



Lindsey Buckingham



LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM
Gift of Screws
[Reprise]

Great Day
Time Precious Time
Did You Miss Me
Wait for You
Love Runs Deeper
Bel Air Rain
The Right Place to Fade
Gift of Screws
Underground
Treason

When it comes to playing guitar, Lindsey Buckingham insists he isn't a virtuoso.

 Many would disagree with that assessment, but in Buckingham's view, virtuosity isn't necessarily a good thing.

"There are times when cleverness or technical proficiency can overwhelm the simplicity or the openness of what needs to be there," he explains. "It can be hard, sometimes, to not do too much. Knowing where to play and where to be silent are important."

Buckingham has been putting that philosophy into practice for more than five decades. Beginning at age 6, when his parents gave him a Mickey Mouse ukulele, the future Fleetwood Mac member set about perfecting a finger-picking technique that's as unique as it is captivating. Stacking an older brother's Elvis Presley 45s on the phonograph, Buckingham spent hours

alone in his bedroom figuring out how to duplicate the sounds made by guitarist Scotty Moore.

"It wasn't about facility," Buckingham says. "It was more about being so interested in music and wanting to learn to play those songs. When you're 7 or 8, your learning curve is way quicker. I was so taken with this form of music, I had to be a part of it."

Fast-forward 50 years, and the richness of Buckingham's contributions to contemporary music is beyond dispute. After making a superb folk-pop album with childhood friend Stevie Nicks, the northern California native was invited by Mick Fleetwood to join Fleetwood Mac. Nicks came along, as well; together, the two helped transform the group into a brilliantly sophisticated pop band.

Following the success of *Rumours* —the landmark 1977 album that vaulted Fleetwood Mac to the top of the rock world—Buckingham tried to take the group in a more adventurous musical direction. The changes met with resistance from both the band and their record company, however, setting the stage for the dual-career track Buckingham has pursued since. Beginning with 1981's *Law and Order*, the singer-songwriter-guitarist carved out a successful solo career while reuniting, on occasion, with his bandmates.

Buckingham's latest CD, *Gift of Screws*, offers a bevy of treasures from both songwriter and guitarist perspectives. More aggressive than 2006's *Under the Skin*, the disc veers from bluesy riff-rockers ("Wait for You") to propulsive, "Go Your Own Way"-style anthems ("The Right Place to Fade") to incendiary bashers that sound like the Stooges meet Les Claypool (the title track). Along the way, Buckingham tosses in several changes of pace including the ethereal, plucked-guitar epic "Time Precious Time" and the ballad "Treason" that's as elegant as anything he's ever written.

Clearly, at age 59, Buckingham is at the top of his form. At home in L.A., he spoke with us about his guitar style, songwriting and the relationship between his solo career and his work in Fleetwood Mac.

Several of the songs on the new album were written years ago. Why are they only now seeing the light of day?

Back in 2002 I was poised to put out a solo album. As has been the case on several occasions, however, Fleetwood Mac intervened and said they would like to make a studio album. Because I had all that material, and because Mick [Fleetwood], especially, had played on a lot of it, it seemed a natural thing to fold it over into what became the 2003 Fleetwood Mac album *Say You Will*.

So some of these songs are ones you had that weren't used on *Say You Will*?

That's right. Between Stevie's songs and my songs, there wasn't enough room for everything unless we put out a double album, which we had endless discussions about. So there were a few stragglers that went on the shelf. Those songs weren't really appropriate for *Under the Skin*, which I did a couple of years ago. That album was a

lot more acoustic-based. When I started working on new material for this album, I wasn't necessarily expecting it to go in such a full-on rock direction. It just seemed to want to go there. And when it did, those stragglers seemed to want to include themselves.

that music, of course, you're talking about basic Travis-picking [named after famed country-music guitarist Merle Travis], which everybody was learning.

Is it true your first guitar was a cheap Harmony acoustic?

That's right, although I first learned some chords on a plastic ukulele. Then, when I was about 8 years old, I got a Harmony six-string, three-quarter-size guitar for Christmas. It cost 35 or 40 bucks.

Did you feel an immediate facility for the instrument?

It's hard to say. What I did feel was an immediate motivation, triggered by my brother's Elvis Presley 45s. I had been exceptionally interested in music before then. I was tuned in to my parents' record collection which ranged from the *South Pacific* soundtrack to Patti Page to my dad's collection of Dixieland jazz 78s. I was always interested in what was making those sounds, and trying to understand what I was listening to.

When did you first try to write?

