



THE

RUMOUR

MILL

With the 'Rumours' line-up of **Fleetwood Mac** effectively back together again, rock's longest-running soap opera shows no signs of rolling its final episode. **Classic Rock** talks to **Mick Fleetwood**, **Stevie Nicks** and **Lindsey Buckingham** about fights, divorce and drug madness. Man of the world: **James Halbert**

Smile if you're shagging another band member's partner. Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie, Mick Fleetwood, Stevie Nicks and John McVie generate rumours and 'Rumours', circa 1977.



IT'S ANOTHER sunny California morning, and there's a genuine sense of occasion in the warm, dry air. It's some weeks now

since Fleetwood Mac invited *Classic Rock* to visit them at Culver City Studios in Los Angeles, and now we're pulling up to the main security gate. The colonial mansion that forms the exterior façade of the studio building was featured in the 30s classic movie *Gone With The Wind*, and it was also here, in 1933, that RKO Radio Pictures filmed *King Kong*. With its grandeur and its A-list showbiz credentials, Culver City Studios is an auspicious setting – and one wholly in keeping with the legend that is Fleetwood Mac.

The band are here to rehearse for an upcoming US tour in support of their new album 'Say You Will' (reviewed in issue 52). The record is their first studio work since 1987's 'Tango In The Night' to feature guitarist Lindsey Buckingham; thus it's the Mac's first studio record since 1987 that really matters. But what God has given with one hand, he seems to have taken away with the other, for keyboardist and valued songwriter Christine McVie is now no longer in the band.

Bassist John McVie has decided he doesn't want to take part in today's interviews with *Classic Rock* and other sections of the international media, but genial drummer and Mac founder member and linchpin Mick Fleetwood is game for a chat, as are the American contingent of Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham. We've been told by the band's record company WEA that the latter two won't be doing their interviews together, but that we shouldn't read anything into that. Being journalists, however, we read plenty into it – mainly that rock's greatest soap opera seems to still have plenty of episodes left.

That soap was undoubtedly at its most lathery around the time of the band's 1977 album 'Rumours'. But the events surrounding that record's recording have been well-documented elsewhere, so let's nail that essential piece of back-story quickly and succinctly.

Here we go: 'Rumours' was a certified AOR masterpiece. It sold zillions and topped charts around the world for months at a time. Fuelled by a veritable snowdrift of cocaine, the making of it saw Stevie Nicks break up with Lindsey Buckingham, Christine McVie part from her bass-playing husband John, and Mick Fleetwood begin divorce proceedings with his then wife Jenny Boyd.

Songs like 'Go Your Own Way', 'Dreams' and 'Second Hand News' channelled the heartache directly. And then things got more incestuous still: Christine McVie started dating the band's lighting director, Curry Grant (sic); Nicks and Fleetwood had a brief fling of their own. That, in a nutshell, was the script.

"You couldn't make that story up," Fleetwood said years later in 1997. "You'd say: 'How could they possibly continue to play music together?'"

But continue they did. And as 'Say You Will' testifies, four of the five people who created 'Rumours' all those years ago are still creating great music together today as Fleetwood Mac.

I hear Stevie Nicks's distinctive drawl before I see her; she's recording 'drops' for Australian radio and I'm listening outside the door: "Hi! I'm Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac, and this is our new single 'Peacekeeper'," she chirps with practised precision. I'm thinking: 'That voice belongs to a woman who is best mates with Tom Petty; to the gal who is now due another huge royalty cheque thanks to The Dixie Chicks' recent cover of her wonderful 1975 ballad 'Landslide'. She's also the woman, I'm thinking, who once did so much cocaine damage to her nose septum that she allegedly resorted to imbibing it up her a...

"...Okay, you can go in now," a PR person barks, interrupting my train of thought.

When Stevie and I meet, I'm pleased to note that her big hair is still intact and blonde. She's wearing a sweatshirt, not leather or lace, however, and her

Mid-70s Mac, with founder member Mick Fleetwood in the driving seat – and multi-platinum success just around the corner.



"You couldn't make the story up. You'd say: 'How could they possibly continue to play music together?'"
– Mick Fleetwood



➤ Yorkshire terrier Sulamith (named after Sulamith Wulfin, the German painter of fairies and elves) is perched on her lap. "I'm gonna put you on the floor, honey," she says to the pooch, doing so. But Sulamith jumps up again and continues to eye me suspiciously.

