

SECOND TIME AROUND

Dan Fogelberg finds a new lease on guitar playing and performing

By James Jensen

IN HER CLASSIC SONG "BIG YELLOW Taxi," Joni Mitchell sings, "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone," and that sentiment certainly pertains to the acoustic guitar playing of well-known singer-songwriter Dan Fogelberg. While sailing a couple of years ago, Fogelberg was severely injured. In fact, he almost severed the little finger on his left hand, creating concern about his future as a guitarist. Picking out instrumentals on his nylon-string to help rehabilitate his finger had the side effect of dramatically rehabilitating his love of playing the instrument, which had waned over a couple of decades on the road.

While many folk/pop artists dating back to the '70s are lucky to have careers, given the always changing musical landscape that is pop music, Fogelberg's audience has been constant. During his summer '97 tour, a solo acoustic affair in support of the generous four-CD career retrospective box set *Portrait*, Fogelberg filled the large and prestigious Greek Theater in Hollywood. When I showed up at his hotel room the next day for our interview, Fogelberg was busy fingerpicking on his trusty Martin D-45 and playing bottleneck with a metal slide. He was excited to talk about his love of guitar playing, songwriting, and the accident that he now views as a blessing in disguise.

When did you start playing guitar?

FOGELBERG Well, I started playing when my grandfather gave me an old Hawaiian steel guitar when I was about 11 years old. This guitar was black with hula dancers, palm trees, and the moon painted on it. It was made for slide, with action about a half an inch off the neck, and was supposed to be played [lap style], which I didn't know about. I was trying to play Buddy Holly and Beatles songs, as well as basic and minor chords. I started to develop calluses really fast.

After I got over the hand injuries [laughs], I developed pretty strong hands because of that guitar. About a year later I realized the way that guitar was to be played and talked my dad into getting me an electric guitar. I jumped right into electric for playing in bands and stuff when I was about 12 or 13 years old. In my second band I put my Strat away and played an Eko 12-string acoustic, getting into fingerpicking styles and Travis picking, which I had gotten from Peter, Paul,

and Mary and Paul Simon. I took that band into more of an acoustic folk-rock kind of place, performing Buffalo Springfield material and Beatles songs like "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away."

In the liner notes to your double album, The Innocent Age, you point out folk artists like Gordon Lightfoot as influences. Did you study his 12-string playing?

FOGELBERG Oh sure, and Red Shea [Lightfoot's lead guitarist] was a big influence and even played on *The Innocent Age*. His picking was instrumental to what I do as far as when I'm layering guitar parts while recording. The guy was so tasty with his work with Lightfoot. While Gordon was singing and playing a basic Travis picking pattern, Red was playing these beautiful little lines that seemed inseparable from Lightfoot. It was a great sound. You have to be incredibly sensitive to put those types of chops in a tune and not get in the way of the song.

You also spent some time enamored of Luis Bonfá and experimented with bossa nova-style instrumentals, right?

FOGELBERG I really got turned on to bossa nova music in the '60s, because I was a huge fan of [Antonio Carlos] Jobim and his music. I love that style of music, and I love playing it. I still write in those terms once in a while if I have a project that will allow it.

Who influenced your flatpicking?

FOGELBERG Living in Nashville, I was always picking with people, but I must say that I was a huge Doc Watson fan in high school and used to try and pick out his leads.

Did you ever take lessons?

FOGELBERG I have a great story about formal lessons. I took them for about a month because my dad insisted, as he was a trained musician. He really looked down on the guitar as an instrument,

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The balladeer, 1970s.

but he felt that if I wanted to take up an instrument, I should be trained and do it right. The deal was that he would buy me a Stratocaster if I would take the lessons, which I of course agreed to. I went to see a teacher twice a week for about a month. In the meantime, I was already playing gigs. I came into the store one day after learning the opening lick of the Beatles' "I Feel Fine" from watching the top cover band in town the night before. I was practicing this lick when my teacher arrived late for a lesson, and hearing me doodling around with this riff, he asked me to show him how to play it. I told my dad that it didn't make a lot of sense for me to pay this guy to show him how to play, and that was my last guitar lesson.

In concert you mentioned that you injured your finger a year ago.

