

## John Fogerty Interview

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by Daniel J. Levitin © 1998

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The record producer. Isn't he the guy that raises money for the recording? Or hires the studio personnel? In the music industry, record producers are the invisible part of the creative team, and most listeners don't know what the producer does. The best analogy is that the record producer is like a feature film's Director. In film-making, the Director has the creative vision for the film - how the film should look and feel. To achieve this she works closely with the cinematographer not just to capture the scene on film but to enhance it with effective lighting and camera angles, and special effects. Although the Director and Actors work from a script, it is the Director's job to interpret that script with (and sometimes for) the actors, to suggest alternative readings. And it is the Director who yells the now famous "cut" when she feels that the actor has given the best performance he can give.

In the recording studio, the Producer functions like the Director. While the recording engineer is responsible for getting things on tape (like the cinematographer) the Producer must articulate a vision for what the end product should sound like. The musicians are somewhat like the actors, reading from a script (the written music) and the Producer guides them through the reading. Even when the artist has written the song, the artist relies on the producer to present the song properly, to run the recording session, and to help the artist be objective about the quality of his own performances. Like most films, most popular music recordings are not made in real time; parts are recorded individually and out of sequence, and it is not uncommon to spend 50 hours working on a 3-minute song.

Different producers bring different strengths to their projects. Quincy Jones (Michael Jackson) and George Martin (The Beatles) are primarily musical arrangers and orchestrators; Walter Afanasieff (Mariah Carey) and Narada Michael Walden (Whitney Houston) are songwriters who principally produce artists singing songs they wrote for them; Steve Lillywhite (U2) and Roy Thomas Baker (Queen) are primarily known for the innovative sounds they achieve; Gary Katz (Steely Dan) and Peter Asher (James Taylor) fulfill an important role by handling business affairs and setting a mood that help their artists to feel creative and comfortable in the studio.

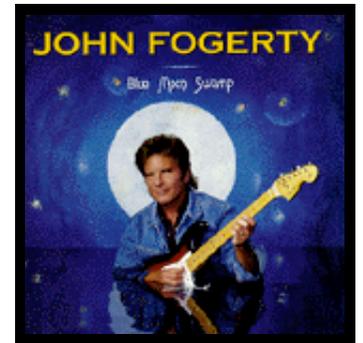
The vast majority of rock and pop musicians rely on outside producers, and only a small few have successfully produced themselves: John Fogerty, Stevie Wonder, Prince, Paul McCartney, Donald Fagen & Walter Becker (Steely Dan), Brian Wilson, Richard Carpenter, Neil Young, Lindsey Buckingham (Fleetwood Mac), Paul Simon, and Jimmy Page & Robert Plant (Led Zeppelin). While each of these self-

producers have their own strengths, Fogerty is uniquely able to work in all aspects of record production. The band with which Fogerty was associated from 1967- 1970, Creedence Clearwater Revival, was scarcely more than a convenient fiction, a marketing vehicle for John's songwriting and production ideas. With their swampy grooves, CCR's albums seem to be the epitome of laid-back front-porch casualness, but they are in fact impeccably produced and carefully orchestrated. Fogerty wrote every note that was played, and in many cases played most of those notes himself, alternately playing guitar (acoustic and electric), Dobro, saxophone, harmonica and vocals. On all his albums, Fogerty's musical arrangements are simple enough that any bar band can play them and sound good doing so. But his performances of them are subtle and intricate enough that no one has ever bettered them. On the engineering side, his records have always conveyed a strongly identifiable sound and engineering consistency. He also has an uncanny ability to pick hit singles. A generation of rock bands from ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers to The Eagles and Chris Isaak have been influenced by Fogerty's melding of rock, blues, country, and bluegrass. And more than a few current country hits have been written around guitar licks he played (and wrote) in the 1960s.

In June, 1997, Fogerty released a fine new solo "Blue Moon Swamp," reportedly five years in the making. He used the occasion of its release to discuss his philosophy of producing records, and how he achieved some of the sounds he and CCR are famous for.

