



Stephanie Lynn  
Nicks, 1976

# Stevie Nicks

HER DAZZLING SOLO CAREER  
HAS PROVIDED AN OUTLET FOR  
HER PROLIFIC SONGWRITING AND  
BOUNTIFUL CREATIVITY

BY PARKE PUTERBAUGH

Stevie Nicks' life and career have always had a touch of magical enchantment. Tonight represents a crowning validation of her spellbinding gifts as a rock & roll icon, as she becomes the first woman to be twice inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame – with Fleetwood Mac in 1998, and now as a solo artist.

The solo career of Stephanie “Stevie” Nicks (born May 26, 1948, in Phoenix) derived from the almost enviable frustration of belonging to a band with three sterling songwriters. On Fleetwood Mac's gem-packed albums, Nicks had to compete for space with guitarist Lindsey Buckingham and keyboardist Christine McVie. When drummer Mick Fleetwood informed her that time constraints would keep her song “Silver Springs” from the final lineup on the mega-hit *Rumours* (1977), she was distraught. The song held great personal meaning, and though it was released as a B side (of “Go Your Own Way”), the consolation wasn't enough. Out of the enraged tears she cried that day came the resolve to launch a solo career. Her plan was not to leave Fleetwood Mac, but to have an outlet for her prolific songwriting and bountiful creativity.

Nicks succeeded brilliantly. Her solo work during the 1980s further established her captivating voice and mystical persona. Her first two albums – *Bella Donna* (1981) and *The Wild Heart* (1983) – were powerful assertions of selfhood that made a bewitching superstar of Nicks in her own right. On her own, the chrysalis became a butterfly and took wing. The imagery seems apt: Nicks' songs are filled with airborne creatures – songbirds, nightbirds, skylarks, and white-winged doves – seeking to escape the gravity of earth for the transcendence of the ether.

Millions bonded with Nicks' albums, despite the fact she, and they, didn't always receive the respect they de-

served from condescending, patrician rock critics who dismissed her as flighty. “Stevie Nicks: Gifted Dreamer or Air Head's Delight?” read the headline of a typical review. Feminism has come a long way since the early 1980s. Hell, feminism has come a long way in just the past year. If Nicks' dreamy, daring solo albums had come out today, they would've certainly received a warmer overall reception from reviewers. Not that it mattered – each sold hugely and charted highly, earning accolades in the court of public opinion. It's sufficient to note that some of the estimable artists who followed in Nicks' wake – Tori Amos, Courtney Love, Lorde, and Haim, to name just a few – cite her as a key inspiration and influence.

Nicks was making exquisitely crafted classic-rock records with some of the best producers (notably Jimmy Iovine) and musicians (especially guitarist Waddy Wachtel) on the West Coast. She even worked with keyboardist Roy Bittan, from Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band. But an alternative-rock insurgency was taking place at the time, and sometimes old and new sensibilities clashed, especially in the minds of the self-anointed arbiters of taste.

The irony is that, in hindsight, Stevie Nicks and her music were actually quite alternative in their own way. Nicks was idiosyncratic and self-determined in everything from her manner of dress (“I wear boots all summer long,” she sang in “Nightbird,” as if to say she marched to a different beat) to the prototypical emo sensibility she brandished in song. Her music speaks its own language, has its own quirks and syntax. She has a propensity to sing with and against herself, à la Prince and Marvin Gaye, creating a tangle of overdubbed voices that counter and reinforce points of view like different personalities engaging in conversation.

Listen again to the cascade of voices on “Edge of Seventeen” and “Wild Heart,” and study the contrasting



This page: Nicks poses with Fleetwood Mac at the height of their fame, Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, 1978. Opposite page: In the studio, early 1980s.

images of Nicks on the cover of *The Wild Heart*. Decoding the complementary and contradictory facets of self is a thread that runs throughout her work. As she sang in “Wild Heart,” attempting to explain the unexplainable: “Where is the reason? / Don’t blame it on me / Blame it on my wild heart.” Nicks has also made exquisite use of backup voices from her close-knit posse. Coming from a harmony-rich band like Fleetwood Mac, she forged her own approach to choral accompaniment on songs like “If Anybody Falls,” where Nicks and her backup singers wail out a veritable wall of sound.

It’s a miracle, and a testament to her determination, that Stevie Nicks found time for a solo career in the midst of the racing comet that was Fleetwood Mac. She made *Bella Donna*, her first solo album, during a period bounded by the supergroup’s twin-disc behemoth *Tusk* (1979), the double album *Live* (1980), and *Mirage* (1982). A new label, Modern Records, was created specifically for Nicks by music business veterans Paul Fishkin and Danny Goldberg.

For Nicks, *Bella Donna* was about recapturing her younger, less jaded self. Serious and personal, *Bella Donna* wrestled with the damaging spoils of rock stardom, from the success of *Rumours* and the subsequent excesses to serving as fodder for an escalating tide of celebrity tabloids.

*Bella Donna* – especially the stunning title track – found Nicks offering herself counsel. It was about “making a lot of decisions in my life, making a change based on the turmoil in my soul,” Nicks told *Rolling Stone*. “You get to a certain age where you want to slow down, be quieter. It was basically a warning to myself and a question to others.”

As had been the case on *Rumours*, songwriting served as therapy and self-revelation. Nicks shared her fears and bared herself to the world, as all of the best song-poets have done: “Come out of the darkness, Bella Donna,” she sang with a kind of weary ardor. She was only 33 at the time. There would be further trials and reckonings before the darkness lifted.