I didn't write until 1972, near the very end of the first band that Stevie and I were in. Stevie had been writing tunes since she was in high school. She thought of herself as a writer-poet, very early on. Actually, I still don't think of myself as a writer but as more of a stylist. Obviously

I've gotten better at it, but it still comes in bits and pieces—the process of putting a song together. It's hard for me to get the whole thing down on paper and say, "OK, here's the song. Now what are we going to do with it?"

Does the process always originate with a guitar part?

Occasionally something has come from sitting at the piano. Lately I've been thinking that might be a good thing to try again. I haven't done it in a long time. In a band situation, you're forced to have more of a complete song. You can't go in and say, "Here, I have this part" and expect anyone to respond to that, unless you formally put yourself in a co-writing situation. On the other hand, when you work alone and play a lot of instruments, you can work more on nuance. You can start with something that's much less fleshed out, and then slop the colors on. It's like painting.

Beyond technique, does playing without a pick make you feel more of direct connection to the guitar?

I think so. It has its good and bad points. It



Stevie Nicks with Buckingham in 1979

"I still don't think of myself as a writer but as more of a stylist. I've gotten better, but it still comes in bits and pieces."

Even though it's a rock album, your finger-picking style is very much at the center of the things. How did you get into that technique at such an early age?

Part of that stemmed from not taking lessons. As a child, I found my own way in a manner that made sense to me. There's always been an element of that that's worked for me. I wasn't motivated to use a pick. I wasn't finger-picking right away, but I strummed with my hand, because I didn't know any better. But even Scotty Moore had an element of finger-picking and orchestral playing going on. He used a pick, but he also used a couple of other fingers to fill out what he was doing. The other thing was, before the British Invasion, a lot of folk music became popular. In

can be a little sloppy. Sometimes on stage, when I'm playing lead, I'll look down and see that I'm just thrashing around. I don't know what I'm doing with my fingers, and it looks sort of odd. When I first joined Fleetwood Mac, Mick tried to get me to use a pick. He felt there was a lack of "pointedness" in my sound. I tried it once or twice in shows but dropped it pretty quickly.

To what extent did you have to make adjustments in your style, when you and Stevie joined Fleetwood Mac?

It was an exercise in paring down. There wasn't as much room to establish any sort of style statement, in terms of what I had done on [1973's] *Buckingham Nicks* album. The band's pre-existing sound made it difficult for me to even play the model of guitar I had been using. The electrics I played had always been either Stratocasters or Telecasters. And both those Fender guitars sounded a little anemic within the band. I was forced to switch over to something "fatter," which, at the time, was the [Gibson] Les Paul. The irony was that the Les Paul wasn't especially suited to my style. There was a lot of adapting to do, but there's also a lesson there. Being in a band is all about compromise and working for the good of the whole.

Were you directly involved in developing the Turner Model 1 guitar that you're so closely associated with?

I didn't give Rick Turner any technical input, or any input in terms of its visual aspects. My involvement was more general. I said, "I'm in this band that has a certain sound. The guitars I used"—which I felt were more appropriate to my style—"don't seem appropriate to the sound of the band. Can you make me a simple guitar that somehow bridges the gap between a Les Paul and a Telecaster or Stratocaster, sound-wise?" In other words, I wanted the fullness of the Les Paul along with a very clean sound. I also wanted it to be percussive enough, and have enough top end, to work with a finger-picking style. And that's what he came up with. He hit a home run as far as I'm concerned. He gave it the one pickup and a couple of knobs, and that was it. I still marvel at how well it's worked for me.

Do you have two or three other go-to guitars for studio work?

I generally use either the Turner or a Stratocaster—or sometimes a Telecaster—for lead playing. As far as acoustics go, I have an old [Martin] D-18 I got when I was 19. That guitar sounds better as the years have passed. I also play a Baby Taylor. Small guitars,

and some of the Taylor acoustics I use on stage, work well in the studio. Sometimes I go straight into the board with a Roland synth. You can get some good lead sounds that way, along with, of course, other weird things that sit well behind the lead guitar to give it a mysterious sound.

You've spoken about a certain Dave Mason album that had a big impact on you as a lead player.

That album—*Alone Together*—came out in 1970, about the time the original band Stevie and I were in was breaking up. I was trying to embrace lead playing, and the things Dave Mason was doing on that album seemed to mesh with what I was aspiring to do. He wasn't trying to be technically proficient, and the playing had a plaintive quality that fit what I was already doing as an acoustic player.

Didn't playing "Big Love" [from 1987's *Tango in the Night*] on stage change your thinking with regard to guitar playing, as well?

