

GQ ICON

Tusk by Fleetwood Mac

STORY BY DYLAN JONES



Cover version (above): Tusk's eye-catching album sleeve features images by Afrocentric photographer Peter Beard

Everyone loves *Rumours*, but what about its follow-up? Tusk remains the greatest self-sabotage in rock'n'roll history, but this month's reissue of the Mac's elephantine monolith reveals a record that stands for a golden moment in time – blithe and bacchanalian – which will never be seen, or heard, again

"Oh I get it, you don't want to be cute any more." Bob Dylan to Paul McCartney, 1967

How things change in the index of cool. Back in 1989, back when God was a boy, there was a rather annoying Stock Aitken Waterman club single sung by the teenage Reynolds Girls called "I'd Rather Jack", a "peculiar moment of year-zero militancy" in the words of GQ music columnist Dorian Lynskey. "I'd rather jack than Fleetwood Mac," they sang, using the band as a rather convenient example of middle-aged millionaire campaign-trail rock (Bill Clinton would use the band's "Don't Stop" when he was running for office in 1992). Back then, the emerging rave generation had no time for the band, but these days it would be difficult to find anyone who doesn't treat Fleetwood Mac as though they are as important and as influential as The Beatles.

They are almost as ubiquitous.

Rumours, their classic album from 1977, is now one of the most beloved albums of all time – everyone loves it, whether they're 15, 25, 35 or 60. U2 unfairly got themselves into a bit of a fix when they delivered their last album free via iTunes, but I don't know anyone who would complain if they suddenly found *Rumours* on their laptop one morning. In fact, I'm not sure I know anyone who





Landslide victory: In 1978, Fleetwood Mac won the Grammys' most prestigious award – Album Of The Year – for *Rumours*, setting high expectations for follow-up record *Tusk*

doesn't own it and, in the same way that it's difficult to believe anyone who says they actively dislike The Beatles, saying you don't like *Rumours* actually sounds pretentious.

A blackboard sign outside Hector & Noble, a pub in London's Victoria Park, says it all: "Burgers. Pie. Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* on repeat." We love *Rumours* in the same way we love James Corden, *Dad's Army* or the Queen: it is a national treasure. One of the more popular Fleetwood Mac Instagram memes is a photograph of a small girl screaming, "Me when I realise I will probably never see Fleetwood Mac performing 'Storms', 'Beautiful Child' or 'Sara' live."

Between 1977 and 1979, *Rumours* sold 13 million copies,



becoming the sound of FM radio in the process. It was played in dorms, in shopping malls, at baseball games, you could hear it blasting out of car windows and pouring out of the radio. During 1977, Fleetwood Mac spent so much time on FM radio in the US that you could have been forgiven for thinking the technology was named after them.

Mixing business and pleasure is an occupational hazard in the music industry, although with Fleetwood Mac it became something of a career in itself. The breakups of band members John and Christine McVie, as well as that of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie

Rumours may sound escapist, but in the lyrics there's no escape, especially for the band

Nicks, created not just personal chaos, it also led to the creation of *Rumours*, which contained such classic co-dependency songs as "The Chain", "Go Your Own Way", "Dreams", "Don't Stop" and "You Make Loving Fun".

"It has the firepower of a greatest-hits collection and the coherence of a concept album," says Lynskey. "Each song seems to be talking to, or about, all the others in a he-said-she-said echo chamber. *Rumours* may sound escapist, but in the lyrics there's no escape, especially for the band. On one level it's a painstakingly crafted soft-rock fantasy, glowing with sunshine and money, but



uncomfortable emotions are constantly gnawing and jabbing away at the music's flawless surface pleasures."

In the same way that, more than 150 years ago, Manifest Destiny drove American pioneers westward – as hordes of speculators, migrants and would-be moguls staked claim to anything and everything before them as they pressed onward to the Pacific Ocean – so during the late Sixties and early Seventies, Los Angeles became the geographic holy grail of American rock music. It didn't matter if you were an aspiring singer-songwriter like Joni Mitchell or Neil Young, an eager bunch of double-denim guitar players like The Eagles, or an old British blues band like Fleetwood Mac looking for rejuvenation, LA was where you came. Even though the spelling still told the world they were a British band, *Rumours* is really a concept album whose concept was Los Angeles, as never has a record sounded so Californian, so sumptuous, so golden (honestly, you almost expected the album to come complete with a pair of sunglasses and a pool-side ice bucket).

