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# FLEETWOOD MAC

## *The* SUPERSTARS

*It took three Brits, two Yanks, mountains of coke and tangled love affairs to make the '70s' biggest album. This is the story of Rumours.*

WORDS **CRAIG MCLEAN** PHOTOGRAPHER **HERBERT W. WORTHINGTON**

**I**n a cavernous studio in Los Angeles, Fleetwood Mac singer and guitarist Lindsey Buckingham is thinking back to his band's '70s heyday. Their 1977 album *Rumours* had turned them into the biggest band on the planet, but their internal relationship was far from healthy. In his 1991 autobiography, *My Life And Adventures In Fleetwood Mac*, drummer Mick Fleetwood recalls Buckingham once slapping his co-singer – and ex-girlfriend – Stevie Nicks and bending her backwards over a car.

"I can't really respond to that one incident," Buckingham replies evenly today. "In those days, anything was possible. But there's stuff in that book that's completely untrue. Mick admits that he was high during the time that he was conveying information to his ghostwriter. I had a low regard for him doing that. There's a song on [*Buckingham's 1992 solo album*] *Out Of The Cradle* called *Wrong*, which was about Mick basically getting it wrong."

Settling scores in song is something at which Fleetwood Mac have always been good. Recorded

against a chemical backdrop of bacchanalian proportions, *Rumours* recounted the disintegration of Nicks and Buckingham's relationship, and of the marriage of bassist John McVie and his wife, keyboard player and singer Christine McVie. And the craziness continued in the wake of the album: Fleetwood and Nicks embarked on a clandestine affair, which resulted in the end of his marriage. No band has come close to matching Fleetwood Mac for excess, argument and betrayal, and *Rumours* remains their dysfunctional high-water mark.

More than three decades on, the *Rumours*-era Fleetwood Mac line-up – minus Christine McVie, who retired in 1998 – have patched up their differences for a world tour that's scheduled to reach Europe late summer. Predictably, the setlist draws heavily on *Rumours*, as does Mick Fleetwood's stage gear: he sports a pair of pendulous, testicular "clackers" identical to the ones he wore on the album's sleeve.

But there are still barriers, perhaps out of necessity. The band have a total of five managers to oversee everything. This situation could explain the delay surrounding a mooted, three-disc reissue of

*Rumours*; there are still some legal wrinkles to iron out first. Nor will they be interviewed together. I speak to Buckingham in LA, and Nicks and Fleetwood a few weeks later in separate hotels in New York, the night after they played Madison Square Garden (bassist John McVie has long refused to talk to the press). Despite this, they're all frank and honest, though given *Rumours*'s mix of the confessional and accusatory, that's no surprise.

"*Rumours* is our Dark Side Of The Moon," says Fleetwood. "Part of the magic is that it has become a document of some importance if you choose to look into what emotion is being said."

**L**indsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks met at a party at Menlo-Atherton High School, near San Francisco, in 1965. A competitive swimmer and gifted guitarist, the 16-year-old Buckingham began strumming the Mamas And The Papas' *California Dreamin'* on his acoustic guitar. Nicks, a year older and recently transplanted from Los Angeles, brazenly walked over and >>>



