

# Go your own way

WORDS BY DAVID CAVANAGH  
PHOTOGRAPH BY FIN COSTELLO

When Fleetwood Mac recruited LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM, they found a genius musician who would push them to their greatest successes. At the same time, though, Buckingham was plotting some of the most radical music ever made by one of rock's superstar elite: "I was the Terrence Malick of rockers!"

**L**INDSEY BUCKINGHAM's patio is, as you'd expect, a discreetly opulent spot. The chairs are wicker, the potted plants are profuse, and the views are tremendous: beyond the pool, the poolhouse and the tennis court, where his 13-year-old son is taking a lesson, the hills of Pacific Palisades stretch out below a bank of clouds floating over the Santa Monica coastline.

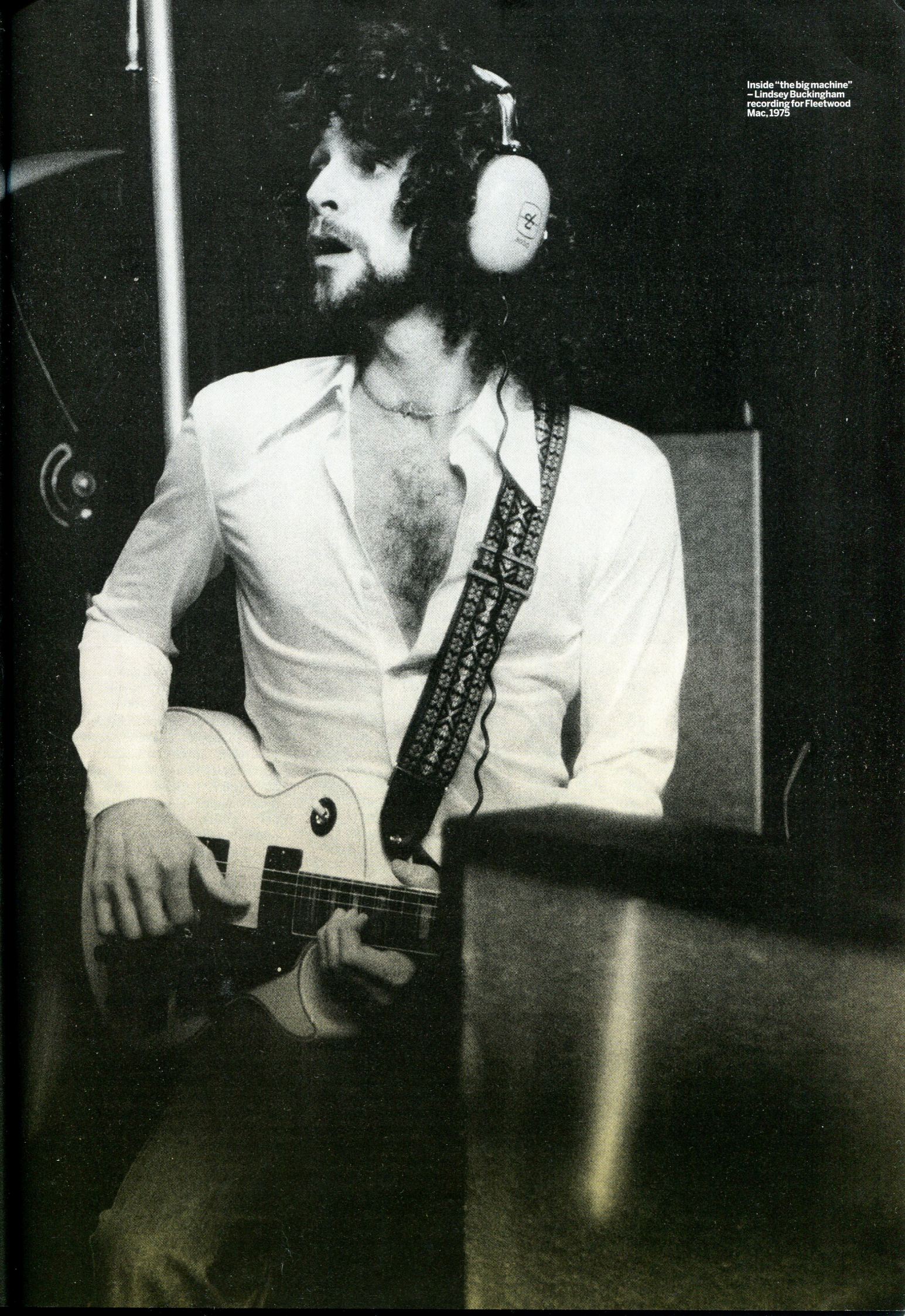
Buckingham is talking, on this perfect LA morning, about newish bands that he likes—The Arcade Fire, Phoenix, The Dirty Projectors and Vampire Weekend. "These guys have been to school; they know more than we did," he marvels. He is also, though, talking about Fleetwood Mac's *Tusk*, a bloody-minded inspiration to plenty more indie-rockers, and about how he compelled his band to skew what he calls the "normal order of things" after the monumental success of *Rumours* in 1977.