Some say that Fleetwood Mac's Wikipedia page reads like a Russian novel, with new characters popping up, before exiting in grim circumstances, including mental illness, alcoholism, adultery, a religious cult and romantic trauma. They're not wrong. The band was formed in 1967 in London by the guitarist Peter Green, who recruited drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie. Honing a hip, blues-rock sound, they had commercial success with songs such as "Black Magic Woman", "Man Of The World", "Oh Well" and "Albatross". However, Green's use of LSD exacerbated his schizophrenia, causing him to quit the band in 1970. He was replaced by Christine Perfect soon after she married John McVie, and various other members came and went, rarely having much lasting impact.

Seeking a reinvention of sorts, in 1974 the band moved to the





Sisters of the moon: Christine McVie (left) and Stevie Nicks have more than half the writing credits on *Tusk*, 6 December 1979

US and, having seen Buckingham Nicks play in California, Mick Fleetwood asked Lindsey and Stevie to join them. The couple radically altered the band's sound, adding a West Coast sheen that would quickly result in hit songs such as "Over My Head", "Say You Love Me", "Rhiannon" and "Landslide". Soon, though, group relationships started to crumble. Fleetwood was in the middle of a divorce from his wife, Jenny Boyd; John and Christine's marriage came to an end; and Buckingham and Nick's romance fell apart. "Being in Fleetwood Mac is more like being in group therapy," Mick Fleetwood famously said.

These dysfunctional romantic struggles informed the bulk of the songs that turned up on *Rumours*, creating one of the most popular



albums of all time. Fleetwood Mac managed to fuse the singer-songwriter pretensions of the early Seventies with a slick pop sensibility (and a great drum sound) that sounded just fine on FM radio, especially in your first car, with the top down and four or five friends in the back, passing beers and smokes between them. This imperial version of Fleetwood Mac achieved something quite rare, conquering a country and seemingly able to define it too. In the late Seventies, their only rivals in this – bottling the marshmallow musical essence of Los Angeles and Southern California – were The Eagles, and they had spent the best part of the decade working up to it; with Fleetwood Mac it sort of happened by accident.

And then they went and recorded *Tusk*, a double album of wildly eclectic and eccentric lo-fi, high-concept material that *Mojo* magazine once called “one of the greatest career sabotage albums of all time”. This was a concept album of sorts, although many at the time thought the concept was simply “We are not Fleetwood Mac!” In short, *Tusk* appeared to be a wholesale attempt by the band to completely subvert their brand.

Until a few months ago, I had never heard the band’s follow-up to *Rumours*. I knew the title track and had begun to begrudgingly enjoy it, fascinated by the way in which the horns had come to define the song, much like they have on Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke”. I knew the pearlescent song “Sara”, as it was a favourite of my wife (Sarah was one of the many disappointed millions who had bought a copy of *Tusk* after falling in love with *Rumours* – “It was boring,” she says). But apart from that, as far as I was concerned *Tusk* may as well have been a King Crimson album from the early Seventies or a Britney Spears CD from the early noughties; it simply wasn’t on my radar. Nonetheless, like many others who have spent time with it, I have, over the past few months, become quietly obsessed with it.



This month sees the release of a remastered deluxe edition of the album, including alternative tracks, two additional live CDs, a DVD documentary, extended liner notes and a wealth of previously unseen visual material. One of the most extravagant anniversary box sets ever, this is the last word on *Tusk*. It is a fitting tribute as, at the cost of well over \$1 million frittered away over the space of two years, *Tusk* was the last word in extravagant, over-indulgent West Coast pop. If *Rumours* was the towel-slapping sound of young America getting ready for the weekend, *Tusk* was its nerd alternative, new-wave folk music for people who stayed in on Saturday nights.

The record was nothing if not unconventional, a volte-face of the most extreme kind. The band now like to say it was a pointed retort to the suffocating cocoon of expectations that fame had woven around them, although in reality it was more like the sensation you get when you've just climbed to the top of a very steep hill. Not only do you have to walk back down, but what's the point of climbing it again?

"How do you follow, let alone top, the best work you've ever done in your life, work that almost killed you to complete?" asks Mick Fleetwood.

Well, the rest of Fleetwood Mac thought the same thing.