Yes. That wasn't the first time I had done a song with just an acoustic. "Never Going Back Again," from *Rumours*, had worked well, but that song was more of a chamber piece and had a folksy, classical quality. "Big Love" started as an ensemble piece with Fleetwood Mac. I don't remember how it made its way to the stage as a single-guitar piece, but obviously I had an interest in

redefining that song. When Fleetwood Mac went out in 1997 to do what became the live CD—*The Dance*—that song would go down like a storm every night. I realized something was connecting strongly with the audience. Plus, it was more challenging than "Never Going Back Again" and more rock 'n' roll. In a lot of ways, it became a template for wanting to do an album like *Under the Skin*, where I could expand that idea into other songs. It seemed to answer some questions. The more mature you get as an artist, the more you look for something that strikes a different tone.

Did the experience of making 1979's *Tusk*, and the reaction to it, serve you well, in that it forced your hand with regard to making solo albums?

It did force my hand. When we began work on *Tusk*, it was difficult to get the band to experiment with some different ways of making music. But by the end of making the album, everyone was actually quite enthralled with the results. I don't know that the same was true for Warner Bros. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when that album was played in the boardroom.

Anyway, a year later there was a lot of backlash because the album didn't sell anywhere close to what *Rumours* had sold. When that happened, there was an edict that came down from the [rest of the]

PRODUCT REVIEW

PHONIC FIREFLY 808 UNIVERSAL

192kHz USB/FireWire Interface with Studio Preamps

BY DAVE JONES

Expanding their line of Firefly interfaces, Phonic has pumped up the I/O of their 192kHz-capable 808 to be more inclusive: The Firefly 808 Universal has all the abundant input and output options and high sample rates of much more expensive interfaces.

USB 2.0 is included—in addition to FireWire on the Universal version—which makes it painless for Mac or PC users to plug in and begin recording right away. Two front-mounted combo XLR-1/4" inputs (channels 1 and 2) and a headphone jack are handy for the home studio, but keeping the line and XLR inputs for channels 2-8 on the back side maintains a tidy house, as well; the rear panel houses the requisite MIDI, S/PDIF, clocking, etc. One big surprise is eight channels of optical ADAT I/O, fantastic for small-venue recording with the right digital mixers. The 808 Universal can also be used as a standalone eight-channel mixer in live or rehearsal settings.

The preamps are definitely good bang for the buck. A bright meter bridge illustrates plenty of headroom, and we delighted in this very practical indulgence, not often found on lower-priced multi-channel interfaces. All eight channels have convenient independent phantom power and, in addition to the combo inputs, channels 1 and 2 feature a pad and a TRS insert.

IN A NUTSHELL: Home-studio centerpiece, high-end recording interface or mobile mixer, Phonic's Firefly 808 Universal can handle any number of scenarios that call for digital I/O or multiple preamps.

STREET PRICE: \$500.





band that we weren't going to take those sorts of chances again, and we were going to revert to a more conventional way of making music. As a result, those next two albums—although they have some great songs—reflect the fact we were treading water. Since that process was disallowed within the band, the only way I could go there was to make solo albums. If *Tusk* had sold a bit more, and if the band had been

fine with things, I probably wouldn't have made any solo albums.

Do you ever feel that your adventurous side is at war with your gift for hooks and melodies—things that have more commercial appeal?

I don't see the two as being at odds—although the record company does, and maybe to some extent the band does, too. In the case of *Gift of Screws*, I don't think anything's at war. It's funny—after I turned the album in I started getting calls from Warner Bros. saying how much they loved it, that this was the album they had wanted last time around. They weren't too crazy about *Under the Skin*. What is at war is the big machine versus the small machine. I couldn't have the esoteric side if I didn't have the mainstream side. And, to some extent, I wouldn't be able to fold back into the mainstream—the big machine—if I weren't able to do these other things. There's a direct relationship. They feed each other.

Are there things you can do as a solo artist that you absolutely cannot do within the parameters of Fleetwood Mac?

I don't think there's any one thing. It's more a case that maybe there are things you can do only once on a Fleetwood Mac album. You couldn't get away with doing them three or four times. There are lots of things on *Under the Skin* that are just one guitar, or two guitars and voice, and nothing else. Politically, that would be fine in Fleetwood Mac as a one-off type of thing. On *Rumours*, for instance, you wouldn't want to have four songs like "Never Going Back Again." It just wouldn't be appropriate.

Are plans still in place for Fleetwood Mac to begin rehearsing in January?

That's a possibility. There's still quite a bit of road that we need to walk together in order to put things in a certain place, with regard to interaction. For that reason alone, there's an interest, for me, in reconvening, to see if we can approach things a little more humanly. Christine [McVie, who retired from the band in 1998] is still not in the picture for this. She has no interest in touring, and that's fine. But Stevie and I have some stuff to work on. That, in and of itself, becomes intriguing. I've known Stevie since I was 16, and we've been through things together that no one else has. We know each other awfully well. It should be fun. ▀▀

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