DL: I know that for the new album you said that you wanted to take some time out to become a better guitar player. But you are considered by many to be one of the great guitarists. Where did that desire come from?

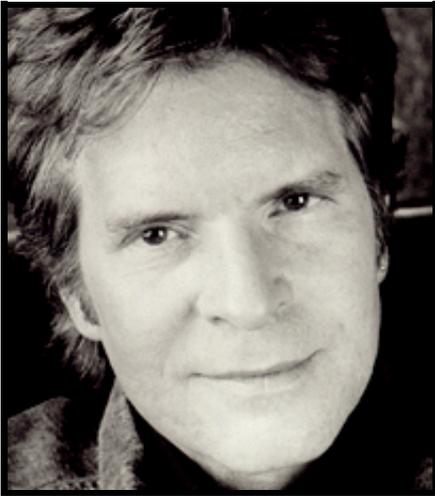
JF: Well I'm not sure I can answer that. I'll try. When I was young I was smitten by Elvis and Duane Eddy. But there came a point when I could tell the difference between their roles - Elvis on the Dorsey show was just strumming his guitar. I've had renewed respect for him in later years - he sure strummed it great, he could really mash the guitar and those old Sun Records have a great acoustic sound - but still, there came a time when I knew there were other guys who could play with a lot more technique and finesse. Particularly Chet Atkins and James Burton. Chet was the first guitarist I appreciated because he was the artist, the solo artist, he was the name on his records. And he was obviously real good and I liked some of his early records. Chet was more country and more elegant, and I knew that he was awfully damn good. But then James Burton came along and he was rock and roll, I mean he just really played the crap out of that guitar and it was so good sounding, particularly the records he made with Rick Nelson. I'm about 14 years old and I'm going "when I grow up I want to be a really good guitar player like that." And then you go on and you're in a garage band that plays mostly instrumentals, so we [John and the earlier incarnation of CCR, The Blue Velvets] emulated The Ventures and Duane Eddy. But as good as those records are there's not a lot technique there. Which is why they sound so good by garage bands. And also, I might say that's the same secret of Creedence. All the arrangements I did were for four people who were kind of medium or less on their instruments. So the reason all the Creedence stuff sounds so good by every bar band in the world is that the ability required to play the stuff is so minimal that anyone can play it and it sounds good.



I still play in concert these days in a very simple way; not a lot of technique, not real complicated. My way of playing guitar is more like singing with the guitar - like a vocalist, but it happens to be on the guitar. So that you could hum the parts. You know, "Green River," if you go [sings opening guitar line] everybody knows what you're doing. You can sing the guitar line, you can say it with your mouth.

DL: I guess that's partly the simplicity, and also it's that you've written parts that are so memorable. You

could take the lead-in from any one of forty Creedence songs and play it for somebody on another instrument and they would know the tune.



JF: Well, I read something once where a writer was listing the ten most influential guitar players, and somehow he had stuck my name in there. It was a real shock to me. I went "huh?" There were people on there like Cliff Gallup, Eddie Van Halen, Jimi Hendrix. But the guy's theory was that in the case of me and Eddie and Jimi, these guys are songwriters. So the idea is if a guy is able to write songs, he should be able to do that on the guitar; that's why the playing is memorable. It's an interesting theory. Because a guy that is writing songs and can apply that same knack to his playing will write parts, he'll tend to play things that you remember as opposed to a Les Paul who's so incredible, but you could never hum those parts.

DL: There's always this tension between the technique and the passion. With the extreme case maybe being someone like Al DiMeola -

JF: - Thank you! -

DL: - on the technique side -

JF: - yeah and you know what, if he was in the next room I might not even get up out of my chair to go listen...

DL: But then there are players like Buddy Guy who have so much energy that when they're playing one note it knocks you over -

JF: Right -

DL: So this internal battle you have with technique - how do you perceive it and wanting to balance energy in your playing?

