

creedence clearwater revival

The origin of America's greatest authentic rock & roll band begins in 1959, the penultimate year of the Eisenhower era. In El Cerrito, California, a lower middle-class suburb in San Francisco's East Bay, eighth-graders John Fogerty, Stu Cook and Doug Clifford, like so many other rock & roll crazed kids, took matters into their own hands and did the natural thing: they formed a band.

The repertoire of these 13-year-old rockers, the Blue Velvets, was virtually preordained — with nobody willing to handle vocals, guitarist Fogerty, drummer Clifford and bassman Cook covered the instrumental sounds of Sandy Nelson, Duane Eddy, Bill Doggett and, of course, the Ventures.

Hitting the sock hop circuit with "Wipe Out" and the like, they occasionally augmented their instrumental bent with the addition of John's older brother, Tom, who not only played rhythm guitar but was willing to *sing*. It was a time when "Louie Louie" was the de facto teen national anthem and notions of innocence and rock & roll were not at odds. It was America before Dallas, before Viet Nam, before Nixon; it was the way it was supposed to be.

By 1964, Tommy Fogerty and the Blue Velvets were signed to Fantasy Records, the region's only local label with national distribution. After a few releases, the company, without the band's compliance, saw fit to change their name to the Golliwogs, the rationale being that an English sounding name would make them more competitive with the British invasion groups. The Golliwogs were represented by seven Fantasy singles, including "Don't Tell Me No Lies," "Where You Been," and "You Can't Be True." These songs gained little more than scattered local airplay.

In 1967, Doug entered the Coast Guard and John joined the Army Reserves for a six-month hitch. It was

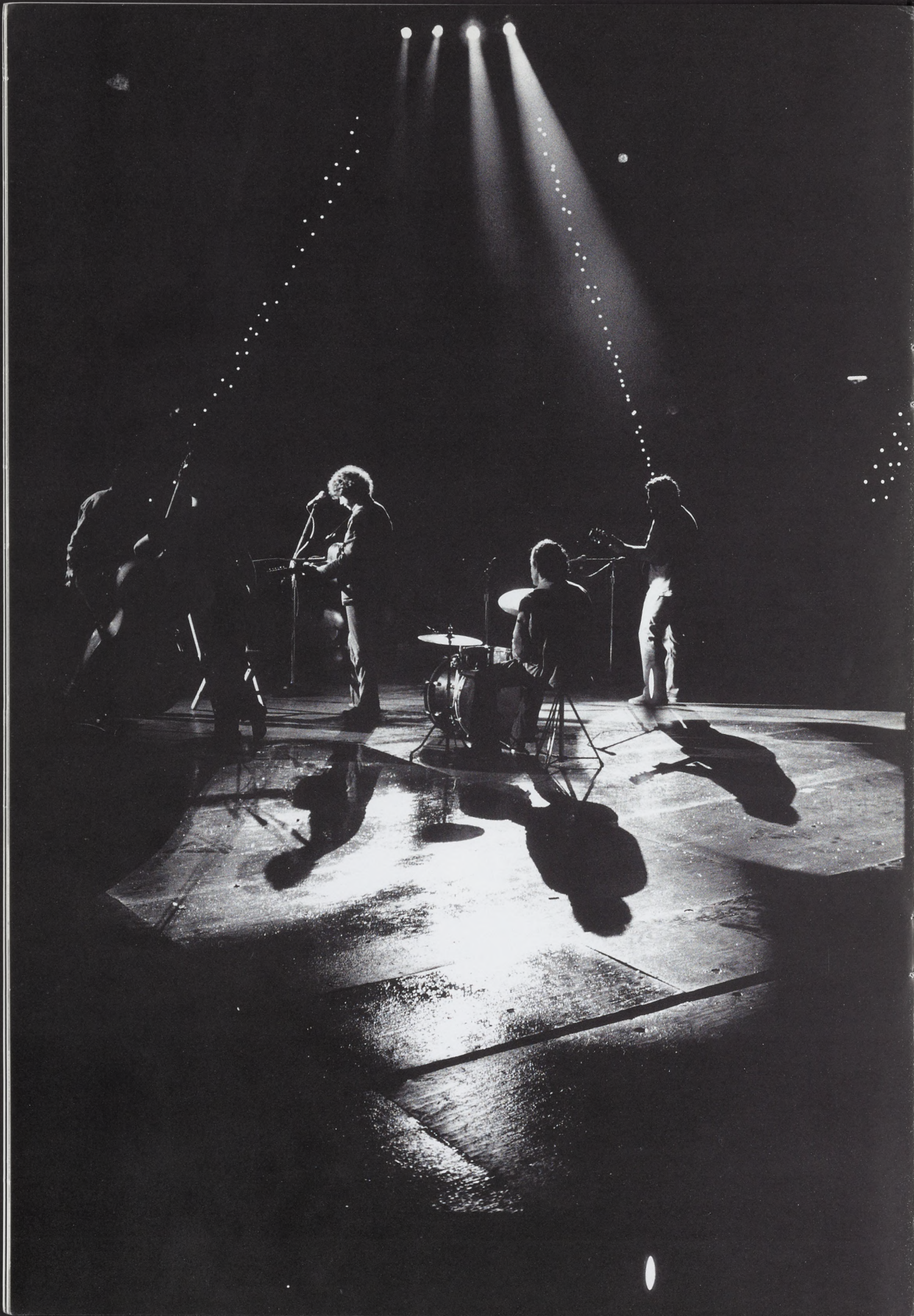
at this time that Fantasy Records rereleased "Porterville," the last of the Golliwog singles, under a new name, one of the band's own choosing — Creedence Clearwater Revival. The Creedence designation initially did little to change the band's status as a local subphenomenon until its demo rendition of Dale Hawkins' rockabilly classic "Susie Q" found its way to pioneering free-form FM station KMPX. While laden with neopsychedelic effects, vocal processing and meandering instrumental passages, the song still held a certain magic, powered by John's swampy-sounding guitar riffs. "Susie Q" was the moment of mojo that Creedence Clearwater Revival had been waiting for; Fantasy subsequently decided to spring for an entire album built around this powerful track.

