

Featured Drummer ...

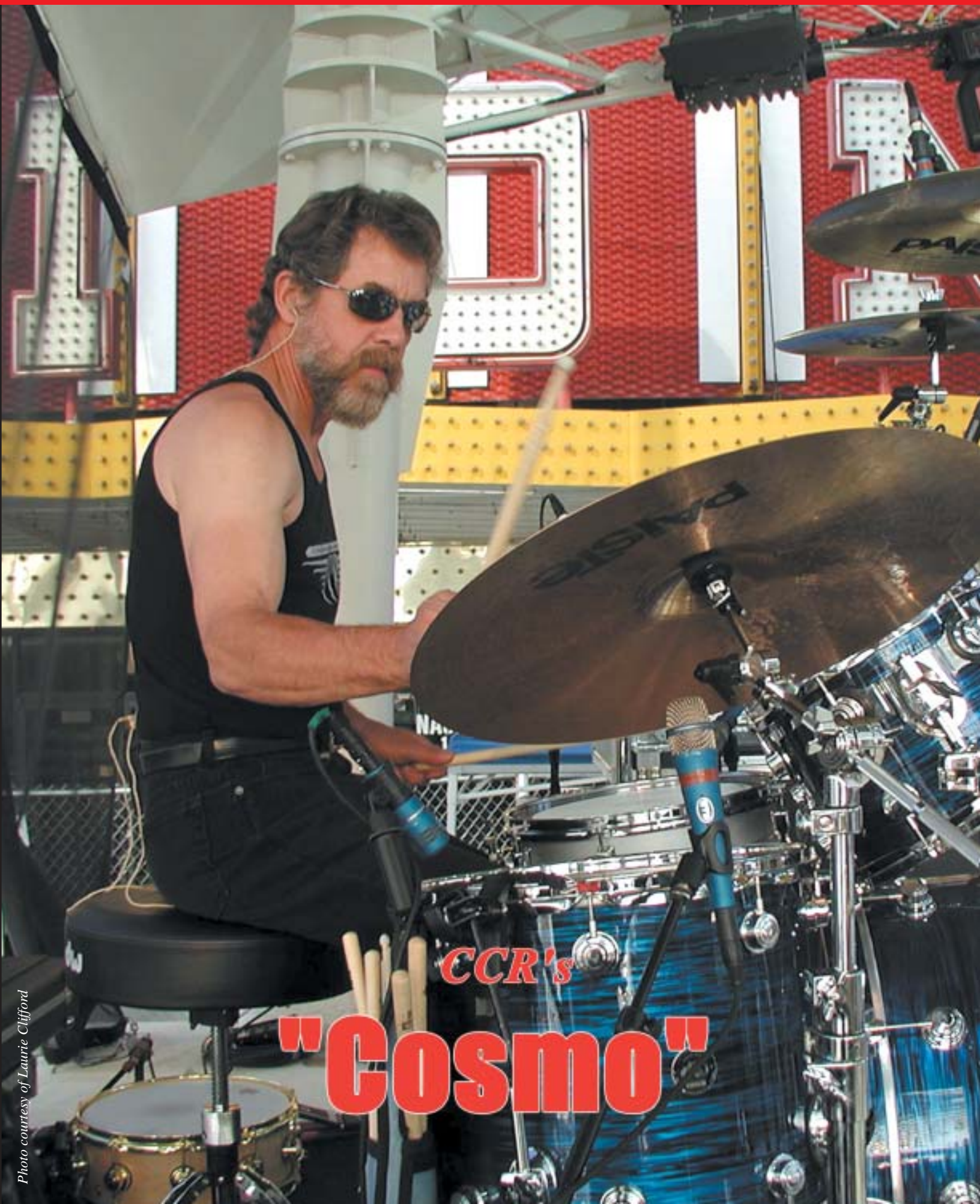


Photo courtesy of Laurie Clifford

Doug Clifford

Revisited!

“Cosmo” as Doug Clifford is called, is the core of what put the emotion in the music for Creedence Clearwater Revival. CCR was the number one band in the world in the late 60’s, early 70’s with it’s rhythm & bluesy rock’n roll. Cosmo created the energy that is felt every time you listen their music. Every drumbeat pumps each song with an unending supply of fuel. His drumming inspires a song to be slow and smooth and then can change to raw excitement as he is able to power a song to a climax. Doug’s feel for making music on the drums takes the song to another level. There seems to be a fire burning in Doug’s playing that creates such intense heat that makes the song move you. His live performances are just as exciting with his new band. Doug, along with long time band member, Stu Cook, formed Creedence Clearwater Revisited in 1995. There is not enough that can be said about Doug “Cosmo” Clifford’s playing. From his teen days with the Blue Velvets to the current Creedence Clearwater Revisited, let’s take a look at the man who put *emotion* in rock and roll drumming.

