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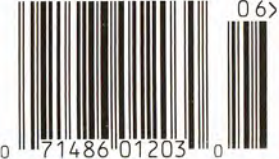
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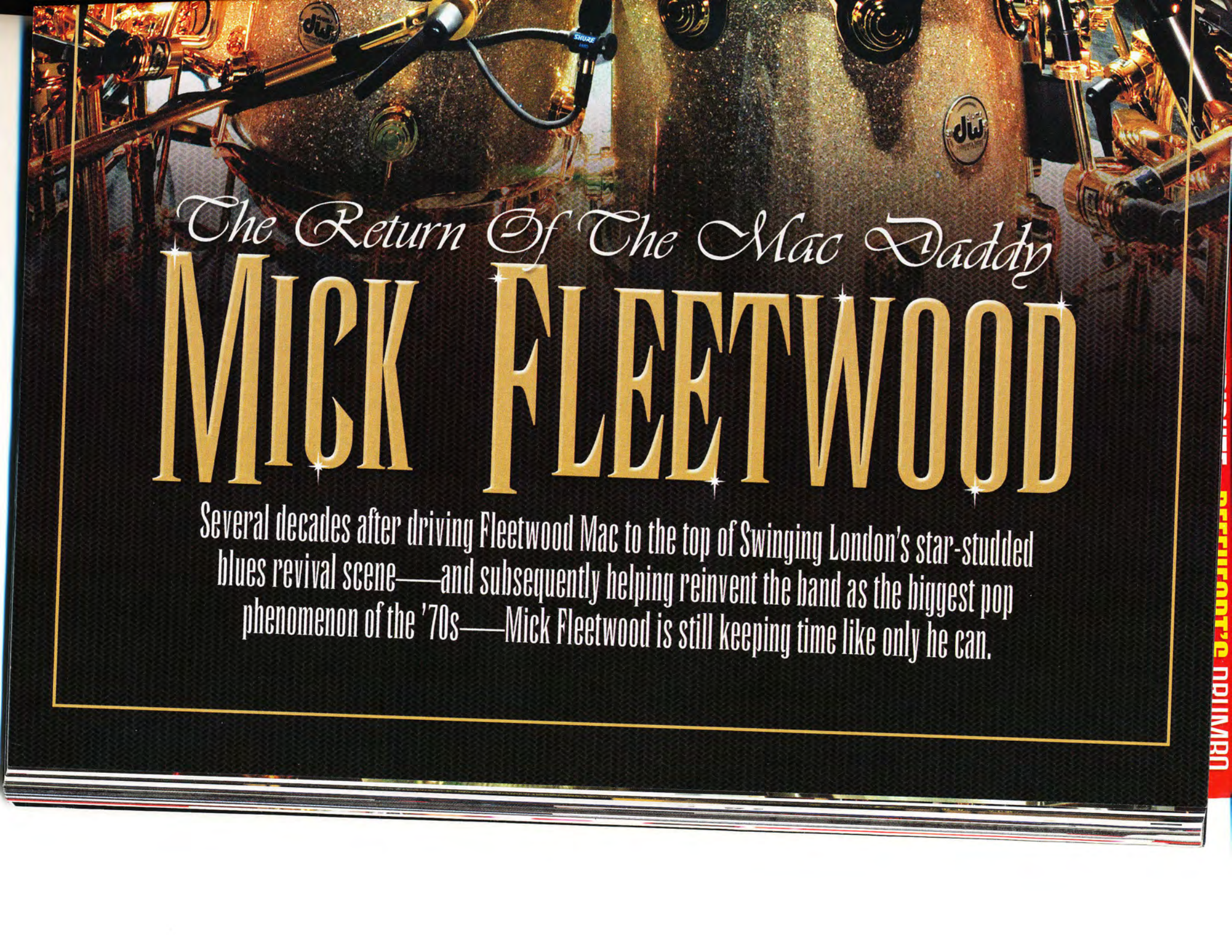
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Story by Patrick Berkery • Photos by Rob Shanahan





The Return Of The Mac Daddy
MICK FLEETWOOD

Several decades after driving Fleetwood Mac to the top of Swinging London's star-studded blues revival scene—and subsequently helping reinvent the band as the biggest pop phenomenon of the '70s—Mick Fleetwood is still keeping time like only he can.

"Mick Fleetwood could hypnotize me with a bass drum and a cowbell."