FOGELBERG I cut it real bad, almost took it off. You can still see the scar goes from here all the way to here [points to a very noticeable scar on his left pinky]. I caught it in the mechanism for taking up an anchor on my boat. It was about six months before I could

play guitar with it again. The playing actually became therapeutic in that the recuperation went faster the more I played.

Were you worried about losing its use permanently?

FOGELBERG I began thinking in terms of Django Reinhardt [who played with only two fingers on his fretting hand] and feeling that I would have to adapt. I just didn't know, and I couldn't even press down on a piano key, because without feeling you don't know how much pressure you are applying. I was terribly frustrated.

But in the long run, this accident has been a real blessing because it has brought back the joy of playing, and I have been writing all these medieval lute-type guitar pieces. I don't think in terms of the commerciality of what I am writing; I just sit down and come up with all these cool guitar-based tunes. It all began because I was playing more gut-string guitar, as it was easier on my finger, and

on that instrument I don't think in pop music terms, I think of Spanish or bossa nova or classical.

You were playing solo acoustic shows in the mid-'80s, half a dozen years before the unplugged phenomenon happened. What is your take on all of that?

"I am having more fun performing than I have ever had in my life. I just realized what a great job I have and how much fun it is."

FOGELBERG I laughed because I had been doing it since I was 15. The disappointing thing was that MTV didn't call. I felt like I had done it more than anybody, and done it well, but I guess I wasn't hip and groovy enough for MTV. I had MTV people come to my shows and say, "Wow, we have to get you to do this" and then never call. So who knows? They are playing to a young rock crowd, and Richard Thompson, Bruce Cockburn, and myself don't figure to that crowd so much.

I am happy that the whole unplugged thing has nurtured acoustic music, though. One of the reasons I recorded *High Country Snows* [a 1985 bluegrass-flavored album featuring many of the genre's best players] was to nurture acoustic music, being a huge fan of these great players. Everyone is listening to Garth Brooks, but David Grisman and Tony Rice are phenomenal musicians.

When you toured after that album was released, you played a half set solo and then introduced these musicians to your fans, a much larger audience than they were used to playing to

FOGELBERG I think it kind of kick-started a few things for some of the guys. Chris Hillman and Herb Pedersen [along with John Jorgenson] formed the Desert Rose Band and had quite a successful run in Nashville. I am not saying that wouldn't have happened without me, but I remember when we recorded that album in Nashville and there was a kind of buzz around town because Ricky [Skaggs] was working on it, and Vince Gill, and these other young cats who weren't really legit yet in Nashville. The old school didn't really like Ricky Skaggs and Sam Bush [with the New Grass Revival] pushing the envelope. I have always been a big fan of that type of acoustic music.

What are some of the benefits and limitations to putting on a solo acoustic show?

FOGELBERG Emotionally and artistically, it is really rewarding. If you have an audience there that is ready to listen,

it is very different from a rock show with the lights and the band and the up crowd. It is frustrating for me because I am an electric guitarist as well, so I can't perform the entire breadth of my music. But I love the subtlety and tonal range of the acoustic guitar.

It sounds like sometimes you use altered tunings to present some of your band arrangements in a solo context.

FOGELBERG You can't just play the same parts you played on the record

Leader of the Band

Words and music by Dan Fogelberg

I played "Leader of the Band" for my father before the album *The Innocent Age* came out, and that was pretty difficult. It became such a big hit that the press wanted to know if it was true, and who was this guy? So the press was interested in talking to [my father], and he was doing phone interviews with people from all over the country. I am probably the proudest of that song, even though I wouldn't pick it musical-

ly. Lyrically, it's so real and honest, and it meant so much to our family. But the biggest reward is that it has meant so much to other people. Writing songs is a great thing to do for a living, but when you actually touch people's lives, that is a bonus I never saw when I started doing this. That song has got a long life, and I had no clue it would be a hit when I wrote it.

