

# Fleetwood Mac: They may be paleolithic, but they have good bones



Fleetwood Mac

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So you never got to see Queen with the incandescent Freddie Mercury, Journey fronted by Steve Perry, or U2 before Bono took himself so seriously. It's a loss, to be sure. But on Sunday at the Rose Garden, you'll have the chance to catch one of rock's legendary bands while they're mostly intact and can still bring it.

[Fleetwood Mac](#) is Paleolithic by pop music standards -- its first incarnation can be traced back to 1967 -- but recent reviews from previous stops on the band's current world tour attest to the fact that they're still more than the sum of their very individual, disparate parts.

Drummer Mick Fleetwood is the band's occasional manager and one of the Beatles-era originals, along with bassist John McVie. Fleetwood has also been described as the glue that's held the group together for decades, even back when they cycled through various members as a blues outfit in London.

In 1975, at a Los Angeles restaurant, Fleetwood hit the jackpot for the band's lineup, meeting the couple who would anchor the band's longest-running incarnation. Lindsey Buckingham and his girlfriend/partner Stevie Nicks brought pop and poetry to Fleetwood Mac, but like so many windfalls, they also brought more drama and turmoil to a group already rocked by substance abuse and the crumbling marriage of Christine and John McVie.

That drama eventually resulted in "Rumours," one of the best-selling albums in music history.

More telling of influence than album sales, however, is the number of 30-something women walking around today with the name Rhiannon. It's likely they've only seen videos of the person whose song inspired their name -- the band's enchanted frontwoman, Nicks. There's an argument to be made that Nicks, still draped in diaphanous scarves and age-defying blond locks at 65, is the element that must be present in order for Fleetwood Mac to conjure magic.

And yet the creative process that resulted in some of pop's most enduring music rarely involved the band jamming together. "Rumours," as well as many subsequent Fleetwood Mac albums, came about through overdubbing and piecing together various bits and riffs recorded by the members individually, with almost all tracks written by Nicks, Christine McVie or Buckingham.

This dogged individuality has been both necessary to the band's success and nearly its undoing over the years; it's fitting that "The Chain" -- a song that the players themselves agree is the band's unofficial anthem -- is the only one in Fleetwood Mac's extensive catalog with a five-way writing credit.

It's a track that begins with one of rock music's most recognizable plucked-guitar intros, courtesy of Buckingham, Fleetwood Mac's youngest member. At 63, he remains the intense, guitar-shredding kid in the band who has always served as the catalyst for change. Buckingham is also the main reason Fleetwood Mac has a new four-song EP called "Extended Play," which landed in the iTunes Top 10 when it was released in April. At least a few of those tracks are incorporated into this tour's set, which has been running longer than 2 1/2 hours.

While the new songs are unmistakably Fleetwood Mac creations, they are missing the sweet voice and polished keyboard work that Christine McVie brought to the mix. Retired to the English countryside since 1998, she was always the group's much-needed leavening agent. Some of her best-known songs are understandably absent from the current tour's playlist, and word is there's a thinness to the live show without her presence.

But there is still the drama of seeing Buckingham and Nicks trying to resolve whatever chemistry remains between them live on stage; lanky Mick Fleetwood hunched over a drum kit pounding out "Tusk"; John McVie's ominous vibrating bass lines; and the near-astral experience that is "Sara." Even after three decades, it's an alchemy that continues to produce gold.

Buckingham says the band's musicianship has not diminished with age, nor has the desire for most of them to make music together.

"After all this time you would think there was nothing left to discover, nothing left to work out, no new chapters to be written," he told *Rolling Stone* earlier this year. "But that is not the case."

-- *Michele Coppola*