She tells me that she misses Christine McVie and her "crazy English humour" every day. "It used to be like that show *Charmed*, where they go: 'The power of three!'," she laughs. "Chris and I had the power of two. But now some of that feminine energy has gone."

The good news, Nicks maintains, is that Lindsey, Mick and John have become a power trio again – although not one that has lost sight of what made the Fleetwood Mac of the 70s and 80s such a chart-storming colossus. "When I started working with the guys again last February," she recalls, "I thought the new album was going to sound way different than 'Rumours' or 'Tango In The Night'. But in fact I don't think it does."

Given that Nicks's last solo album, 'Trouble In Shangri La', did very nicely indeed, I put it to her that she might have had less reason than her bandmates to put her picture in the frame of the reconvened Mac.

"I could have toured my album for another year," she agrees, "but I love this band, and I felt it was important that we do one more record. Also, the '...Shangri La' tour became very difficult for me to deal with around 9/11. I was in New York at the time, and my Rochester show was cancelled due to an act of war. At one point we had a military escort on our wing, which was scary but rivetting. That whole period nearly drove me into a mental home."

Before beginning that tour, in July 2001, Nicks had left demos of five new-ish songs with Buckingham, Fleetwood and John McVie. But the origins of the 'Say You Will' album stretch back much further than that. You may recall that the Buckingham songs on 'Tango On The Night' were originally earmarked for a solo album. Intriguingly, the same is true of his songs on 'Say You Will'. Indeed, some of them were written more than six years ago, and thus predate Mac's 1997's MTV-led live album 'The Dance'.

U NSHAVEN, SOCK-LESS AND WEARING A BEATEN-UP leather jacket, Lindsey Buckingham still does the 'just out of bed' look rather handsomely. He's relaxed and attentive when we talk, and has a gentleness about him that is difficult to equate with the man who once slapped Stevie Nicks then bent her backwards over the bonnet of his car, before being restrained by two of the band's managers (see Mick Fleetwood and Stephen Davis's *Fleetwood: My Life And Adventures With Fleetwood Mac*).

Listening to 'Say You Will' tracks like 'Morrow Turning Over In His Grave' and

'Come', it's clear that Buckingham's voice and guitar playing have lost none of the feral passion that so was evident on the version of 'Big Love' on 'The Dance'. How has he retained that edge?

"Let's go back a bit to try and answer that," he says. "'Tusk', from my point of view, was an attempt to derail the machine that kicked in after 'Rumours'. 'Tusk' was an artistic success, but because it didn't sell 25 million the band and the record company were like: 'Oh, well we're not going to do that again.' Cut to the difficulties that we had making 'Tango In The Night' [for example, Nicks was undergoing treatment at the Betty Ford Clinic for her cocaine addiction, and attended few of the 'Tango...' sessions], and there was no atmosphere whatsoever that was conducive to growth. I had to say: 'Sorry, I love you guys, but this isn't working for me.' Whatever edge and realness I have today is because I took myself off that treadmill and tried to keep in mind what was important."

Distanced by what he describes as the drummer's "drug madness" ("He didn't want me turning up at his house coked out of my head," Fleetwood tells me later), Buckingham didn't see Fleetwood for some eight years after leaving the Mac in 1987. But then they ran into each other again in 1995. Buckingham picks up the story: "Mick was evidently a changed man, and we had plenty to talk about. I was just about to go into the studio with [producer] Rob Cavallo, and I said: 'Why don't you come down, Mick? Let's cut some tracks.' So we started, and it was going great. And eventually we got John [McVie] down to play some bass."

"What happened next, though, was that somebody over at Warner Brothers – and maybe this was the agenda all along – said: 'Do you want to do a live Fleetwood Mac album?' I was like: 'No, but okay' [laughs]. It was great to get together again for 'The Dance', but from my point of view it wasn't that important. It was just a restatement of a body of work, and I'm much happier working on new stuff."