"We were in this place where we could have made *Rumours 2* and painted ourselves into a corner stylistically," he says, still sounding like a mellifluous choirboy at 61. "There was a point where *Rumours* became about the voyeurism and the success of the album itself. I wanted to wiggle free from that trap."

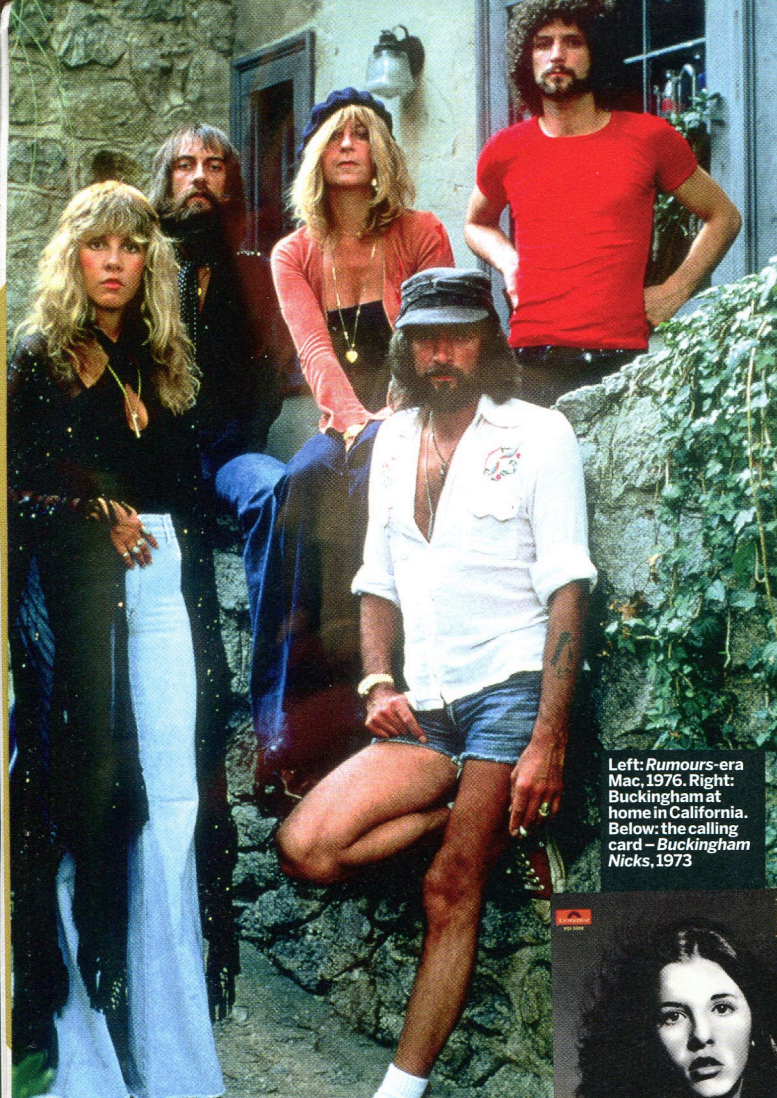
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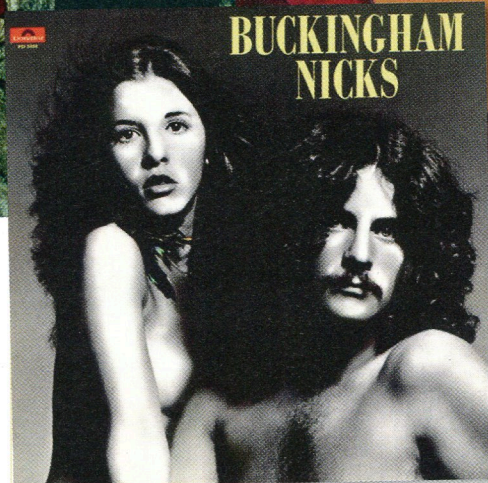
Inside "the big machine"  
— Lindsey Buckingham  
recording for Fleetwood  
Mac, 1975







