with the arrangement that has been made here, tasteful organ, some great and typical Keith Wilkinson bass... just perfect really. The musical drama of side one has returned in full force in this tune, and these lyrics deliver some beyond wonderful moments. “She's a very good mum as she tries to explain Everything that she can” ... “When I saw their father walking down the path ... I froze on the spot, heart in my throat I hoped he'd not see us there” ... these lyrics are just something else, such emotion and such a story present that feels real and feels genuine. My favorite lyric in this tune however happens quite early in – “To them she's mother and I am their friend Who sits with them on his lap ... And sleeps on the sofa on alternate weekends No substitute for their dad,” these lyrics paired with the great pad of music underneath is just something else, I can really barely explain it with words! With that at the very least, you must go listen to this tune and keep your ears open for this specific moment, its early in, so just let it happen and enjoy it. As for the title and the singing of “when you open a can of worms,” the chromaticism in the organ and the growing intensity of the bass is a great pairing and again, provides such an emotional moment, Glenn’s voice only helping out with the overall intensity. Some great background vocals come in around the last minute only make this musical arrangement more effective and more emotional, it begins to climax here with intense beauty and grace. It slows to a stop by the end and ends on a nice finite chord only heightened by the organ. This song really packs a punch, it’s an emotional one, its nearly five minutes, and to me, is incredibly underrated in the Squeeze catalog... go listen if you have not already, and if you have heard it already, listen again... you are overdue for a listen anyway ; )

### **Side 2, Track 4 (11): *Dr. Jazz***

*“Then a drop of rain ... A trickle in my eye ... I look up and smile ... At the rhythm that never, never dies”*

Here we go! This is the tune that got me to even listen to this whole album in the first place (I am a pretty young Squeeze fan, so was not around when these all came out) and what a tune it is! So much fun happens in this four-minute Jools feature, and it is only made better by the harmonies of the lads in the background, Gilson’s tight drumming, and some fun lyrics. We of course start with some nice bluesy tremolo piano (that is of course featured throughout) and we get our vocals when Jools starts musing on New Orleans and all the things associated with it... among a great many things... gumbo. As stated, the guys provide some great backing vocals here to Jools, really enjoy his voice as is, but being backed by Chris and Glenn at the least is just a phenomenal sound. Keith gets to slide around on the bass at multiple points, really adding to the style and charm present in this tune, lots of fun hearing him mess around a bit, and of course, the piano solo is just the overall highlight. The whole tune really features the piano as mentioned

before, as it is a Jools tune of course, but a middle 30 seconds of straight solo, with some fun chromatic and honky tonk bits is the real gold of the entire piano part, and the whole song at that really. Towards the end Jools starts letting it rip vocally a bit more, and the guys keep it grounded with again, stellar background vocals. A simple fade out occurs, and we end our jazzy-bluesy-honky-tonky-shuffly (is that even a word?) escapade for the album, and realize that we only have one tune left...

*Bonus:* For any fans of the Jools R&B Orchestra... here is a great live performance of Dr. Jazz only a few years after this album, one of my favorite live performances ever...

Link: <https://youtu.be/c4Wu-iZHxJE?si=pPs0g1k-BOMk0n8r>

### **Side 2, Track 5 (12): *Is It Too Late***

*“I feel rotten to have done this But now it's been done ... And drink was my only accomplice and then we fell in love”*

Our final track for this album starts in an excellent Jools Holland Rhythm and Blues Orchestra fashion with a driving start with just drums and piano. Once again, in a bit of country fast tempo, you cannot help but tap your feet to this tune, like it or not! Nice Chris lyric about drinking and the immediate regret of such an activity... we know he had been there, and Glenn delivers it in such a punching way almost; we feel for him and really can only begin to understand and get the ramifications of what he has done! The background vocals here once again are on point, and the guys seem to be having real fun with it, whether it be through the vocals or just through everyone's instrumental performances. Jools delivers some real relentless piano work, really working the tempo, and Gilson and Keith keep this thing rolling forward with style and agility, particularly on Keith's part. The guys close it out with an excellent “too- late-,” which again, is harmonized beautifully and Glenn adds some flourish that only cements his greatness as a vocalist.

### **Final Thoughts and Track Ranking:**

We have come to the end of this amazing album, as I stated towards the beginning, this is my favorite Squeeze album. It is not the one I have heard the most, as that would probably go to Cool for Cats, or Sweets from a Stranger, and yet, this is still my favorite, no doubt. So many great things happening, and the guys were truly on the top of their game here, with that being said I think it is fair on my own end to say this is my favorite iteration of the band to date... from Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti, to Frank... so exciting to hear the sound evolve through this set of albums, and it is sad to think Jools would leave the band for good after this album, but we of course know he was destined for great, great things. As for the other lads, the four of them can be heard on the bands next release “Play” from 1991... maybe I will review that one someday... anyway, here is my final ranking of all the tunes on Frank... excluding the first track Frank of course as, well... it really isn't a song ; )

1. *Peyton Place*
2. *If It's Love*
3. *Can of Worms*
4. *Love Circles*
5. *Rose I Said*
6. *Dr. Jazz*
7. *She Doesn't Have to Shave*
8. *Slaughtered, Guttled, and Heartbroken*
9. *Melody Motel*
10. *Is It Too Late*
11. *(This Could Be) The Last Time*

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Album: Frank (1989)  
Artist: Squeeze