



sheet music: he wrote the parts for Green to play, but such was their complexity that Kirwan ended up playing them himself.

Indeed, the complexity and intricacy of Kirwan's guitar style, particularly his vibrato, is still admired by musicians today, not least Little Barrie's Barrie Cadogan and Wolf People's Joe Hollick, who both bonded over a love of Kirwan's music. In 2017, the pair performed songs in Kirwan's honour at the Blues Kitchen in Camden: during rehearsals, they were staggered by the mastery Kirwan had over his guitar at such a young age.

"The speed and intensity of his playing was mind-blowing," Hollick says. "The melodies he wrote are so beautiful – almost more beautiful than anything else that was

going on at that time. They were so elegant and mature beyond his years. For such a young guy to come up with songs as achingly beautiful as his was really something."

A year after joining, Kirwan had already contributed several songs to his first album with the band, *Then Play On*, including the folky ballad standout *When You Say*. He composed half the songs on the album, including the propulsive opener *Coming Your Way*, a song of simultaneous complexity and beauty.

By the time *Kiln House* arrived in 1970, songs such as *Dragonfly* – a song Kirwan wrote using lyrics from a WH Davies poem – felt like a sea change for the band, while *Woman Of 1000 Years*, on *Future Games*, took them into dreamy Californian psychedelia, hinting at the later *Rumours* era. The beautifully desolate *Bare Trees* – the last album on which Kirwan featured – was emotive and raw, and led Fleetwood Mac into vulnerable new territory.

Green's eventual departure from the band led to issues for Kirwan. Shy and unassuming, he didn't enjoy being at front and centre, and the additional attention compounded his existing mental health issues. Kirwan was a perfectionist and would turn up hours before the rest of the band to rehearse, his seriousness often clashing with other band members. There was also an insularity and fragility to Kirwan, that Green had noticed soon after he joined. All this, plus an incessant touring schedule and life in the spotlight, proved too much for him.

Kirwan started to drink heavily and would often go days without food. More line-up changes unsettled him further and his behaviour became increasingly withdrawn and erratic. Before the band were due to go on stage in the US in 1972, Kirwan had a breakdown that resulted in him smashing his beloved Les Paul guitar to pieces. He refused to go on stage and the following day, he was fired from the band.

He made three solo albums after his departure, but he stopped touring – something that resulted in the albums selling badly. By 1980, Kirwan found himself homeless, sleeping between a basement flat in London and various shelters. That same year, Fleetwood Mac toured in London and Kirwan turned up at the band's hotel. Fleetwood described it as a "heart-breaking

encounter" and recalled how Kirwan "looked derelict... he told us he'd slept on a park bench the night before."

Thirteen more years of homelessness followed for Kirwan. After Fleetwood contacted the Missing Persons Bureau in the 90s, having lost all contact with Kirwan, a writer from the *Independent* found and interviewed him: he said that he felt no bitterness towards the band.

"I've been through a bit of a rough patch, but I'm not too bad. I get by and I suppose I'm homeless, but then I've never really had a home since our early days on tour," he explained. "I couldn't handle it all mentally and I had to get out." In his last interview for *Guitar* magazine in 1997, he said he still thought of Fleetwood and band as friends.

Kirwan was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame a year later but didn't attend, and between 1998 and his death in 2018, it was reported that he had become a semi-permanent resident in a London hostel. Later, he was a resident in a care home for alcoholics where, some reports say, he always had a guitar at his side. He died in 2018 after a bout of pneumonia.

After Kirwan's death, Fleetwood described him as "a huge force in our early years." He added: "Danny's true legacy will forever live on in the music he wrote and played so beautifully as part of the foundation of Fleetwood Mac."

Indeed, a 1975 review in *Rolling Stone* already noted the link between the

band's Buckingham-Nicks era Mac and Kirwan: "The band began its spiritual journey to LA half-a-dozen albums ago on *Future Games* – when it was led by the often-dazzling guitarist/singer Danny Kirwan. His inspiration lingers in the songs and singing of Christine McVie... and the electric guitar playing of Buckingham." As the *Guardian* put it in their obituary to Kirwan, he was the "missing link" between the old and new Fleetwood Mac, but often didn't get credit for evolving their sound.

After Kirwan's death, Cadogan and Hollick put on a tribute gig. "We just couldn't understand how he was so criminally underrated," Cadogan says. "There wasn't much support for people in those days with mental health issues – people weren't open. It's sad to think how things could have maybe turned out differently for him with more support."



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