



Moon Still Risin'

John Fogerty **story by** Johnnie Clott

Live Aid his tunes were still being covered. Status Quo did a version of Fogerty's *Rockin' All Over the World* and people like Dave Edmunds took his paean to the delights of rock *Almost Saturday Night* back into the charts. It was probably for this very reason that, for all the years when he wasn't really on the international radar, his name survived out there. So how must it feel to be John Fogerty, back treading the boards with a brand new Grammy-winning album and immense crowds all around the world eager to hear his brand new band and all his old tunes?

"Oh it feels great," he laughs, seated comfortably in one of the small ante-rooms inside the cavernous Sydney Entertainment Centre just before he has to wander down and run his roadcrew through their soundcheck. "I had known I was going to get back out there for several years. I had spent some time going to Mississippi in the early nineties a place I'd never been to before. It was really as a result of those trips down there that I came to the realisation that I ought to be playing my famous songs. I finally now realise I must've been guided to be there. It was something that occurred to me while I was at Robert Johnson's grave and I had posed the question to myself 'well I wonder who owns his songs'. I realised that it must be some guy in New York city with a big cigar, and that creates a cynical image, if you know what I mean. And I finally got past that because I realised it doesn't matter - Robert owns his songs! As far as I'm concerned and all the people who love his music, they're Robert's songs. That happened quite innocently. When I realised what I had said I knew that applied to me too. I kind of went 'oh my goodness, that's what this is all about. I should start playing my songs before I end up under a tree like I'llis,' and everybody wonders 'well I wonder whatever happened to John Fogerty?' (laughs) So that was the moment. That was 1990 that occurred. It wasn't until early ninety-seven that I finished the album *Blue Moon Swamp* so I waited all that time to jump up on the stage."

Having been through the mill in terms of losing the veritable fortune that he'd worked long and hard for, after his band's accountants got it wrong and involved him in an offshore banking scheme, and after losing the ownership of his songs and then being sued by his old record company for writing songs that sounded like, of all things, himself Fogerty must have learnt a few valuable lessons he could pass on to others in the business.

"Pick your friends very wisely," he states succinctly. "The things that may go wrong don't come from far over the horizon, from some unseen force over there. It's usually the people right close to you that are going to be able to do you harm. That's what happened to me. I don't mean that you should be cynical. I mean you have to put your faith somewhere. But I guess the best advice is to choose your friends wisely. Otherwise you spend a lifetime paying for the wrong decisions. But I don't want you come away from our meeting here thinking I'm a cynical person. I've learnt a lot. It's a lot harder to trick me now. One of the saddest things that happened to me, let's say, was that I wrote all these songs and yet somebody else owns them because they...it's what's called the publishing, they own the copyrights. They choose how those songs are used. You may have seen one or more bad movies that my songs are in! That's another specific thing you could tell young songwriters. Don't give away your publishing. Keep the ownership for yourself. Still I would say don't go around poking at everybody in the eye either, because if you're confident and you know your own worth people will come to you. You don't have to beg. And I think that's very important for all artists really. Don't get talked into doing things that you really don't want to do."

Considering that it's been thirty years since Creedence Clearwater Revival was a charting and touring act, like a lot of bands of that vintage they still manage to dominate radio around the world. For instance Creedence themselves were the twenty-fifth most played act on Australian radio last year. Why is that?

"Number one first I think it's the songs. Everybody during

the heyday of Creedence when all those records were being produced, any band that had a lot of life like the Beatles or the Stones, people think that it was Ringo's cute smile or...they really don't notice that there's something else giving strength to it. For my own part I believe the biggest ingredient is the songs. I would say that was the case with Creedence and certainly it was the case with the Beatles, the Stones, Elton John, Elvis Presley and so on. I just think that the reason records or performances will have staying power is because the song itself is in an upper scale. Happily you know I must also say the recordings themselves, the performances of the Creedence records, how they sounded, has a lot to do with it. This was done on purpose in the time we were making the records. They're really simple. We were not great technical musicians and I was the best guy in the band, you know, (laughs). So I figured out how to make music that almost anybody could play. Truthfully I've heard good versions of *Green River*, even *Heard It Through the Grapevine*, that arrangement, *Proud Mary* all over the place. I think it's because they're so easy so simple to play. My favourite has always been *Green River*. I thought that that album, even the cover, that was kind of the very middle of my soul. The sound of *Green River* and the words, what it describes, the imagery you might say, is where I mostly live and still do."

"Pick your friends very wisely,"

It may be an urban myth but it's said that one of the reasons that Fogerty began playing his own songs again was that Bob Dylan whispered a few quiet words in his ear.

