

WROTE a BOOK FOR EVERYONE

John Fogerty delves into his professional and personal life in new memoir, "Fortunate Son." By Chris M. Junior

THE WAY JOHN FOGERTY SEES IT, a great rock 'n' roll record should have four key ingredients, and at the top of his list is a distinctive title.

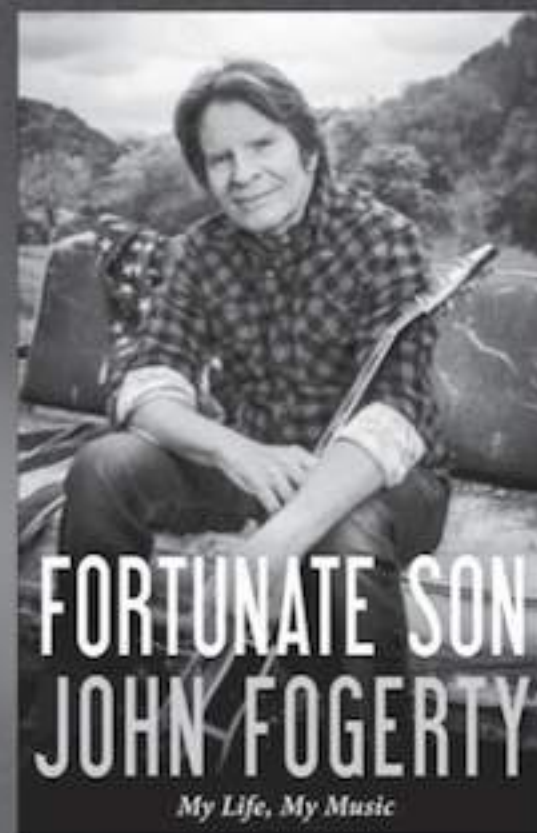
His Creedence Clearwater Revival catalog is full of songs with notable names, among them 1969's "Fortunate Son." Fogerty has given new life to that title, repurposing it for his autobiography, released in October by Little, Brown and Company.

While "Fortunate Son" the song took 20 minutes to write, "Fortunate Son" the book required years of work, with many alterations along the way.

"At the point when I thought we were done, that's when I read the book and revised it six more times," Fogerty says.

In his memoir (subtitled "My Life, My Music"), Fogerty doesn't mince words, especially when writing about his musician-bandleader abilities and turbulent relationship with the rest of CCR: guitarist-older brother Tom Fogerty, bassist Stu Cook and drummer Doug Clifford.

Other areas pertaining to John Fogerty the musician are absorbing, too, such as the inspiration behind signature songs and his business and legal battles with Saul Zaentz, who ran CCR's label, Fantasy Records. Those dealings with Zaentz also helped shape John Fogerty the man, as did a stint in the Army Reserve, the years spent out of the public eye dealing with various issues and the personal and artistic reawakening provided by his second wife, Julie.



GOLDMINE: Word of your autobiography has circulated in the media over the past few years. When did you actually start working on it, and what needed to fall into place for this to be the right time in your life to write it?

JOHN FOGERTY: Well, the first way to answer that is my wife, Julie, had wanted me to write a book. She thought it was a good idea, and she urged me to get thinking about it. I've thought about it a long time (laughs), but thinking about it and actually doing it are very far apart from each other. Several years ago – six years ago, maybe – I did a lot of interviewing with a fellow who was working for us at the time. It was pretty serious. We videotaped all of that. The fellow I wrote with, Jimmy McDonough, went through all of that earlier videotape, and then, of course, he interviewed me specifically. Some of this stuff I hadn't talked about in public, but (I did) in those earlier sets of interviews. There's well over a hundred hours of interviewing when you put it all together. I'm glad that the book is happening right now. I know that if I had done this 20 years ago or even 15 years ago, I'm sure I was still pretty caught up in it all – the career stuff. I remember doing an interview around 2000 with one of the guitar magazines. Boy, I was full of rant (laughs), and when I saw it in print, I thought, "Oh, that doesn't look very good in print" – regardless of the truth of it or the passion. So I thought, "No more of that until you write a book."

GM: There's a lot of personal, professional and financial heartache and turmoil in your book. Which parts were the most difficult to write about and why?