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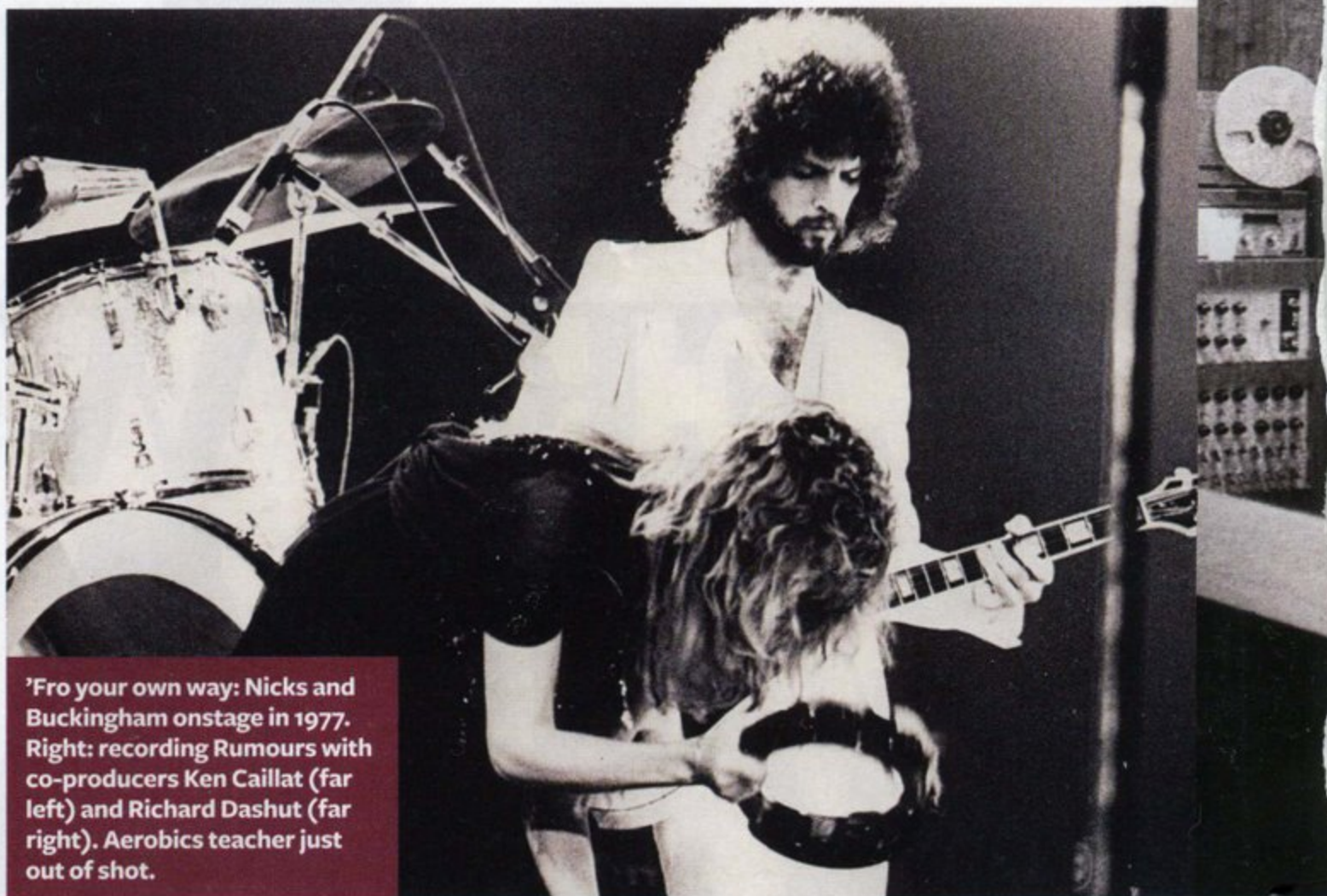
began singing along. Only when they had finished did she introduce herself. "Stevie breezed in and made a splash," recalls Buckingham. "She'd learned how to do that."

But it wasn't until they left school that they began working together, when Nicks was invited to join Buckingham's band, Fritz. Despite high-profile support slots with the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin, there was little interest in the band. But labels were interested in Buckingham and Nicks.

"Stevie and myself were singled out," says Buckingham. "The whole idea of us being a duo fuelled the romance part of it, and vice versa."

Fritz broke up in 1971, by which time Buckingham and Nicks's professional relationship had turned into a romantic one. Signing to Polydor, the pair's debut album, Buckingham Nicks, came out in 1973. But while its sunny, West Coast rock chimed perfectly with the post-hippy times, it failed to find an audience. It did, however, bring the duo to the attention of Mick Fleetwood.

