

FLEETWOOD MAC

EVERY MUSICIAN KNOWS IT'S THE RHYTHM SECTION THAT HOLDS a band together. But who knew we'd find as durable an application of that maxim as the one exemplified by the history of Fleetwood Mac? ☞ Over the last thirty years, Fleetwood Mac has comprised fifteen musicians shuffled through six major lineups, resulting in endless tinkerings with tone and genre. Yet the two members to survive it all rarely write tunes and never front the recordings. They're the beatkeepers – drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie. The fact that a rhythm section could sustain a band through thirty years seems all the more amazing considering the traumatic histories of the band's shifting array of stage-front stars. Together, their personal lives have given rock one of its most elaborate and juicy plotlines. ☞ Religious conversions, spells of madness, “incestuous” liaisons within the band, drug freak-outs, alleged brainwashings, impersonations, everything short of murder have spun Fleetwood Mac's legacy into a story worthy of Scheherazade. ☞ Musically, the band has endured just as many twists, moving from blues to rockabilly to laid-back California folk rock – finally to bloom into purveyors of some of the most popular and enduring music of the Seventies. ☞ It all began humbly enough. In 1967, the

Mick Fleetwood, Stevie Nicks, John McVie, Christine McVie, Lindsey Buckingham (from left)





The band in '69: Peter Green, Fleetwood, Jeremy Spencer, Danny Kirwan, McVie (from left); original guitarist Green (below)

After and Chicken Shack). Anchored by the rhythm section of Fleetwood and McVie, the band found its star power in gifted guitarist Peter Green, buttressed by slide guitar work from Elmore James devotee Jeremy Spencer. All but the latter honed their talents in England's first school of British blues, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. (McVie joined Mayall in 1963, Fleetwood in 1965, and Green came in to replace Eric Clapton in 1966.) After Mac made their debut (as Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac) at the British Jazz and Blues Festival in August of 1967, they got signed, and then scored a Top Five U.K. hit with their self-titled debut release the next year. The album, which had far less impact in the United States, mixed genre classics like "Hellhound on My Trail" with originals by Green and Spencer.

The busy foursome made a big leap ahead with their second album, 1969's *English Rose*, which housed their first U.K. hit single – the gorgeous instrumental "Albatross." A languid mood piece, "Albatross" went far beyond the twelve-bar standard, to give the group its first Number One smash in the U.K. (it likewise shot to Number Four with its British re-release in 1973). *English Rose* also featured Peter Green's sexy cut "Black Magic Woman" (a hit for Mac in England, though the song didn't earn major recognition in America until it received a fiery cover version by another 1998 Hall of

original foursome convened as arch devotees of the blues, arriving in the second wave of U.K. rockers dedicated to translating electric Chicago blues for English audiences (along with acts like Savoy Brown, Ten Years

Fame entrant, Santana). If that wasn't enough, *Rose* also saw the band adding nineteen-year-old Danny Kirwan (who'd played in the minor blues group Boilerhouse), making Mac the only British blues act with three lead guitarists. That same year, the band also recorded a new studio album called *Then Play On*, which moved the group further beyond the blues and featured a Peter Green song, "Oh Well," that remained in its repertoire well into the Eighties. Another album release in 1969, *Fleetwood Mac in Chicago* (not issued in the States till 1971), found the band paying a debt to its roots, and featured Willie Dixon and Otis Spann.

In the meantime, the group suffered both its first major loss and its first plot turn. Peter Green not only quit the group, he announced he was ditching the entire music business to pursue a religious life. (Green didn't record again until the mid-Seventies, when he began putting out solo work.)



After his defection, Fleetwood Mac moved decisively beyond blues to pursue a herky-jerky take on rockabilly instigated by Jeremy Spencer (who now shared the band's star position with Kirwan). On 1970's *Kiln House*, Spencer sang songs more influenced by Buddy Holly than Elmore James, while Kirwan contributed the album's hardest rocker, "Tell Me All the Things You Do." The album likewise featured a cameo on piano from Christine Perfect, late of Chicken Shack, who had already shacked up with her soon-to-be husband, John McVie. (Christine drew the LP's bucolic cartoon cover, too.)

