DON'T STOP!

As FLEETWOOD MAC's imperial comeback tour reaches Britain, MICK FLEETWOOD reflects on an eventful 46 years as the band's gatekeeper. The early days with Peter Green... the lost guitar heroes... the days of high life and strife... And onwards, towards the next album and the rapturous gigs... "We haven't turned Fleetwood Mac into Cirque Du Soleil yet!"

Story: Andy Gill
Photo: Sam Emerson

Blues boomers the Mac, 1968: (l-r) Mick Fleetwood, Peter Green, Jeremy Spencer, John McVie

MICK FLEETWOOD IS musing upon the gloriously chequered career of Fleetwood Mac. "We were blessed with finding some uniquely important people at the right time," he says, with typical modesty. "You can thank the angels for that, really." Genial and self-deprecating, Fleetwood always plays the diffident associate, ascribing his band's success to fellow bandmates, both past and present. For years now, he's given the impression of being just a happy crew member, glad to keep cruising along. Yet it's clear that Mick is the backbone of Fleetwood Mac, the self-confessed "nutcase driving force" who's kept the vessel afloat through stormy waters and lengthy doldrums alike, lubricating the sometimes clashing gears of the band's creative elements. As the Mac sails serenely through a world tour occasioned by the success of the 35th Anniversary reissue of *Rumours*, he considers the qualities behind the band's enduring appeal. "Fleetwood Mac's history is very spotted, not everyone's cup of tea all the way through," he says, "but it's never been a bunch of people pretending to do something that's been done before."

> "I've almost been sick with the obsession of not letting this band go..."

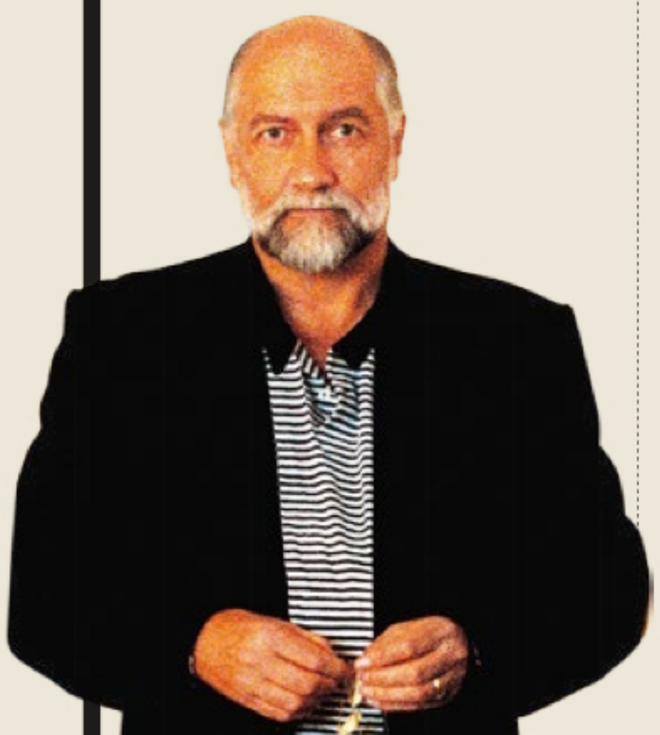
UNCUT: How's the tour going?
MICK FLEETWOOD: We've been touring all over the States, so with rehearsals and stuff, we've been at it for the better part of six months. It's going incredibly well. We're halfway through the tour – we're coming to Europe, as you know, in about eight weeks or less, finishing around December 15.

Do you have surprises for us?
Well, we always try to put a new show together. As long as a good chunk of your show is stuff that people are emotionally attached to, which of course would be the more well-known songs, then we have fun peppering the set with stuff like we're doing in this show – for instance, we recorded an EP before we went out on the road, and there's an old song of Stevie's that had never seen the light of day before, which she wrote way, way back, nearly 40 years ago, about Stevie and Lindsey. We put it in the show, and no-one knows it at all, but people are loving it. So we spice it up that way, and hopefully we can take the audience on a creative journey, where we're not just schlocking up stuff we've done time after time before. As regards other surprises, no, we haven't turned Fleetwood Mac into Cirque Du Soleil yet! There aren't any midgets or acrobats careening across the stage during "Rhiannon"!

