

Backstage Interview:

# Mike Finnigan, A People's Performer

In the Winter of 1978, while working at a record warehouse, one of my superiors, presently an unemployed accountant, handed me a copy of **Black and White**, a new LP by Mike Finnigan. "Joe, take it home and play it. I know you'll dig it." "Who the hell is Mike Finnigan?" I asked. "He plays keyboard for Dave Mason. I know you'll like it!" he said. Later, I proceeded to pull this album out of its jacket and I threw it on my turntable. Just by hearing the opening chords and vocal work on the first cut, **Just One Minute More**, I had an idea that I was in store for some great music. I was correct. To make a long story short, this record turned out to be one of my most favorite pieces of plastic ever to garnish my turntable.

So by force of habit I began to collect any recordings that Mike had played on in the past. I almost went broke. This guy's been all over the place! From the **Jimi Hendrix Experience** to Crosby, Stills and Nash, Finnigan is one of those well-respected musicians who're always being hired to put their tremendous talents on other people's wax.

I recently had the privilege of meeting this great musician. First over the phone, then later at the Tower Theater. I called him up at his hotel about six times. I finally got through about a half hour before the show; he was playing keyboard for Stephen Stills. A tired and angry voice answered, "Hello?" "Is this Mike Finnigan?" "Yeah!" "Ah, this is Joe Reagoso and . . ." "Whoever you are, you're real persistent! I'm trying to sleep, and you're ringing my phone all day. Well, just as well. I would have slept through St. Patty's Day." As you can see I was off to a great start. I reinforced my character and began to sing **How Wrong Can You Be**, a great song off of his masterpiece **Black and White**. He began to laugh loudly and replied, "Hey, that's really nice." I proved to this man that I really appreciated his music and that I wasn't the typical run-of-the-mill rock journalist. They're usually good at reviewing politics, not masters of the music industry. Being the nice guy that he is, he got me clearance to do an interview.

Before going backstage, one always runs into a handful of record people, security guards, and imbeciles. One such person, a

photographer, was there. He wanted to know why I was interviewing Mike Finnigan instead of Stills. "Who's Finnigan, Stills' manager?" he asked. This idiot was serious. I told him, "Why don't you start filming more exciting things, like funerals."

Fortunately, I escaped that wimp and walked up to the second floor to meet Finnigan. The room had ugly yellow walls, with rat poison containers underneath the heaters. What a dive! I wouldn't hold anything there — I'd be ashamed. Standing in front of a torn-up sofa was Mike Finnigan. Shocked by his height (6'6"), I said, "Your're a giant in the music business." We then began the interview.

REAGOSO: I really dug your performance tonight. Do you like playing with Stephen Stills?

FINNIGAN: Yeah! Hell, he's a really good artist. He's never into the same bag. He's always changing, never consistent.

REAGOSO: I really thought **Black and White** was a rock masterpiece. Why didn't it catch on?

FINNIGAN: Thank you. Well, it sold alright. It was pretty successful on FM with Expressway To Your Heart. It just needed a little more airplay.

REAGOSO: I loved the production by Ron Nevison (who also produces for Pink Floyd and Dave Mason).

FINNIGAN: Yeah, he did a great job on it.

REAGOSO: He makes his productions clear as glass.

FINNIGAN: It was a little too polished. Now don't get me wrong, Ron's a great producer. He sort of made the sweat fall in the right spaces. On my next album, I'd like there to be less falling in the pores, a little more loose and funky.

REAGOSO: I think Jim Krugar (who wrote Mason's **We Just Disagree**) is an excellent composer. What does he mean in the lyrics of **The Words** when he writes, "What is it like Capt. Steinback?"

FINNIGAN: It means, how do you write your stories so well? Me and Jim are best friends. He's my number one "ace" buddy. He's always stopping by my house. We hang out a lot.

REAGOSO: So what plans do you have for the immediate future?

FINNIGAN: Well, right now I'm recording an album with Jim, Lee Dudek, and a few other people. We're forming a new group called the **DFK Band**. (Finnigan played a few rough mixes on a tape recorded on a bus. One particular song, **I Know You're In There**, sounded like a sure-fire hit to me.)

REAGOSO: Who else is in the band?

FINNIGAN: Max Gronenthal on piano, Trey Thompson on bass, and Bill Meeker on drums.

REAGOSO: When will the LP be released?

FINNIGAN: Sometime around the middle of May. We'll probably tour in the summer also.

REAGOSO: Have you received offers to tour with anyone recently?

FINNIGAN: Yeah, Gary Wright's manager called me on the phone last week. "We need an additional keyboardist, we'd

like to audition you," he said. As soon as I heard that creep say "audition," I hung up! He's got guts to say that. Nobody auditions me, man. I've been playing too long to start hearing that bullshit now.

He called me back and asked, "What did you hang up for? We're going to pay you good." He told me the figure and I hung up again.

REAGOSO: What kind of music do you listen to?