JF: Well, it's sort of a cop out, kind of like the argument about not learning to read music, which I still don't know how to do for the guitar. You say, "I don't want to get any better because then with my technique I'll end up screwing it up, like those guys that play a million notes." So in the old days of Creedence my aesthetic was much more towards "less is more," that simple is more powerful. I still feel that way. And I'm very happy with most of the stuff I did with Creedence, although let's say something like "Heard It Through the Grapevine" where I go off on 11 minutes basically in the same position on the guitar...there's times now where although I don't actually sit down and play those things, I'll be in the car, just driving along, and hear them. This actually happened about ten years ago with that song; I was on the highway and four, then five minutes pass and I'm thinking "come on, John, do something different now." And then there was another chorus, you know.

DL: There's a real tubey sound in your solo on that song, a beautiful guitar tone I hadn't heard on your other recordings. How did that come about?

JF: Well, that's a Les Paul Custom, the same one that I still use for recording. I don't take it out on the road,

but I have other guitars from that era; that's the black one. It was a small Fender amp, probably the Concert; I used to always play through the Vibrolux but at some point mine developed a chirp in it, in the vibrato, so we had to rush out and get something else at the local music store, and we got the next larger model. So I'm thinking it was the two speaker, whatever was the vintage '67, '68, '69 Fender -

DL: - open back -

JF: - open back, with the silver grille, you know, I think it was probably two 12-inch speakers, not two tens. But the whole song's played on one amp, there was no switching.

DL: Oh?

JF: I think I may have gone to the bass pickup on the guitar for the solos.

DL: Yeah, it sounds that way, it has that kind of fullness.

JF: Yeah, what Eric [Clapton] called the "woman" tone. But as best as I can tell - I've done some relistening in the past couple of years - he would darken up the bass pickup by putting all the bass tone on it. But to me, that makes it kind of unprintable, it makes it too [sings imitation]. But it certainly worked for him in those days.

DL: In particular, I know that you wanted to spend some time studying Dobro. But you played Dobro twenty-five years ago on "Lookin' Out My Back Door."

JF: Well, I played one little lick on the Dobro for that. I figured out how to do it by just playing with a flat pick.

DL: There's two Dobro parts in there, right? There's the solo and then there are some fills going on through the whole tune...

JF: Yeah, I guess you could say that, but it's just what one mediocre player would play. But you know, I had a knack for making records - that's the "producer" guy talking. But anyway, I couldn't really play the Dobro - it was so complicated and so over my head. I was down in Nashville at the Johnny Cash show in 1969 - that's where I picked this up - and Tut Taylor was with Johnny's band he was saying, "well you know you can do slants and reverse slants" and I went, "what in the world is that?!" And he said, "well, you know you don't just put the bar straight across, you can slant it this way and it covers other frets and I looked at that and it sounded like I rocket scientist talking to me. I went, "Oh my God!" So I went home and I tried it for three days, and I finally went "never mind, this is not my job right now." So I put it away for 25 years until 1992 when I was at a vintage guitar show and a guy had one for sale. And I said "play me something on that, can you play?" And I mean, he was pretty simple too, but I went "damn, that sound is so great." So I bought it from him because it was reasonable, and I'm really glad I did because it's a good one, but anyway, that's where it started. I was smitten; I was helpless. The sound kind of grabbed way down in your heart where these things go - it's like seeing a pretty girl, you know? And it's like, if you have any chance at all you take the flying leap and you go over and you ask her a question. So that's what I did with the Dobro. I started without knowing anything, but the sound grabbed me and I said, "man, I gotta learn how to do this. And really play - rather than just working up a part for a record or something.

DL: The way a lot of producers work is that they try to "cop a sound" from somebody else's record for the

record they're making. That's not necessarily a negative thing - with the Beatles, for example, that's what they did, they were always trying to sound like other people. How much of that did you use as device in producing Creedence Records? "Lookin' Out My Back Door" has some of the sounds of Ricky Nelson's "Hello Mary Lou."

