

# **The Vinyl Dialogues**

*Stories behind memorable albums  
of the 1970s  
as told by the artists*

**by Mike Morsch**

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**For my mom and dad,  
who had a great vinyl collection.**

**Cover design by Ron Dacanay.  
Editing by Frank D. Quattrone and Ruth Littner and  
Ann Stolinsky of Gemini Wordsmiths.**

**ISBN: 978-1-62249-207-7**

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2014908973**

**Published by  
Biblio Publishing  
BiblioPublishing.com**

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# Everything old is new again

## *Introduction*

*Mike Morsch*

**W**hen I was a kid growing up in central Illinois, my folks had a record collection that consisted of popular music from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. I played those vinyl albums — Elvis, The Beach Boys, The Beatles, The Association, and many more — so much that I wore them out.

By the time the 1970s rolled around and I was in high school, I was more into eight-track tapes, cassettes, big bushy sideburns, and bell-bottomed pants. (“Seventies suave” indeed.)

And I still didn't have my own record collection.

More than 35 years later I decided to change that. For Christmas 2013, my wife got me a turntable because I told her I was going to start a record collection. The premise was that I wanted to hear the early work of some of my favorite artists, and my thinking was that listening on vinyl would offer me the purest form of the music.

This hobby developed into a labor of love for me.

I spent time researching a band and its music, chose an album I thought I'd like to have in my collection, and went to the record store in search of the album.

Fortunately, there are still a few record stores around my part of southeastern Pennsylvania, and there's a certain nostalgic charm about going into one and searching through the albums.

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The first album I coveted was *Abandoned Luncheonette* by Daryl Hall & John Oates. I suspect that since I didn't grow up on the East Coast, I was unaware of the early Hall & Oates stuff because they didn't have country-wide recognition back then. So I had never really heard the entire album as a single body of work.

Anyone who's a treasure hunter of sorts — be it at an antique store, garage sale, or baseball card show — knows that feeling of elation upon actually finding that one thing you've been searching for, and that's what happened to me with *Abandoned Luncheonette*.

It was sitting in plain sight in one of the bins, and I spotted it instantly as I walked through the door of The Vinyl Closet, a quaint little record shop on Main Street in North Wales, Pennsylvania, owned by Jason McFarland.

I bought the album for \$1; it was in fabulous shape. Naturally, I rushed home to play it on my new turntable and I was immediately transported back to the early 1970s in my mind. I was listening to the origins of what is now known as “Philly soul” or the “sound of Philadelphia,” and it was, and is, a really cool vibe.

As I was examining the cover art, I flipped the record over and read the information on the back. There, at the bottom in small print, were the words, “1973 Atlantic Recording Corporation.”

*Hey, I thought to myself, 2013 is the 40th anniversary of the release of that album. I wonder if Daryl and John would want talk about it?*

I emailed Jonathan Wolfson, the manager for Hall & Oates, and he responded the same day saying he thought that a story about the 40th anniversary of *Abandoned Luncheonette* was “a great idea” and that he would make Daryl and John available for interviews.

Within a week I had both artists on the phone in separate interviews for a story that I was writing for my news organization at the time, Montgomery Media, in

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Fort Washington, Pennsylvania. Both Daryl and John shared their recollections about making *Abandoned Luncheonette* and the story of how they got the now-famous photographs that grace the front and back covers of the album, those of a forgotten diner that once rested on the outskirts of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, just off Route 724, not far from where I live.

The Hall & Oates interviews were so fun and informative that I began to wonder if other artists from the 1970s would talk about their experiences and recollections of making specific albums.

And that's how the idea for this book was born. All I needed to do was execute.

I asked other favorite musicians; they answered "Yes!"

And that's what you'll read about here — those memorable stories from the artists who made such brilliant music in the 1970s — in *The Vinyl Dialogues*.

It all started because I found an album at a local record store for a dollar, took it home and listened to it, and discovered the early sounds of Philly soul.

And everything old is new again.

— Mike Morsch



# **We were lazy slobs; we didn't work at it**

## ***Burrito Deluxe*** ***The Flying Burrito Brothers***

**I**t had all started out so well for The Flying Burrito Brothers. And those good feelings continued into the early recording of their second album, *Burrito Deluxe*. But before the completion of *Burrito Deluxe*, The Flying Burrito Brothers were starting to lose it. One of the reasons was that guitarist Gram Parsons was having trouble staying focused on the music he was creating, because he was infatuated with Keith Richards.

The group's first album, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, released in 1969, had helped cement the reputations of Parsons and Chris Hillman — two of the original members of The Byrds — as innovators in what was then the early stages of a new genre, “country rock.”

