

VERITAS VAMPIRUS
LEFT OF THE "LEFT"

ISSUE 1,267 JAN. 2017

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PETER GREEN / FLEETWOOD MAC - *Man of the World: The Peter Green Story* (2016 / MVD)

I'd like to start with a few quotes from this documentary:

[Peter Green's time as a prime player] was an incredibly short run, and yet we're still talking about it 40 years later. - John Mayall

The only guitarist that ever sent shivers down his spine was Peter Green. - journalist Keith Altham talking about an interview with B.B. King

Without question, the best British blues guitarist ever. - Noel Gallagher (Oasis)

We got rid of Eric. This one's much better! - John Mayall in the mid-60s, in studio, to Mike Vernon, as reported by Keith Altham

I've got to say that I'm sorry [but] Peter Green is the best. - B.B. King

Peter in his prime in the 60s was without equal. - John Mayall

Don't be deceived by the rough visual and aural starts in *Man of the World*. The DVD cover's terrible, looks like a badly done poster for some cheap Italian horror movie no one watched, then or now. What prompted a mgmt. decision on that, I don't know and don't want to know. The intro to the documentary is quite dodgy: cross-cuts are too rapid, truncating the meaning and impact of what individuals are trying to get across, and the sound's too brittle in some places, muddy in others, rapidly switching from one level to another annoyingly. More, interviewees are not uniformly - again: only in the start-up - identified, normally a necessity in this sort of venture, though, admittedly, something orientationally scamped in many docs.

Two more problems: the DVD is 2 hours long, not a 90-minuter as cited on the liner, and the bonus materials are barely noted. Encountering all these elements within the context of a rock-doc on one of my all-time favorite guitarists and, in my opinion, the best blues player ever, I was not pleased...to say the least.

I record all this not to heap opprobrium but to exercise my duty as critic, not merely of subject but of presentation as well, an important aspect of art which, though minor in many respects here, can make or break a product.. But then, as one watches, perhaps as discontent and impatient as I was, things swiftly even out, the auteurs settle in, and the true narrative begins, smoothly paced, well cut, and fascinating.

By the 20-minute mark, I'd forgotten all the initial disquiet, sat absorbed, discovering or being reminded of many things...for instance, that John Mayall was intimately, singly, and accidentally responsible for Fleetwood Mac's birth and berth well beyond Green's membership in the Bluesbreakers. As a birthday gift, he'd bought Pete some studio time, so Peter, Mick Fleetwood, and John McVie seized on the opportunity to cut a few songs, Mike Vernon engineering, which very soon led to the formation of the group.

Vernon was consequently fired from an irate Decca Records because the interlude had led to the signing Green and his mates to CBS, not Decca (actually, Vernon was given the choice to resign or get fired; he resigned with a bit of a birdflip to the execs), which picked him Fleetwood Mac - initially 'Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac') instantly, without a word of discussion. The label-switch, however, had not been Vernon's decision but Green's, who was insistent upon it as he hadn't wanted to proffer an unkindness to his former employer, Mayall, by staying on at Decca, competing within the same label.

Mike had acted merely in the capacity as go-between, and Decca smirked as he left in, in their opinion, disgraced. *Heh!* How often the assholes at the top cut off their genitalia to please their tinsel dignity: that ostracism was not to have its desired effect nor seep in more than skin deep, as, by '69, Fleetwood Mac was outselling the Beatles and Stones combined...*combined!*... and Vernon was their guy. Along the way, as audiences grew by leaps and bounds, Jeremy Spencer was picked up as co-lead fretsmaster. Why? Well, in Green's own words, Jeremy was "the first guitarist that made [him] smile since Jimi Hendrix". A freewheeling individual, Spencer immediately helped broaden the group's sound and repute. Interestingly, the point at which Green also knew he really needed to start breaking boundaries was upon hearing Carlos Santana's version of "Black Magic Woman". That twist on Pete's song was to quickly usher in the period in which "Green Manalishi", "Oh Well", and other gems would erupt and bedazzle ears, mine included, but...