JF: Wow (long pause). I think the personal stuff was the hardest. Certainly

the career stuff, you've heard me kind of talk about it, although it's something that I have a lot more wisdom about now. The facts in a career are just too complicated, really, when it's a piece for a magazine. There just isn't enough space to really tackle the subject and present it in a short read. I found that it seemed to happen over and over through the years; I just couldn't wrestle the beast to the ground and make it understandable, so you're always kind of frustrated. But I did do a lot of talking about it (before), so all I'm doing now in a book is just being a lot clearer, and there's

more time to (delve into) why something was really bad. But the personal stuff – me and my drinking, kind of being distant and not taking care of myself – that's hard to admit. I mean, it isn't hard now – it certainly would have been impossible 20 years ago because I was still caught up in all of that. Like I say, even the anger or frustration – when your emotions have a hold on you, it's not a good time to be talking about it. You're so busy swimming, trying to stay afloat, I don't think you have a good grasp on things. I think it takes some distance before you can talk about things wisely.

I'm not angry at this stage of my life; my color is not red, you know what I mean? So it's a lot easier and better, I think, to talk about things. I can just look at them and say, "Well, that was me. That's what I did. I'm sorry." I'm surely not proud of a lot of the stuff in my personal life, but I don't run away from it.

GM: You acknowledge your wife, Julie, early and often in the book, and a few later chapters have you writing alternating passages. Did you literally pass things back and forth, so you could respond to and elaborate on what she wrote, and vice versa?

JF: It was like what you said – passing it back and forth. I didn't sit with her while she was speaking, and I think that was probably a good idea. She's pretty straightforward, but still, it might be hard to talk if she's talking about me when I'm sitting right there. She would talk, then I'd read what she'd written, and for the most part I left it alone. There were things I had said, (such as), "The better I treat her, the better my life becomes." That's something I started saying after we'd been together four or five years. I had a couple of friends who were having issues with girlfriends and such; I was very proud of my relationship with Julie ... so I would want to tell other guys who were having relationship issues. I would use that phrase, and she had credited it to her grandpa at some point. And I said, "Honey, I came up with that one on my own" (laughs). So there were a few of those kinds of things. You can't tell my story without having Julie in there. There is a journey. When I met her, I was pretty much a mess. But it's kind of hard for me to describe that in the real colors that another person sees. And the fact that our journey together ends up having a happy ending – that's the whole point of the book to me, really. That somehow this guy who maybe doesn't even deserve it ends up getting the big prize and not being stuck in the normal quagmire.

What's important to say is usually when you're young and in a career, that career is the biggest thing in your life. Your whole life sort of revolves around that. And what I came to learn was that it's not (laughs). The value

for me, or the prize, is finding love – finding Julie. So all those disappointments have a lot less heartache later because that's not really what life is about. I feel that it's a very happy story and everything turned out great.

GM: Let's dive into some specific areas covered in the book. Given the personality and performance issues you had with Doug, Stu and Tom pretty much throughout the life of Creedence Clearwater Revival, what prevented you at that time from working with other musicians, either in the studio or on the road?

JF: I was very invested in the idea of my group, Creedence Clearwater Revival. My brother was with me the whole time, but I'd known Doug and Stu since junior high school, basically. There were times I went off and played with other musicians – in high school and after. I talk in the book about going up to Portland (Oregon) with some other guys, and it possibly could have gone that way. But I think there was some kind of loyalty I felt in my heart about Doug and Stu and certainly Tom. And I think I make it clear that as I started to gather them around me, I wanted Tom in the band, but I had to sell that idea to Doug and Stu because ironically then, they were sort of naysaying Tom. At that point, Tom could barely play guitar; he wasn't really very accomplished.