From then on, the hits kept coming in a steady stream as the band churned out six world-beating albums — its eponymous debut released in July of 1968 followed by *Bayou Country*, *Green River* and *Willy and the Poorboys* (the title taken from a phrase in "Down on the Corner"), all in 1969, and *Cosmo's Factory* and *Pendulum* in 1970 — all recorded and released in a period of only three years.

Although this was the time of the vaunted San Francisco sound, Creedence, while geographically near Haight Ashbury, was more than just the distance over the Bay Bridge from that hippie vortex, both in the musical and spiritual essence. John, Stu, Tom and Doug's forte was the concise, radio friendly, two-sided hit.

They were progressive and anachronistic at the same time — a throwback to the golden era of rock & roll when you got two great Elvis, Little Richard, Jerry Lee or Ricky Nelson songs for the price of one. Their hit singles — and they went on to score nine consecutive Top 10 hits — were in direct counterpoint to the psychedelic tracks propagated by their San Francisco





neighbors. The patchouli crowd tended to dismiss them as too commercial; their hit singles were a mainstay on Top 40 radio.

But Creedence's blitzkrieg of hits consisted of intense three-minute bursts of hard driving rock & roll with the most singular purity and purpose ever to find a mass audience. Total commitment without a trace of kitsch, corn or pandering to the lowest common denominator were hallmarks both of the band's all-out approach to performance and John Fogerty's songwriting. It was a nuts-and-bolts approach that cut right through the clutter. "Basically, Creedence was a rock & roll band, that was our job," John Fogerty recalled, underscoring his gift for understatement. Here was a rock band driven by the work ethic, a harbinger of attitudes to be evinced years later by Bob Seger, Bruce Springsteen and John Mellencamp.