Left: *Rumours*-era Mac, 1976. Right: Buckingham at home in California. Below: the calling card—Buckingham Nicks, 1973



**S**INCE *TUSK* WAS released in 1979, Buckingham has made it a point of honour to wiggle free of many expectations surrounding an artist of his success and stature. There have been lucrative retrenchments with the Mac, of course. But in the past 28 years, he has also delivered five solo albums to Warner Bros that were received with increasing degrees of consternation from the label. Now with his sixth solo LP imminent, the artist-label relationship has finally atrophied to the point that *Seeds We Sow* will be the first that Buckingham, as befits a cult solo artist, has released himself. Fleetwood Mac are now also on their own, after 40 years with Warners.

Buckingham's solo albums have allowed him to explore his riskier, more experimental impulses, away from the commercial imperatives of Fleetwood Mac. "I don't do these things to make a killing financially," he admits. "And it would shock me—*shock* me—if that ever happened." Certainly, his solo records [see panel] are bold and idiosyncratic, with Buckingham the perfectionist frequently applying disorientating delay effects and nervy loops to his acoustic guitars. His latterday solo work remains emotionally candid—"Reading the paper, saw a review/Said I was a visionary, but nobody knew," he notes ruefully in 2006's "Not Too Late". It might be a little more mature and measured, but it's still just as potent as the domestic melodramas he channelled in Fleetwood Mac's '70s heyday.

"The whole arc of what's happened since the '70s, it's been an interesting ride," he says, before returning to the subject of *Tusk*. "All of it

was an outgrowth of the fact that we are this strange group of people who function through chemistry. We were two couples who had broken up, and while we were making *Rumours* I had to see Stevie [Nicks] every day. We never really got a chance to get any closure, and I still had to try to make the right choices to do the right thing for her and, in some ironic sense, help her to move away. We were also aware, because that first album [1975's *Fleetwood Mac*] had done very well, that there was this calling—this destiny—that we needed to fulfil. What was going on with one's personal life was secondary to that calling.

"But in the wake of *Rumours*," he continues, "there was a chance to take stock of what it all meant. There had been a lot of other music in the late '70s, which was reinforcing to my sensibilities—The Clash, Elvis Costello, all of the new wave—but was confrontational to what Fleetwood Mac was about. So I was just looking outside of the box. The irony of *Tusk* was that I did engage the band in the idea and the process, and what broke that spell was the commercial outcome.