Fleetwood was already a veteran of the music industry – and a dedicated partier. In 1967, he was fired from British blues linchpins John Mayall And The Bluesbreakers for being repeatedly drunk



'Fro your own way: Nicks and Buckingham onstage in 1977. Right: recording Rumours with co-producers Ken Caillat (far left) and Richard Dashut (far right). Aerobics teacher just out of shot.

## "WE WERE YOUNG, PASSIONATE AND CRAZY. AND DRUNK." STEVIE NICKS

behind the drumkit. Soon afterwards, he founded Fleetwood Mac with fellow ex-Bluesbreaker, Peter Green, recruiting bassist John McVie.

Over the next few years, that band released a string of blues-rock albums and defined "chaos". Guitarists came and went, often in extreme circumstances: Green left in 1970 after one too many LSD binges (he was later diagnosed with schizophrenia); another, Jeremy Spencer, walked

out mid-tour to join a religious cult; Danny Kirwan was fired for being an alcoholic. Thankfully, Christine McVie – who married John McVie shortly before joining the band in 1970 – was impervious to the madness.

In early 1974, at the suggestion of yet another new guitarist, American-born Bob Welch, Fleetwood Mac relocated to Los Angeles. When Welch left the band later that year, Fleetwood didn't

have far to look for his replacement. The drummer was testing out a studio, Sound City, when Buckingham Nicks engineer Keith Olsen played him that album's seven-minute final track Frozen Love to show off the equipment. Fleetwood was impressed: Buckingham could be the man to save his ailing band.

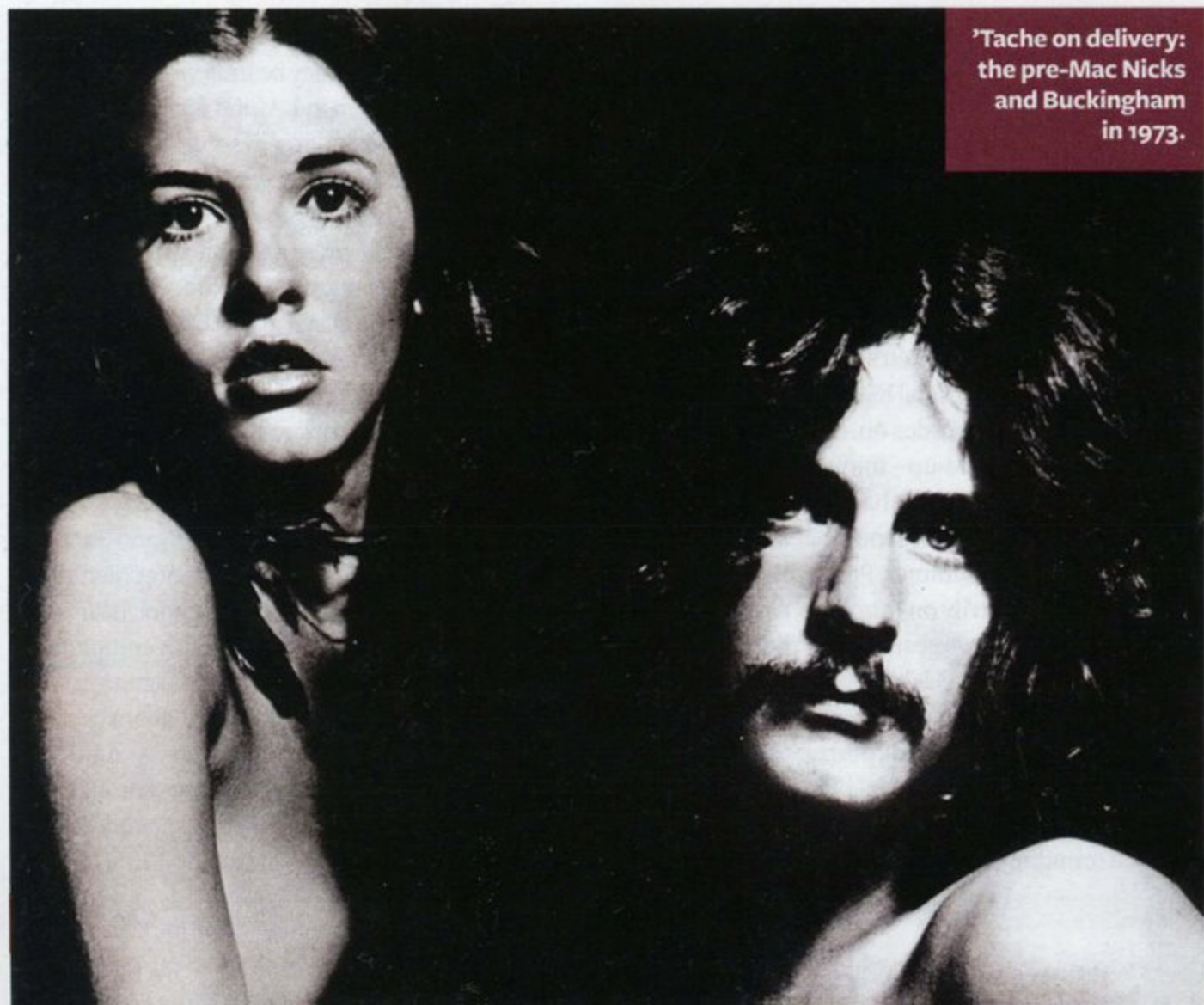
"Mick calls me: Would you like to join Fleetwood Mac?," recalls Buckingham. "I said, OK, but you're gonna have to take my girlfriend, too."