The original Flying Burrito Brothers — Parsons, mandolin player Hillman, bassist Chris Ethridge, and pedal steel guitarist “Sneaky” Pete Kleinow — was founded in 1968. After *The Gilded Palace of Sin* was released, the band hired another ex-Byrds member, drummer Michael Clarke, and lost Ethridge, who was replaced by Bernie Leadon. In 1970, the reshuffled lineup set out to record its second album, *Burrito Deluxe*. In the two and-a-half years since Parsons and Hillman had left the Byrds, and up to the recording of *Burrito Deluxe*, almost everything had been going smoothly between the

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two collaborators. Then Gram Parsons met Keith Richards.

“Gram was starting to lose interest and was hanging out a lot with Keith,” said Hillman. “That’s how we ended up with the song ‘Wild Horses.’” Written by Richards and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, “Wild Horses” was the 11<sup>th</sup> and final song cut by the Burritos for *Burrito Deluxe*.



Chris Hillman, left, and Bill Bryson, members of the Desert Rose Band, appeared at the Sellersville Theater 1894 in Sellersville, PA, in April 2013. Hillman is an original member of The Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers and was a frequent collaborator of the late Gram Parsons.

(Photo by Mike Morsch)

“With all due respect for Mick and Keith, I hated that song,” said Hillman. “They did it quite well, but Gram was caterwauling on that song and it drove me up the wall.”

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Hillman described Parsons' influence on Jagger and Richards as "sort of a Johnny Appleseed thing," turning the two rockers on to country music.

"And they came up with 'Wild Horses' in that sort of groove," said Hillman. "They said, 'Hey, you guys cut it,' meaning we could cut it before they did, which was an honor."

Time has softened Hillman's feelings about the song. But in 1970, that wasn't the case.

"I retract my original statement," said Hillman. "What Mick and Keith had done with 'Wild Horses,' it was well put in the lyric. 'Wild horses couldn't drag me away' – that's a great poetic line with great imagery. But as a player of that groove, and with Gram singing it at that particular time, it wasn't resonating the way Mick Jagger sang it."

In addition to the Jagger-Richards tune "Wild Horses," the Parsons-Hillman-Leadon-penned "Cody, Cody" became the second cut on Side Two of the album. And once again, Hillman didn't much like the song, but for a completely different reason.

"I can't stand it, and I wrote it," said Hillman. "It's not a bad song, but it's a little strange in the lyric. However, we really didn't nail it. I gotta tell you something — and I don't tell this to many people," said Hillman. "I came from the Byrds, where we learned how to play and we went from covering Bob Dylan songs to doing songs like 'Eight Miles High' [written for the Byrds by band members Gene Clark, Roger McGuinn, and David Crosby]. We were really a solid band and very sophisticated.

"But the Burritos . . . we were lazy slobs," he said. "We didn't work at it. We had the material, but the execution was a little flawed. I hold myself responsible, although it doesn't matter now. But I should have been

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cracking the whip on those guys. I knew better, but I just sort of let things go . . . that lackadaisical approach. In some ways it worked and in some ways it didn't. 'Cody, Cody' is an example of that."

The cut "High Fashion Queen," a song on the same album, is another instance of where the group was not able to nail it, according to Hillman. But unlike "Cody, Cody," Hillman got another swing at that one, albeit nearly 30 years later.

"About three years after we cut 'High Fashion Queen,' I said, 'Someday I want to record that properly.' It's supposed to be a country shuffle and not so frantic," he said.

In 1999, Hillman finally got the chance. Songwriter and performer Emmylou Harris produced an album titled, *Return of the Grievous Angel: A Tribute to Gram Parsons*, and on that record Hillman asked musician, songwriter, and author Steve Earle to cut a version of "High Fashion Queen."

"So Steve and I sang it in a straight country shuffle, the way it should have been cut the first time. Once in a while I get a chance to redo something that I didn't quite nail the first time, and 'High Fashion Queen' is a great song. That was when Gram and I were writing on a level of the stuff on the first album [*The Gilded Palace of Sin*]."

But loss of focus continued to plague *Burrito Deluxe*. And Hillman was losing Parsons.

"Gram had talent. But it's one thing to have talent; it's another thing to have the work ethic to make that happen," said Hillman. "And he wasted it, wasted it, wasted it. We were losing him at that point in time. Gram was an ambitious kid, and he was a dear, dear friend, but he wasn't a loyal guy. We were brothers, but we became Cain and Abel. Seriously, that's the way to describe it."



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Instead of putting in the studio work needed to complete *Burrito Deluxe*, Parsons continued to spend time with Richards and the Stones. In addition, Parsons was missing paying gigs, instead choosing to hang out at Stones' recording sessions. It was well documented that Parsons had fallen into serious drug and alcohol abuse.