By early 1971, bizarre events once again overtook the band. During the Los Angeles dates of an American tour, Jeremy Spencer suddenly disappeared, only to turn up as a member of a religious cult, the Children of God. While the band consid-

ered it a case of brainwashing, the guitarist insisted he'd found the way and, like Green before him, quit the biz.

Despite such a negative, and thoroughly Californian, experience, the band rebounded by adopting a very musical, L.A. sound. They added Angelino guitarist Bob Welch to the lineup, using his singer/songwriter style to dovetail with the emerging soft-rock bent of Danny Kirwan and the intimate pop-soul style of Christine McVie. On 1971's *Future Games*, Fleetwood Mac debuted its moody new sound, which was right in step with the mellow L.A. sound of the moment. The band perfected that approach the next year on *Bare Trees*, which yielded the 1972 FM-radio hit, penned by Welch, "Sentimental Lady." The album, Mac's biggest American seller so far, also featured Christine McVie's most beautifully honed melodies and Kirwan's most sensitive vocals.

While this incarnation of Mac worked well in the studio, Kirwan proved a reluctant frontman. According to Mick Fleetwood's autobiography, the willowy guitarist was given to stage fright. By late 1972, the band canned him. It took two members to replace Kirwan: guitarist Bob Weston and singer Dave Walker (ex-Savoy Brown). That lineup appeared solely on

1973's *Penguin*, but by *Mystery to Me* later that year, the band had fired Weston. After the iffy *Heroes Are Hard to Find*, they axed Welch.

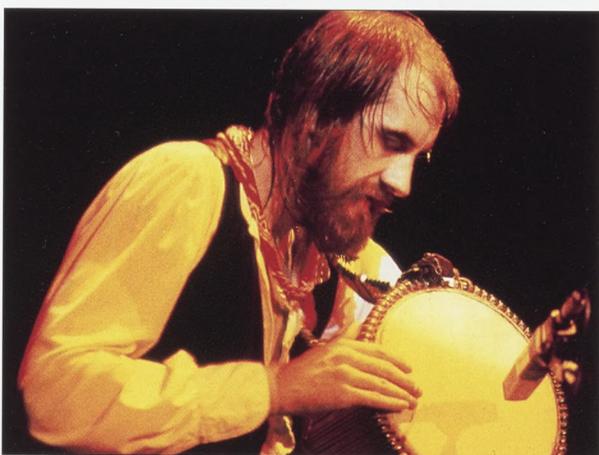
If this wasn't tumult enough, the group next endured an identity crisis that cut to its core. When the band didn't see eye to eye with manager Clifford Davis, he took an impostor Fleetwood Mac on the road, fronted by Weston and Walker. While the real group managed to abort that tour with a lawsuit, the ensuing legal tangles prevented the legit Mac from playing live for nearly a year, leaving them at a virtual standstill for most of 1974.

Given such dire straits, no one could have predicted the next turn for this tenacious

act. During 1975, Mac producer Keith Olsen played the waylaid band an album he'd engineered for an obscure southern California folk-rock duo called Buckingham Nicks. The band liked what they heard and decided to relaunch with their help. Though they tried to hire guitarist Lindsey Buckingham alone, the musician said he came only in a package deal with girlfriend Stevie Nicks.

The resulting lineup restored Mac to its triple-threat songwriter lineup of the early Seventies (with Nicks, Buckingham and McVie standing in for the *Bare Trees*-era trio of Welch, Kirwan and McVie). Yet that's as far as the comparisons could go. This lineup wound up bracketing the band's entire previous history into a separate world, dwarfing it in both commercial and cultural influence. In 1975 the band released *Fleetwood Mac*, a work that featured not a single weak cut. Slowly, the world discovered this for itself, first falling for McVie's song "Over My Head," which went to Number Twenty by early the next year. That was followed by Nicks's "Rhiannon" (which got to Number Eleven in June) and Christine's "Say You Love

Mac Attack: Nicks (at left); John McVie, Fleetwood, Christine McVie, Buckingham (from top)







Me" (also Number Eleven in September). By the middle of 1976, *Fleetwood Mac* had scaled the summit of the charts, going on to sell over five million copies.