Unlike many Top 40 acts of the day, Creedence Clearwater Revival's catchy material had a dark side reflective of the younger Fogerty's sometimes apocalyptic preoccupations. Without resorting to overt protest, the songs he wrote for the band, including "Who'll Stop the Rain," "Fortunate Son" and "Bad Moon Rising," spoke about class privilege, the Viet Nam war and institutionalized repression. Personal concerns about pride, rejection and nostalgia for an American culture that was fading fast were the subtexts of such megahits as "Proud Mary," and "Lookin' Out My Back Door."

Creedence Clearwater Revival's body of work includes no real love songs, no ditties with catchy hooks for the sake of commercial acceptance. The music was more about reality and substance than any band's before or since. The approach was uncompromising traditional rock & roll, very basic yet, eloquent about this country, its people, their dreams and disappointments. Despite the group's astronomical successes over a very short period, it kept true to its working-class East Bay origins, eschewing self-indulgent production and the florid tone that seduced so many of its contemporaries. John understood the strength of the band when he told a *Time* reporter in 1969, "If you sit around and think of all that money, you can't write a

song about where you came from."

The term "roots rock" had not yet been invented but, in a real way, Creedence had already defined it. The band wore its influences as proudly as their flannel shirts and red bandannas. Little Richard, Bo Diddley, Hank Williams, Leadbelly, Motown, Stax, Buck Owens and, of course, Elvis, were some of the standard bearers of real American Music celebrated in CCR's songs and performances.

The band was so enamored with the southern roots of rock that John's vocals often affected a quasi-Creole patois, which, in the context of the band's hillbilly-gospel orientation, came across as a genuine musical coloration rather than artifice. For the crew from El Cerrito, "Proud Mary" did, indeed, *boin* most ferociously and most of the uninitiated listeners simply assumed the band was from Louisiana, Mississippi or some out-of-the-way Delta bog. Doug Clifford once summed up his band's basic promise: "Our music was very honest, very straightforward, very ballsy and very danceable." Rock & roll defined.

Creedence Clearwater Revival thrived as John Fogerty's songs and presence dominated the band. Tom Fogerty left the band in 1972, and it soldiered on as a trio, releasing *Mardi Gras*, the last original album, in April 1972. The Creedence juggernaut, after six platinum albums and thirteen earth-shaking Top 10 singles, ground to a halt as the specter of Watergate began to loom. John Fogerty went on to become a virtual one-man band in the guise of the Blue Ridge Rangers and has, of course, recorded successfully under his own name in both the Seventies and Eighties. Tom Fogerty issued a number of solo albums; he died two years ago after relocating to Arizona. Doug Clifford and Stu Cook stayed active as an intact rhythm section, backing "Sir" Doug Sahm. Cook went on to play a key role in country rock's Southern Pacific.

The legacy of Creedence Clearwater Revival has left a mighty mark on the course of American music. Just as rock's pioneers profoundly influenced Creedence, the band has cast a giant shadow on successive generations for whom rock & roll music has become an inalienable birthright.

- BOB MERLIS

creedence clearwater revival at woodstock. august 1969



california sound

It's the pot of gold at the end of Route 66; home to the cutest girls in the world; the place you'd rather be when all the leaves are brown and the ski is gray; where it never rains and a certain hotel always has room for the pretty, pretty people. It's where you come when you're going right back where you started from.

It, of course, is California, that mythic state of mind, where life is sweet along palmy streets paved with broken dreams. It's where the world runs out, merging with surf and sun and sky into a fanciful paradise of winsome charm and wishful thinking. From the desert to the sea to orange groves rolled flat by freeways, it's California now and forever. . . amen.

Notwithstanding Paris when it sizzles or autumn in New York, California is maybe the most celebrated locale in the history of popular music. Banjo-pluckers sang her praises on their way to gold fields and heartbreak. Oakies ached for her citrus-scented bounty, and every surfer worth his salt can sing a salute to her gnarly tubes.

For big band warbler Irving Kaufman, "California and You" was all he needed to put together his first hit in the freezing Gotham winter of 1914. Ten years later "California Here I Come," first heard in a Broadway musical called *Bombo*, reaped gold for, respectively, Al Jolson, George Price and California Ramblers. In 1931, Red Nichols & His Five Pennies cashed in with "California Medley."