—Stan Lynch, *Modern Drummer*, May 2008

For proof of what former Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers drummer Stan Lynch is referring to, listen to Fleetwood Mac's "Gold Dust Woman," the spooky closing track on their landmark 1977 album, *Rumours*.

Beneath Stevie Nicks' witchy purr and Lindsey Buckingham's diffuse electric guitar squalls and piercing slide work, Fleetwood anchors the track's mix of drama and drone with a sparse bass drum and cowbell part that is indeed hypnotizing: boom-TOCK, boom-TOCK, boom-TOCK, boom-TOCK.

Fleetwood is held in high regard as a drummer for outfitting his band's songs with similarly hypnotic grooves in various forms. Think of the hollowed-out verses of "The Chain," the delicate brushwork of "Sara," and the steady pulse of "Dreams." When the chorus of "Gold Dust Woman" enters, however, the other side of Fleetwood's rhythmic genius is on display: his penchant for playing patterns of accents where you least expect them, and rarely duplicating those figures when a section repeats.

Mick says that habit developed from a difficulty in consistently committing things to memory. And he's well aware that other drummers have driven themselves mad trying to approximate his unorthodox style. "Some of the drummers that play with Stevie when she goes out on her own, they'll say, 'When I play your parts, it just sounds so stiff and weird. It's driving me crazy,'" Fleetwood says with a knowing laugh. "I tell them it was just the way I felt it and I can't really explain it. With me, it's back-to-front sometimes."

While he's celebrated by fans and fellow musicians for providing such unique rhythmic counterpoint to the gilded pop songs of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, within the ranks, Fleetwood, sixty-one, has always been much more than just the band's drummer, or founding father, or partial namesake.

From Fleetwood Mac's inception as a blues-based London combo back in 1967, Mick has been the straw that stirs the drink. He acted as de facto road manager in the early days, drafted new members as original guitarist-vocalist Peter Green and replacements like Bob Welch left the fold, managed the band's affairs when things blew up in the '70s, and kept his group afloat in the '80s and '90s after Buckingham and Nicks temporarily departed.

Throughout it all, Fleetwood has had bassist John McVie (the "Mac" in Fleetwood Mac) at his side to form one of the greatest rhythm sections in rock history. And well into his fifth decade as a working drummer, he's feeding his desire to have a regular gig with two bands he formed with former Mac guitarist-vocalist Rick Vito—The Mick Fleetwood Blues Band and The Island Rumours Band.

Today, the Mac is back (albeit minus retired keyboardist-vocalist Christine McVie) and is well into a reunion tour that should keep the band on the road throughout 2009 and might inspire the members to enter the studio in the not-too-distant future. "I truly believe that during this tour Stevie and Lindsey will be thinking of ideas for a new Mac record," Fleetwood says with palpable enthusiasm. "This band feels we're more than capable of doing that. If I was put on the spot and asked to bet on whether it would happen, I would put money on this band definitely recording again."



MD: When you wrapped the last tour in 2004, was there any certainty that Fleetwood Mac would work together again?

Mick: There was, it was just a question of when. In truth, we thought we'd have been doing this three years ago. But it had to be right for everyone.

focused. So it's worked out better.

MD: Is there a conditioning regimen you now go through prior to a tour?

Mick: More in the past, really. I stay reasonably fit these days. And I play quite a bit at home in Hawaii with The Island Rumours Band. Prior to

cle memory was pretty locked in.

MD: Does having two bands going while Fleetwood Mac is inactive keep you as busy as you'd like?

Mick: Yes. And while I'm off with Fleetwood Mac, both units are active with another drummer in my place. The

"I don't think I would make a good full-time session drummer. I'd bankrupt people, chewing up time with suggestions."

Otherwise it would just suffocate something that someone's doing. Lindsey's solo projects took way longer than he thought. And Stevie went back out on the road, so we waited. Everyone is totally focused instead of sort of

rehearsals for the Fleetwood Mac tour, I was in Europe with The Mick Fleetwood Blues Band. We did a grueling five-week tour, a helluva lot of fun. We were playing five, six nights a week, so coming into Fleetwood Mac again, my mus-

Island Rumours Band does a lot of corporate gigs in Hawaii. We play a mix of traditional Hawaiian styles and a good cross-section of older Fleetwood Mac stuff, re-approached. And John McVie sits in from time to time. I wanted to keep active musically, and the best way to do that is to put something together that has a real purpose to it. Going around and jamming and stuff is great—and I do a fair amount of that on the island, to keep my chops up. But inherently I'm a band creator. I always seem to end up forming bands. [laughs]

MD: It also seems like a good way to stay connected to Fleetwood Mac's roots as a blues-based band.