JF: If that's the case, then I would say no (laughs). "Green River" is obviously a tip of the hat to the Sun Records sound, but I can't think of any real specific song. Actually the loping beat of the acoustic guitar and then the bass kind of doing that rocking beat on the I and the V, I tend to think of something like "Dream Baby" by Roy Orbison. Yet this song was much more rocking than that song, but the rhythm treatment fit. Obviously I'm trying to sound that way as opposed to James Brown.

I can't think of a time we tried to capture another sound, except of course when we covered another person's song. Like "My Baby Left Me" by Elvis. We did our best, but we didn't have the musicality of those guys. I mean, my guitar playing - all I could do is give an impression of Scotty Moore, who is one of my idols. But in those days it was just an impression. I was playing flat pick, you know, holding a traditional pick and playing with a couple of fingers. And actually he played all that stuff with a thumb pick and his fingers, more like Chet Atkins. I have since as a mature adult learned how to do it both ways, but that's what I went after in the last ten years or so. But in those days, all I could try to do was get my little "impression of," and it was a sort of limited impression at that.

DL: Speaking of impressions, when The Hollies came out with "Long Cool Woman in a Black Dress"-

JF: - that was Creedence's greatest record!!

DL: - Right! (laughter).

JF: It's the way I feel about [Gene Vincent's recording of] "Be Bop A Lula" - that was Elvis's greatest record!

DL: And "Long Cool Woman" was "Green River," right?

JF: Yeah, and well - kind of just the vibe - coming from "Green River" and a little bit of "Bad Moon," and just kind of going off into the Creedence repertoire. And that's okay - unless you're actually stealing the song itself, the sound and the arrangement are just there for the asking, really.

Don't get me wrong - I'm not going to say that I was not influenced. Man! I was influenced by everybody. I always made it clear by saying, "here's a guy I love, here's another guy I love..." I did not fall to the earth a complete original.

DL: I was hoping we could set the historical record straight on something. You your interview with Dan Forté for Guitar Player in 1985, you told him that CCR was very much a band in the conventional sense, that everybody wrote and played their parts, and after they did that, you would go in and do everything else necessary to make it a record. Later in the interview you said that when you write a song you have all the parts figured out in your head, that you have the whole arrangement completed. Those two statements seem incompatible. How much of the parts did you write for Doug and Stu and Tom?

JF: 100%. I was always very much a team player. I had created this entity and I was doing what a CEO today would call "marketing." I was trying to present the image of a group and that we were all this band of

happy lads and all - you know, much like The Beatles. And so years later I was still trying to defer to their egos and not make it look any other way.

But the truth is, I would write the song and then the Producer in me would take over and write the arrangement and I would show everybody exactly how it went. With as much as you know about making records Dan, you know that if you're going to go in and record you've got to have everybody having a specific part, otherwise you have a train wreck - you're just going to have noise. So I arranged everything, quite specifically, very much in the same way that Benny Goodman did with his swing band. There are only a couple of right ways to play a song, and there are a whole lot of wrong ways. With most Creedence songs, the arrangement was based on a groove or a rhythm. I've had people tell me, "gee, you've always had this great groove going on in the background." Well that's not an accident, that's what I wanted. You have to figure out what it is that grooves. Only a few things are going to work. Let's say you've figured out the guitar; then you've got to figure out the bass part, and the rhythm guitar part and the drums that complement that because you still have a myriad of choices that could screw up your initial choice on the lead guitar. So it was very much chosen and arranged before they ever even heard the song.

So I would show them what to play. And in some cases, it got really touchy, especially as we made our way along the successful path we were taking. The guys in the band's egos got more and more sensitive to where I actually had to spoon feed them the parts. I remember when I was showing Stu [Cook, bassist] "Down on the Corner" he was having a hell of a time with it. I was showing him one or two notes at a time, so that it evolved to where he thought he invented it. I'd say, "well try going 'do doo' [sings first two notes of bass line]" and he'd play those, and then I'd say, "well what if you did this next..." So by the time he got done he actually thought he invented it, but I had worked it out a couple of weeks before.