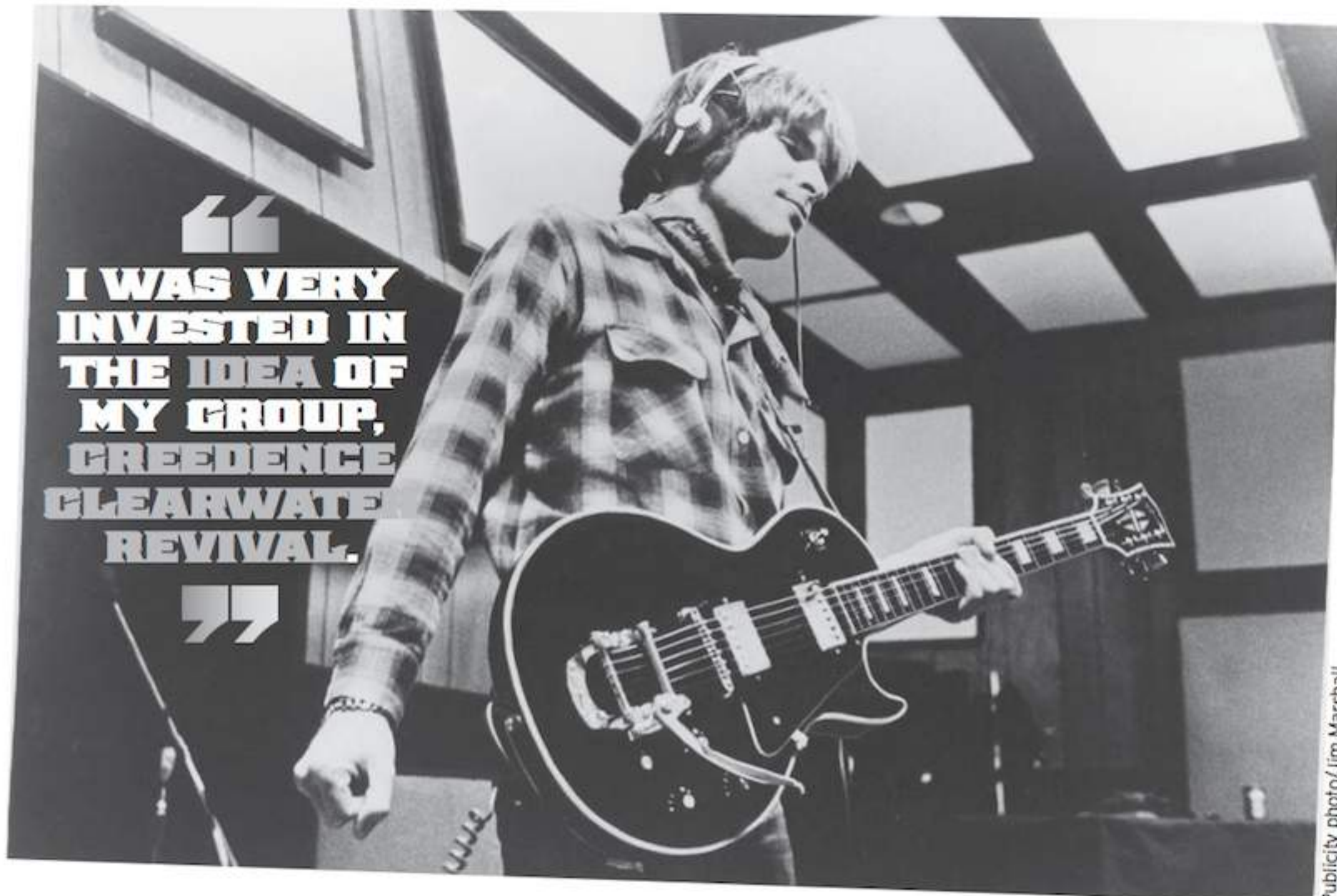
The dream in my heart was to have it all be us and have us work hard at it and get good enough to be an actual group. Certainly during the Golliwogs era, we weren't very good. We were fairly amateurish at that point in our lives. But I kept pushing the idea of dreaming about being a world-class band, sort of like The Beatles.

That's why I stuck with them. When the negativity started to surface, it really took me by surprise. But I kept trying to have it all work out somehow. I felt that if I worked hard enough and everybody could see that I knew what I was doing, then it would all be OK. But that never did happen.

GM: In the sections about the self-plagiarism case involving "The Old Man Down the Road," you write that the song was originally compared to CCR's "Green River," not "Run Through the Jungle." Did you dodge a legal bullet around the same time with regard to the end of "I Saw It on TV" having the same three-note guitar figure that defines the opening and outro of CCR's "Who'll Stop the Rain"? That would seem more like self-plagiarism, if such a thing exists, to a litigious-minded listener.