Mick: Definitely. On this last Blues Band tour, we obviously played a lot of the old Fleetwood Mac stuff from the Peter Green days. And having done that in a focused way, I wondered for the life of me why I hadn't done it before. Now in downtime from Fleetwood Mac, we can go play blues festivals, just generally plug into that music I was weaned on. I love playing it. We're even doing "Oh Well" in the show with Lindsey. I'm very happy about that. A little slice of where the band originally came from. And it's been kicking ass.

MD: What are some of your recollections of the early days gigging around London?

Mick: My first official gig in London was with a band called The Senders. They were basically an all-instrumental group. And out of that band came The Shames, which did fairly well around London. We played at The Marquee, doing Yardbirds-esque stuff. From there came my connection with keyboardist Peter Bardens, who I played with for many, many years. I went on to play

MICK'S SETUP

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- A. 7x14 snare
- B. 11x14 tom
- C. 10x13 tom
- D. 14x16 floor tom
- E. 16x18 floor tom
- F. 16x23 bass drum

Hardware: DW 5000AD3 bass pedal, DW 5500TD two-leg hi-hat stand

Cymbals: Zildjian

- 1. 20" K crash-ride with rivets (brilliant finish)
- 2. 22" A Custom ride
- 3. 15" hi-hats
(New Beat top/Mastersound bottom)
- 4. 17" A Custom crash
- 5. 18" K Custom Session crash
- 6. 22" K ride (brilliant finish)
- 7. 22" K Constantinople medium low ride
- 8. 18" Oriental crash

Electronics: Roland PD-8 trigger pads





with him and Rod Stewart in Shotgun Express, and with all sorts of people. I was very fortunate that once I got to London I was never without a gig. I never had any downtime when I wasn't playing. That situation really helped my chops.

MD: Did you have lessons or any kind of training before you started gigging?

Mick: No, it was training on the job. Though I was playing to records in the attic when I was a young kid, about nine or ten. I had a toy kit called a Gigster. Each drum was about 6" deep, and it had a 6" cymbal, a hi-hat, and a bass drum.

MD: When you were playing around London in the mid-'60s, were you rubbing elbows with up-and-coming drummers like Ginger Baker?

Mick: I didn't really know anyone, but I very quickly knew of them. They were all drummers that commanded a lot of reverence, like Ginger, and Phil Seamen, who used to play with Georgie Fame. He was a great English jazz drummer. Ginger used to worship him. And I first knew of Ginger from playing with the Graham Bond Organisation—that was a wild band. And Mickey Waller [Jeff Beck, Rod Stewart, Brian Auger, John Mayall] I

really admired. Great feel drummer, one of the dudes. He was like the English Jim Keltner—played with a lot of people, but he still retained his own style.

MD: When did you hook up with John McVie?

Mick: I hooked up with John playing-wise with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. I knew him as a sort of wayward friend. We'd played on so many gigs in and around London, at places like The Flamingo and The Marquee. When I hooked up with Mayall it was John Mayall, Peter Green, John McVie, and me. So unknowingly, the first three members of Fleetwood Mac were in that band.

MD: I would imagine you and John could roll out of bed in the middle of the night after not having played together in a decade and fall into that boom-bap/boom-boom-bap groove without a problem.

Mick: You are entirely correct. [laughs] We all don't see that much of each other when we're apart—John and Lindsey had probably seen each other three times in five years. And Lindsey, bless his heart, like the second week

GOING HIS OWN WAY: Mick's Lists

RECORDINGS

Mick's favorites of the tracks he's recorded with Fleetwood Mac: "Albatross" (English Rose) /// "Black Magic Woman" (English Rose) /// "Go Your Own Way" (Rumours) /// "Rattlesnake Shake" (Then Play On) /// "Oh Daddy" (Rumours)

INFLUENCES

B.B. King Live At The Regal (Sonny Freeman) ///
Sandy Nelson Let There Be Drums (Sandy Nelson) ///
The Rolling Stones Exile On Main Street (Charlie Watts) ///
George Harrison All Things Must Pass (Alan White, Ringo Starr, Jim Gordon, Ginger Baker)

of rehearsals, literally, he had tears in his eyes, saying, 'Shit, I forgot about you guys.' He was saying, 'I get what we have in this band.' No matter the blows that come and go personally, musically, when we're all together, it's for sure a trip.