In a portent of trouble to come, Nicks, however, says that Buckingham was hesitant to abandon their fledgling career as a duo. After the guitarist was struck down by glandular fever, she had been forced to take a series of menial jobs to make ends meet. She was in no mood to look a gift blues-horse in the mouth. "You be the cleaning lady, then," she told her heel-dragging boyfriend. "I will stay home and write music and work the four-track Ampex!"

The duo officially joined Fleetwood Mac on New Year's Eve 1974, and two months later the five-piece began recording what would become the Fleetwood Mac album. During their time in California, the band's British contingent had discovered cocaine, and the drug fuelled the sessions.

"We recorded our album in a somewhat Peruvian atmosphere," wrote Fleetwood. "Until then Fleetwood Mac hadn't had much experience with this Andean rocket fuel. Now we discovered that a toot now and then relieved the boredom of long hours with little nourishment."

The addition of the two glamorous young Americans had successfully rebooted Fleetwood



'Tache on delivery: the pre-Mac Nicks and Buckingham in 1973.





## Mac Attack

*Their place in the scheme of things*

### Influenced by...



**THE BEACH BOYS**

*Pet Sounds*

(CAPITOL, 1966)

*Troubled visionary Brian Wilson's magnum opus, cited as an influence by Lindsey Buckingham: a head-spinning suite that redefined what could be done in the studio before The Beatles' Sgt Pepper.*

### Influence on...



**RILO KILEY**

*Under The Blacklight*

(WARNERS, 2007)

*A modern-day Fleetwood Mac, right down to the relationship between ex-paramours, singer Jenny Lewis and guitarist Blake Sennett. Their fourth album found them shaking off their indie-rock trappings and revealing a slick, Mac-style West Coast rock makeover.*

Mac. By the end of 1975, their eponymous album was Number 1; by the time *Rumours* was released a little over a year later, it had sold four million copies and was Warners' biggest-selling album to that point.

But it came at a personal cost. Feeling the pressure of the band's heightened profile, John McVie started drinking heavily, putting strain on his marriage. On the attendant tour, he and Christine occupied separate hotel rooms. Cracks had started to appear in Buckingham and Nicks's relationship; success only exaggerated them.