JF: I suppose, but I'm not really playing the whole song. I never worried about it. I thought it was a cool thing to refer to that. I think (something like that is) probably allowed, but

Photo of John Fogerty taken on the first night of the Canadian portion of the "1969 Tour," in St. John's Newfoundland on November 7, 2014. Photo by Lacey Benda.



“ I WAS VERY INVESTED IN THE IDEA OF MY GROUP, CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL. ”

as you say, with someone who's so litigious: Well, you can sue anyone for anything. It doesn't mean you'll win. You can sue if you want to do that. I don't know, I sure didn't worry about it at the time, but maybe I should have (laughs).

GM: Some of your recent music-related activity has looked deep into your past. Have the tour dates where you've focused on CCR's three studio albums from 1969 reminded you of anything about the music or yourself?

JF: I really had not sat down and realized how well the plan I set out to do (at that time), how well it worked. I literally looked at my situation after "Suzie Q." and thought, "Yeah, John, you look exactly like a one-hit wonder right now." We were on such a tiny label, and we didn't have all of the machinery around us. I took stock of the situation and realized the only person who could do something about this was me. Back then, having done it and then finding ourselves at the top of the heap, it was a very nice thing. But there was already so much turmoil by the time we got there that it wasn't very enjoyable, and as you see in the book, things immediately start to unravel for me. There was no option other than to just stop, which is what I did. Otherwise I'd be a complete idiot because of the way everything was stacked against me.

But looking back at it as an achievement, in that year of 1969, I certainly managed to get three albums written and produced and put out there. And the end result of doing that was by the next year, after The Beatles broke up, we were considered the No. 1 band in the world.

It remarkably worked very well. It is a thing to celebrate – you know what I mean? It's not exactly like I feel like I'm 24 years old, and I'll just step right into the day after those three albums (came out), and everything is just like it was. Because it's not: I'm 70 years old; a whole lot of other stuff has happened. It was Julie's idea to take a subject called 1969 and present it as a show. I don't know why I never thought of that in all of my born days. But Julie thinks that way, and it's such a great idea. It puts it right there in front of the audience. It's such a cool thought because in my show, I then get to place it within the times and refer to everything that's going on in those times, including myself. And it becomes a really cool story to tell. I am really enjoying that.

I think this will get more and more developed for quite some time in my current career because there's just a lot of ways of looking at stuff and presenting stuff. We're barely scratching the surface now with the show that we're presenting. I have a longer version and a shorter version of every story. It's really become a lot of fun.

GM: The "Wrote a Song for Everyone" album could have been an opportune time to rework something from the unreleased "Hoodoo." You write in the book that rather recently you'd played around with the "Hoodoo" song "On the Run." So how likely is it that "On the Run" or another "Hoodoo" track with potential – say, "Between the Lines" or "Evil Thing" – will get a makeover and appear on a future studio album?

JF: It's a possibility. I don't sit around and worry about that too much because I feel that it's in the past, and I've done so much re-recording of older songs. It's a lot harder to make new songs, and I'm looking forward to that. But in the case of "On the Run," I always did feel that it was a good beginning to a song. And I could never get it figured out as a musician or a writer to a point that it really made me happy. For me, the best example of that is probably "Mystic Highway" [which was included on 2013's "Wrote a Song for Everyone"]. That's been floating around with me for 30 years. Every now and then, I'd revisit it and try to work it out, but it was way too big – I couldn't understand it all. I finally said, "John, you got to get with it here." In the old days, "Proud Mary" or whatever – (those songs) all felt complete. But through the years, with all the mental issues I'd have where I just couldn't think (laughs), there were times when I knew it wasn't quite done and it was going to take more work.

GM: Has writing the book led to some new titles in your songwriting notebook?

JF: Yes, absolutely. You're thinking about stuff, you're talking with another person, and you suddenly say a phrase that captures an idea. You know how this works: Things are part of your own personality that are always there, but they're kind of behind the veil. And maybe you thought about it in the sixth grade, but you didn't have it all quite clear, and suddenly when you're (much older), you remember thinking about that, and it becomes really clear. So that's happened. **GM**