FINNIGAN: Well, I listen to just about anything. When I'm at home, I play a lot of gospel and jazz. It's bad if you listen to only one type of music. There's so much waiting to be heard.

REAGOSO: What do you think of the Doobie Brothers?

FINNIGAN: Ah! They're great! That Mike McDonald is one of the greatest singers in rock and roll. He's the driving force behind the Doobie's.

REAGOSO: Who else do you

listen to?

FINNIGAN: Ray Charles. He's my favorite. I couldn't believe what Elvis Costello said about him. He said something like, "I hate America, I hate Americans, and I hate Ray Charles." If I was in the bar when he said that, I would have broken his jaw! What is he for if he doesn't like America? And nobody says that about Ray. (Finnigan was referring to comments Costello made recently in a bar. **Bonnie Bramlet**, also on tour with Finnigan and Stills, objected and punched Costello in the face.)

REAGOSO: Have you been on any new records recently?

FINNIGAN: Yeah, I bet you didn't know that was me and Max Gronenthal singing background vocals on Rod Stewart's **Blondes Have More Fun** album. That was us doing the "Do-do-do-do-do's" on **Ain't Love A Bitch**. We also sang on **Is That The Thanks I Get**.

REAGOSO: How did you get to play on tour with Dave Mason?

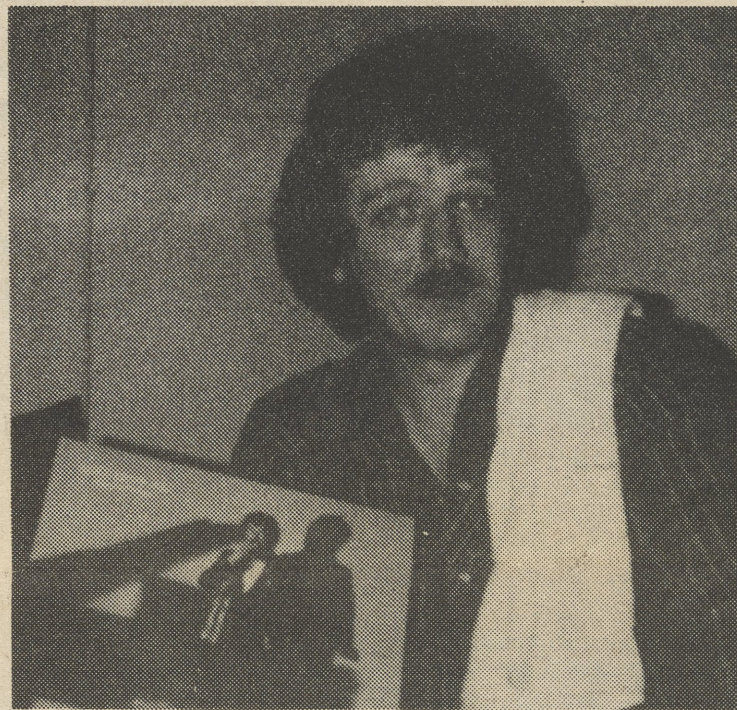
FINNIGAN: When I was recording for Blue Thumb, known to us as Black Thumb, I was hired for his second LP. Since then I've been on most of his albums.

REAGOSO: I hear you recently played on tour in Cuba. How did you like it?

FINNIGAN: It was great. They have hardly any rock and roll music there. The closest thing they ever had there was The Beach Boys. I wouldn't consider them rock, though. They're more like pabulum.

It was time for the second Stills show to begin and Mike had to get ready.

— Joe Reagoso



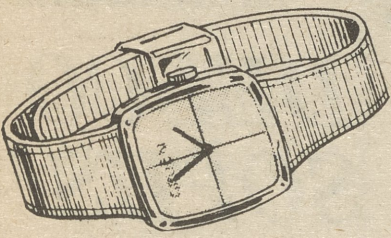
Mike Finnigan's album, **Black and White**, is available on CBS records and tapes.

## FINNIGAN APPEARS ON:

- Paul Simon (CBS)
- Dr. Hook (CBS)
- Dave Mason - All Along The Watchtower (CBS)
- Jimi Hendrix - Electric Laydland (Reprise)
- Maria Muldaur - Sweet Harmony (Reprise)
- Dave Mason - Certified Live (CBS)
- C, S and N (Atlantic)
- Dave Mason - Let It Flow (CBS)
- Peter Frampton - I'm In You (A&M)
- Richard T. Bear - Bring On the Night (RCA)
- Les Dudek - Ghost Town Parade (CBS)
- Dave Mason - Mariposa de Oro (CBS)
- Jim Krugar - Sweet Salvation (CBS)
- DFK Band - Tour Sampler (CBS Promotional LP)
- Stephen Stills - Thoroughogap Fare (CBS)
- Rod Stewart - Blondes Have More Fun (Warner Brothers)

## FINNIGAN'S ALBUMS:

- Serfs (Capitol)
- Jerry Hahn Brotherhood (CBS)
- Finnigan and Wood (Blue Thumb)
- Mike Finnigan (Warner Brothers)
- Black and White (CBS)



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