"I had to literally go into the session and get him because we had a gig to do," said Hillman. "That's when Jagger came over — Mick was the consummate professional — and said, 'You have a show to do . . . and we're working here.' That's a key line: 'We're working here,' meaning 'You're in the way.' That's a great line. There was no love lost between Mick and Gram, I'll tell you."

Eventually, the Burritos had to fire Parsons.

"It's all in print, where he'd show up out of his mind, inebriated, you name it, and show up to a show," said Hillman. "And the rest of us were there to work. Bernie [Leadon] is a professional musician; he's an on-the-money great player. And Sneaky [Pete Kleinow] is a professional. And then here comes Gram, barely able to walk, coming into the show. It eventually got to where we had to let him go."

Parsons died of a drug overdose on September 19, 1973 — at age 26 — in a hotel in Joshua Tree, California, less than three years after *Burrito Deluxe* was released.

The album cover of *Burrito Deluxe* shows the band members dressed in what Hillman called "radioactive lab jumpsuits" and plastic gloves in the upper left corner of the cover, but the dominant art on the page is a photo of two big burritos.

"The cover was Gram's idea," said Hillman. "He had the greatest sense of humor, but a little off. But I can't even make something up now as to why we did it that way."

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The transition from the Byrds to the Flying Burrito Brothers wasn't the first step toward country rock for Parsons and Hillman.

"Gram really was responsible for taking songs from another genre — not that he was the first one, though," said Hillman. "You can go back to Ray Charles and Buck Owens songs in the early 1960s, but Gram made it work."

As an example, Hillman offered up the Burritos' versions of two songs — "Do Right Woman" and "Dark End of the Street" — both written by Chips Moman and Dan Penn, and both of which appeared on *The Gilded Palace of Sin*.

"Gram would say, 'Let's cut "Do Right Woman."' And I'd say, 'OK, I love the song, but it's a woman's song.' And he'd say, 'We'll make it work.' And we did. We took Aretha Franklin's 'Do Right Woman' and made it work," said Hillman.

The original Flying Burrito Brothers were together only a few years and would record only two more albums, the eponymous *The Flying Burrito Brothers* in 1971 and *Last of the Red Hot Burritos* in 1972. After Parsons was let go, Rick Roberts joined the band on vocals and rhythm guitar for the third album. After that, Kleinow left the group and became a session musician; Leadon soon followed and helped create the Eagles. Hillman was the last to go, joining Stephen Stills in the band Manassas for a short time. Still, more than 40 years after recording *Burrito Deluxe*, Hillman said it was a memorable experience.

"The music was great. It happened the way it was supposed to happen in an ethereal-spiritual sense," said Hillman. "I got a lot out of it. I wrote some of my best songs with Gram, I really did."

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“The stuff we did together on the first album — *Sin City* — has been covered by four or five major artists. And Gram was a great guy to work with.”

In the 1980s, Hillman formed the Desert Rose Band and became one of the most successful country music acts throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The band had two No. 1 hits in 1988 — “He’s Back and I’m Blue” and “I Still Believe in You.” Although the Desert Rose Band officially disbanded in the early 1990s, Hillman still performs with some original members, including Herb Pedersen, John Jorgenson, and Bill Bryson.

“My audience now is my age — that’s the general demographic,” said Hillman. “The other part that’s really great — and I love this — is that I get young kids coming to concerts who love The Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers; kids in their 20s — they just love that stuff and they’re playing that kind of music and it’s very flattering.”

As of 2013, Hillman had been in the music business for 50 years. He’s still having a great time and *Burrito Deluxe* was one of those great times that came along in his life.

“Did we know what we were doing back then? Not really,” said Hillman. “I never thought I’d get paid — none of us did. It was all about the passion for the music. I love to play, I’m glad I can still play, and I’m glad people still want to hear me play.”



# The smoke shack that produced a '*Sgt. Pepper*'

## *Cosmo's Factory* *Creedence Clearwater Revival*

**T**he title of Creedence Clearwater Revival's fifth studio album, *Cosmo's Factory*, evolved from the nickname of one of the band's members, advanced to a small gardener's shack — so full of smoke that not only rehearsing, but breathing, proved difficult — and eventually became what one of its creators called the band's *Sgt. Pepper*.

That's how CCR's original drummer, Doug "Cosmo" Clifford remembers it.

Clifford's nickname predates Creedence Clearwater Revival, which included lead vocalist and lead guitarist John Fogerty, his brother, rhythm guitarist Tom Fogerty, bassist Stu Cook, and drummer Clifford. The four had known each other since junior high school in the late 1950s in California, and had played together as The Blue Velvets since the early 1960s. Cook and Clifford went off to college at San Jose State in the mid-1960s, and it was there that Clifford got the nickname "Cosmo."