MD: You also have a tight rhythmic link with Lindsey that feels a little more primal than the way you lock in with John's bass. The way you and Lindsey often jam into "Go Your Own Way" live is a good example of that.

Mick: You're right. I play very physically. And when Lindsey's on stage he's also pretty physical, in terms of how he gets his stuff over. We have that sort of camaraderie. He knows he can turn

MICK FLEETWOOD

around to me and he's going to get his ass kicked. And he can do likewise with me. That's how we communicate musically. With John, I don't have to think about what he's playing, and he doesn't think about me. We're so blended into one, it's second nature. I can go off and have fun and play off Lindsey, and John's always right there with us.

MD: It's certainly an interesting contrast of styles. There's Lindsey, who's more of an eccentric, studio-rat perfectionist

type. And there's John and you, who bring an old-school blues approach to the table. On paper, you wouldn't think that mix would work, but it does.

Mick: John and I deliver something that may not be everybody's cup of tea, but generally—which is a nice thing—people acknowledge that it's a rhythm section that is very identifiable. I'm only saying that because I've heard it so often. For Lindsey, when he's away from that, playing with other players who do their thing and approach things

differently, it takes a few days for him to come around. I could see it on his face when we started rehearsals. We were doing some of our songs that he had been doing on his solo tours, and I could see him thinking, *That ain't gonna work with these two...* [laughs] But slowly, the big smile would come, and he'd realize that's the stuff that Fleetwood Mac does.

John and I play like blues players, really, in terms of the way we approach things. It's not the material we're doing. But the approach John and I have was learned in the trenches playing with Sonny Boy Williamson. It stays with you. I'm not Gene Krupa. When all is said and done I'm just a guy who gets out his own emotions through a pretty simple formula of technique. I pride myself on time and I pride myself on knowing that if something is digging a hole or not swinging, I'm not playing well. It's that simple. Has it got the grease? If not, give me a can of it, and let's deliver this shit—properly.

MD: Another interesting contrast can be heard on the recordings. It's well documented how the band would work tirelessly in the studio on tightening arrangements, getting sounds, and perfecting harmonies. Yet a lot of the drum parts seem pretty loosely played—you'll fill through the tops of measures, you won't repeat parts from verse to verse or chorus to chorus. That's really become your trademark.

Mick: Some parts definitely don't repeat, that's for sure. [laughs] It's only because I have no idea what I'm doing.

MD: In the past you've discussed how, as a young man, having difficulty committing things to memory led to your somewhat nonlinear drumming style.

Mick: Yes, and I'll take it willingly. A lot of these songs, no matter how simple they are, would get played differently by me each time. They still do. You're right, that has become part of my thing. John has become a master at catching my mix-ups: "Whoops, there he goes." [laughs] That's another thing that makes John's relationship with me so special. He covers my ass. We'll play a lot of stuff separately. In doing it that way, he so perfectly places a part in impromptu stuff that I do. It becomes seamless, and

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it becomes part of, quote, the style. And then you're off to the races.

MD: During the recording process, has a producer or anyone in the band tried to get you to focus on repeating parts and playing more static arrangements?

Mick: Yeah, for about two minutes. [laughs] Then they realized that I was having a mental breakdown. Lindsey was familiar with [early Fleetwood Mac] albums like *Then Play On*. He loved that album. He had heard these somewhat complicated things that I played, and at the onset of joining Fleetwood Mac he would say, "You must be able to do that." He would come in with demos of songs, which was totally fine. I would get as close as I could get to the drum part. And early on he would go, "No, no, we've got to do it like *this*." I'd say, "I'll really try and do it, but I'll probably mess it up, and we'll spend three months in the studio doing it." He very quickly realized that John and I listen, and we really try to deliver to your front line what they really want—as a rhythm section should.

MD: So in something like "Dreams," for instance, where the chorus makes that



elegant entrance and you answer that by crashing the cymbal on the first downbeat, that's just how you felt it?

Mick: I'm playing it as I feel it. And a lot of the things that stayed there over the years have been repeated because that's where I feel it should be. I've had incredible drummers ask me, "What is that thing you do on 'Go Your Own Way'?" It was just the way I felt it. I'm a big believer in listening to the lead guitar and, more importantly, the lead vocal—where the singers are dropping

their phrasing. This comes from my training as a blues player. In blues, for the most part, really all you have is the timing around the vocalists, and the timing where you complement their phrasing. The other part of the equation is just how loud or how soft you play.