The *Extended Play* tracks are really good – "Sad Angel", particularly, is as good as you get. I notice you put it out yourselves. What's it like working without a record label?
Well, I don't know whether we really know what we're doing! We're still with Warner Brothers, sort of; we're still working that out – but they let us do it. With all deference to record labels, they are not what they used to be, anyhow. We just wanted to have something out there – I don't think we expected it to be a huge success or anything. The music business has so greatly changed, and we had some contractual things to sort out – we're not sort of super-locked-in to Warner Brothers, but we're not super-locked-out either, so in the interim they gave us permission to do what we wanted to do while this business is all being sorted out.

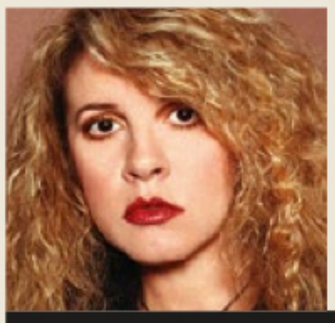
MICK ON...

Mr Fleetwood on his bandmates...



LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

"He's so focused on, quote, 'his art' and what it means to him, and it's certainly not about the money. He goes about and works his nuts off trying to have people listen to what he's doing, and it's really a labour of love. It's not about going out and making zillions of dollars."



STEVIE NICKS

"She really feels that we are bound: she is a loyalist at heart, married to this crazy band. She is always there for this band, but she needs to feel there's a real partnership on stage: she looks to the musicians in the band, that's her band, because she doesn't play an instrument and can feel a little exposed."

JOHN McVIE

"I'm very connected with John, he was always at my side, though maybe sometimes not particularly hopeful of the results continuing through lineup changes. He'd say things like, 'Well, let me know – you're out of your mind, I think we're finished.'"

NEAL PRESTON

Is there going to be another album?
We've got a whole bunch of songs that we did, and we're hoping we can coerce and have Stevie be enthusiastic about the possibility of completing a body of work that could be construed as a new album, where these songs would make their way into an album presentation. These days, with iTunes, you can do that – release things and down the road add them to an album. I certainly hope that happens over the course of the next few months.

You're effectively a band always in transition, it seems – looking back through your history, you seem to have been able to almost miraculously transform yourselves through the years. How do you do it?
Well, I'm beginning to wonder how we have done it. I've literally been with it since the very beginning, with Peter Green, he had me right next to him when we formed the band, and I really know the road that we've been on. I would say, in truth, I've worked really hard at keeping this band as a band: I've almost been sick with the obsession of not letting go. Having said that – and there is some comedic sense to it – a drummer needs a band! But it was a lot of hard work, hard work that became habit-forming, so it wasn't extraordinary after a while, it was just what we did: "Someone's leaving? Well, we're not breaking up!" The chemistry of the situation was helped by the fact I wasn't the lead singer and couldn't say, "Well, I'll go off and do my own thing" – I was always looking at creating a stage that would be able to welcome someone new. So my version of writing and being lead singer was: I'm the gatekeeper, if I can find lovely people to create theatre with me, then I and the band have a chance to survive.

McVie and Fleetwood with Bob Welch and Christine McVie, August 1974

You seem to have an instinct for it, as well: as I understand, you hired first Bob Welch and then Lindsey and Stevie virtually unheard, just bumping into them in a studio.
Well, I'd heard them, but they were instantly welcome. With Bob, a friend of mine said, "I know this guitar player", and I really respected her opinion. Bob just got on a train from Paris and arrived at our house in England, where we all used to hang out, a hippy commune kind of thing, and plugged in a guitar. But it was really all about Bob, more than his music, a vibe about the person, that he had his own talent to offer, and to me it seemed evident quickly that this was supposed to happen. I said, "I think he's the right guy" and John and Chris both said, "Yeah." Bob never left – he just unpacked his suitcase, moved from Paris, and we were done.