DL: When you worked it out in those days - the late sixties - did you work it out by doing demos at your house on a tape machine or was it all in your head?

JF: Well, both ways. In fact the guys used to say "it seems like John was born with an eight-track machine in his head." I actually started playing around with that when I was still in ninth grade. I bought this Sony tape recorder that had a tweed covering on it -

DL: Oh yes, with the built in speakers?

JF: Yes, and it had what they called "add-a-track." You could record something on the first track and then play that back and play along with it on the second track, so you were adding to it. I learned how to add three or four parts. I learned that I had to add the thing I wanted loudest last so that it was the cleanest. A lot of my arranging skill came from being able to experiment with that when I was still 15 and 16 years old.

DL: Did you go through several iterations of tapings to get the arrangements right or did they come out right the first time?

JF: No, no. Let's take a song like "Who'll Stop The Rain." I wrote that on my electric guitar but not plugged in so it sounded very acoustical. Remember, I'm a guy in a little two room apartment and you can't be rocking out because your neighbors would let you know about it. So I would be doing that late at night and it would have a very acoustical sound, so I could imagine an acoustical sound for the song. Which means we're talking kind of folk-right, if you're going to hyphenate what it was in those days. And you just start imagining what will work. Let's say with a bass part. you don't really want it to be doing like what a Jimi Hendrix part would do, or a James Brown part (sings a typical funk James Brown bass line). You can't do

that, you need something that complements the "do-da-chinga-chinga-chinga" of the guitar - you know you almost end up doing it with your mouth. And the same with the drum, it has to lock together and it has to complement the acoustic strumming part. It can't be any more complicated or you're going to start getting into some new fusion of some kind.

DL: Well okay, you can solve the rhythm problem that way. But there's all this choice of notes kinds of decisions to make.

JF: Well in my mind not. You know, the bass has to be supportive. I never really bought into the late 70s and 80s music or what I just said, "fusion": I never thought of the bass as a lead instrument. And I don't believe you need more than five strings on a bass. And you sure don't need all those gadgets. I mean the concept of reverb, echo, delay on a bass - I'm sorry.

DL: In a typical case would you go through a whole bunch of demo versions before you brought it to the band?

JF: A few, at home. A few. Certainly I would work it out with the guys showing them what notes to play, but obviously there would be a couple of places you'd hit where there was a question from one of the band, and I was always the one who answered it; it was my personality that I could do that.

DL: This is a very different style of working than most artists. It's more like what Brian Wilson, Stevie Wonder, or Prince do, but not at all like most people work. The typical producer, whether its a self-producer or not, just has the musicians play a whole bunch of different things and listens and then tells them what works.

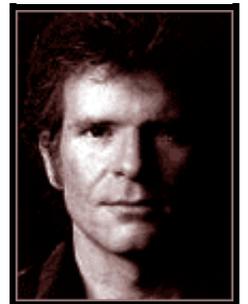
JF: Oh no, I would know what one was going to work long before we went into it. That was my job. The guys really did not have the musicality to come up with things like that.

DL: Well, I guess history's proven that. Southern Pacific and the other things they've gone on to do haven't been successful.

JF: Well there's a lot of ways to judge that, and you can say it cynically or non-cynically. In an arrangement, you're asking someone to delve within their own taste and musical knowledge and come up with something. I've actually said this to those guys when I was angry with them: "You know, we could stand here until the end of eternity and you're not going to come up with it. It's just not going to happen because it's not in you."

DL: You knew how to make records.

JF: Yeah, and I knew how to resolve those musical questions. And that's all arranging is: you're resolving those musical questions in a way that works, so that you can go on. Have you ever noticed that you'll be listening to something by a good band, let's say Van Halen or Quiet Riot - and it starts out good enough, maybe there's a lead guitar you like - and then the guy comes in singing, and somewhere in the middle it just kind of goes \*sphrrrlt\* and it turns into a mess. And all that is is that they didn't resolve it right, either in the songwriting or the arrangement. You know, in the songwriting there are all those choices: what chord do I go to, what note do I sing? But even in just the music, where it starts out kind of cool or ends up chaos.