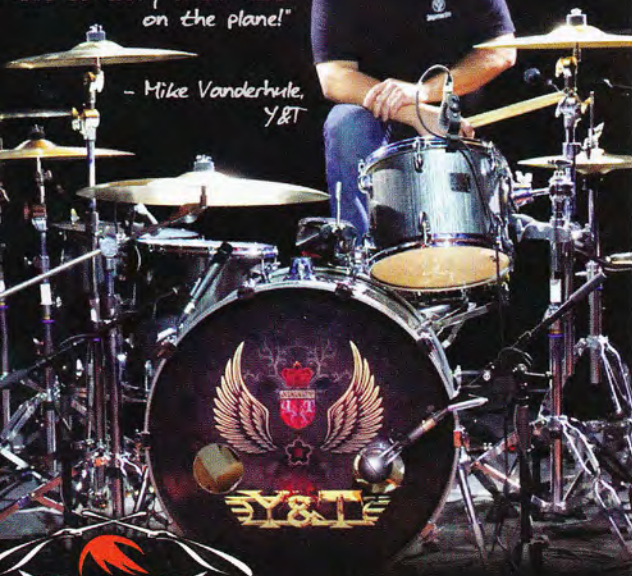
MD: You mention "Go Your Own Way," and that's a fascinating drum track for what you *don't* do in some spots, and what the listener thinks is going on. Like the chorus that comes back in after the guitar solo—you fill up to it, but

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there's no cymbal crash. There's also the way the shakers are pushing time in the chorus, making it seem like you're playing a four-on-the-floor thing, but you're not. And you can't really find the 1 when Lindsey brings that acoustic part in at the top—it's pretty maddening!

Mick: I've gathered that's an interesting track from people's reactions over the years. [laughs] When Jeff Porcaro was playing with Boz Scaggs, we used to tour a lot together. He would stand

beside the stage almost every night, but we didn't really talk that much at first. Then a few weeks later, he grabs me after soundcheck one night and says, "All right, I'm going out of my mind every night trying to figure out what you're doing on 'Go Your Own Way.'" And he was a true craftsman with a great feel. Technically, he was very astute. I would watch him be quietly intimidated, really. And I felt so awful, because I couldn't actually explain my part. I said, "You may not want to hear

this, but I don't really know what I do." I didn't know how to dissect those figures, to tell him what I was doing. I told him he'd have to figure it out himself, just watching me every night. And then, just when he thought he'd found out what I was doing, he realized it was slightly different every night. I had him bedazzled by stuff that, in truth, is so incredibly simple. People often think it's more complicated than it really is.

MD: It kind of all comes back to your approach being informed by that difficulty in committing things to memory.

Mick: I think that over the years, my thing—call it lazy mind, or whatever—it did become part of my style. In the early days, there's no doubt that some of the things I would do would, in essence, get me into trouble. I was hanging on by the skin of my teeth half the time. Then I figured out how to get in and out of these funny, simple time zones. It could've been catastrophic, but it became something I was very comfortable with. It's like committing a crime and getting away with it. Now I just do it without any discomfort, and it's become part of the plot. When I do session stuff—which is very rare, because you have to deliver certain things—I always say, "I'd love to come and play, but I just want you to know, I'll do what I do. And if it's good, great. Or you can take it in and chop it up and do what you want with it."

MD: Listening to some other artists' records you've played on, like Matthew Sweet's *Altered Beast* album and Warren Zevon's "Werewolves Of London," it seems pretty clear from what you play that you were brought in to "be Mick Fleetwood," so to speak.

Mick: Yeah, I think that's safe to say. [laughs] "Werewolves" is just John and me doing our rhythm section thing. And I did a session for Dido's most recent album [*Safe Trip Home*]. Dido and her producer, Jon Brion, had been sitting around listening to Fleetwood Mac and they said, "Let's get Mick down." Little did she know I was a huge fan of hers. They ended up cutting up bits and pieces of what I played. But I had a lot of fun doing that. Though again, I don't think I would make a good full-time

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session drummer. I'd bankrupt people, chewing up time with suggestions: "Let's do this, let's do that..." [laughs] A session guy comes in, does his thing, and leaves. I get too interested in how to go about it, or finding ways to go about something that I couldn't do. It becomes something else, and everyone else gets sucked into my process. It's still a thrill to be asked.