Is it an instinctive thing?
It's very instinctual – Peter and I used to ask, in any situation, personal or musical, "Is it It?" And It is about intuition, it's about, are you really connecting, are you really moving me? Is the chemistry right? When you're considering making music with someone, you need to know it's 'It', and when it is, you need to let go immediately and not second-guess yourself. That's how those decisions came about, and if there was any alchemy to it, that's as close as I can come to describing what it is. I paid huge heed to what Peter thought. I would say, "Why would you want me in the band? I'm not the best

REX FEATURES; GETTY IMAGES

Nature boys: the Mac with Danny Kirwan, right, 1969

HOW TO BUY...

RUMOURS, TANGOS AND FUTURE GAMES...

The best of Fleetwood Mac

FLEETWOOD MAC (AKA PETER GREEN'S FLEETWOOD MAC)
BLUE HORIZON, 1968
8/10
The album which broke the British Blues Boom as a chart prospect, an unassuming mix of Jeremy Spencer's Elmore James slide licks and Peter Green's more delicate, sylvan lead lines which captured the hearts of greatcoated youth across Europe.

THEN PLAY ON
REPRISE, 1969
8/10
The first Mac's masterpiece, an album of brilliant diversity and exploration on which new boy Danny Kirwan showed his abundant potential alongside Peter Green. Sadly, it would prove to be Green's band swansong, save for the hapless "Man Of The World" single.

FUTURE GAMES
REPRISE, 1971
8/10
The best of the so-called "transitional" Mac albums, with the arrival of Bob Welch and Christine McVie alongside Danny Kirwan helping to lay the groundwork for their subsequent melodic pop style. The slow, woozy title track and "Woman Of A Thousand Years" (sung by Christine McVie) are the highlights.

FLEETWOOD MAC
REPRISE, 1975
8/10
The great breakthrough: Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham brought with them hit singles ("Over My Head", "Say You Love Me" and "Rhiannon"), multi-platinum sales, and the rare example of an album that first topped the charts over a year after its first entry.

RUMOURS
REPRISE, 1977
10/10
The game-changer: by all accounts sheer torture to record, *Rumours* remains one of rock's most honeyed listening experiences, a commercial and cultural landmark emblematic of an entire era. More than one in every six US households has a copy.

TUSK
REPRISE, 1979
8/10
The deal breaker? With the three songwriters operating more independently of each other, and Buckingham given free rein to pursue his exploratory new-wave inclinations, this sprawling double-album perplexed fans expecting *Rumours 2*. At a mere four million sales, the label considered it a failure, though it remains Mick Fleetwood's favourite.

TANGO IN THE NIGHT
REPRISE, 1987
9/10
Originally begun as a Lindsey Buckingham solo album, *Tango In The Night* developed such a gravitational pull it brought the band back together on top form. Among other delights, contains two of Christine McVie's most irresistible songs, "Everywhere" and "Little Lies".

Stevie and Lindsey, recording a radio session to promote the *Fleetwood Mac* album, New Haven, 1975

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

drummer", and he'd say, "You're missing the point – we're the dearest of friends, and I don't want to be making music with some jerk I don't like." That whole mindset stayed with me. Peter said to me, "You don't have to be the big musical svengali, stop feeling so insecure – when you're playing, I feel what you're doing, and you're OK." But although Peter could have been the big power-monger, when he was in Fleetwood Mac he was in a band, and despite clearly being the mainstay, he still put himself in the back: when we made *Then Play On*, Danny Kirwan had only just joined the band, he was like a little schoolboy, but Peter said, "Take half the album" – that's a pretty damn generous thing from someone who could have hogged the whole damn thing!