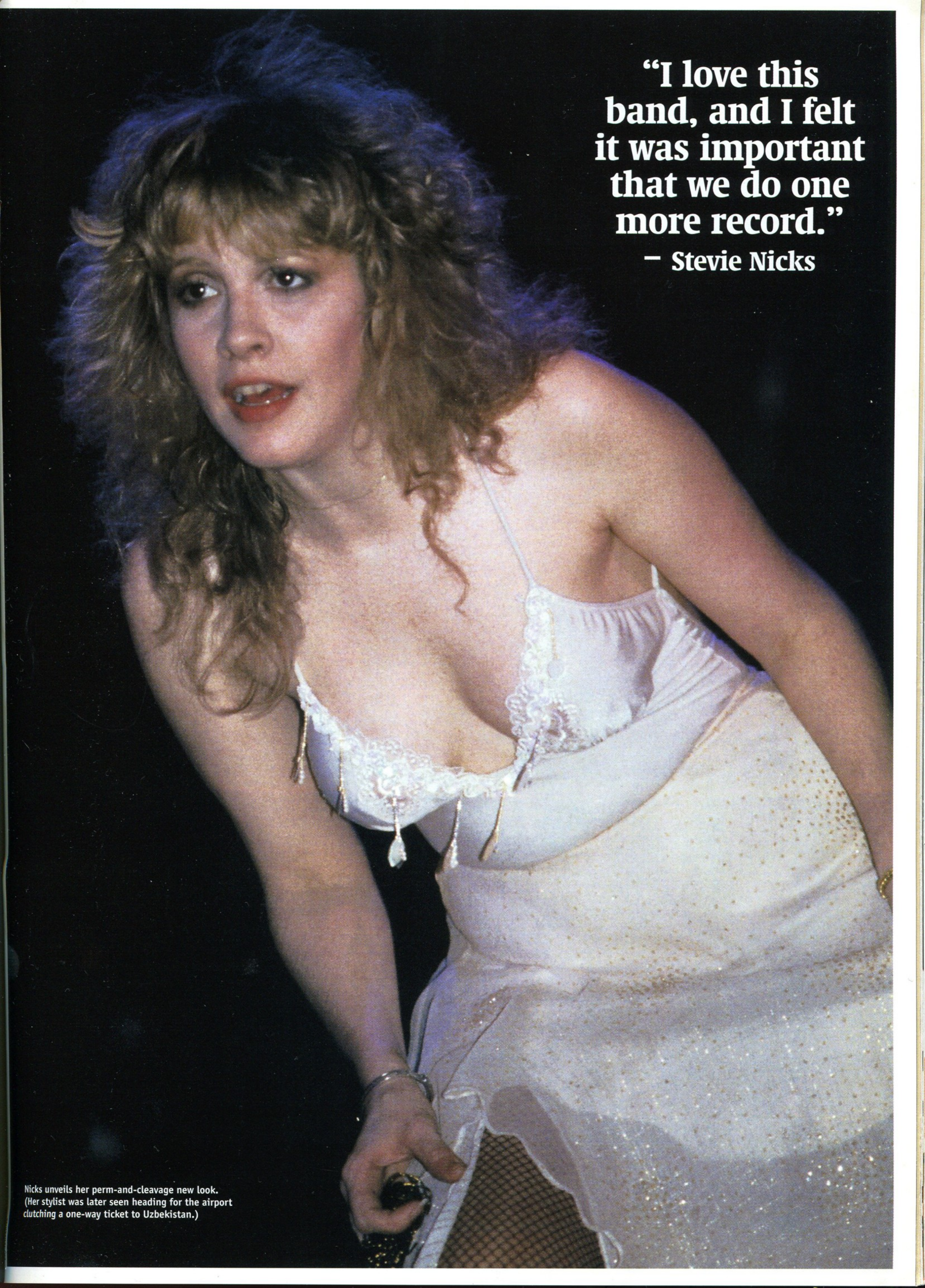
Unsurprising, then, that when 'The Dance' was finished Buckingham quickly resumed work on his solo album. But when he delivered it, Warners were nonplussed. Or at least that was what they said: "Russ Thyret, for whatever reason, said he just couldn't hear it," Buckingham says. "But I knew AOL were about to buy Time Warner, so rather than put the album out with a lame duck regime I decided to wait for the new one."