"Well, that occurred in 1987," he reminisces fondly, "and yes it really happened. But at that point I wasn't beginning a tour. I wasn't even beginning to record so you might say it was one of the ingredients but it didn't have an immediate effect. This was one of the little illuminations I was given on my path to being healed again. We were all on a stage. We were there to see Taj Mahal, the blues player. I didn't know Bob would be there nor did I know George Harrison would be there. We had come because we all happened to be fans of Taj Mahal. There's a club in L.A. called The Palomino. Mostly a country western kind of club. George got up on the stage. I think Taj invited him up. Then Bob Dylan was up there and finally I got given a guitar and I went 'shoot this is history. Nobody's going to keep me away from this, you know!' And slowly through the hour when we were all on stage the crowd managed to coax everybody else to sing one of their own songs, and I was kind of still in that stance 'no I don't do those songs', (laughs). And that's when Bob turned to me and he said 'gee John if you don't do *Proud Mary* everybody's going to think it's Tina Turner's song', so I did it right there!"

So what is there left for John Fogerty to do?

"I think there's plenty to do. I mean I really feel that I've just started because the old songs are from so long ago. I've just gotten in touch with all the facets of my personality and I'm raring to go, I really am. My wife encourages me one hundred and fifty percent. It's a great atmosphere to be in, for me, the artist. First of all I really want to write a lot of really good songs which would also mean make some very good recordings and I want to tour the world. I've been waiting frankly a long time. There are so many places that I haven't been in a long time, let's say, like here in Australia and there are lots of other places that I never got to at all. You know, most of Asia, Russia and a lot of places even in my own country. I never toured in South America. It's remarkable that so many people know who I am. To me my music has been around a long time but in a sense I haven't, so it's really great to get out and play in front of people and see your music so well received. Some people have the question, or it's unspoken I guess, 'well gee, does this mean he's going to go away and retire for another thirty years?' No! I'm really having fun at this and I think what's left to do is a lot more of the same."

Hooooeee....would you get a load of this, y'all! Man, I've just got to set here a spell. Hand me that bottle of Jim Beam and pass the chillum round one more time because the man is back in town. And it seems like he came hurtling out of the sky and landed just a little south of the Mason Dixon line with his thunder and lightning vision intact and ready to burn. In the late sixties and early seventies he was a swamp ridden, guitar playing demon who held a deathrattle hold on the airwaves. He knew his voodoo from his hoodoo when it came to writing hit tunes and managed to put a spell on us all while he was rockin' all over the world. His unmistakable riffs, stewed from a gumbo of Hubert Sumlin and Scotty Moore, were responsible for untold sales of black Les Paul guitars and he did more for the state of American rock than the devil did at the crossroads of Greensboro, Mississippi. He had a bone shattering voice that was one part James Brown and Little Richard and one part Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell. He was also the cat, long before Neil Young or Pearl Jam, who made it compulsory for every self-respecting rockin' fool to wear a flannel shirt. What more can I say? The man's a champion! He's been there and done that. And he's here today!

John Fogerty came from a small East Bay suburb called El Cerrito near San Francisco in Northern California and lead his band, Creedence Clearwater Revival, through a whirlwind three years of nine double-sided smash hits with names like *Fortunate Son*, *Proud Mary*, *Green River*, *Who'll Stop the Rain*, *Bad Moon Rising*, *Run Through the Jungle*, *Down on the Corner*, *Looking Out My Back Door* and a host of others. They recorded seven certified gold albums and, like Jimmy Page in Led Zeppelin, John Fogerty wrote the songs, arranged them and produced all the recordings. Hell, he even booked the band. For a brief startling and intense period Creedence burned brightly as the quintessential American rock band.

In their home country only The Doors came close to rivaling their singles and albums' success. The Beatles and the Stones were ranked as their closest peers. The critical favourites of the day like Jefferson Airplane have all but been forgotten but John Fogerty and his band remained working class heroes, despite appearing at Woodstock. Then the whole shebang collapsed around them. Creedence's internal problems came to a head and they split up. But Fogerty's record company had a stranglehold over him. They owned his back catalogue and they wanted more of the same so they wouldn't let him out of his contract. But the creative switches went down and he simply dried up as a songwriter. For a long, long time he point-blank refused to play any of the old hits.

Like Stephen Forster before him John Fogerty had sung about the American south so believably that his music has become firmly identified with it. Like Forster he'd never been anywhere near Mississippi. That is until very recently. The land of riverboats, Huckleberry Finn, swamps, gators, barefoot girls and weather so unbelievably apocalyptic that it could only come from an artist whose country was at war in the jungles of Vietnam, were all conjured from the Californian imagination of John Fogerty. But despite only occasional appearances on the charts with songs like *Centrefield* and *Old Man Down The Road*, over the intervening years Fogerty's classic songs lived on. They were played perpetually with all the other memorable tunes on the radio and at events like the massive world wide hookup that was