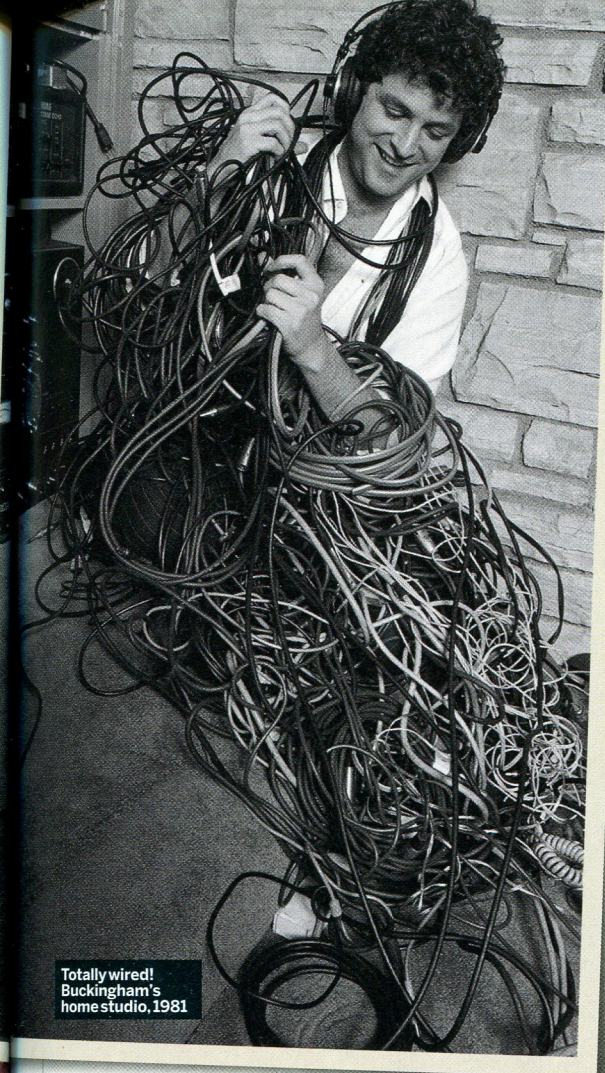
"It's not that it didn't sell—it sold four or five million albums. But because it did not stand up

to *Rumours*, this edict came down where basically the band said, 'We're going to go back to something a little more to the right'. And had there not been that reaction from the rest of the band, I probably would have never started making solo albums. There wouldn't have been a need for an outlet for the left side of the palette. At the time they probably just saw me as a troublemaker—I'm sure the label did, too. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall when they put that album on in the boardroom. 'What was that we just heard?'

"I'm at the point now where all these choices I've made add up to something more tangible, where I feel like they were not bad choices that I made, if not popular at the time. I feel like my street cred is better than it's ever been. That does not translate to marketability, nor should it, necessarily. It's just easier to come to terms with what it is and what it isn't at this point, and then be completely happy to go out with Fleetwood Mac for a while. There's something to be said for that, too, and if you do it properly, it has its own credibility. There's a story that is still evolving with that band, if that's possible after all these years—and with Stevie and me. We're getting along better than ever."

Nicks appears to take all the talk of a kinder, gentler Fleetwood Mac with a grain of salt. In 2009, she told MTV.com, "When he [Buckingham] goes onstage and does his little speech where he says, 'You know, everything is great and we're just all grown up now and we're having fun,' I'm just standing on the other side of the stage and going [rolls her eyes], 'Whatever!'"

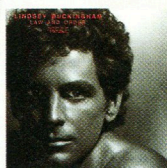




Totally wired!  
Buckingham's  
homestudio, 1981

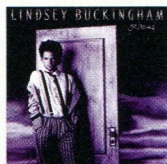
## GO INSANE!

"The left side of the palette..."  
Lindsey Buckingham's solo career



### LAW AND ORDER (1981)

Buckingham went straight from the *Tusk* marathon to this stylistically eclectic collection, playing almost all the parts to establish his DIY solo mode. A success, too: lead-off single "Trouble" peaked at No 9 in the US and made the UK Top 40.



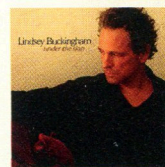
### GO INSANE (1984)

A distinctly catchy, effortlessly melodic way to express some serious emotional turmoil. "There was no irony to that title at all", says Buckingham. Closes with "DW Suite", an elegy for Dennis Wilson.



### OUT OF THE CRADLE (1992)

Newcomers to Buckingham's solo work should probably begin here. An elegant, intense, painstakingly executed collection, this was recorded during his self-imposed exile from the Mac—it's a fine showcase for his orchestral guitar-picking technique, too.



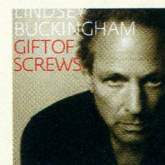
### UNDER THE SKIN (2006)

Buckingham's most engaging LP is at once a celebration of romantic salvation ("Show You How", "It Was You") and a meditation on the life of the musician ("Not Too Late", "Cast Away Dreams").



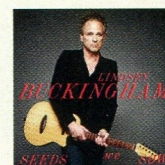
### LIVE AT THE BASS PERFORMANCE HALL (2008)

A mixture of electric rock-outs and hyper-dextrous acoustic picking, this live set provides a real-time career overview, and establishes a common ground between his solo and Fleetwood Mac identities.