In the early Fleetwood Mac, it was never a case of loudest and fastest, as it was with most British blues bands. On the contrary, it seemed to get subtler and more delicate as it went along.

"I hope *Rumours*' success wasn't just 'cause we were all sleeping with each other!"

I agree, that's absolutely right: the Marshall stack, Spinal Tap approach to blues playing was not our thing. In fact, we were horribly aware of a lot of stuff which may have been fun, but we quietly knew it wasn't what we were trying to do. When we first started, we were a blues band, then Peter started writing, and you had things like "Albatross", which were way beyond that. But we were already accustomed to being tender, because of the dynamics, and all the slow blues we had been doing. The blues model for us was not about boogie, it was about where the dynamic was, and if Peter was singing something like "Need Your Love So Bad", you wondered, Dear God, where is this coming from? Once we'd started spreading our wings with *Then Play On*, the writing skills, particularly Peter's, were taking huge steps into different areas. Sadly, those were the last things he would do with Fleetwood Mac. People often ask, "What would have happened if Peter had not left?", and I truly think he would have developed such a musically diverse, soulful approach that if that incarnation of the band had continued, you would have seen a similar journey to the one Led Zeppelin took, when you suddenly had Moroccan orchestras and funky things, way more adventurous than people realised.

Do you think the success of *Rumours* was partly due to it being rooted in the band's real-life circumstances?
I think so. That certainly had a huge amount to do with the power of what happened during that period – to literally be putting an emotive diary onto a piece of vinyl. But one will never know at what point that began and stopped being the reason why it was so hugely successful. As a musician, one likes to think it wasn't entirely because we were all sleeping with each other! And I don't think it was, by the way.

It's extraordinary how such sweetness comes from such apparent strife.
Correct. And strife it was!

When you first had the enormous success with the first album with Lindsey and Stevie (*Fleetwood Mac*), what was your first great indulgent purchase when you got your royalty cheque? Car, yacht, house...?
Oh! Well, knowing me, I'm sure it was a car. I'm a car freak, always a car freak. But you have to remember that the emotional side of success was something John and I already knew about – we had been at the top of the charts all over

PERFECT TIMING

GO YOUR OWN WAY...

Where's Christine McVie in 2013?

WHEN CHRISTINE McVIE left Fleetwood Mac in 1998, it was the arduous grind of touring that caused her to finally quit – she simply couldn't face another flight, it was claimed. "She did not enjoy the whole rigmarole of travelling and touring," says Mick Fleetwood today, "and no amount of coercing with golden carrots on strings in front of her nose attracted her to get back on the boards again." McVie moved back to England, settled in the Kent countryside and contemplated opening a restaurant. Since then, she's steadfastly refused to rejoin the band onstage. This has left a glaring hole in the band's setlist – there's no way they can avoid encoring with "Don't Stop", of course, but how many in the audience must yearn to hear the likes of "You Make Loving Fun", "Everywhere" and "Little Lies" again? "We are absolutely happily obligated to do some of Christine's songs," admits Fleetwood. As the tour heads to Europe, there are signs that finally, UK audiences at least may get a glimpse of Christine: earlier this year, she flew to California and Hawaii to hook up with her old bandmates, following which both she and Mick Fleetwood have dropped heavy hints that she may drop in for a duet at one of the O2 shows.

Europe and in Australia. We were huge, and hugely successful. Having said that, it never translated into money! Which begs the question whether we were being ripped off. But emotionally, we had gone through that whole gamut of being struggling musicians loving what we were doing, to being on *Top Of The Pops* wondering, what the fuck's this? Shouldn't we be playing in a pub down the road? We'd had all of that, all the front pages and the adulation, then sort of lost it – when Peter left, we basically tanked, we were floundering, and so we went off to America and slowly built up a following. When we began being hugely successful again, amazingly enough, even going into the *Rumours* period, when we'd just sold six million albums and were able to live like pigs in shit, we never had that dynamic of realising we even had any money! For months and months we'd be touring in the same way we'd always toured, driving ourselves in station wagons – we didn't realise we could afford to rent a small plane, or stay in a better hotel. Of course, that did eventually change, and I have to say, when it did, we went a little too far the other way...