"Stu and I lived literally in the 'Animal House.' It was grand but it had really seen better days," said Clifford. "We were supposed to be a fraternity but we were on suspension — double secret probation, whatever — and there was no adult supervision there. So it was a

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pretty wild place. Of course the students were pigs. Half-eaten burgers in their rooms; just never would clean up after themselves. So we had a roach problem.”

As a youngster, Clifford was an amateur entomologist, collecting butterflies and moths. That evolved into an interest in insects like bees, wasps, and termites. By the time college rolled around, Clifford was seen as the closest thing in his “Animal House” to an expert in getting rid of its roach problems.

“There had been an ant problem long before I was there. They had pest control come out and nobody could get rid of the ants,” said Clifford. “So I said I could get rid of the ants and I could get rid of the roaches, but I needed help. You guys have to clean up — and I mean really clean up — and continue to keep things clean or otherwise I’m not going to do it.”

Pest control in the mid-1960s consisted of what Clifford called “lethal poisons that were like weapons of mass destruction.” So Clifford made “little food bombs” of poison for the roaches and ants, and that did the trick.

“So finally after two or three weeks of working hard on doing that, the house was pest-free, except for a couple of the guys I wanted to poison, but that’s another story,” said Clifford.

A few weeks later, Cook and Clifford were at a party, drinking cheap wine — because that’s all they could afford, according to Clifford. His reputation as a pest control expert had followed him to the party. He was known by the guys in the frat house as “Clifford C. Clifford” — an inside joke. Someone at the party asked what the “C” stood for.

“And before I could respond — this was like in 1965 maybe — someone said, ‘It stands for Cosmo

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because he's cosmic; he's a man of nature.' That's the story," said Clifford.

Flash ahead a few years to the second half of the 1960s. Creedence Clearwater Revival had yet to release its first album. The band used to practice in Tom Fogerty's garage.

"We were literally a garage band. To this day, I consider us the best garage band in the world. That's how I have perceived us all these years. We worked hard to do that," said Clifford. But the neighbors complained about the noise coming from the garage and the police were called on several occasions. The last time law enforcement arrived, they told the band members they had better find another place to practice, or they'd have their equipment impounded and risk arrest.

Just at that time, Clifford and his wife were renting a house and had just had their first child. Behind the house was a small gardener's shack, and Clifford suggested that the band rehearse there.

"I mean it was a ridiculously small place. It had a glass window that there was no way to open. I had an old rug rolled up in there and I cut it up and tacked it onto the walls to absorb a little of the sound. I would say maybe it was 10 feet x 6 feet," said Clifford.

At the time, everybody in the band except Clifford smoked cigarettes while they were practicing.

"We were working on a song and we'd been there like an hour and it would be hard enough being in there for an hour sitting and doing nothing but playing drums; my heart rate was up, my breathing was up. These guys were just pounding the smokes," said Clifford.

"I had finally had enough. I said, 'I can't stand it anymore!' I got up and threw my sticks down, pushed open the door and started breathing fresh air. The guys

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said, 'What's the problem?' I said, 'You guys are smoking me out of here. I can't breathe. I don't know how you do it.' And Tom Fogerty said, 'Well, it's better than working in a factory somewhere.' So the seed was planted," said Clifford.

The next day, Clifford took a piece of 1 x 4 x 15-inch wood and painted "The Factory" on it, and nailed it onto the door of the shack. And that became the original "Cosmo's Factory."

Once the band became successful, it needed a newer and bigger facility in which to make music.

"So we went into the industrial section of Berkeley, California and picked an old wooden structure with multiple stories. When we leased that building, then that became 'Cosmo's Factory,'" said Clifford.

With each album, CCR's stock continued to grow and John Fogerty asserted himself even more. He had become the band's principal songwriter and leader.

"John was under a lot of stress because, unfortunately, he had undertaken the duties of being the manager for the band. He's a brilliant talent, but he didn't know anything about business," said Clifford.

"John thought he could do this. But he let that whole side consume him. And we were left out in the cold on that. We never knew what was going on. When we would call him on it, he would get very angry and it was a nightmare."

And John Fogerty had shut his older brother Tom out of doing anything creative with the band.

According to Clifford, Tom Fogerty was a gentle guy who had devised the original concept of the band. Tom was in a band called Spider Webb and the Insects at the same time as John Fogerty, Cook, and Clifford were performing as The Blue Velvets, an instrumental trio.



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Tom Fogerty's band eventually went belly up — the members said they would rather work on their cars than learn the songs. So Tom approached The Blue Velvets to work out some sort of arrangement. They agreed to join forces to record and perform under the name Tommy Fogerty and The Blue Velvets.

"Tom enlisted us to back him up and we were terrible. But he stuck with us and we eventually got better. We worked at it and worked at it. He was generous and treated us with patience and dignity. That was his strength. We owed him a lot. And we were lucky that he brought us on or it never would have happened for us," said Clifford.