By the time the group started to record *Tusk*, Lindsey Buckingham had become the de facto leader, slipping into shoes only recently vacated by Mick Fleetwood. The album sessions started in spring 1978 at the Village Recorder studios near Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, at the very height of punk, and you can hear its peroxide-spike-topped influence all over the record. Buckingham had become obsessed with punk and its inevitable US abstraction, new wave, devouring the likes of The Clash, Gang Of Four, Talking Heads and Elvis Costello. He wanted the band to sound modern, relevant, and yet he was also keen to branch out himself, wanting to start writing the kind of material



that Brian Wilson, his hero, had created on *Pet Sounds*. Buckingham saw himself as the band's visionary and he was determined that they not rest on their laurels. The band begrudgingly agreed to follow him.

"It seemed to me at some point that there was a major discrepancy between what the work was and what was going on outside of that," says Buckingham, referring to *Rumours*. "I found that to be sort of dangerous ground. You know, Michael Jackson land. You're walking on thin ice as far as how you define yourself and what you are and what is expected of you after that."

"He was a maniac," says Ken Caillat, who was one of the co-producers on *Tusk*. "The first day, I set up the studio as usual. Then he said to turn every knob 180 degrees from where it was now and see what happens. He'd tape microphones to the studio floor and then get into a sort of push-up position to sing. Early on he came in and he'd freaked out in the shower and cut off all his hair with nail scissors. He was stressed. And into sound destruction."

There is an old theatrical term, used to describe unnecessary exposition or simple overacting: "That's a hat on a hat." You could ascribe the phrase to some of Buckingham's songs on the record, songs the man who wrote them didn't think were good enough unless they were recorded in a way that made them sound modern and relevant.

"*Tusk* is the most important thing, on some level, that I ever was involved with," says Buckingham. "With Fleetwood Mac, certainly, for me, as much for the music but also because it was a line I drew in the sand. We had this ridiculous success with *Rumours*, and at some point, at least in my perception, the success of that detached from the music, and it was more about the phenomenon. We were poised to do another album, and I guess because the axiom 'If it works, run it into the ground' was prevalent then, we were



probably poised to do *Rumours II*. I don't know how you do that, but somehow my light bulb that went off was, 'Let's just not do that. Let's very pointedly not do that.'"

As the group was in the process of fraying internally, so the three principal songwriters had stronger voices on this album than perhaps at any other time in their career, and while this made for a less cohesive record than *Rumours*, it was no less interesting. However, instead of braiding the group's talents to continue to strengthen their increasingly distinctive sound, Buckingham pulled them apart, allowing it all to unravel. The band was tri-polar.

It sounded as though parts of Tusk were recorded live on a whaling ship in heavy seas

"Think About Me", the pre-Raphaelite "Sara" and the epic "Sisters Of The Moon" (on which Nicks sounds like Patti Smith in a wind tunnel) sound as though they could have slipped easily onto *Rumours*, while other songs – "The Ledge", "What Makes You Think You're The One" – are so particular that they couldn't really be anything other than the result of Buckingham's homemade demos. Elsewhere, because Buckingham – the Rodeo Drive punk – deliberately sped up his songs to ape the "new-wave" metronomic, some of his songs sounded like fast versions of old rock'n'roll songs from the Fifties.



Released in 1979, *Tusk* would go on to sell four million copies, yet because *Rumours*' sales were then already into the double-digit millions, and because it had been slated by the press, *Tusk* was deemed a commercial and critical disaster. "The record was certainly not a failure," says Fleetwood, "but neither was it the celebration of the quantum leap we felt we had taken."

It was Mick Fleetwood who decided *Tusk* should be a double album, simply because of the amount of material the three songwriters were producing. "At some point, Lindsey was starting to get very experimental in his own studio and was veering a little left of centre," says Christine McVie. "He [Buckingham] had already decided that he wanted to make a solo record. In order to keep him within the fold we all said, 'Well, look, let him do his experimenting and incorporate it in the album somehow.' That's how in essence it came to be a double album. There was all this experimentation flying around, especially from Lindsey's point of view."