In the meantime, *Bella Donna* went on to become one of the best-selling albums of the 1980s. It topped the *Billboard* chart in September and launched four hit singles. The biggest were duets: “Stop Draggin’ My Heart Around,” an intense, smoldering collaboration with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, rose to Number Three. “Leather and Lace,” another Top Ten hit, was originally written for Waylon Jennings and Jessie Coulter but was repurposed as a duet between Nicks and Don Henley. Few lyrics have captured the attractive polarity between the sexes better than these: “You give me your leather / Take from me my lace.”





An early  
Buckingham-Nicks  
promotional shot



In performance  
with Tom Petty,  
Radio City Music  
Hall, 1983



Perhaps the album's defining moment, at least in the hearts of the tween, teen, and twentysomething women who revered Nicks as an oracular sister and sage, was "Edge of Seventeen." Driven by an insistent rhythm and Nicks' fierce, explosive delivery – indeed, she spits out the words with a savage passion worthy of Patti Smith – "Edge of Seventeen" remains an anthem to all the rattling emotions and sensations that mark the tempestuous passage of adolescence. It wasn't the album's highest-charting single, peaking just shy of the Top Ten, but it remains its most resonant, lingering composition. The last in *Bella Donna's* procession of hits was "After the Glitter Fades," which bore a distinctly countryish facade, attesting to Nicks' range as a songwriter; somewhere, Gram Parsons must have been smiling.

*Bella Donna* has been Nicks' calling card as a solo artist. It has sold more than five million copies in the U.S. alone. Incidentally, it has outsold every Fleetwood Mac album except for *Rumours* and the self-titled long player that marked Nicks' and Buckingham's rejuvenating mid-1970s arrival to the quixotic group. As recently as 2016, *Bella Donna* re-entered *Billboard's* album chart when it was reissued as a deluxe three-disc edition. It remains a classic-rock touchstone that still gives off shimmers and causes shivers.

Next came *The Wild Heart*, another assured statement from an artist who had fully come into her own. Recorded on the run at six studios in three cities, the album is a garden of riches: Even the non-hits are equals of the songs that became etched into our ears via radio play. The lead-off single was "Stand Back," a banging urban dance track that rose to Number Five. Its authorship was inspired by hearing Prince's "Little Red Corvette" on the radio for the first time. The special ingredient that really made it cook was retaining Prince himself, who played and provided arrangement assistance on the session. The other hits were the thrilling "If Anyone Falls" (Number 14) and the somber, elegiac "Nightbird" (Number 33).

Among *The Wild Heart's* other worthy tracks are "Enchanted," a bouncy piano rocker that provided the title for Nicks' self-curated 1998 box set, and "Beauty

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



**Bella Donna**  
(Modern) 1981



**The Wild Heart**  
(Modern) 1983



**Rock a Little**  
(Modern) 1985



**The Other Side of the Mirror**  
(Modern) 1989



**Enchanted**  
(Atlantic) 1998



**Trouble in Shangri-La**  
(Reprise) 2001



and the Beast,” an intense, piano-and-voice ballad about an unlikely relationship. Beyond the album, even the B side, “Garbo,” offered a beguiling glimpse into Nicks’ interior world.

Nicks rounded off a remarkable decade with two more platinum albums: *Rock a Little* (1985) and *The Other Side of the Mirror* (1989). The former included her second-highest-charting solo single, “Talk to Me” (Number Four), and another high-energy club banger, “I Can’t Wait” (Number 16). *The Other Side of the Mirror* boasted the engaging rocker “Rooms on Fire” (Number 16), which would turn out to be Nicks’ last Top Forty single.

The pace of Nicks’ solo work has tapered off since the furiously busy 1980s, when she ranked among its very brightest stars. Nicks made four solo albums in that decade and has chosen her releases somewhat more carefully since then, issuing four more albums to date. Each of them has added to her legacy. The most recent, *In Your Dreams* (2011), was coproduced by Glen Ballard and Dave Stewart. The most underappreciated and organic album in her repertoire might well be *Trouble in Shangri-La* (2001), made with assistance from kindred spirit Sheryl Crow.

Returning to “Silver Springs,” there’s a rich, full-circle irony about the song whose omission from *Rumours* inspired Stevie Nicks to go solo. Twenty years later, the song turned out to be enormously popular. Reuniting in 1997, Fleetwood Mac recorded a live album and DVD (*The Dance*) on a Burbank soundstage, bringing renewed energy and the perspective of time to some of their most popular songs. “Silver Springs,” the overlooked outlier in the bunch, finally received its due on *The Dance*, with Nicks’ dramatic performance earning a Grammy nomination for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals.

Throughout 2018, Stevie Nicks toured with another revamped lineup of the never-ending saga that is Fleetwood Mac. Nicks learned of her solo induction, and the twice-inducted landmark it represents, late in the tour. She had this reaction in a *Rolling Stone* interview: “My biggest hope is that I have opened the door to the fact that there’s twenty-two men that have gone in twice and zero women ... It took a long time for this to happen, but maybe because of this, it won’t take so long for all the other incredibly talented women I know and respect and listen to and am friends with. That’s really the nicest thing.”

“It took a long time for this to happen, but maybe because of this, it won’t take so long for all the other incredibly talented women I know and respect and listen to and am friends with.”

Still soaring: Stevie  
onstage in 2018

