



Assignment 6: “Go Your Own Way” - Fleetwood Mac

<https://songexploder.net/fleetwood-mac>

Fleetwood Mac’s 1977 album *Rumours* won the 1978 Grammy for album of the year, and is one of the ten best-selling albums of all time. Writing when the album came out, rock critic Robert Christgau noted that it “jumps right out of the speakers at you.” This week, we are going to investigate that lush and punchy production that Christgau noted, attempting to answer why this album—and the song “Go Your Own Way” in particular—has such emotional staying power for almost 50 years.

We’ll start by exploring and transcribing the initial guitar idea from writer Lindsey Buckingham. Transcribe the guitar line and the vocal line against each other through the first verse (8 bars). You can hear the lead guitar and voice isolated in the podcast starting at 4:18, though they add extra bars underneath Buckingham’s interview!

The next key ingredient is Mick Fleetwood’s drum pattern. It’s interesting how Buckingham wanted the groove from the Rolling Stones’ “Street Fighting Man” but Fleetwood couldn’t play it, and came up with this instead. While Fleetwood varies the pattern slightly each time he plays it, you can get the heart of it with a 2-bar phrase.

Next up is John McVie’s bass line from the chorus section, which you can hear at about 9:15 in the chorus (4 bars).

Now we get to the title of this week’s lesson, the guitar-chestra! We’ve already done the main, chunky guitar line for the verse, so now we’ll move on to the other layers, starting with the clean, high electric (9:46). Listen for how the upper voice moves, creating some susses. When you listen to the whole track, how are those different guitar parts panned?

The 12-string acoustic guitar part is introduced at 13:20 in the podcast. Because it’s a full chord, you can use a chord symbol plus a single note for the moving top voice to transcribe, rather than notating every single note of the chord.

Now onto perhaps the most recognizable element of the song—the chorus vocals! Transcribe both the lead vocal and backing vocals as accurately as you can. Buckingham’s lead is isolated earlier in the podcast to start, then you can find an isolated backing vocal track at 12:30 to get your ear attuned to what’s going on. They bring out each voice for you afterward, which can help a lot. Think about how their vocal timbres blend (or don’t!).

So to recap, you should transcribe:

- The 3 guitar parts of the verse (8 bars)



- The 2 bar drum groove in the verse
- The 4 bar bass melody in the chorus
- The vocal chords in the chorus (lead plus backups, 8 bars)

There's a lot to chew on here for a response, so feel free to go off in your own direction, but here are some things that interest me:

- Going back to the Christgau quote, and now that you've transcribed all of this musical info, what do you think makes the song pop out of the speakers so well?
- How do you think the overall sense of rhythm relates to the headspace Buckingham was in while writing it?
- What do you think Stevie Nicks thinks of the song, or Buckingham's psychoanalysis of their relationship?
- Based on how he organized the song and its parts, how do you think Buckingham is as a musical collaborator?