By the time the new regime did come into Warners, however, Buckingham, Fleetwood and co. had decided to use the guitarist's stockpile of songs on a new Fleetwood Mac album. And that, we can safely assume, made AOL Time Warner's accountants very happy indeed.

At this point, 'Say You Will' didn't have a title and was scheduled to be a double album. Christine McVie's absence meant that all the songs were either Buckingham or Nicks compositions, and his songs far outnumbered ➤

The Mac clean up at the 1979 Grammys.





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— Stevie Nicks

Nicks unveils her perm-and-cleavage new look.
(Her stylist was later seen heading for the airport
clutching a one-way ticket to Uzbekistan.)



Chemistry lesson, 1980. "There are songs that Stevie has written all throughout our relationship which I assumed were about me, then discovered that they weren't," Buckingham says.

➤ hers. However, a look at a finished copy of 'Say You Will' shows that the former sweethearts ended up with exactly nine songs apiece on it. But whether or not that was down to the bargaining power of Nicks's manager (the man Buckingham calls "big, bad Howard Kaufman") isn't that easy to determine.

Nicks: "What happened was that when I went home to Phoenix for Christmas I realised that I needed to say how I was feeling now; how I was feeling after that horrendous tour of mine. The way things stood, none of the songs on the new album were actually brand new, and as a writer that is not acceptable to me. So I went back to my journals and I wrote 'Destiny Rules', then 'Silver Girl', then 'Illumine', then 'Say You Will'."

Buckingham: "Howard has his formulas, and he's very much in control of certain aspects of the business side. He's not really concerned with anything creative, he's concerned with getting this project up and running and making Stevie the money that he feels he wants to make her. There's a strength to that, but there's also a weakness to it. That approach was less of a problem with something like 'The Dance', but with an album like this, which I feel transcends all of that... well let's just say I sense there's something large looming up ahead. Whether that turns out to be the case, I don't know."

EVEN AT 55 YEARS OF AGE, MICK FLEETWOOD CAN'T HELP but make an entrance. Given that he's six-foot-six it's mostly a height thing, but he's also dressed impeccably and doused in a potent, expensive-smelling cologne. Around a year ago, his wife Lynn bore him twin daughters, Ruby and Tessa. "We're thrilled and it's a total trip," he says. "I also have two grown-up daughters, Amy and Lucy, so that makes four girls. This time around I'm much more aware of what's happening, though."

Fleetwood describes his band as "the most abused franchise in rock". But no

one has worked harder than he has to stave off the demise of that franchise. The Buckingham song 'Peacekeeper' isn't about Fleetwood, but it might as well be. Indeed, you could reasonably argue that neither 'The Dance' nor 'Say You Will' could have happened had Fleetwood not put so much effort into repairing his friendship with Buckingham.

"Lindsey knows that I understand elements about him that others don't," he says simply. "And I really do. With a passion." But Fleetwood also understands and adores Stevie Nicks. And you sense that as he moves between she and Buckingham's worlds, his diplomacy skills are frequently called upon.

It was also Fleetwood, it seems, who put the most effort into trying to lure Christine McVie back for The Full Mac Monty: "I hear from Chris quite a lot," he says. "She would ring up and say: 'How are you doing? How's the album going?' For a while it was maybe she will, maybe she won't. She could still have come on board in the early stages of the recording, but as time went on that became more impractical. Eventually I said to Lindsey: 'My read on this – and I know Chris very well – is that this isn't going to happen.'"

"I adored him. I took care of him. I embroidered stars and moons on his jeans." – Stevie on Lindsey

"After that, Lindsay really took the reins in lieu of the fact that Chris wasn't there as musical partner, and with John's and my support he got a very clear picture of where he wanted to take things. Chris is still there on one of the older tracks, though – she's singing and playing organ on 'Bleed To Love Her.'"

Sheryl Crow, meanwhile, sings back-up and plays keyboards on the title track of 'Say You Will'. Elsewhere on the album Nicks's 'Silver Girl' is about Crow, and seems to repay the compliment that Sheryl paid Stevie when the former wrote 'It's Only Love' for her around the time of 'Trouble In Shangri La.'

Asked if Crow might play live with the Mac, Fleetwood quashes any rumours about her replacing Christine McVie, yet leaves the door open slightly: "If you're asking me if she'd be welcome to come up on stage and sing a few songs with us, the answer is yes, of course. But we have nothing official planned."