MD: In a conceptual sense, *Tusk* was someone else's album—Lindsey's. It's

viewed as his "weird" anti-*Rumours II* brainchild or something. But it doesn't seem to be *that* much of an odd record once you get past the presentation of the drums—both the sounds and the performances. What are your thoughts on the record thirty years on?

Mick: *Tusk* is my favorite album. And the whole making of that record wasn't that strange to me, because if you go back to "Oh Well" and some things on *Then Play On*, Peter Green was playing

timpani and having fun with drums and percussion. Lindsey's choice of odd drum sounds and parts was never a problem for me. I would calmly say to Lindsey, "We just can't have a whole album of drum parts made on tissue boxes. As we can't have the whole album with John not playing bass. We could do some of it—*should* do some of it. But we can't have that take over the whole thing."

MD: What are some of your favorite moments on the album?

Mick: "Over And Over" is just lovely. What I got to play was so spacious and simple, but it really supported Christine's melody. And definitely "What Makes You Think You're The One." We recorded the drums to a boom box, that main sound. And it just kicks ass. From the jump we decided it would be that very abstract part—not a kick, snare, hi-hat thing. For other songs, Lindsey and I would have these hitting sessions, where you pick up this and you pick up that and play it. I loved all that stuff. It's much easier to express little rhythmic things on percussion that, in truth, I sometimes don't have the ultimate technique to do on a drumkit. And I totally get that small sounds are very often the only thing you can do [on a recording]—otherwise you eat up too much space.

MD: You've always had a nice way of mixing in those "found" percussion sounds, particularly on *Rumours* and *Tusk*.

Mick: We always had loads of great percussion stuff hanging around. Invariably, though, we'd end up hitting rulers and pencils on matchboxes. We were definitely into that whole thing. I'd done a little of that with Peter Green. Lindsey was happy to find a percussionist who wouldn't get all put out of joint that he was playing a Kleenex box.

MD: What was it like tracking the song "Tusk"?

Mick: "Tusk" came from a soundcheck. Lindsey would play that riff, and we just played what we played around it. When we started the album Lindsey began working that into a song. And I think it got discarded, really.

Then I went on holiday in Normandy

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to visit my mother after my father passed away. I'd arrived on a weekend and drunk massive amounts of brandy. The local band in this fishing village started playing early the following morning right outside my sister's house, where we were staying. And I thought, *I'll never get to sleep now*. So I went out onto the balcony and had some coffee to try and feel alive. And every ten minutes they would come around this side of the village and the crowd would get bigger and bigger. It was like the Pied Piper. I thought, *What a great idea—people really seem to be enjoying this*.

So I went back to the band and suggested that we find a great brass band and record them playing Lindsey's riff with Fleetwood Mac. We pulled it off the back burner, and I went to see Dr. Bartz at USC and made a whole project of it, with them coming up with the arrangement. Everyone thought I was insane, and then I said, "Let's do it at Dodger Stadium." And they said, "You can't f'ing pay for it!" But we got it for nothing.

It was built around me playing toms. Then we made a huge loop of it—about

thirty feet long, pencils holding it in place around the room—so it would keep feeding through the tape machine. The rest of it is sundry bits of overdubs. It was a mind-boggling thing. These days you just put it on the grid and loop it. That became one of the classic Mac songs, this epic thing. It basically came from a soundcheck and me surviving a hangover in Normandy.

MD: After the drum solo in the middle, is there an actual count from that back into the riff? It seems pretty random.

Mick: It is. On stage I just let it loose. I don't know how long I'm going to go. Everyone will go, "We've got to know how long you'll go on. We've got to bring keyboard brass pads back in." But I can't count it. So I just go [sings the sound of rattling drums] and as soon as I go onto the cymbals [makes a whooshing noise to indicate a cymbal swell]...BOOM! You can see me signal that I'm coming off the cymbals back onto the drums, and we never miss it. And they don't have to count, and neither do I! [laughs]

MD: "Sara" was another big hit from

Tusk, and that has some lovely brushwork, as does the live version of "Never Going Back Again" you've been doing on recent tours. Did you have much brush playing in your background?