DL: Well I guess there are three separate elements to what you and I are calling arranging. One is how the separate elements of the song go together, and whether there's an intro or not, whether you start on the chorus -

JF: - right -

DL: - and the second element is the parts, the notes that the various instruments will play over and above the melody and chords that were written -

JF: - right -

DL: - and the final element is to decide the different instrumental colors and textures you want to have in the song, the question of instrumentation and who plays what parts. And you can go wrong, you can derail the train at any one of those points...

JF: Absolutely. One of the reasons Creedence records sound so good, even now, is that the power comes from the simplicity. We were alluding to this about my own guitar playing. My guitar playing was very simple but deceptively powerful - something like "Green River" is easy to play, but it's the right easy thing out of all the possible parts.

DL: Paul McCartney said that he really only has two vocal sounds, and they're both based on trying to copy someone; he has his Elvis sound for the ballads and his Little Richard sound for the rockers. Is there a particular singer you emulate?

JF: It's interesting that Paul would say that, because as rock and roll as he really is - well, number one, I wish he'd do Little Richard more. But on his ballads, he's developed a really nice "dry" sound. By "dry" I mean he doesn't use vibrato, which Elvis did. The thing I've noticed about Paul - particularly in the song "Yesterday" - the dry sound is so great because it sounds like he's right there in your ear. That's a tendency of his I've noticed over the years, his remarkable lack of vibrato - that's his sound. I've often thought when I'm singing along with him "oh! too much vibrato, John, they'll think you're Elvis."

DL: In your flat-out rock and roll voice is there someone you're hearing in your head ó besides yourself?

JF: Well I'd certainly have to have a tip of the hat to Little Richard. I'd say it's sort of a composite guy, because obviously I love Wilson Pickett, and there are a few guys who have that sort of high, edgy thing, Little Richard being the best and the most famous. Wilson even screamed in tune. My voice came out a certain way and I've learned to be that way. But it is an affectation - I mean, it's something I had to work on. That's the part that people don't understand. It's just like guitar playing. You decide in your mind, I want to get good, I want to play. Well it takes work, you practice.

DL: And you practice developing a sound on the instrument that isn't something you had from the get-go.

JF: Right, so you end up getting to where you want to get if you put in enough practice time. It was the same for me and my singing. I just sort of had a mental image of what my voice ought to sound like, but it sure didn't sound like that when I was fourteen - kind of like any other kid who's voice was cracking.

DL: And there was that whole other thing, of you sounding southern, affecting the southern accent in your singing.

JF: Well, that's because what I aspired to - what I thought was cool, in other words - was the way I ended up sounding. I mean, that was what worked for me. It's your musical personality. You should do stuff you're good at, you should favor your strengths. I've drifted into not always doing that - on some of "Zombie" - maybe some of the cuts from "Blue Ridge Rangers." Maybe I tried to be a little more country than I really am, and so it sounded like some guy who was out of his element so to speak.



DL: I have a tape of your Showtime cable special where you were singing a lot of do-wop tunes, and I had never heard that sweet, beautiful John Fogerty record before. I like your rock voice, but I had no idea you could do that, too!

JF: With "Blue Moon Swamp" people have commented that there's some softer singing and they say, "are you getting softer?" And I say no, but that kind of material demanded that I sound that way. Like this past Christmas at my kid's school the music director wanted me to do the song "Amen" with the kids. So I got up with the acoustic guitar and I sang that with the kids and people came up to me after and said "gee, your voice is so sweet and angelic - I didn't know you could do that." And I was thinking, well what do you want me to do, Little Richard in the middle of "Amen?" It was just what the job required at the time.

DL: It's a nice palette of sounds to draw from.