But it's more recently that California — the dream, the reality and the shimmering mirage between the two — has come into musical maturity. Since the dawn of rock & roll, dozens of tunes touting California's elusive essence have made the charts. Among the many: Leslie Gore's "California Nights," the Rivas' "California Sun," "California Dreamin'" by the Mama's & the Papa's and "California Soul" by the 5th Dimension.

The list goes on (who can forget "California," Debbie Boone's plaintive 1978 follow-up to "You Light Up My Life?"), but California's place in rock reaches far beyond a litany of Golden State come-ons. It's a place that has nurtured

more significant innovations in music than anywhere in the world. More than simply a destination for dreams, California is home for a dazzling variety of indigenous sounds, echoed and enhanced by the legendary locale itself.

Where else, for example, could Brian Wilson have found inspiration for what remains the single most potent evocation of all things Californian? For the rest of the world, the Beach Boys *are* California, in all its eternal youth and halcyon hedonism. There is simply no body of work as closely associated with its point of origin as the sound and substance of these 1988 Hall of Fame inductees. The Beach Boys' sonic simulation of surfing may have initially ridden the crest of a craze, but early Sixties hits like "Surfin," "Surfin' Safari," "Surfin' USA" and "Surfer Girl" (complete with a West Coast geography lesson from "Huntington to Malibu") have endured as anthems to that most alluring element of the California lifestyle — the promise of a free ride.

The same might be said for their drag strip dramas and high school confidentials. But such is the group's identity as a Southern California zeitgeist that is virtually impossible to imagine "Rhonda" or "Barbara Ann" residing anywhere else. If not always "Good Vibrations," then certainly "Fun, Fun, Fun," could well be California's official motto. It's a connection that sparked again in the hit flick *Shampoo* when "Wouldn't It Be Nice" became the ironic lament of Beverly Hills' bored and beautiful.

The Beach Boys, Jan & Dean and a dozen supersonic surf bands fashioned a universally recognized California Sound out of high harmonies and Strats. But the state has hosted such a wide variety of musical evolutions and revolutions that the lines quickly begin to blur: what began there was soon everywhere. For much of the best music of the rock & roll era, it really *did* happen in California first.

The prime example, of course, is the sublime and surreal epidemic of innovation known as the San Francisco Sound. While lumping together such as absurd profusion of music under a single rubric may be an audacious conceit, this much

from top left: buffalo springfield; quicksilver messenger service; the byrds

is known: the outbreak was largely confined to the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-Sixties, it was no respecter of race, creed or color, and no one has ever been the same since.

What's striking, at this distance from California's psychedelic epicenter, is the music's commercial impact. Of San Francisco's pantheon of pioneering early bands — the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Big Brother & the Holding Company — most went on to achieve genuine mainstream success. It was, of course, another example of California trend-setting, but more to the point, the San Francisco Sound was another heady whiff of the creative audacity that had always hung over the western edge.

The transcendental folk tales of California's native's the Grateful Dead, heard on such essential albums as 1970's *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*, evoked imagery of an Acadian California. The "Dire Wolf" prowled the pine forests of the High Sierras; "A Friend of the Devil" was on the lam in the high desert.

But it was the ringing, echo-drenched early hits of Jefferson Airplane that best represented California to the rest of the awakening world. 1967's "Somebody to Love" remains a cornerstone of psychedelia's contribution to pop mainstream. The acoustic strumming, the silver dagger sentiments, Grace Slick's slashing vocals backed by Marty Balin's polished harmony — the song neatly summed up the intense fusion of folk and rock that had been underway in California for years.

As for the rest of the motley Sixties crew rocking Babylon By the Bay, the mind boggles. After all, wasn't that the point? The San Francisco Sound was *about* being different, from

everyone else, ever. Tom Donahue's eclectic Autumn Records roster neatly captured the time and place, thanks largely to Autumn's A&R chief, and this year's Hall of Fame inductee, Sly Stone. The label waxed a dazzling array of native talent, from faux-Edwardians the Beau Brummels to the Mojo Men, whose lilting "Sit Down I Think I Love You" is a sparkling example of the sheen the California sound lent to the most

disposable pop ditties.