VDM: *What inspired you to become a drummer?*

Doug: First of all, I was a record collector. I was hooked when I heard rock and roll music. I was only 9 years old when I bought my first record. It was a 78. I didn’t know that there were 45’s. The record was “Bo Diddley” by Bo Diddley, which has that great drum lick in it. I would listen to it over and over again. I knew that I was going to do something in music. Then I saw a special on TV with Gene Krupa. Gene was playing all these different drums and never missing a beat. I loved the rhythm and swing that Krupa had. That’s when I said, “that’s what I want to do”. But not the big band stuff.... I want to play rock and roll. That’s when I bought my first snare drum.

VDM: *Who were some of your biggest influences?*

Doug: All the great drummers that played on the records that we were listening to...Earl Palmer, Hal Blaine, Al Jackson Jr., Ringo Starr, Charlie Watts, all the drummers that were in the groove on the records back then. There were so many great drummers of that era. I looked up to all these guys and borrowed a little of what they offered.

VDM: *How did you progress from that point?*

Doug: Once I had found someone to play music with, I saved my money and bought an old Slingerland set with tacked on bottom heads. I paid \$200.00 for them. That was a lot of money in 1958, but the guy knew I wanted the drums. I took Mother of Pearl contact paper and covered the whole set. The next set was also Slingerland, which had been left in the sunlight in a music store. Half of the set was aqua and the other half was faded and had turned a champagne color. I set up the drums in my garage and practiced every day.

VDM: *How old were you when you met John Fogerty and started the Blue Velvets?*

Doug: I was in the seventh or eighth grade and was about 13 years old when I first met John.



photo courtesy of Laurie Clifford

VDM: Doug, please tell me about the birth of Creedence Clearwater Revival.

Doug: I was walking home from school and went by the music room and heard some Fats Domino piano playing coming out of the music room, which was taboo at the time. There was this skinny little kid (John Fogerty) playing this stuff and I stood in the doorway and listened. He went into some Little Richard songs. I had all the records he was playing. I walked up to him and asked him if he wanted to start a band. He said "Yes, but actually I play the guitar".

Stu, John, Tom, and I grew up together with a dream. We stayed focused on that dream and stayed away from drugs. Finally when we achieved success, we overcame everything but success.

Later, we went over to his house for rehearsal. I had a snare drum on a wrought iron flower pot stand and a bass drum that someone had given to me. It was a marching bass drum. I saved my money and ultimately bought the old set of Slingerland drums.

John played guitar and wanted to add a piano player. Stu Cook, who was my best friend whom I had met the first day of school in the 7th grade, was taking piano lessons, so he became the piano player. The bass was Stu's left hand on the piano. That's how we started...we were an instrumental trio called the Blue Velvets. This was in 1959.

Tom Fogerty was the lead singer in a band called Spider Webb and The Insects. Tom had a vision of making records, but his band wasn't interested in making records. Tom took Stu, John, and myself into Dick Vance Studios on Grand Avenue in Oakland, CA. I brought my drum set in the small room on the second floor which also had a



*Photo by Max Weiss
Courtesy of Amorous Archives*

The Golliwogs

piano in it. The room was so small that I could not put my drum set in there and sit on my drum stool. Dick Vance opened the window onto Grand Ave. and I sat on the window sill with my ass sticking out on to Grand Ave.

We became Tommy Fogerty and the Blue Velvets. We made several recordings in mono. Tom finally got a record deal at Fantasy Records. Fantasy Records changed our band name to the Golliwogs. This was when Stu Cook converted over to playing bass guitar. The band had regional hits and the record company bought us new instru-

ments. I was given a new set of Ludwig drums which replaced my old beat up Slingerland set. I played my Ludwig set on the first and second Creedence album. From the Green River album on, I played Camco.

VDM: How did you get the name "Cosmo"?

Doug: In college I was called Clifford C. Clifford. I don't know where that came from. We lived in a real animal house. Belushi should have been there. It was a crazy joint. One night we were at a party drinking some cheap wine and someone yelled out "Hey Clifford C. Clifford, what's the C stand for"? Before I could answer, the only hippie in the place at that time, like in 1965, said "It stands for Cosmo because he's so cosmic." It stuck with me ever since.

VDM: There was a magic in the sound of CCR. What was the chemistry in this band that made it work so well?

Doug: First of all, we all learned to play together. We started playing our instruments at about the same time. Also, we all had the same record collection before we even knew each other, so we all had the same musical taste. With Tom's guidance of getting us to think about recording, we studied the records a lot more and listened to the radio a lot more. We were a product of the basics of the music that we loved, urban and rural blues.

VDM: CCR's music is such a mixture of Southern creole styles and rhythm & blues. How did this sound surface from a band in California?