JF: Well thank you, I appreciate the complement. But to me the tough thing, or the more rare thing in this world, is having a good rock and roll voice, especially for a white guy. Paul McCartney's got a great one that for some reason he chooses not to use. Of course Paul Rogers has that wonderful voice. Even Ted Neely, the guy did Jesus Christ Superstar...we haven't heard from him in a long time, but he's got a great voice.

DL: In many of the Creedence recordings you layered a lot of guitars. As a producer, how do you layer so many guitars without it sounding muddy, without them smearing together? The Creedence records have this quality that you can follow any part through the song and it doesn't get lost in the other parts.

JF: That is arranging. That's exactly what that is - knowing the qualities of a Rickenbacker guitar and how it will mix with other guitars. Also, knowing your equipment. Like a Rickenbacker guitar sounds best through two fifteen-inch speakers if you're using it for rhythm. The 10" speaker or 12" is much more focussed, that's why all the lead players like them so much, for playing single note stuff. Then if you're going to have an acoustic rhythm over that - let's take "Green River" for example, and that's me playing pretty much all the acoustic guitars on Creedence. I think the only time Tom ever played acoustic was on "Bootleg" because we did that live, and then I just overdubbed the same part on acoustic, with me doubling Tom.

DL: The perception is that Tom's role in the band was just to play rhythm, and then pretty much to play on the 2 and 4 of the measure, so he'd be going "m-DAT-m-DAT."

JF: Right. That's exactly right. And also Tom did not understand the role of the producer, so it was like every other band you've ever heard of. It was like a cartoon to me. When I mixed "Suzie Q" they were present in the studio. This was one of those studios where the mixing console was raised, and then down in front of it you could look out into the recording studio.

DL: This was the Wally Heider studios in San Francisco?

JF: No, we recorded our other stuff albums there, but this was at Coast Recorders. Heider had a similar set up though. So there were some seats down in front of the console where hangers on could look out into the studio, but they were not looking at the mixing console. So while I was doing "Suzie Q" the one and only time they were there during a Creedence mix, I kept hearing "well that's not going to work!" and "oh that's too loud!" and "aw, that'll never..." you know, that sort of thing for the whole two hours.

DL: Which is the producers' greatest fear of what the band is going to do if they're around.

JF: Exactly. Well I let it happen only one time, even though I was only 22 years old. When it was all mixed and mastered and they heard it, they went

"Well John, how did you know all that background vocal stuff was going to work?"

And I said "Because I mapped it all out. I knew what I was going to do before I got in there."

And they said "Well we didn't think..."

And I said "Yeah, I know you didn't think it was going to work. And that's the last time you're ever going to be around when I'm doing it."

And that was it - I never let them be in there again. Every song after that, I just refused to let them be there because it was so disruptive. It's like with every single band in the world, especially when they're young. They have no concept of what a producer does - they just know they played this part, their little drum part or their rhythm part or whatever. They go into the control room and the rhythm guitar player hollers "I can't hear my part," so of course the guy defers to him and turns up the rhythm guitar. Then the bass guy comes in and screams "I can't hear my part" and you turn up the bass part. And then the vocal background singer comes in, "I can't hear my part" ... Shit, you can't have everybody louder than everyone else - you're not making a record when you do that. So it was a go around I had with Tom for the whole three years we were Creedence, he kept saying "my part's not loud enough."

DL: It's been famously reported the frustrations you had with Doug and Stu as a rhythm section. I know you've talked about how you never happy with the tightness in that rhythm section. But by analogy, let's talk about the Rolling Stones. With Charlie Watts drumming, the band always sounds like it's just about to fall apart at any second.

JF: Well and sometimes, like on the song "I'm Free" they do!

DL: It sounds like a train that at any second is going to jump the tracks and there's going to be a huge mess.

JF: Right.

DL: But that's part of their excitement. I wonder if some of the excitement in Creedence tracks come from that - not being sure what is going to happen.