Mick: Yes, absolutely, through the necessity of playing and practicing in flats and little apartments, the need to keep quiet. In the early days I played with a piano and upright bass, pretending I was a jazz drummer when I wasn't. I'd be stuffed in the corner with a hi-hat and snare drum, gigging around London. I did a lot of that in the early days. We're doing "Sara" in the set now and I'm really enjoying that. Brushwork is not used a lot now, and through the years I've always been up for doing that. I didn't record much if any at all with Peter Green. But on stage we used to do a couple of really slow blues numbers where I'd pull out the brushes.

MD: "Second Hand News" is considerably less ambitious than "Tusk," but it also has an interesting layering of drum parts and percussion.

Mick: That was me sitting down at the

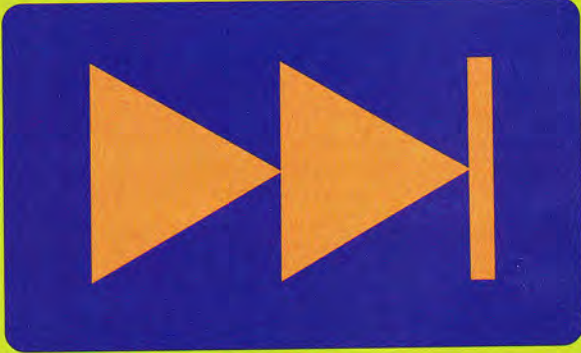


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kit playing bass drum, snare, and hi-hat. And then I was overdubbing those tom fills and some cymbals over the top of it. And there's a rhythm that Lindsey tapped out on the plastic-padded end of the mixing console that runs throughout the song. It adds a really nice slap-and-tickle sound. More found percussion from Lindsey.

MD: And "Big Love" also has a layered, galloping feel like "Second Hand News." Is that you playing along with a drum machine?

Mick: Yes. "Big Love" is very much an example of full cooperation between Lindsey and me. Several of Lindsey's songs from *Tango In The Night* had been intended for a solo album. He had started doing some of the percussion work on that song, and I stripped some of it off and put some overdubs on, like the snare drums. That's crafting a thing together instead of doing what I normally do, which is just play the song. That was a fairly unique one.

MD: You've had a percussionist on the last two Fleetwood Mac tours, but not this time out. Has that forced you to adapt your part on songs like "Tusk," which has a lot going on in terms of drums and percussion?

Mick: Not really. Steve Rinkov, my drum tech—who's a great drummer—is playing on about three or four songs. On "Tusk" he's doing some extra tom work, because we don't want to be playing to loops. I prefer playing without percussion, really. And I'm really having some fun with a lot of little musical touches—nothing highly intricate, just doing a lot of chime and cymbal work with pads. Just whacking the pads once, I know I can have the chimes come in when I want. It gives a little bit of tinsel here and there, which would have been covered by a percussion player.

MD: Back in the '70s you were very active in managing Fleetwood Mac's affairs. Did you find that robbed you of the time and energy you needed to be the band's drummer?

Mick: I'd always done that, even back in the early days. Making sure we got to gigs on time, picking everyone up, reading the road maps—it was second

nature. It never occurred to me I was wasting energy I could've used on the music. Not to play down my role as a drummer, but I just became the dude that did all that [managerial] stuff. And I don't walk around thinking of drumming all day long. I know some people do. But I never crucified myself learning paradiddles and all the different technical stuff. I sort of fudged my way through. I just couldn't get it together to nail all that stuff.

For me, being a musician is not necessarily always about your own playing. It's how you react when playing with other musicians, especially if you're just not in the habit of playing with other people. Is it meaningful that you're inclined to sit in a room and play by yourself for five hours a day? Yeah, it is. But I would say what is more meaningful—and I always say this to young players—is to reach out to play with other people. Even if you find people that in your estimation aren't terribly good, you'll raise their game. In raising their game, you create this chemistry, this knowledge of natural musical chemistry, which I do know about.

MD: That's a good way to describe your role in Fleetwood Mac. You don't write or sing the songs, but you're a vital element to the band's chemistry, as a player and a person.

Mick: Looking back on what I've done, I'm happiest with that part of my portfolio; that's probably what I'm most proud of. I want to feel that I can really pull that chemistry out of the players around me. I'm not really that worried about me. You get so obsessed about your instrument. To a certain extent that's necessary, and it's great. But I want to encourage someone as a player. It's about the people you're with, and whether you're doing the very best job collectively. That's how you get a band with a sound. That's how you get a band that works. That's how you get John and me, that's how you get Fleetwood Mac. All deference to other people Stevie and Lindsey have played with over the years, it isn't that.



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