Random, abrasive and lo-fi, the music that Buckingham started making didn't sound like Fleetwood Mac at all, and it definitely didn't sound like anything on *Rumours*. If *Rumours* was an exquisitely engineered soft-rock colossus, *Tusk*, said the *New York Times*, sounded as though parts of it were recorded live on a whaling ship in heavy seas. If it sounds as though parts of *Tusk* were recorded in a bathroom, that's because they were. Some songs were laid down in Buckingham's home studio, where he had set up the equipment so he could play the drums while sitting on the loo seat. Reviewing the record, the critic Greil Marcus said, "Fleetwood Mac is subverting the music from the inside out, very much like one of John LeCarré's moles – who, planted in the heart of the establishment, does not begin his secret campaign of sabotage until everyone has gotten used to him and takes him for granted."





Bang on: Stevie Nicks and Mick Fleetwood take the Tusk tour to Rotterdam, 13 June 1980

As one critic said, it's the ultimate cocaine album, with manic, frantic explosions followed by interminable stretches of mellow. There were nine songs by Lindsey Buckingham, six by Christine McVie and five by Stevie Nicks, and, as John McVie says, the album sounds like the work of three solo artists. It was a highly adventurous, almost elephantine gamble – fragmented, uneven and often confoundingly irritating.

Buckingham had asked Warner Bros if they could create their own studio in order to record the album. The label declined so it ended up costing the band more than \$1m. Not that any of them were shy about spending money or indulging themselves to the hilt. Throughout the *Rumours* sessions, it was said that a large black velvet bag full of cocaine was kept under the mixing desk,



which meant that it could be dipped into at any point during the recording process. And, boy, was it dipped into. So much so that one day, as a prank, one of the engineers substituted a dummy bag full of talcum powder. When someone wanted a hit, he very slowly tipped the bag onto the floor, causing mayhem in the studio. *Tusk* was apparently no different; not only was there cocaine, champagne and lobster, there was English beer on tap. The atmosphere was more than heightened; it was positively spotlit.

"The studio contract rider for refreshments was like a telephone directory," says Christine McVie. "Exotic food delivered to the studio, crates of champagne. And it had to be the best, with no thought of what it cost. Stupid. Really stupid. Somebody once said that with the money we spent on champagne on one night, they could have made an entire album. And it's probably true."

In this department, the band had a pantechicon-load of previous. One of the studios they used had a projection of the day on the walls, from sunrise to sunset and stars at night in real time to help them get a handle on the outside world. When they used the Record Plant in San Francisco, they took full advantage of the complimentary limousines, speedboat and conference room complete with water bed and tanks of nitrous oxide for those requiring a mood change.

"*Tusk* was very native, very African," Stevie Nicks said soon after its release. "Mick thinks he is a Watusi warrior and... he is! I would sit and wait for days. It was like these are the sacred steps back up to the top of the sacred mountain of this jungle. That's what *Tusk* was. Everything on *Tusk* was very warrior-esque, which is probably one of the reasons why 13 months didn't kill us all; we went to another kind of world for *Tusk*." She says the band were like a tribe, although she has also likened the recording process to being held hostage in Iran.

The title song, released as a single prior to the album's release, certainly sounded like nothing the band had ever done before.



Driven by a strident, jungle-sounding drumbeat, a loop conjured up by Fleetwood, the band hired Dodger Stadium and the 120-piece University of Southern California Trojan Marching Band to play over the top of it – Fleetwood had been inspired by a brass band he'd heard outside a hotel room in Barfleur, a fishing village in northern France. "I was in a room in the town square with a horrific hangover, and I was woken by the sound of the local brass band that relentlessly went round and round the square. As the day went on, they got drunker and drunker. But one thing was apparent. Everyone followed the brass band around the town, and I thought, 'What a good idea!'"

"Tusk" started out as a drum riff that the band played onstage to warm up before the opening of every concert. Buckingham took a 20-second section of a recording of this, sped it up and then started layering it with vocals and guitars. As Buckingham says, the 20-second section of drums was on "enough tape to go all the way across the board to the other side of the control room. We had to have someone in the middle of the room holding the tape up to make sure it didn't sag. Then we made a copy, from one 24-track machine to another, of this huge, sped-up tape loop rolling around the room."

As for the art, in hindsight it looks like an imperfect example of the transition between the Seventies and the Eighties, being a mixture of Hipgnosis-style Seventies extravagance (like a Pink Floyd or Led Zeppelin album) and California New Wave, all red triangles, power-pop sunglasses and fake neon. The sleeve was illustrated with the dense, African-inspired collages of Peter Beard, but also contained the sort of colourful, madcap photography that would become such a big part of pop iconography in the Eighties.