When John Fogerty took over the lead vocals for CCR, Tom gave them up, but expected to sing a song or two, Clifford said. Only one of Tom's songs, "Walking on the Water," was ever recorded.

"The Beatles sang different songs and it wasn't just one singer. So when we had success, John told Tom, 'Don't send any material to me. You're not going to sing on any songs. And shut the fuck up.' Basically that was it. And that started the split between the brothers. Stu and I stuck up for Tom and so we were in the doghouse as well. And the business continued to fall apart. But John would not give it up," said Clifford.

"Fantastic deals came across the board and he turned them down. It was almost like he wanted to. Any good offer that came was rejected. Anything bad, he did. We had all of that going on at the time," said Clifford.

That dynamic among the band members, exacerbated by the huge success it had experienced within a short period of time in the late 1960s, set the stage for the production of the group's fifth studio album.

And the title of the album was inspired by John Fogerty's trepidation at dealing with the media.

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“John wasn’t comfortable with the press and my personality was — and always has been — I’m kind of the class clown, I like to have fun that way, tell stories. Keep things up and happy,” said Clifford.

“So John called me upstairs and I thought, ‘What the hell is going to happen now?’ And he said, ‘Look, I’ve decided to name the next release *Cosmo’s Factory* and that’s going to put the press over in your corner, and I wanted you to know why. You figure it out and keep them off my back. That’s what I want to do.’

“And I said, ‘Man, I can’t wait!’” said Clifford. “I told different stories in different cities. It wasn’t like it is now, everything, no matter where you are, gets out. You could tell one story in Chicago and a different story in another city. It was fun. I just had a lot of fun with it.”

*Cosmo’s Factory* became CCR’s biggest album, selling more than four million copies. It was the No. 1 album for more than 12 weeks and had six singles, releasing them as three double-sided hits on 45 rpm records. In that era, double-sided hits on 45 rpm records were only common for artists like Elvis Presley, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and now, Creedence Clearwater Revival.

The album was released in July 1970 and included three double-sided hits: “Travelin’ Band”/“Who’ll Stop the Rain”; “Run Through the Jungle”/“Up Around the Bend”; and “Lookin’ Out My Back Door”/“Long As I Can See the Light.”

“The thing also was that we put out so much material in such a short period of time. Three albums in 1969 alone. And to make it even worse, we were cutting our singles in half. We could have stretched things out a little bit more. The reason why we were on such a pace was that John’s theory was: If we were ever off the charts,

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we'd be forgotten. Through that whole period of our career, we were never off the charts. We would release singles from the albums before the albums would be released. It was kind of backwards, really," said Clifford.

The quality of the music and the pace with which it was being released eventually proved to be too much.

"That made it really tough, because we were learning songs for albums and recording these albums didn't take long; it took us two weeks to do an album from start to finish. We'd rehearse and shape and work sides up for a couple of months, so the whole process was two-and-a-half months at the shortest. It was a wacky pace. And then we wanted to support those albums with touring and that put us on a wild pace for sure," said Clifford.

He suggested that the band hire a mentor.

"When you're in your early to mid-20s, you don't know much. And it was a wicked pace to keep up — there was a lot of pressure. The business side was going to hell in a hand basket; the brothers were at each other's throats. You think you know a lot and you really don't. In our case, we were in the big time and we didn't have guidance or any real professional management, somebody to smooth the problems out, use common sense, be someone that could mentor all of us. Smooth out the bumps, kick the record company's ass, all the things that needed to be done that were failing," he said.

"We had the biggest crumbling because of lack of management. But yet still we were producing at a ridiculous pace. That's what we did, hanging on by our fingernails trying to go on until it just blew up."

Of all the songs on *Cosmo's Factory*, Clifford said his favorite was CCR's version of "I Heard it Through the Grapevine." The song had originally come out of Berry Gordy's Motown and had been cut and released in 1967

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by Gladys Knight and the Pips, reaching No. 2 on the Billboard chart. A year later, in 1968, Marvin Gaye's version of the song hit No. 1 on the Billboard pop singles chart and stayed there for seven weeks.

CCR's interpretation of the song was a little different. The version that ended up on *Cosmo's Factory* was 11:05 long, lengthened considerably from the original, just more than three minutes.

"We produced singles and we knew it, but we could also jam a little bit and that's what we did with 'Grapevine.' We did 11 covers of other people's music and that was my favorite one, because I got to do a little something that I normally didn't do and that's play a lot more fills, work a lot more with the lead guitar," said Clifford.

"That's sort of how I got my style. We'd play simple music, but any fill that I came up with had to be musical and any fill that John wanted me to do, it had to be musical, and if I didn't think it was the right fill, I'd argue. I'd fight for it. I won half the time and half the time I didn't," he said.