In the words of Lenny Kravitz: it ain't over till it's over. And in the words of Jeff Buckley: 'It's never over/A kingdom for a kiss upon her shoulder'. The point I'm trying to make is this: even though it's many, many years since any members of Fleetwood Mac were romantically involved with each other, the love triangle that once involved Buckingham, Nicks and Fleetwood still seems to exert an influence on the band's dynamic. In fact how could it not?

Certainly it's there in the new album's lyrics. Or at least it seems to be; and you suspect that we're supposed to think it is. Can it really be mere coincidence that Buckingham's 'Say Goodbye' (*I let you slip away/There was nothing I could do/That was so long ago/Still I often think of you*) closes the album in conjunction with Nicks's 'Goodbye Baby'? (*Goodbye baby/I hope your heart's not broken/Don't forget me/Yes, I was outspoken*)? Extremely doubtful. Time to ask some more searching questions.

"'Thrown Down' is about Lindsey," Nicks says candidly. "But I wrote that around the time of 'The Dance' tour. Suffice to say that there are new songs about him, too. It's terrific that [he] continues to be a well of inspiration."

It would be easy to infer that her friendship with Lindsey is stronger than it's been for a while. As for whether she herself would say that: "Um... Lindsey and I's relationship is sort of the same. We work together and write together. He quit in 1983 and was gone. Then he came back in 1987 for about half a year and we made 'Tango In The Night', which none of us were very much a part of [tell that to Buckingham or Christine McVie]. He quit again right after that, and then I didn't see him until we played at President Clinton's inauguration, which was like two days.

"Then we did a song together for the movie *Twister* in 1996, and then I didn't see him until we went into rehearsal for 'The Dance' in 1997. We've been apart for gazillions of years now. And as I tell him: 'You have to understand that when I come in with a pretty-much finished demo, that's because you haven't been in my life. I had to go and learn how to make music without you.' And I did. And I

learned it very well; I don't always need Lindsey to make my music come true."

Lindsey Buckingham is now 53 years of age. Although he once thought he'd never have children, he and his wife Kristen now have a four-year-old son, Will, and a two-year-old daughter, Lee Lee. Asked whether he thinks people still tend to assume that he and Nicks's lyrics are about each other, he responds thus: "I'm sure they do. And in Stevie's case at least some of them may be about me. Why do I say 'may'? Because it's not for me to say if they're about me. I suspect some of them are. Then again," he laughs, "there are songs that Stevie has written all throughout our relationship which I assumed were about me, then discovered that they weren't, or that they were hybrids. I can be as confused about that as the general listener, believe me."

And his friendship with Stevie – would he say it's stronger now than it's been for a while?

"In some ways it is. But right now it's a little tricky. Towards the end of the album we had some problems with the running order, and there were some issues with that that got Stevie and I into some over-the-phone conflicts. She was in Hawaii on location, and I was here in LA trying to master the album. It got difficult.

"You know, it's been hard for Stevie to feel good about what we've accomplished with this record. And I really hope she will at some point. She's yet to say: 'Good work on my songs, Lindsey', even though that was basically what we were working on for the last year. She wasn't that way at the start of the record, and she wasn't that way in the middle of it. But I don't really know what goes on with that. It's all off and on."

IT'S A FASCINATING BAND DYNAMIC, IT REALLY IS. And while you shouldn't underplay the value to the band of John McVie as one half of a fine rhythm section, it's the roles of Buckingham, Nicks and Fleetwood that continue to make Fleetwood Mac a potent and lucrative force.

First there's Fleetwood. He's the band's most fervent flag waver; a lanky emblem of the band's longevity, who, along with John McVie, has been its backbone since 1967 and Mac's years as the UK's premier blues band. Buckingham, meanwhile, is the band's wild card and life force; the art-for-art's sake guy. And in terms of man hours spent on it there can be no doubt that 'Say You Will' is predominately his baby. And then there's Stevie Nicks, the rock matriarch and would-be Welsh witch from whom we should take nothing away. Three of those songs that she wrote in Phoenix – seemingly at the drop of a black, pointy hat – are genius. Let's not forget, either, that there are reasons why Nicks's solo albums have always been much more successful than ➤➤➤



Walk this way: Fleetwood Mac take their place on Hollywood's Rock And Roll Walk Of Fame in 1980.