"You're onstage and someone's holding a sign that says, I love you, Stevie!, right in front of Lindsey," says Nicks. "I wanted to say: Please don't do that. You're not helping Lindsey or me or our relationship. You're helping to break it up."

**B**y the time rehearsals for the album that would become *Rumours* began in Florida in 1976, Buckingham and Nicks's relationship was over. John and Christine McVie followed suit during the sessions. All the band's writers were heading into the new album bruised and bitter, and this fed into the new songs. Most notable was Buckingham's *Go Your Own Way*, a frank broadside at Nicks: "Loving you isn't the right thing to do... Packing up, shacking up's all you wanna do".

"There had been some traumatic moments already," says the guitarist. "Betrayals, whatever you want to call them. *Go Your Own Way* was a focal point of the album early on, and sort of set the tone in many ways."

"It was certainly a message within a song," says Nicks primly. "And not a very nice one at that. *Dreams* [a riposte from Nicks, key lyric:

"You say you want your freedom..."] was a different response. It was the fairy and the gnome. I was trying to be all philosophical. And he was just mad."

Recording sessions were no less turbulent. The band were co-producing the album themselves in Los Angeles with Ken Caillat and Richard Dashut. Fleetwood, who was their de facto manager, suggested they break up sessions with live shows, for the practice and the money. He also shipped the band to different studios – Criteria in Miami and Record Plant in Sausalito, Northern California.

"Mick wanted to get us out of LA and out of our day-to-day normality," says Buckingham. "But Sausalito was a hotbed of decadence, way more so than LA. It just became this running party."

Drugs were freely available: a bag of cocaine was kept under the mixing desk for everyone to dip into. Inevitably, these chemical distractions didn't help the recording process: an entire night was lost to hash cookies, while at one point it took four days to tune up a piano.

"Cocaine was not something that was a big part of my life," says Buckingham. "I was certainly partaking of other [drugs] in the studio just to keep up. But cocaine – I never bought it, I never had it at home."

To add extra confusion, the band's romantic liaisons were getting messier. In the summer of 1976, Buckingham presented his bandmates with a new song, *Never Going Back Again*, about a brief relationship he had with a woman he'd met on the road. John McVie briefly dated former bandmate Peter Green's old girlfriend. His ex-wife had started seeing the band's lighting technician, Curry Grant. Christine McVie's songs put a positive spin on their turbulent experiences. *Don't Stop* – later adopted by Bill Clinton as his campaign song during the 1992 US election – was filled with a post-split joie de vivre, while *You Make Loving Fun* was apparently

addressed to Grant ("Knowing John, he probably thought it was about one of her dogs," says Fleetwood). Remarkably, despite the various narcotic and romantic entanglements, the atmosphere in the studio wasn't overtly tense.

"There was this undercurrent," says Buckingham. "But you couldn't walk around like that all the time, you would have been exhausted after about two days. That's where the denial and the compartmentalising came in. You had to seal that off and have a good time in the moment as much as you could. We all knew each other and we all knew what we had to do. So we tried not to dwell on all the rest of it."

**T**he album was finally finished at the end of 1976, and released the following February. Its original title was *Yesterday's Gone*, until John McVie suggested *Rumours* – a reference to the fact that the warring members were writing songs about each other.

"A lot of innuendo had existed in the press about us, because of the uniqueness of our situation, because we were two couples with three writers," says Buckingham. "That was a unique thing. So there was a lot of grist there."

The marriage of personal drama and slick soft rock struck a chord with the record-buying public. Within a month of its release, *Rumours* had sold a million copies. It went on to top the US chart for a staggering 31 weeks and won a Grammy for Album Of The Year in 1978. To date, it has sold more than 30 million copies.