—Dan Fogelberg

Capo I
Intro

G7 G/A C

Am Em D G C/G Fine

Verse

G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014

9 G C/G G C/G G

G 3x0004 Bm x13421 C x32010 Am x02310 Em7 012040

13 _ AND WILD _ A CAB - INET - MAK - ER'S SON _ HIS HANDS WERE MEANT FOR DIF - FERENT _ WORK AND HIS

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Am x02310 Cadd9 x30010 D xx0132 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004 Bm x13421

16 HEART WAS KNOWN TO NONE HE LEFT HIS HOME AND WENT HIS LONE AND SOL-I-TAR-Y

C x32010 Am x02310 Em7 012040 Am x02310 D xx0132

22 WAY AND HE GAVE TO ME A GIFT I KNOW I NEVER CAN RE-

1. G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004

To Intro after Verse 3

2. Chorus G 3x0004 Am x0xx1x G/B x2xx4x C x32010

27 PAY THE LEAD-ER OF THE BAND

Bm x13421 C x32010 G 3x0004 Am x0xx1x G/B x2xx4x Am x02310

33 IS TIRED AND HIS EYES ARE GROW-ING OLD BUT HIS BLOOD RUNS THROUGH MY

Em7 012040 Am x02310 F Tx3211 D xx0132 C x32010 Bm x13421

37 IN-STRU-MENT AND HIS SONG IS IN MY SOUL MY LIFE HAS BEEN A POOR AT-TEMPT TO

C x32010 G 3x0004 Am x0xx1x G/B x2xx4x Am x02310 Em7 012040

42 IM-I-TATE THE MAN I'M JUST A LIV-ING LEG-A-CY TO THE

To Coda ⊕ D.S. al Coda ⊕ Coda

Am x02310 Cadd9 x30010 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004 C/G 3x2014 G 3x0004

G 3x0004 Am x0xx1x G/B x2xx4x Am x02310

46 LEAD-ER OF THE BAND

51 BAND I AM THE LIV-ING LEG-

Chord diagrams for guitar: **Lm7** (012040), **Am** (x02310), **Cadd9** (x30010), **D** (xx0132), **G** (3x0004), **C/G** (3x2014), **G** (3x0004), **C/G** (3x2014), **G** (3x0004), **C/G** (3x2014), **G** (3x0004).

53 A - CY TO THE LEAD - ER OF THE BAND

1. AN ONLY CHILD ALONE AND WILD
A CABINETMAKER'S SON
HIS HANDS WERE MEANT FOR DIFFERENT WORK
AND HIS HEART WAS KNOWN TO NONE
HE LEFT HIS HOME AND WENT HIS LONE
AND SOLITARY WAY
AND HE GAVE TO ME A GIFT I KNOW
I NEVER CAN REPAY
2. A QUIET MAN OF MUSIC
DENIED A SIMPLER FATE
HE TRIED TO BE A SOLDIER ONCE
BUT HIS MUSIC WOULDN'T WAIT
HE EARNED HIS LOVE THROUGH DISCIPLINE
A THUNDERING VELVET HAND
HIS GENTLE MEANS OF SCULPTING SOULS
TOOK ME YEARS TO UNDERSTAND

THE LEADER OF THE BAND IS TIRED
AND HIS EYES ARE GROWING OLD
BUT HIS BLOOD RUNS THROUGH MY INSTRUMENT
AND HIS SONG IS IN MY SOUL
MY LIFE HAS BEEN A POOR ATTEMPT
TO IMITATE THE MAN
3. MY BROTHERS' LIVES WERE DIFFERENT
FOR THEY HEARD ANOTHER CALL
ONE WENT TO CHICAGO
AND THE OTHER TO ST. PAUL
AND I'M IN COLORADO
WHEN I'M NOT IN SOME HOTEL
LIVING OUT THIS LIFE I CHOSE
AND COME TO KNOW SO WELL
4. I THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC
AND YOUR STORIES OF THE ROAD
I THANK YOU FOR THE FREEDOM
WHEN IT CAME MY TIME TO GO
I THANK YOU FOR THE KINDNESS
AND THE TIMES WHEN YOU GOT TOUGH
AND PAPA I DON'T THINK I SAID
"I LOVE YOU" NEAR ENOUGH

CHORUS
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when you play solo, so you have to come up with new arrangements. Someone told me recently that when I play the solo version of "The Reach," which is a strummed and flatpicked riff-groove, it sounds like two or three people playing. It is not how I made the record, on which I was able to overdub the riff on electric and just strum the rhythm chords. I use a D modal [also known as double dropped-D, with both E strings dropped down a full step to D] for slide and blues, plus dropped-D [with the low E dropped to D] on songs like "Make Love Stay." I rarely play standard tuning on stage.