Sheryl Crow (left) and Stevie Nicks. Crow guests on the new album, but is not replacing Christine McVie in the band

recently, where I have a home, and Stevie rented a house just two minutes down the road. I was there with Lynn and the kids, and Stevie was with us all the time. She and Lynn have become great friends. Lynn is my soul mate, but Stevie's a soul mate, too. And my wife knows that. There's so much you can enjoy within that dynamic."

STEVIE NICKS IS STILL SINGLE. "LINDSEY AND I WERE AS close to married as I'll probably ever be," she told MTV in 1998. "I adored him. I took care of him. I embroidered stars and moons on his jeans." These days Nicks seems content with the love of family and friends.

And her friendship with Mick Fleetwood – how is that now?

"Mick and I really do have a great love and respect for each other, she says. "That relationship we had all those years ago was so short that it didn't have time to build up animosities and jealousies. It began, it was, and it was over. Mick will tell you – and I will tell you – that a lot of the reason our relationship didn't continue was because we knew it would be the end of Fleetwood Mac. I certainly didn't want to break up the band, and Fleetwood Mac is everything to Mick, and I didn't want him to resent me for the rest of his life.

"So we were smart about that," she continues, "and we were grown-up and we made good decisions. We didn't throw all that shit at each other, didn't say horrible things to each other, didn't go through that terrible, terrible break-up thing over many years. Mick and I's affair was like a little dream. And now his wife is my new best friend."

It's been a fascinating time at Culver City Studios. But although I've just witnessed another instalment of rock's greatest and most gripping soap opera, it's not quite a wrap. The closing, six-million-dollar question goes to Lindsey Buckingham. And, to his credit, he actually tries to answer it honestly. The question I put to him is this: which would he rather have saved – Fleetwood Mac, or his relationship with Stevie?

"Oh, boy. What an interesting question. What a tough question," he says, seemingly not quite sure how best to answer it. And then eventually: "I'm 53, with a beautiful wife and two beautiful children, so I can't say that my life has gone any other way than the way it was supposed to."

So destiny rules? I ask, name-checking one of those Stevie Nicks songs that sounds like it could be about him.

Buckingham laughs. "Yes." ■

➤ Buckingham's. And even art-for-art's sake kinda guys want the biggest possible audience for their work, right? Which explains why another Buckingham solo record has effectively been incorporated into a Fleetwood Mac one.

Mick Fleetwood is obviously thrilled with 'Say You Will.' Asked to single out a couple of favourite tracks, he opts for 'Come' and 'Illume.' The former is a deliciously barbed, Buckingham-written rocker which goes: 'Think of me sweet darlin/Every time you don't come'; the latter was written by Nicks as a personal response to the events of 9/11. Given that some commentators have alleged that 'Come' is about Buckingham's former girlfriend Anne Heche (after they split, she went on to have a lesbian relationship with fellow actress Ellen Degeneres), it's not surprising when Fleetwood says he shouldn't speak about the song's lyrics.

He has plenty to say, however, about Nicks's 'Illume': "Stevie wasn't that sure about it. She was like: 'Is this any good? Is it doing enough?' I said: 'My opinion, Stevie' – because she ended up singing what I think is a truly great vocal – 'is that this is all about you.' I said: 'This is classic Stevie Nicks; this is your modern-day 'Gold Dust Woman'. It's that Edith Piaf element of Stevie coming through on a lyric that's incredibly personal to her.

"You know, everything that's happening around this record is almost frightening for me," Fleetwood continues, broadening the horizon. "I've seen this kind of thing before with this bunch, and I think something rather good and grand is probably about to happen. The truth is I don't even know how we get stuff done, because we're a semi-dysfunctional family with about five different managers. It's a fucking nightmare, really."

But his relationship with Stevie is obviously still good?

"Oh, yeah," he says. "Absolutely. Stevie and I were, of course, an item for some time. And that was part of the ongoing saga of what makes this band rather... unique. Unique even to this day, let me tell you [laughs]. I went to Hawaii fairly

The return of the Mac, 2003: "I think something rather good and grand is probably about to happen," says Fleetwood.



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