The band hired Beard (who went on to marry supermodel Cheryl Tiegs) to design and photograph the album's inner sleeves. World famous for his photo-diary books and blood-splattered African montages, he was, the band felt, the perfect man for the job.



Explains Fleetwood, “Peter Beard, one of the three photographers who did some of the pictures on the inside [of the album sleeves], the artwork, happens to be someone who spent a lot of time in Africa. He came down to the studio and was there for probably about a week, taking pictures of the band. It turned out most of his work was of animals and people’s feet. He then left and during that time got very involved in the conservation of elephants and wildlife. We were just thinking of an album title. We had no idea that his artwork, when it came back probably three, three-and-a-half months later, would have elephant tusks all over

‘I thought this must be what hell is like. With speakers’

STEVIE NICKS

it with odd pictures of us stuck in it, so it was just a coincidence. Then it was chosen as a word that we thought sounded good.”

Beard was in the studio for two weeks, shooting mainly Polaroids of the band and the inner circle. Resembling Peter O’Toole in *Lawrence Of Arabia*, he was funny and a blast to have around, according to one observer. “Peter seemed unfazed by the amount of drugs that were everywhere in the studio, and I got the feeling that he saw us as just another species of wild creature to capture in his camera’s lens.”

Nicks, for one, was rather circumspect about it all. “Lindsey had



tusks on the wall and all these weird Polaroids," she says. "I thought this must be what hell is like. With speakers."

Celebrated photographer and video-maker Norman Seeff was one of the photographers charged with shooting the band at the time. "They were already historically important by the time I met them, as they were a band that never repeated themselves," he says. "Every member had a unique identity, and they brought that to the photo session."

"I was part of the whole scene at the time, drinking, smoking, living the rock'n'roll life. However, by the time of this particular shoot I had decided to go straight and was into yoga and vegetarianism. But the band loved to party. When they turned up for the session they went straight to it from the get-go. We shot for hours and by the end they were looking a bit ragged, a bit crazy, although they were always professional. Even though they got completely loaded, they knew how to work with each other. I wasn't looking to take pictures of people looking f***ed-up – I wanted to capture vitality... and I think I really captured that day."

When Fleetwood suggested they call the album *Tusk*, the whole band knew this was his nickname for his own erect penis, and indeed anyone else's erect penis. When Stevie Nicks heard that this was going to be the title, she threatened to quit the band. (As Rob Trucks points out in his book, *Tusk*, "You only have to look at the album covers of Fleetwood Mac and *Rumours* to see that Fleetwood has a penchant for dick jokes.")

The tension in the studio was as heated as it was during the recording of *Rumours*, although this time the band were squabbling about their creative direction rather than about who was sleeping with whom. However, this tension was exacerbated by the fact that Fleetwood had been sleeping with Nicks. Some have said this is the reason Fleetwood was so indulgent of Buckingham's new direction.



"Never in a million years could you have told me that would happen," says Nicks. "That was the biggest surprise. But Mick is definitely one of my great, great loves. But that really wasn't good for anybody. Everybody was angry, because Mick was married to a wonderful girl and had two wonderful children. I was horrified. I loved these people. I loved his family. So it couldn't possibly work out. And it didn't. It just couldn't."

Neither did the album, not in the minds of the Warner executives at least. According to Buckingham, when the label was first invited to listen to *Tusk*, they "saw their Christmas bonuses going out the window". One executive said the band were insane to release a double album at a time when "the industry is dying a death. The business is f***ed. We can't sell records and this will have to retail at twice the normal price. It's suicide." Which, commercially, it sort of was. Having been told it had cost more than \$1m to record, Warner Bros told the band they needed to sell 500,000 copies of the album just to break even.

The critics didn't seem to like it much, either. It was immediately called a grand folly, a pale imitation of The Beatles' "White Album". It was called uncompromising, allusive, audacious, lazy, deliberately fragmented, indecisively sequenced (why would you start an album with the wistful ballad "Over And Over" followed by a punk-country hoedown like "The Ledge"?), over-baked, under-cooked, a post-fame comedown, sprawling and ambitious. And it's pretty much all of these things. While it still contained some Stevie Nicks mooncalf songs and some wistful, down-home Christine McVie ballads, it was certainly several leagues away from the generic coke spoons and crushed-velvet formula they had developed over the previous five years. In *Tusk*'s big box of chocolates innate languor sits next to frenetic intensity, making it difficult to digest all at once.



