

BIG SHOTS

John McVie

Doing it With Feeling

Never knowing he'd play the part in a rock legacy that would affect millions, a friend of Jimmy Page's once told Jimmy his new band (featuring the then unknown singer Robert Plant) really wasn't very good, and would "sink like a *Lead Zeppelin*" [sic].

In a kind of *Twilight Zone* of similarity, a few decades ago, John Mayall—one of the godfathers of blues—and his band were recording a funky instrumental in search of a name. Suddenly, John's guitarist, Peter Green, had a funny idea: he'd christen the song after the drummer, Mick Fleetwood, and bass player, John McVie. The song was dubbed *Fleetwood Mac*, a name that went on to become synonymous with great music, multi-platinum albums, and the kind of lasting power most artists only dream about.

In its lengthy tenure, the band has changed more members than the Vienna Boys choir, and seems to get better with each new lineup. But one of the most interesting facts about *Fleetwood Mac* is that, in direct conflict to all the rules of Hit-Making 101, they keep replacing their lead singers and songwriters! In fact, the only original members are the namesakes: drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie. Obviously, these two guys are the glue that holds together one of the world's most successful bands.

John McVie is certainly no stranger to success. Joining *John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers* at the tender age of 15, he had the opportunity to play with the parade of great artists, like Eric Clapton, that passed through the band. Even outside the band, a certain camaraderie prevailed.

"It was different then. We had a real community feeling. Everyone played the same places, knew each other, jammed together."

Mick Fleetwood also did some time with the

Bluesbreakers, but lasted only a month. He and guitarist Peter Green then started calling McVie to join up, but John felt comfortable in his steady gig with the Bluesbreakers—until one night when bandleader John Mayall turned around and said "Alright guys, freeform." ("Freeform" is a style of jazz where every musician simply plays whatever he wants, without regard for melody, harmony, or tone.) McVie called Fleetwood that very night and said "Let's do it!". And so they did.

After a few years and a couple of albums, Peter Green left, and 3 or 4 personnel changes later Bob Welch entered the picture. It was during the end of Bob Welch's stay that Christine McVie started playing with the band.

Soon Bob Welch left and was replaced with the young songwriting team of Stevie Nicks and Lindsay Buckingham. With this lineup, Fleetwood Mac enjoyed phenomenal success, racking up hit after hit and selling tens of millions of albums.

Now, Lindsay Buckingham has left and guitarists/vocalists Rick Vito and Billy Burnette have joined up. The latest album, *Behind the Mask*, is doing well, and the band has embarked on a major tour.

Simply another "year in the life" for *Fleetwood Mac*!

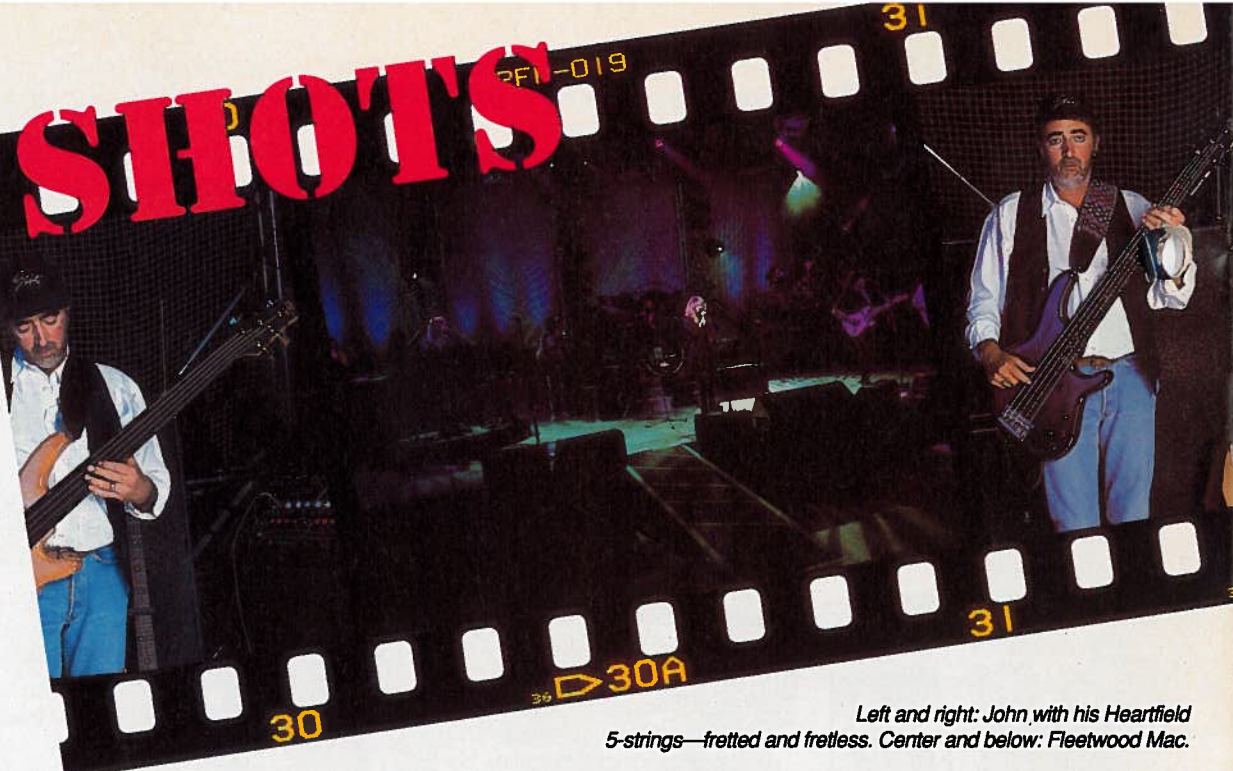
There is one new feature, however. John McVie, life long Precision Bass player, has added a new instrument: the Heartfield DR-5 5-string bass.

John explains that some of the new tunes required lower notes than you could reach on a 4-string. "I needed that low 'B', the way the writers were arranging the songs." (The Heartfield appears on *Back In My Mind*, *Hard Feelings*, and *Standing On A Rock*.)

Did he have to look any farther than the Heartfield? "No. They're great basses, just beautiful. And the feel of the neck is *perfect*." In fact, now he's got his eye on a Heartfield 4-string!

And once the current Fleetwood Mac tour is done? "I'm working with this singer named Linda Thomas. She's a blues singer, and that's exactly what it'll be—with bass, drums, guitar, and keyboards."

So after all these years, John's come full circle, back to the situation he started with: a bunch of musicians jamming, bouncing ideas, playing what comes naturally, and doing it with feeling.



Left and right: John with his Heartfield 5-strings—fretted and fretless. Center and below: Fleetwood Mac.

