



As the individual primarily responsible for Fleetwood Mac's transformation from blues belters into lite-FM mainstays, Lindsey Buckingham has committed more than his share of musical crimes against humanity. He will be judged, in this life or the next, as an unindicted conspirator on every Stevie Nicks composition after "Sara." He will be roundly mocked for the echo-y "tell me tell me lies" refrain on the smarm-rock classic "Little Lies." He will be relieved of the right to vote for idly sitting back as "Don't Stop" - an otherwise harmless ditty - devolved into a rosy-cheeked political rallying cry. As a guitar player, however, he's beyond reproach. Rarely given his due as one of the few melody-first players with bona fide chops, Buckingham's syrupy production belies the inventiveness and ferocity of his playing. Think Pete Townshend, minus the power chords and appetite for self-destruction.

Dexterity is a terrible skill in the wrong hands - witness the 648-notes-per-measure torment of Steve Vai and his shredding brethren - but Buckingham deploys his nimbleness with great restraint. Witness the staccato flutter of the song-ending "Gypsy" solo, the aural sprint of his acoustic introduction to "Don't Back Down," the immediacy that his hammer-happy pulls and plucks lend to the live reinvention of tinny '80s hit "Big Love";

His harmonic creativity even salvages otherwise noisome drum-machine exercises like "Holiday Road," otherwise known as "dude, that song where Christie Brinkley totally strips in the car, dude" from the first National Lampoon's Vacation flick. Try to piece together the garble of notes Lindsey packs into his ascending/descending late-song run, a riff worthy of Jimmy Page. Then try playing it on the bulky [Rick Turner Model 1 guitar](#) with which he plies his trade. The best-case scenario: you'll remember to place the guitar back in its case before you stomp away in frustration. The worst: your neighbors will wonder what prompted you to propel a shiny guitar through your bay windows.

What further separates Buckingham from his melodic peers is the whole versatility thing (and yes, I realize that "versatile" is almost an insult in this era of musical multitasking). The spacey chimes and trills of "Trouble" have precisely nothing in common with the murky stomp of "That's Enough For Me," which doesn't seem even peripherally related to the metallic squeals of live staple "I'm So Afraid." Then there's "Never Going Back Again," one of the few '70s-troubadour moments that doesn't inspire homicidal rage among discerning listeners. At once subtle and intricate, the song's spry-fingered accompaniment ultimately redeems its plaintive lyrics and vocal yowls.

Anyway, to answer your question: No, I'm not asking you to purchase a slew of Fleetwood Mac discs and Buckingham solo platters (though Tusk remains a worthy addition to any collection) just so you know what I'm talking about here. But even if you loathe "Go Your Own Way" with every fiber of your being, humor me with this quick exercise. The next time the song peals from the speakers at your local CVS, take a moment to appreciate the solos that bookend its final chorus: the first, in which a trio of notes are held until the precise moment they threaten to degenerate into feedback; and the second, in which he lets loose with a flurry of musical jabs and haymakers.

Lindsey Buckingham made a lot of execrable records in his day, but his wildly inventive riffery (riffitude? riffishness?) makes it considerably easier not to hold that against him. In other words: love the playa, hate his game. Or something like that.