### GIFT OF SCREWS (2009)

The original of this somewhat scattered LP, which dates back to the mid-'90s, provided most of the tracks for the Mac's most recent LP, 2003's *Say You Will*, as well as two for *Under The Skin*.



### SEEDS WE SOW (2011)

A sort of belated follow-up to...*Cradle*, though the vibe is mellower, Buckingham's latest integrates his full range of moves, from solo acoustic balladry to trademark driving rockers.

**I**N A SENSE, though, Buckingham and Nicks ("It's actually Nicks-Buckingham now," he quips) have come full circle. Since Christine McVie left Fleetwood Mac in 1998, they're back in Fleetwood Mac to being the two intertwined voices they were as Buckingham Nicks, four decades ago. "Back then, we were doing a pop-folk thing with Ian & Sylvia two-part harmonies," Buckingham recalls. "We liked the blend we had, and it's still a great blend—we just don't do it very often in that pure context. Who knows, she and I could get together and do something. That would tug at a lot of people's hearts, including our own. But that album [1973's *Buckingham Nicks*] came and went, at which point we were dealing with a lack of interest from the label, management, everybody, pretty much. It was right at that moment that Mick Fleetwood contacted me. It wasn't clear to us what we should do, but once we all got together, we felt like, oh, there's a vibe. And there was."

Buckingham doesn't have to keep making records and touring, but his desire to excel—to prove himself—is undiminished. "Hopefully, it's not quite as neurotic as it once was, and it may be driven by things that are a little more pure," he says. "But the interesting thing about my scene is there is this big machine—the Fleetwood Mac machine—and without that I wouldn't have been able to do all this small stuff, which is where you take your risks and allow yourself to grow and where the heart lives more, and the two support each other.

"Without the small stuff, I wouldn't have been able to keep coming back to Fleetwood Mac. Even if we never make another album, even if we're just going out and playing the material in a way that is fresh, the two seem to inform each other's sensibilities."

Mick Fleetwood marvels at Buckingham's ability to move between the band and his distinctly separate solo work. "Because he's so focused on his 'art' and what it means—and it's certainly not about the money—he goes out and works his nuts off trying to have people listen to

**"My street cred is better than it's ever been. That doesn't translate to marketability, and nor should it"**

what he's doing," Fleetwood tells *Uncut*. "But you have to really hand it to him; he comes back to Fleetwood Mac as a whole person."

According to Fleetwood, much of Buckingham's current creative streak—*Seeds We Sow* is his third solo album in five years—is down to the belated arrival of domestic bliss. He met his wife, Kristen Buckingham, née Messner, at a 1996 photoshoot while she was still plying her former profession as a photographer, and started a family at 48.

"That's been such a gift," Buckingham says. "Living through the '70s, the '80s and the '90s, I saw that a lot of people I knew were living a

certain kind of lifestyle that we all thought we had to live. A lot of those people who were parents or spouses were not really there for that situation, and I didn't want to be one of those guys, because my upbringing was so stable and so supportive. And, of course, if you wait too long, the odds of finding somebody begin to diminish, so I was just lucky to meet someone who could kick my ass and help me to reorient my well-defended ways. I think all of this was somehow an extension of the whole Fleetwood Mac thing of living in denial."

The physical embodiment of Buckingham's art is the home studio beneath the garage, where he recorded all of *Seeds We Sow* and the bulk of its two predecessors (2006's *Under The Skin* and 2009's *Gift Of Screws*). "There was a period of time when the solo albums were few and far between," he says. "I've been more prolific in the last five years as a solo artist than I've ever been before. Back then, I was more like the Terrence Malick of rockers. Because I've made this choice—or because the choice has been made for me—to define myself off to the left, I'm making things for a fewer number of ears. Yes, it's still about being heard, but I have to also temper my expectations for who is going to hear it and get it—or more to the point, want to get it.

"But that's the freedom of it. If everyone who appreciated Fleetwood Mac appreciated this, I wouldn't be doing my job right." ☺

*Seeds We Sow* is released on September 6