"But most of the time we would just jam on things and eventually things would fall into place and that's what we were doing. It was sort of a combination of things and our knack for coming up with musical ideas through those jams. We did it every day until we had an album together, and then we only worked on those songs. We didn't do 15 and pick 10; we did the number of songs that were on each album, and that is exactly what we worked on. No more and no less.

"So we knew going in before recording what the album was. Sometimes the songs weren't done lyrically and we didn't know what the lyrics were going to be until after the recording session and we heard what John had

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come up with for the lyrics. It made it interesting because you don't really know," said Clifford.

"It was really a challenge; there is no question about that. Unfortunately, John had to be in charge of everything and in the end, it imploded the band. It was a very Shakespearean experience for a bunch of young guys, I'll tell you that."

Clifford said the band recorded "Grapevine" for FM radio, but it ended up making AM radio history.

"Here's the No. 1 singles band and they are stretching out one of the great classic songs of all time — just a brilliant song — and here we're going to take it 11 minutes and 5 seconds. This is what we're going to do, we're going to play this song and play it a lot. At that time we were at our peak, and it became the most-played, long track in AM radio history," said Clifford.

The album cover of *Cosmo's Factory* shows a photo of the latest incarnation of the factory at the time of the album's release, where the band rehearsed and worked on the songs for the album.

The photo includes the band members and their instruments, as well as some of their "man toys." John Fogerty is sitting at Clifford's drum set, while Clifford is shown sitting on his bicycle, wearing red sweatpants and a blue T-shirt, over which he has an orange tank top. An athlete, Clifford rode his bike every day to and from The Factory to work, seven-and-half miles each way.

"Once I knew this was going to be my namesake album, I wasn't going to wear jeans or running shorts; I was going to show off with some bright colors and some funny stuff. And I never wore it again," said Clifford.

A month after the picture was taken for the album cover, Clifford got hit by a car while riding that bike to work. He got scraped up quite a bit, but suffered no

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serious injuries, even though riders didn't wear bicycle helmets in those days.

"I eventually healed and I got another bike and crashed that one, too, and then decided I'd better start jogging because staying in shape was killing me," quipped Clifford.

Creedence Clearwater Revival broke up in 1972. Both John and Tom Fogerty went on to have solo careers, while Clifford and Cook still tour today as Creedence Clearwater Revisited. Tom died in 1990 from a tuberculosis infection. He had contracted HIV when he received a blood transfusion while being treated for back problems.

But *Cosmo's Factory* endures. CCR is still at the top of the rotation on classic rock radio stations.

"To me, that's our *Sgt. Pepper*. That's how I look at it," said Clifford. "I'm not comparing it to *Sgt. Pepper*; it's just how it fits in its place in our career. That ['Grapevine'] was our biggest hit and [*Cosmo's Factory*] my favorite album. It has quite a mixture — three cover songs and six singles. There's some great music there. And a couple of surprises. 'Ramble Tamble,' the opening song, is another interesting tune. Real exciting and then it has the gradual tempo change. And then it goes back up. It's an interesting tune to start out with, and then you go from there.

"We were pretty dedicated to the craft. It's the pinnacle of what we did. As an album standing up on its own, it's our best and most successful," he said.

## **American woman, stay away from Mrs. Nixon**

### ***American Woman* *The Guess Who***

**F**irst Lady Pat Nixon was throwing a party and she wanted some of the popular musicians of the times to provide the entertainment. It was the early 1970s and her husband, President Richard Nixon, hadn't yet been tainted by the Watergate scandal.

The party, held on the White House lawn, was a big deal. So big a deal, in fact, that the guests of honor were Britain's Princess Ann and Prince Charles, the British ambassador at the time, as well as the children of the biggest contributors to Richard Nixon's second successful presidential campaign.

The musical guests were Gary Puckett — who was performing with the U.S. Marines Band — and The Guess Who, a Canadian group that had scored three chart hits in 1970: "No Time," which reached No. 5, and "No Sugar Tonight" and "American Woman," both No. 1 singles, off the album *American Woman*, which reached No. 9 on the Billboard Pop Albums chart.

The Guess Who — which included Burton Cummings on lead vocals and guitar, Randy Bachman on guitar and vocals, Jim Kale on bass and vocals, and Garry Peterson on drums, percussion, and vocals — was hot. But the Nixon White House didn't want the band to play

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the song “American Woman” at the party because of its controversial lyrics that included references to the continued social unrest at the time, and the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.

And the band agreed not to play it.

“I think someone in the White House — and you can be assured that it wasn’t Mrs. Nixon — pointed out, and they were right, that ‘American Woman’ was a bit controversial because it wasn’t about American women, it was about commentary,” said Peterson, the original and current drummer of the Guess Who.