One of the critics who did respond well to *Tusk* was the NME's Nick Kent, who at the time was one of the most influential music writers in the world: "Ultimately it's time to stop bracketing Fleetwood Mac alongside Foreigner, Boston, Linda Ronstadt, The Eagles etc, in the same way that reactionaries bracket together The Clash, Human League, pragVEC, The Slits and Elvis Costello... If you reckon you're too hip for *Tusk*, then you're simply too hip.

"As important as Buckingham's compositions are to *Tusk*, his production work helps to maintain an ever-effective Spartan feel – only the essentials, with the odd embellishment carefully etched in for maximum impact – while his guitar-playing continually impresses by dint of its virtuosity without ever being too flashy.

"This feel is of paramount importance, particularly when faced with Nicks' songs," Kent continues. "If Patti Smith didn't so desperately want to be a man and had a real comprehension of what makes for good musical structure, then she might well be Stevie Nicks. More to the point, even when her songs are obviously well constructed and lyrically intriguing, one continually gets this distinct image of Nicks as a young woman who played Ophelia at some high-school production of *Hamlet* and never quite recovered from the experience."

When the album was launched, the band embarked on an eight-month trek across the US, a champagne-and-cocaine odyssey that would become one of the most celebrated and debauched tours in rock'n'roll history. In every city, grand pianos would be installed in hotel suites, winched through the window. Stevie Nicks would order her hotel rooms to be painted pink before her arrival. Each member had a black-belt karate bodyguard, their own make-up artist and their own masseur. On the *Rumours* tour, when the lights were dimmed between each song, a roadie would walk on stage like a butler, holding a tray of bottle caps filled with cocaine for each member of the band; on the *Tusk* tour there were two black tents on either side of the stage, one for Stevie Nicks' seemingly





Sleeve notes: Like the record it protects, Tusk's front cover has bite



Alt rockers: Adam Anderson of Hurts calls Tusk a 'classic ego album'; for Gabrielle Aplin it's 'stood the test of time'; the 2012 tribute album *Just Tell Me That You Want Me* includes six covers of Tusk tracks; Tusk defined Fleetwood Mac for Echosmith's Noah Sierota

exponential wardrobe changes and one for the band to take cocaine. Before a gig, 14 limousines would meet their private plane at the airport. "It was like a funeral," says Fleetwood.

Christine McVie says she used to go on stage and drink a bottle of Dom Perignon and then drink another one off stage afterwards. "It's not the kind of party I'd like to go to now. There was a lot of booze being drunk and there was blood floating around in the alcohol, which doesn't make for a stable environment." Courtney Love, of all people, thinks the tour may have been one of the most excessive of all time. "I think the interesting thing to a lot of

**'There was a lot of booze, and
there was blood in it'**

CHRISTINE MCVIE

people is that there's never been a period in rock as debauched as the period after *Rumours*," she says. "Nobody's touched it."

The band also started spending some of the vast amounts of money they were earning – buying houses, cars, estates and planes. "The Eagles had it down," says Nicks. "They had the Learjets and the presidential suites long before we did and so I learnt from the best. And once you learn to live like that there's no going back. It's like, 'Get me a Learjet. I need to go to LA. I don't care if it costs me \$15,000. I need to go now.'"

Fleetwood Mac would soon calm down, sober up, and start



making the kind of FM-friendly “Fleetwood Mac-sounding music” that would propel them to even greater heights, causing them to become one of the biggest live attractions of the last 25 years. For years, though, *Tusk* remained a grand folly in the eyes of consumers and critics alike. Unlike *Rumours*, whose songs were rarely off the radio, *Tusk*’s attraction was its apparent failure; it appeared as a stumbling block on the band’s narrative arc. Slowly, though, critics started to reference it, as did a new generation of performers who weren’t around when *Tusk* first came out and didn’t know or care about its diminished position in the pantheon of Fleetwood Mac. *Tusk*’s appeal has grown by accretion.