...well, at that moment, upon that bomb-burst listen, I went the opposite way: after hearing Jimmy Rabbit DJ the Santana cut, already a hit but whose source I was completely unaware of, and the Fleetwood Mac version back to back here in SoCal, I was abruptly knocked through a wall by Green's much more brick and mortar masterpiece. That one song was the opus that *really* turned me on to the blues. Despite a previous years-long enjoyment of white bluesrockers in the Chicago tradition, I now began an interest in straight Black blues (a taste later, in the 2000s, re-amplified by Bernie Pearl, who learned directly under the greats), an artistic wake-up for me as a music hound.

Aaaaaaand we finally get to know the real story behind that song's title and lyrics from Pete's black-magic-girlfriend's own mouth, as well as narrated tales of outrageous on-stage antics none in the States had an inkling of: milk-filled condoms hanging from guitars, Harold The Dildo served to the band members along with beer and cocktails in front of the audience, loo ballcocks serving as crotch pendants, and so on.

Then came the cyclone of San Francisco, the Grateful Dead, Stanley Owsley, the Acid Daze, and, within all that, a commencement of high times and the first notice of deep troubles that would soon end many things, but not before marvels emerged. Those wonders are to this day to be found in the music - get ahold of *Then Play On* to see a pinnacle in what I mean - but tragedies came thundering out in real life and included a cult group of acidhead elitists (known by some as "The German Jet Set") commencing a far too long history of madness, schizophrenia, dissolution, electro-convulsive shock therapy, and more. That hurtling future was hinted at in the lyrics to "Man of the World" and hence the film's title, as Green began to succumb to the ungovernable pressures of stardom and conscience.

And that's where I'll leave the reader, hanging on a precipice. It's not the role of a critic to give the gig away but only entice and assure that the art piece is well worth it, which *Man of the World: The Story of Peter Green* most definitely is, an encapsulation of a guitarist *long* overdue such inspection and commemoration. Green is, Unlike Jimi, Nick, Jim, Janis, and others, still among us and still putting out very good blues, especially in company with Nigel Watson, but things are not like they were and never will be again.

His legacy, though, is damn near singular but regrettably enshrouded, and this document greatly helps dissipate the fog. I suspect that, as has been the case with Nick Drake, Peter Green's contributions to modern rock-blues musics are only just now escaping from the small sphere of awed professionals and well-schooled record collectors out into the wide world. Those of us who have been ensorcelled by the gent's singular artistry dearly hope this is coming to pass and that much wider recognition will not have to wait upon his passing.

Over time, I've grabbed everything I could with Pete on it and am one of the few who think his decidedly odd first solo *End of the Game* is a gem, though completely divorced from all previous and successor efforts. I've laid hold of much if not all of the later releases and was ecstatic to see the recently issued Bluesbreakers CDs *Live in '67, Vol. 1* and *Vol.2*, featuring unreleased killer work by Green.

More, I'm head over heels in love with the box set issued by Vernon in 1999: *Fleetwood Mac: The Complete Blue Horizon Sessions 1967-1969*. It's an incredible 6-CD listen of the earliest *oeuvre* with mountains of bonus materials. I've played the whole box several times through and will be repeating the experience very soon again, as this exotic treasure chest has no equal. Vernon should be granted sainthood for that deed, and this Dougie Dudgeon / Henry Hardaway film serves as the icing on an increasingly resplendent cake, replete with vintage footage and no end of excellent revelatory commentary by all concerned; to miss it, then, would be a form of musical apostasism.

Oh, and as a footnote, if you're not yet hip to it, one of the very coolest mellifluous songs ever issued in any music genre is the Mac's "Albatross", so fundamentally and flawlessly righteous that even Erik Satie would beam with satisfaction upon the listen.