“But I guess Mrs. Nixon found out, and she said, ‘Well, this is not appropriate, we can’t have this.’ So they came to our people and said, ‘We would rather you not play this song.’ And our attitude was, ‘Fine. We’re here to entertain people and make them feel good. We’re not here to cause problems. So if you’re hiring us and paying us and you don’t want us to play our biggest hit, that’s up to you,’” said Peterson.

“We didn’t have any problems with that because we’re a Canadian band. We weren’t getting on a soapbox and saying, ‘You shouldn’t be in this war!’”

Peterson said it ended up being a great gig, despite the band not playing its biggest hit. Band members never left the White House lawn; they never entered the White House to look around or meet the President and Mrs. Nixon.

“I think Tricia Nixon [the President’s daughter] was a fan, but I never got to talk to her,” said Peterson. “We were no different than the security staff. We were hired and did our thing.”

Peterson said that there were a lot of young adult children of U.S. senators on the guest list — kids who



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would have been fans of the popular music and culture of the times. And he did hear one story through the band's manager that caused him some concern at the time.

"They had round tables where you sat for dinner. I think one senator's daughter pulled out a bag of grass and put it on the table. Our manager went crazy and said, 'Are you nuts?' She could get by with it because she was a senator's daughter, but we were all Canadians with visas here in the States and all we needed was some kind of scandal like that," said Peterson.

The White House gig proved to be just one of the interesting aspects surrounding *American Woman*, The Guess Who's seventh album, and "American Woman," the single.

According to Peterson, the story of *American Woman* the album is not just about the single of the same name and how it got recorded in a studio in Chicago, but why it happened the way it did.

It was purely because until that point, the band wasn't getting the quality of recordings that it wanted, Peterson said. The two previous albums, *Wheatfield Soul* in 1968 and *Canned Wheat* in 1969, were produced by Jack Richardson and recorded in New York studios for record company RCA.

"But then RCA made a fateful mistake," said Peterson. "They wanted us to use their studio on the east side of New York, which was the studio where Woody Herman and Benny Goodman and all these guys — the big bands that were on RCA at the time — recorded. And the studio was ancient, with ancient equipment and ancient guys running it."

*Canned Wheat* was recorded at that studio and featured the singles "No Time," "Laughing," and "Undun."

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“They’re hits today, but they weren’t [hits] on that album,” Peterson said, “because the band was so unhappy with the sound on that album.

“And we thought, ‘We’re wasting good songs on this terrible-sounding album,’” said Peterson. Richardson made the decision to go back to A&R Recording, Inc. on West 48th Street and rerecord “Laughing” and “Undun.”

“Those songs sound nothing like the rest of the [*Canned Wheat*] album,” said Peterson. “And that’s because they were done in a different studio than the one [the record company officials] forced us to use.” That left the single “No Time” floundering on the *Canned Wheat* album. And the studio quality issues that The Guess Who were experiencing needed a solution, at least to the band’s satisfaction.

“We needed a small, intimate studio,” said Peterson. “Finally, Jack [Richardson] got RCA to allow us to look for a studio in its system and he found the one in Chicago — and that is the beginning of the *American Woman* album.”

Peterson attributes the success of the *American Woman* album to the band bonding with a studio, in this instance with the RCA/Mid-America Recording Studio in Chicago.

“We did a lot of albums in that studio,” said Peterson. “You have to be comfortable in the studio because you spend a lot of hours there. There are times when you run into the wall when recording and nothing sounds right and nothing works. We had a ping-pong table set up there. We had hockey sticks and we’d play ball hockey in the studio, just to kind of relieve the tension. Some days we got nothing done, but most of the time we really did well,” he said.

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The *American Woman* album was built around the single of the same name, and was essentially written by the band while onstage in what amounted to a jam session.

The band had gone back to Canada to do two shows just outside of Toronto. By that time, hits “These Eyes” and “Laughing” were placed on a double-sided 45 rpm record, which, according to Peterson, wasn’t being done by many artists then.

“So we were a fairly big thing in Canada by that time. We were the local guys who had made good in the States. It was very tough to do that coming from a place like Winnipeg, the middle of nowhere, that wasn’t particularly a media center,” said Peterson.

“So we came back and played the shows. We had just done some extensive touring and we’d seen racial unrest in the United States,” said Peterson. “We’d go into airports and there would be these young kids, soldiers going off to Vietnam. They were scared out of their minds. They didn’t know what they were doing or where they were going, and they didn’t know why. It wasn’t like the other two wars [World Wars I and II] where you kind of knew what you were fighting for.

“We saw that, and we also saw them in airports coming back [from Vietnam], totally screwed up, with a glaze in their eyes. We saw the beginning of it and the end of it for a lot of young men.

“All of this, coming from Canada, which really didn’t have those problems yet. It was foreign to us; we didn’t know what to make of it. It was disturbing and frustrating on all those levels,” said Peterson.