The solo show is also a real showcase for the songs.

FOGELBERG Absolutely. It's not flash, so it has to depend on the song and the performance. I really have to project a big version of the songs when I play them solo

You seem to be a lot warmer to the audience than I remember.

FOGELBERG I am having more fun than I have ever had in my life performing, and again it may be the loss of my playing for a while. I just realized what a great job I have and how much fun it is. I have always been very serious about performing, and now I am more concerned about having fun. It seems that the more fun I have, the more the audience enjoys it as well

Tell me about assembling the recent Portrait retrospective

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DAN FOGELBERG

Portrait, Sony 67949 (1997). Four-CD set.

Love Songs, Epic 67374 (1995).

River of Souls, Epic 46934 (1993).

Greetings from the West, Epic 48625 (1991). Live, two-CD set.

Wild Places, Epic 45059 (1990).

Home Free, Epic 31751 (1989).

Exiles, Epic 40271 (1987).

High Country Snows, Epic 39616 (1985).

Windows and Walls, Epic 39004 (1984).

Greatest Hits, Epic 38308 (1982).

The Innocent Age, Full Moon/Epic 37393 (1981). Two-CD set.

Phoenix, Epic 35634 (1979).

Netherlands, Epic 34185 (1977).

Souvenirs, Epic 33137 (1975).

Captured Angel, Epic 33499 (1973).

FOGELBERG It gave me a sense of accomplishment. I feel pretty good about where I am.

Did you participate in the song selection?

FOGELBERG One hundred percent. It was all my baby. I told them I would do it if I could do it the way I wanted, so I began the song selection about four or five years ago. The bad thing about a box set is that you're never going to satisfy everybody, so I decided to satisfy myself. I knew from performing these songs for so many years which ones really worked with the audience, which ones they want to hear, and which ones meant something. Those are all there. The recently repackaged CD *Love Songs* made me mad, because I didn't even know it was out until someone brought it to me.

Isn't that kind of par for the course when you leave a label?

FOGELBERG Yeah. They are going to try to sell anything they can.

Your live CD and video Greetings from the West seemed very successful from an artistic point of view. Were you happy with the way it turned out?

FOGELBERG Absolutely, especially when you consider that it was taken from only one show. That was the best band I ever had for my music, and when we got to New York I thought it was time to put together a live album or video. I was prepared to beg Epic to let me make this document, but fortunately they were already convinced after seeing the show at the Beacon Theater. We only had one more indoor show on the schedule, at the Fox Theater a week later, so we had a very hectic week preparing for that show. The day of the concert was the craziest day of my life and the day I am most proud of. I was producing a record, starring in a video, and managing this whole insane day with the buck stopping with me for all decisions! Jim Shea [the director], who comes from a cinematic point of view, gave us a great look. We put it on film and used eight cameras so it would look like a film, not a concert or videotape. The thing I am most proud of, though, is that it really was a live performance; we didn't go back in and redo the whole bloody thing.

Getting back to last night's show, you played three instrumentals on a nylon-string guitar. Pretty heady stuff for a singer-songwriter.

FOGELBERG A lot of people come to my shows because their wives or girlfriends bring them. They could care less about my romantic stuff, but when I show them that I really am a musician and can play, they take notice. I want to show off as a guitar player a little, because I don't want to be pigeonholed as just a singer-songwriter of soft ballads! I am not complaining about my hit records at all, but at the basis of all this is still my love of playing the instrument. I have had only one other player solo on a record of mine in 25 years, but when people see me play with my band in concert they still say, "I never knew you played electric guitar" [laughs]. Well, what does it say on the record? I guess they are used to people posing with instruments for image sake.

So, when you're writing a song, does the music come first?