“*Tusk* was my first extended experience with Fleetwood Mac,” says Echosmith’s Noah Sierota. “I randomly found the double vinyl album at a garage sale when I was a preteen and bought it because the name was familiar and the cover intrigued me. I knew some of the more popular songs, but *Tusk* was the first I had listened to completely. This record really captures the three different singers in what seems to me a very transitional phase. But the consistent musicianship keeps the album together as one cohesive piece, yet still explores several new additions and sounds to the music.”

“I love *Tusk*, as it’s an absolute classic,” says 23-year-old singer-songwriter Gabrielle Aplin. “I think the fact that people of my generation and younger are still loving Fleetwood Mac is testament to the quality of their songs, as they’ve really stood the test of time.”

“It’s your classic ego album,” says Adam Anderson of Hurts. “It’s an album made by a band for the pleasure of themselves and other musicians, sandwiched between two albums made for the masses. But retrospectively that’s what makes it cool. It still sounds unique. Fleetwood Mac, for me, is about pure songwriting genius, with three of the greatest songwriters of all time in one band.”





TUSK REDUX

One of the reasons *Tusk* was a commercial failure (relatively speaking) was because of the appalling way in which it was sequenced, with ballads followed by barn-dance punk with a

perverse lack of sensitivity. Back in 1979, the order of songs on a record was paramount, as that was the only way they were listened to. If Lindsey Buckingham had copied GQ's Spotify version of *Tusk*, we guarantee it would have been a lot more successful. Promise. So when you've finally finished with the Weeknd album, give this a whirl.

TUSK, THE GQ REMIX:

- "What Makes You Think You're The One"
- "Angel"
- "Sara"
- "Brown Eyes"
- "That's Enough For Me"
- "Sisters Of The Moon"
- "That's All For Everyone"
- "Honey Hi"
- "Not That Funny"
- "I Know I'm Not Wrong"
- "Storms"
- "Beautiful Child"
- "Walk A Thin Line"
- "The Ledge"
- "Never Make Me Cry"
- "Over And Over"
- "Save Me A Place"
- "Never Forget"



Three years ago the Starbucks/Concord label Hear Music celebrated the band's legacy with a tribute album of covers, *Just Tell Me That You Want Me*, featuring Best Coast, MGMT, The New Pornographers, Lykke Li, Tame Impala, Washed Out, The Kills and more. Remarkably, six of the songs, including Tame Impala's "That's All For Everyone", were from *Tusk*. In 2002 the Californian band Camper Van Beethoven even covered the entire *Tusk* album. The album has influenced chillwave and freak folk and has found fans in The Strokes, Air, Vetiver and Mumford & Sons. And as Dorian Lynskey has already noted, their audiophile fanaticism was a touchstone for Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories*.

In 1979, though, this was all in the future.

The day of *Tusk*'s release, 10 October, was designated Fleetwood Mac Day by Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley. The public's expectations, as well as those of the record-label executives, were almost vertical, and by the time the band's magnum opus was ready, the consensus seemed to be that *Tusk* was going to single-handedly rescue the record business.

Obviously, it didn't.


"Oddly enough, no one in the band really made a judgement about it until it became apparent that it wasn't going to sell 16 million copies," says Buckingham. "It was a double album and certainly confounded everyone's expectations – which is what it was meant to do. Once it became apparent that it wasn't going to be a massive commercial success, then the band members... Mick would say to me, 'Well, we went too far. You blew it.' And it was very hurtful. We were out on the road and I'm going, 'Oh my God, how am I gonna react to this?'"

By April 1980 the awful truth finally dawned. *Tusk* was a comparative failure. After all, it had only sold four million copies.

Over time, however, *Tusk* would slowly become recorded as one of the most intriguing albums to emerge from the post-punk period; it is certainly the most intriguing album Fleetwood Mac



ever made. It will never have the sheen of *Rumours*, but as *Rolling Stone* said at the time, “*Tusk* finds Fleetwood Mac slightly tipsy from jet lag and fine wine, teetering about in the late-afternoon sun and making exquisite small talk. Surely, they must all be aware of the evanescence of the golden moment that this album has captured so majestically.”

They surely are, as, increasingly, are the rest of us. 
The remastered Tusk is out now.



MORE FROM GQ

For these related stories, visit [GQ.co.uk/magazine](https://www.gq.co.uk/magazine)

[Samuel L Jackson](#) (Dylan Jones, December 2015)

[Return Of The Prince](#) (Dylan Jones, November 2015)

[The Art Of Irony](#) (Dylan Jones, October 2015)



TOP