That highly charged political atmosphere in the U.S., and their unfamiliarity with it, were what the band members were dealing with on that night in the Toronto

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area where they were scheduled to play two shows. There were many bigwigs from RCA there, as was Richardson, the band's producer.

"It was quite a scene backstage. It was sort of a homecoming in a way for us," said Peterson. "And we took a break. When it was time to go back onstage, we couldn't find Burton [Cummings]. He was out talking to some fans and friends. So we decided to go back onstage and make some noise so Burton would hear that and come running."

At the time, Peterson was listening to the music of a band called The Electric Flag, and to Buddy Miles, who played double bass drums. There were a lot of great rhythmic sounds on the 1968 Electric Flag album *A Long Time Comin'* that appealed to Peterson.

"I started to play on the bass drum and then Randy [Bachman] started to play the guitar and so we were groovin' onstage," said Peterson. "Of course, Burton came running out and he just started to sing some words. I'm sure all this experience we had in the States resulted in him singing, 'American woman, stay away from me.' Because it wasn't about American women, it was about the country."

The crowd went nuts, and the band played the song at every gig from then on because it was becoming more and more successful.

"It was kind of like The Guess Who going harder rock. Not that we weren't. But we had ballads, 'These Eyes' and 'Laughing.' This gave us an opportunity to not be a ballad band," said Peterson.

"American Woman" refined itself and morphed. And then when the band was finally satisfied with the lyrics and the music, it went into the Chicago studio to record the single and the album.

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“We didn’t want to be a ballad band. Burton’s favorite guy was Jim Morrison, so he wanted to be like Jim Morrison,” said Peterson. “RCA said, ‘Give us another ballad to solidify yourselves [which ended up being the re-recording of “No Time” off the *Canned Wheat* album that became the second cut on the *American Woman* album] and then you can do what you want to do.’ In a sense, they were right and in a sense, we were right, too. It worked out well.”

The album cover for *American Woman* features the faces of the four band members superimposed over a colorized photo of a woman’s face.

“RCA was a corporate company and it did its own thing,” said Peterson. “Now we had the right of refusal, and a lot of times the corporate guys came up with covers that we didn’t want. But we liked this one.” The back of the album features a photo of the band members in an ice cream shop in New York City, taken by a staff photographer for RCA.

“Of course the studio wanted you to use its staff. Why wouldn’t we have gotten one of the most famous rock photographers of the time? Because we would have had to pay for that ourselves,” said Peterson.

But Peterson thinks the inside cover of the album is far more interesting. It features the lyrics to the songs on the record over the top of “ghosted” photos provided by each of the band members.

“That’s all our baby pictures. Go to the top left corner, that’s me and my mom. She knitted that sweater for me,” said Peterson. “Go to the lefthand side, bottom right. Look very closely. There’s a little guy with a cowboy hat and a little car. That’s a Jeep my father made

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for me. I'm about three years old there. Those are all our baby pictures and nobody knows that.

"People have had that album for more than 40 years and they still don't know that. They're busy focusing on the lyrics."

Even after all the years that have passed, Peterson still believes that the demise of the original band was about money, ego, and greed.

"The biggest song we ever had ['American Woman'] you could say was a collaboration onstage," said Peterson. "What's the only No. 1 song the band ever had? 'American Woman,' although arguably the flip side, which was 'No Sugar Tonight,' charted No. 1 at the same time. So it was a double-sided No. 1 record. The only other [musicians who] ever did that were Elvis, The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones. I'm not saying we're in that company, but just for that one thing we were, and that's something that nobody can ever take away from us."

"But we really never did that again. We all put ['American Woman'] together on stage. Arguably Burton came up with the lyrics because he sang them on stage every night and he tried to do something different. But nobody ever came to us and said, 'Why don't we sit down and write a song together?' None of the songwriters [Cummings and Bachman] ever wanted to do that and I know in my heart it was because once you did that, you had to share the credit and there was less money for them."

"I didn't know it at the time, I was just happy to be a team member," said Peterson. "You look at some of the bigger bands that are successful and they have always taken care of all their members. The ones that aren't successful didn't take care of all their members."

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“The two writers, Randy and Burton, could have changed that. We could have done a group song on every album and it would have given a source of revenue to the other guys. I would have done that. And why? Because when everybody is happy, everybody is happy,” said Peterson. “And that’s the reason the band broke up, I believe. I don’t say this with malice. I wish nothing but the best for everybody in the band.”

As for the creative aspect of recording in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Peterson said it was a simpler time, when bands were allowed to develop and create.

“We were very fortunate in that we were recording in a era where we were allowed to do just about anything,” he said. “The corporate mark of what is the formula for selling was not refined the way it is now.

“I feel very fortunate in my life to have been able to do what I have done. And I’m still doing it.”