According to the wag, there is no "there" in Oakland, yet San Francisco's East Bay has forged a modest yet significant musical presence with some key California artists. The boogie of El Cerrito's own Creedence Clear-water Revival rightly belongs to fans from Lodi to the bayou, thanks to nine consecutive Top 10 singles. But sounds more representative of San Francisco's down-home sister can be found in the East Bay Grease of Tower of Power and the dazzling diversity of Sly & The Family Stone. The clan's canny funk-rock



the beach boys

concoctions, most conspicuously 1968's "Dance to the Music" and "Everyday People," pointed to the mix-and-match cultural mélange for which California was becoming renowned. Different strokes for different folks, indeed ... and Sly knows most all of them.

Down South, Los Angeles had long since established itself as a pop music mecca, a hit-making factory the equal of any. From Johnny Otis to Terry Melcher, Lou Adler to Peter Asher, Jerry Leiber to Mike Stoller, the best behind-the-boards talent in the business did their best work in the city's studio hive.

L. A.-based Specialty Records boasted a distinctive West

Coast R&B sound with artists the likes of Little Richard, Larry Williams, Lloyd Price and others. Producer and talent scout extraordinaire Johnny Otis was the spark plug for dozens of homegrown hits. Among Otis' most enduring discoveries: California native and Hall of Fame inductee Etta James, who recorded for the Bihari brothers' Mo-dern Records, another L.A. enterprise.

While flowers in the hair were *de rigueur* for San Francisco, something more ominous was sprouting to the south, where the Beach Boys' balmy reveries had given way to smog-and-neon passion plays, with soundtrack courtesy of the Doors. On the 1967's break-on-through debut album the group posited a wholly different California landscape — one, in its vividness, as complete and compelling as surf music or psychedelic soul. Their rapacious visions of an urban wasteland shot through with lurid transcendence, served as a road map to California's soft and seamy underbelly. There were some spooky characters out there in the charred hills beyond Tinsel Town, and The Door's moody grandeur lit more than one weird goldmine scene. This, too, was California ... a place where madness lurked in the shadows of a Hollywood bungalow.

It was an echo heard in the melancholy ballads of Love, Arthur Lee's quintessential Lotus Land dandies, whose languid laments expressed the detached cool of an L.A. in love with its own wan reflection. The Byrds, on the other hand, defined their California-ness in Right Stuff rock & roll, all Jet Age symmetry and supercharged twelve strings, like some-

thing out of Travis AFB, flying eight miles high over Hollywood. The California Sound would continue its prismatic refractions of time and place, chasing down a dozen variants on the theme of charmed living — from the soul of Boz Scaggs to the simmering barrio rhythms of Santana, War, Malo and other exemplars of Chicano cool, to the hard rock candy of Van Halen, the state has room for it all.

But it's the freewheeling, fringe-jacketed singer-songwriter who has emerged as the state's most identifiable musical standard bearer. The earliest incarnation of the sensitive troubadour can be traced to such second generation folk-rockers as Buffalo Springfield, an uneasy alliance of soloists where the song was the thing. The group's first hit, "For What It's Worth," was a chronicle of the Sunset Strip riots, and they would incubate a number of variations on the theme, including the bucolic reveries of Crosby, Stills & Nash and Neil Young's ranch-style rock & roll.



the grateful dead, 1969

Founded in Los Angeles in 1971, the band's ten-year run yielded five Number One singles, including such paeans to fast-lane living as "Hotel California" and "New Kid in Town." Here, California was the stage setting for cryptic cautionary tales that found innocent country boys and brazen city girls locked in a hot, star-crossed embrace ... small wonder earnest songsmiths flocked to Los Angeles in the band's wake, all in search of that elusive Tequila Sunrise. What a way to go.

California has, finally, always been that kind of place: wide open to the widest-eyed naif, consort to the dream weavers, Our Lady of Perpetual Indulgence. No wonder no place has ever sounded quite the same.

-DAVIN SEAY