FOGELBERG I never write away from an instrument. I am a musician first, and then I write lyrics. I write good lyrics, but I am not a poet. Bruce Cockburn, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen are all poets . . . and Canadians [laughs]. My songs all come from music. I could write you a dozen melodies in an hour, but the lyrics take a long time, if [they come] at all. Occasionally I can come up with a title like "River of Souls," but that is the rare exception. "Run for the Roses" was a song I was hired to write for the Kentucky Derby, and that was fun. I work really well when somebody says, "We need a song by tomorrow, and here's your subject." I could probably be a great jingle writer. That's easy. The hard thing is to come up with something unique, new, and imaginative.

Until I read your liner notes in the box set, I never had the impression that you were writing from your own experience. Did you purposely take a little of the first person out of your songs for a more universal feel?

FOGELBERG There is not a lot of *I* in my music. I often couched it in third person or looked at it like an analyst. I think of myself as more of a journalist. I am looking at relationships in my own life, but then I am trying to back away and say something bigger. It's not just "Oh my heartbreak," it's "This is why hearts get broken, this is what we do to each other." I am always trying to find something from my experience that can translate to someone else's, and trying to find the essence

of what this thing is about. When you look at a song like "Sweet Magnolia," it really is a story, but it's my story, about my first wife. It is couched in a pretty dramatic way, that song, so oftentimes it's a little easier for others to see it. A lot of people tell me that they feel I have written about their lives. How did I know? If I were writing from a really personal standpoint, the songs wouldn't connect like that.

Your CD Exiles is a personal favorite of mine. I guess going through a divorce at the time it came out gave me that same feeling you describe. I never thought, "Oh, Dan must be going through this as well."

FOGELBERG Interesting. That is some of the most brutally autobiographical stuff I have ever written, but there is still a crane shot [referring to the camera angle looking down on a scene from

Are there songs you have trouble playing live?

FOGELBERG "Hearts in Decline" from *Exiles*, as much as I like it. It was a powerful production at the time, but it puts me in a place I don't need to be again. I rarely perform "Longer," but people want to hear it. I don't dislike the song, I just think I have written so much better. It seems just like a pretty piece of pulp to play at weddings. Great, hooray.

You double-tracked acoustics on that one?

FOGELBERG I always used to do that on the fingerpicking stuff on my early records. I probably got that from Stephen Stills and Buffalo Springfield. It spreads out the sound a little. I also layered a high-strung guitar into many records. People wondered at the time if

"I have always subconsciously tried to temper everything I do with a sense of hope. I don't want someone to feel bad. I want to offer comfort."

above] or overview of what happened. I wasn't interested in writing an album of, "Oh my God, my marriage is falling apart and I feel like shit." That's not it. It is looking at it and saying, "What happened here? What did I do? What did she do? How does this happen to people's lives? How do we heal? How do we grow?" I have always subconsciously tried to temper everything I do with a sense of hope. I don't want someone to feel bad; they already feel bad. I want to offer comfort: "It's OK, buddy, it happened to me too. You're not alone up there." I think that's the key to communicating and one of the reasons people are still with my music after all these years—we've been through a lot of the same changes.

Would you describe yourself as prolific?

FOGELBERG Yeah, I write a lot. I haven't written a lot in the last few years, and I don't have an explanation for that. I don't feel the same urgency, to be honest with you. After 25 to 30 years of this, it's like how much more is there to say? And is this the same passion I had when I was 20? I doubt it. I love music, but the thought of sitting down and grinding out songs doesn't appeal to me like it used to.

I was using an Autoharp or harpsichord on songs like "Believe in Me" and "There's a Place in the World for a Gambler" because of that unfamiliar sound.

You played an instrumental last night, George Harrison's "I Need You," on a high-strung Yamaha

FOGELBERG I played it with both E strings tuned down to D. I usually play a Martin 000-18 for the high-strung stuff, but I was worried about traveling with it so we used the custom Yamaha [see Gearbox, page 94]. The Sunrise pickup sounds pretty warm with that tuning, and since I fingerpick with flesh, it's a little warmer and fatter than with a pick.

Did you ever use fingerpicks or thumbpicks?

FOGELBERG On my opening song last night, "Nexus," I used a thumbpick and fingerpicks. I spent years playing with fingerpicks, all the Paul Simon songs, etc.

What excites you most these days?

FOGELBERG Playing guitar, just playing and having fun. I don't feel any great responsibility to the world lyrically. Although I could sit you down and play you 20 unrecorded songs [laughs]! ■