

FLEETWOOD MAC

by Elizabeth Aubrey

By the time Fleetwood Mac's second eponymous album arrived, there had been a tumultuous amount of change in and around the band. They'd already released nine albums in eight years, and all manner of walkouts and splits had led to multiple line-up changes. By 1975, Fleetwood Mac had morphed into yet another line-up – but this one would go on to alter the history of pop music.

In 1974, producer Keith Olsen played Mick Fleetwood a demo from a then-unknown Californian folk-pop duo made up of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks.

Fleetwood was taken aback when he heard it, according to *Pitchfork*, famously saying that the sound had the “it” factor he'd been looking for. Buckingham agreed to sign up, but only on the proviso that his songwriting partner and girlfriend Nicks would too. They soon became the second couple in the band after John and Christine McVie, and a new quintet was formed.

The deal was done on New Year's Eve 1974, and the band went into the studio soon after, producing new songs at lightning speed. Buckingham proved to be an early force in the studio, not least because of his perfectionism and assertiveness. John McVie initially found it difficult when Buckingham started to instruct the long-term members just how he wanted them to play on his songs. As journalist David Honigmann noted, McVie reportedly told Buckingham “The band you're in is Fleetwood Mac. I'm the Mac, and I play the bass.”

Despite this initial acrimony, after just three months in the studio the album was ready. *Fleetwood Mac* was a slow burner that steadily grew on fans who fell in love with the songs when they were played live. Indeed, 15 months after its arrival and a period of relentless touring, it reached number one in the US. In 1977, the success of *Rumours* sent fans in search of that album's predecessor, sending *Fleetwood Mac* five times platinum.

The secret of the album's success lay in the unique way that the musicians merged English blues-rock with the folk-pop of Buckingham and Nicks' West Coast California. They'd almost achieved this three years earlier with *Bare Trees*, via the experimental songwriting of former guitarist and vocalist Danny Kirwan: his work was arguably the catalyst that sent Fleetwood Mac along a different path. As *Rolling Stone* noted in a review of the album in 1975, “his inspiration lingers in... the electric guitar playing of Buckingham, who likes to interpose aching, Kirwan-esque leads and textured Byrds-like rhythm lines.”

Buckingham's opening track Monday Morning served as a statement of intent: the band were fusing blues with pop to create a new sound that would, along with the work of the Eagles, come to define the sound of the Seventies. Another standout Buckingham song is his excellent collaboration with Christine McVie, World

Turning. Its rocky, bluegrass opening burns slowly, increasing gradually in pace until Buckingham's relentless guitar playing kicks in at the bridge. Listen closely and you'll spot some of the same patterns that we'd later hear in The Chain, driving the song's momentum to a thrilling crescendo.

It was Nicks, however, who stole the show with Rhiannon, a song that came to epitomise everything that she was about – the otherworldly, the dream-like and the occult, with folkish storytelling, mythical legends and mysterious lore. Lyrically, the song is rooted in Welsh legend and is about a “goddess who possesses a woman” as *Classic Rock Review* explained: Nicks' raspy, shadowy vocals were a keen match for the song's enigmatic subject matter. The group harmonies on the track's now-famous chorus – especially those of Christine and Nicks – were intoxicating. This was the start of the sound that would come to define

Fleetwood Mac.

While the love affairs of the two couples in the band had already started to break down – and went on to form the subject matter of *Rumours*, the most famous break-up album of them all – the real love affair of Fleetwood Mac was between Christine and Stevie, best friends who became allies in an industry where women were pitted against each other daily. To have two females at the forefront of a mainstream pop-rock group was still a rarity beyond ABBA and the Mamas & The Papas: this album's place in moving things forward for women in pop and rock still feels pivotal.

Like Nicks, Christine had the album's second big standout track with Over My Head. As with World Turning, it begins in the blues and soars to a breezy pop song that sounds like a West Coast summer's day bottled. Likewise, Warm Ways, another composition by Christine, was used as evidence by *Rolling Stone* in 1975 to describe her as “one of the best female vocalists in pop” – and listening, it's hard to disagree.

Nicks' gorgeous acoustic fingerpicked Landslide feels like a direct through-line to Christine's Songbird in spirit, further evidencing the deep creative bond between the pair. The song initiated a new, emotive depth to the songwriting that was absent in the sometimes over-clinical work of John McVie and Fleetwood. “Well, I've been afraid of changing,” Nicks sings, “but time makes you bolder...” – a metaphor for Fleetwood Mac's journey to this album. *Fleetwood Mac* is often referred to by fans as

“The White Album” on account of its cover, as is the Beatles' self-titled LP of 1968 – and it's telling how both are marked by bold journeys into new directions, risk-taking and experimentation. It lay the groundwork for *Rumours*, and is perhaps the most famous example of a transition album of all time: it remains an understated classic in its own right. Self-titled albums often signify a statement of arrival for a band: Fleetwood Mac's second such LP was certainly theirs.

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