Of course, it wouldn't be Fleetwood Mac if the band didn't suffer some kind of major personal breakdown the minute things started to go swimmingly. During 1976, the McVies' marriage cracked. Shortly after, the romantic link of Buckingham and Nicks came undone. By this time, however, the band had enough experience with emotional tumult to realize they'd do best to milk it for all it was worth. Instead of burying their feelings of loss and betrayal, they dealt with them directly in the music for their next album, 1977's *Rumours*. The result turned that album into a full-scale proto-*Oprah* episode. Years before the rise of Sally Jessy Raphael and the rest, the Macs understood the value of airing every bale of dirty laundry they could get their hands on. *Rumours* did just that. Like some failed version of group therapy, the songs bickered with each other, challenging and answering every emotional question raised by the compositions surrounding them.

Aided by pop-perfect material, the album entranced the public, shooting to Number One while spawning hits by Nicks (the Number One "Dreams"), Christine McVie (the Number Three "Don't Stop" and Number Nine "You Make Loving Fun") plus Lindsey Buckingham (his Number Ten "Go Your Own Way"). Having eventually sold over seventeen million copies, the record now stands as one of the most purchased albums of all time.

It took two years and nearly one million dollars in studio time for the band to fashion a followup – 1979's *Tusk*. That double-disc set sought to present a more complex, less pop version of its two predecessors. But along the way it also spawned a Number Eight single with its title track and a Number Seven notch for Nicks's "Sara."

As with many super-successful bands, Fleetwood Mac began to splinter into solo efforts at the point of its greatest power. By 1981, Fleetwood, Nicks, Christine McVie and Buckingham had all released albums of their own. Stevie's far outsold the others with her four-million selling *Bella Donna* in 1981.

Despite the members' broadening efforts, their next joint LP of new material, 1982's *Mirage*, turned out to be their tightest pop piece since *Rumours*. Fleetwood Mac kept its creative and commercial standards high with 1987's *Tango in the Night*. But behind the scenes, band members struggled for control; when Buckingham quit in 1987, it left the group at wit's end. The next few years weren't great ones for the band's legacy. With Buckingham gone, it drifted creatively. Eventually, Nicks left as well.

Ten years later, the last thing anyone expected after the classic lineup's bitter crackup was a full-scale reunion. But by late 1996, Lindsey Buckingham had found himself employing John McVie and Mick Fleetwood on his solo album. They, in turn, suggested he use Christine McVie on some harmonies, and from there things just started to jell. After Nicks rejoined the fold, they rehearsed vigorously for a series of live dates in L.A. They taped a TV special, which resulted in a comeback album in 1997 called *The Dance*.

The record shot to the top of the charts in September and earned the band more reverent reviews than ever. Unlike some comebacks, Mac's couldn't sugarcoat their relationships. Their problems and controversies were all chronicled in the songs they performed, giving the return a startling honesty. To boot, the band sang their vintage songs from an older perspective, lending them new poignance. The lineup also brought something uncommon to the Nineties. By reuniting the rhythm section with its three main writers, Fleetwood Mac extended into these far more selfish times the old Sixties idea of a band as an equal collective. Best of all, on both *The Dance* and on a sold-out comeback tour, the group offered its most musically assured performances to date while, subtextually, the shows exuded the richness and pain of a true family reunion. Forever wed to the whole wacky Fleetwood Mac tale, the band today reflects the depth of a full life – strange, complex and still unfolding. €

In January 1993, Fleetwood Mac reunited to perform at the presidential inauguration for Bill Clinton, who had adopted their "Don't Stop" as his campaign theme song