JF: This is the way I look at it. I have not altered my position about it musically. I think it could have been a whole lot better and the sound wouldn't have suffered. It's like talking about Rosanne [Barr-Arnold]. Somebody could say if she was to slim down and be more pretty the lines wouldn't be as funny. And I say OK, I'll buy that. But deep down in her heart, I'll bet Rosanne wishes she was slimmer and prettier, because most women do. In the case of the Rolling Stones, take "Honky Tonk Women," which is one of my favorite

Stones' tracks. If you listen to the drums even in your car, you listen to Charlie and he's just rushing and he's all over the place. It's a complement to him when I say I love Charlie's playing, but it's sort of a cop-out too. OK, I'll give you a better one, because with Charlie and The Stones it works. With Jimi Hendrix I thought Mitch Mitchell was sloppy. And then people always say "but he's a jazz player." And I go, "yeah, show me a jazz player whose time is that bad."

DL: They called him a jazz player because he didn't play straight time....

JF: Yeah, you're saying what I'm saying. I'm cynical: because he couldn't really rock and roll, so they've got to give him some kind of credible title. I maintain that he's not. Max Roach would say he's not. I'm playing with guys now who I always thought Creedence could be like. Kenny Aranoff is a fucking great rock and roll drummer. I think there really is a greatness in the performance of the music on "Blue Moon Swamp" that was never achieved at any time in my career before. That's why I'm so happy.

But that's what I was always complaining about with Creedence. We were very young, and the rhythm section wasn't anywhere near the tightness I thought it should be. But there's another angle you could look at it from here. Our average audience was fourteen years old. And they can't tell the difference. I mean, they really do not hear the difference at that age. And Dan, that's why when you and I listen to some of the stuff now that is very popular - let's pick on Hole with Courtney Love - I mean, that's the most godawful stuff I've ever heard in my life, I mean that's really bad; but a fourteen year old kid doesn't know that.

DL: We sound like our parents now, right? "What is that noise you're listening to?"

JF: Yeah, well and there's some other stuff where the guys are really good, like Pearl Jam. Those guys are kickin' butt. But Hole - not only is the singing awful, but you hear a drum break and it's so out of time, that sets girl drummers back another 150 years.

DL: What's the story with the drums on "Who'll Stop The Rain" with all those drum fills?

JF: Umm, I wouldn't prefer it to be that way.

DL: I wouldn't have thought so.

JF: There are times now when we're playing that song live and Kenny Aranoff will go "ba-do-do-do-do-bump-bump-bom-bom-bom" and I'll hear it and I'll look back and grin at him because I know what he's done there. It's like he just slid in the other drum part from the record. It cracks both of us up.

DL: So was that one of those cases where in order to keep peace in the Creedence family you let Doug do that?

JF: Yep, you've got it.

DL: What was your working relationship with Russ Gary, the engineer on the CCR albums?

JF: He was a good engineer; he covered all the bases. Later in life here I've had some differences with Russ; I know he's been trying to put together some sort of Creedence tribute album and some other stuff that I think is kind of hokey. I think in his mind he's had a lot more to do with the success of his recordings. But honestly, my recordings all sound a certain way and I can't think of other recordings by Russ that have this sound. I don't want to put him down. In the old days we recorded pretty much the way things sounded like

out in the room. Very little EQ going to tape, and then I'd EQ them a little bit at in mixdown if that's what was required. I never trusted those knob twiddlers - they get in there and make a mess of things.

DL: You have brought some beautifully poetic, and introspective lyrics to rock music:

"Five year plans and new deals  
Wrapped in golden chains  
And I wonder, still I wonder  
Who'll stop the rain?"



or

"We watched the dream dead end in Dallas  
They buried innocence that year."

Nobody else puts those kinds of lyrics into rock songs.

JF: Well I always thought that people that love rock and roll aren't necessarily stupid. You know, if you can write a really good song and add as icing good lyrics, then it would be even better, as long as you didn't sacrifice the ethic of rock and roll in the first place. I mean, I like lots of stuff and I think I have a brain, and I consider my audience to be the same way. Instead of playing down to them, you're playing up to them.

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