I understand you could have signed with Apple at one point, that The Beatles wanted you to sign with them.
That's true! I don't know why we didn't – I was quite excited about it at the time, because George was actually my brother-in-law. But it didn't happen.

Well, it hasn't worked out too badly at Warner-Reprise.
No, it's been a good old run. All these record companies are in a state of shock themselves right now.

Why did you have such a brief tenure at Immediate?
That I also don't know, because I wasn't in charge of the band then. I think they were going under, it was all going wrong, so we bailed out.

When you came to do *Mirage*, was the sound of the album a response to the more abstract, experimental approach of *Tusk*?
It was. It was really good that on *Tusk* Lindsey had been given his head – looking back, I'm really glad he fought so hard for that, and that he got it. *Then Play On* and *Tusk* are my favourite Fleetwood Mac albums, because they both represent very similar types of departures, when you think about it. They beautifully signpost the aesthetics of the journey to try and change up – Peter wanted to expand, like Lindsey did – so full kudos to both of those people, and to both of those albums. *Mirage* was a more natural progression from *Rumours*, there's no doubt. *Tusk* at the time was just way too much information for someone who'd enjoyed the *Rumours* album: "What the fuck is this? This guy's screaming at me, and shit!" But I have nothing but absolute regard for the stance Lindsey took.

Indestructible: the reunited Mac at the Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, April 6, 2013

"Car freak" Mick Fleetwood, 1975

GIG LOVE

THEN PLAY ON!

Inside the Fleetwood Mac 2013 tour...

Opening date: April 4, 2013, Nationwide Arena, Columbus, Ohio

Capacity: 21,000

First song played on the tour: "Second Hand News"

Last song played on American leg: "Say Goodbye"

Dates played in America: 48

Total gross to date: $58.1 million

Total attendance to date: 538,961

Average length of show: 2 hours 30 minutes

Dates scheduled to play in UK: 8

Wineries scheduled to play at in Australia: 2 *(Hope Estate Winery, The Hill Winery)*

Odds on headlining Glastonbury 2014: 12/1 *(Paddy Power)*

Can we expect another cover appearance from you? You've made some unusual appearances throughout your career.
This is true. But I don't think there'll ever be another cover appearance exclusively by me. At some point I had to hand over to the possibility of other people being on the cover. I think I've had my day!

I remember buying *Mr Wonderful* and being somewhat startled...
Oh, I know! That too was not really thought out – it was just that no-one else could ever give a shit about anything, really. I was the only one, through being around my sister and other artsy people, I would go, "I'll put something together, I'll find a way to make people look at it – I know, I'll take my clothes off!" We did all kinds of weird stuff. It maybe went on a little too long, but I don't complain about it. I always joke that I've still got a ponytail, so maybe one day I'll have an execution, cut my ponytail off and shave my head, and that will be the end of that character. No more Mr *Rumours*!

Well, if you start out your career with a dog on your cover, any way is up.
Yeah! And then with the dog under my arm, that stuffed dog, which was *Mr Wonderful*; and then years later Lindsey and I put another dog on the cover of *Tusk*. But it didn't mean anything other than that there's another dog there!

All great rhythm sections have their own signature. What's the key to yours and John's?
Our golden rule would be "less is more". I think the fact that we were both blues musicians, trained in that world, means we learned to listen like crazy, and therefore are slaves to dynamics, listening and letting the people out front do their job, and not getting in the way – subservient, in the healthiest sense of the term. That's Mick Fleetwood and John McVie.

*Fleetwood Mac's UK tour begins on September 24. A remastered edition of **Then Play On** and a vinyl-only boxset of four albums, **Fleetwood Mac 1969-1972**, is released on August 20 by Warners*

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; REX FEATURES