The *Rumours* tour only ratcheted up the insanity. Come showtime, band members were supplied with their cocaine in Heineken >>>





**Above: winning the Grammy for Rumours in 1978. Below: (from left) John McVie, Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham and Mick Fleetwood today.**



bottle lids. They had individual limos, as did their crew. The decadence peaked when they came up with the idea of floating a 70-foot penguin over the stage, although it would never inflate satisfactorily.

In this crazed climate, it was perhaps unsurprising that Nicks and Fleetwood had an affair. Fleetwood was still married to Jenny Boyd, sister of model Pattie Boyd, and Buckingham had been best man at their wedding; it was actually the second time they'd married – their first union had been dealt a body blow when Boyd took up with one of Fleetwood's friends.

Nicks and Fleetwood had got together in Los Angeles, but their affair blossomed during the Antipodean leg of the Rumours tour. Remarkably, they managed to keep it secret from their bandmates, not least Buckingham. When they did eventually tell him, the guitarist was unconcerned.

"They made a big production of coming over to my house, the two of them," he recounts. "Lindsey, we're seeing each other... Yeah? So? That's it? There were other things that bothered me about being around Stevie way more than that. I'd already let go of the fact that she was sleeping with other people... It was just one of those things where there was an environment of promiscuity and they got their rocks off for a short period of time and then got bored. That's the way I see it."

For his part, Fleetwood admits that he didn't consider the damage the affair might have caused the band. "I'd say the beginning of it wasn't even something that we realised, it wasn't a question of leaping into bed. The dynamic had crept up on us. It was ill-fated in many ways. But we remained great friends, and went off our separate ways." For Nicks, that meant a romance with the Eagles' Don Henley and later, Eagles co-songwriter JD Souther.

**R**emarkably, the madness didn't stop with Rumours. They followed it two years later with the double album Tusk, a bold excursion that found Buckingham indulging his experimental tendencies. But it was considered a flop next to Rumours, selling a "mere" four million copies, and the guitarist was brought to heel by the rest of the band.

The turmoil continued throughout the '80s. By the time of 1987's *Tango In The Night*, the band were in disarray. Nicks had become addicted to tranquilliser Klonopin, prescribed to help wean her off cocaine. Mick Fleetwood, meanwhile, had holed up in his Malibu home, where he partied with fellow hellraisers Nick Nolte and Gary Busey.

"I don't know how any of us came out of it really," he says. "It was booze and cocaine – and thank God, certainly to my knowledge, that's where it ended. I don't think we'd be here if there was heroin. But we had a lot of fun."

Except Buckingham didn't. He left Fleetwood Mac after making *Tango In The Night* and barely spoke to Fleetwood for eight years, before rejoining in time for the recording of 1997's live album, *The Dance*. A year after his return, the Fleetwood Mac revolving door swung around again and Christine McVie left, tired of touring and recording.

These days, the four people who make up Fleetwood Mac seem to be having fun. Onstage at Madison Square Garden, Buckingham makes a show of cosying up to Nicks; the latter looks on approvingly as the still-spry guitarist leaps about the stage. Of course, there's the potential for it to all go wrong again: Nicks "hated" the Christine McVie-less trek in support of 2003's *Say You Will*, the lack of female companionship compounded by Buckingham's "abrasive" behaviour onstage. At the end of the tour, the following year, she vowed never to work with him again.

But that was then. Five years later, Fleetwood

Mac have settled into the pattern they know best – the kind of functional dysfunctionality that defined their careers and turned Rumours into one of the biggest-selling albums ever.

"You've got to assume that much of the success of Rumours came from the non-musical part of it," says Buckingham. "We were a walking soap opera; people bought into that mythology. People identified with us as people. They sympathised with us. They were for us as people. So there was this whole other thing that had nothing to do with the music. And it was a built-in hook."

"We were kids: young and crazy and passionate," adds Nicks. "And drunk most of the time. Stuff went down that was insane. But none of us, I don't think, ever set out to hurt each other. Because we were very aware of what a ride we were on."