Doug: It's the records we bought and the music we listened to. The bay area was a ship yard in WWII. People came from Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas to work there. Many of these people stayed, so we had great R & B stations. Also, you could see some great bluesmen there, such as John Lee Hooker and Jimmy Reed. We had to sneak in clubs to see these people because we weren't old enough to get into the clubs. We also had country music and pop stations. We just happened to like the blues stuff and the southern music. It was the heart of American music. The combination of urban blues and rural blues was the birth of rock and roll, so we borrowed from both sides of the fence. We were very true to those roots. You can hear that in the records.

Donald "Duck" Dunn said, "Me and Cropper were driving in my Cadillac, had the top down, hot f@%#ing day, and you guys came on the radio and we were trying to figure out what part of Louisiana you were from. Then we found out that you guys were from Berkeley. I went home and burned all my records." (laughing!)



photo courtesy of Clifford archives

VDM: When did Creedence actually start going on the road as a working band?

Doug: We didn't start going on the road until the Golliwogs had a hit. Stu and I were going to San Jose State. We had jobs and were going to school. We were mostly a weekend band at that time. We played five 45 minute sets a night. Once we decided to make a commitment to do the band full time, everyone quit their jobs and focused on music full time. We began playing 6 nights a week between Sacramento and San Jose. While this was going on, we were always working on material to record.

VDM: Were you consciously aware of the impact that CCR was creating on American music and on the whole world at that time?

Doug: I was as consciously aware as a guy in his early 20's can be with the pressures of having hits, touring and starting a family. When you've had this dream and it's unfolding bigger than you ever really thought and you're number one in the world in record sales, you're seeing all these different people in the world reacting to your shows the same way that an American audience would, then you start realizing what was happening. We were so busy being right in the middle of it, we didn't have time to dwell on it. I look back, even now with



Photo courtesy of the Doug Clifford Collection

play the tracks and John would go in and overdub the guitar solos. I played a lot to the bass patterns, but some of the fills were played off of John's lead guitar.

VDM: Tell us about the drum part you created for the song "Suzie Q".

Doug: Suzie Q was on the first album. We had just come from playing the night clubs. We had to stretch the songs out because we were doing 5 sets a night. I just started playing that groove and it worked.

I love "Born on the Bayou"...That's my favorite song that we recorded with Revival

Creedence Clearwater Revisited, playing these songs that some of them are 34 years old, and seeing 3 generations of fans at the shows, it is very humbling. I'm much more humbled by it all now than when I was in the middle of it.

VDM: Were the CCR recordings done live or tracked separately?

Doug: Everything was recorded live. The four of us would go in and



Photo courtesy of the Doug Clifford

It had a nice back and forth thing; it was so simple. I played quarter notes on the downbeat with my right hand, quarter notes with the kick on the offbeat and the backbeat on the snare drum. I hadn't heard anybody play that beat, except maybe the drummer in Little Richard's band playing it in a lick, but never through a whole tune. I stuck it out there and just went with it. It worked. "Born on the Bayou" was sort of the same thing with different patterns and accents, but it was still a quarter note song, which gave it that driving feel. It was simple and straight ahead. I think that's the key for it's success and it's longevity. We always kept the music simple.

continued on page 20

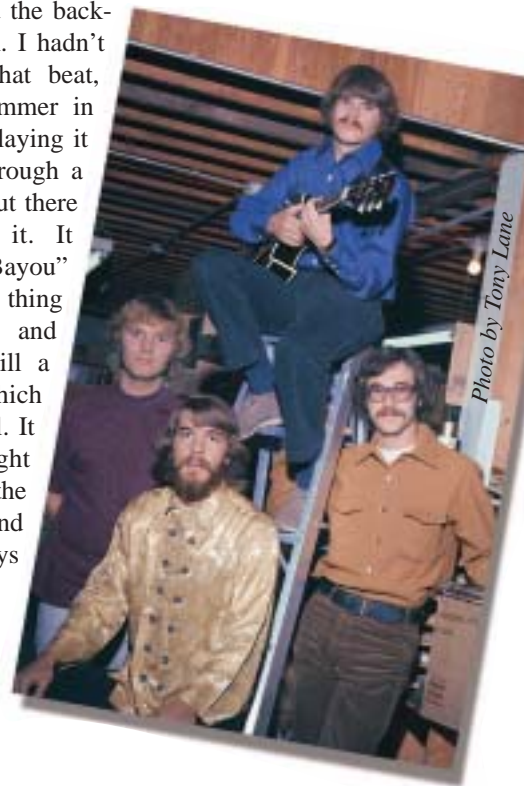


Photo by Tony Lane

MUSICAL PARTNERS

Stu Cook on Doug Clifford: “Doug and I have been very close friends since the day we met which has been almost 45 years ago. We have had some amazing experiences together. We’ve been to the edge and back many times together. We’re always going to be pushing the envelope together. We’re survivors. We’ve survived Creedence and we’re surviving life. It has been my extreme pleasure to have known and worked with him for all these years.

As a bandmate, there is none better than Doug. He understands what the job is. “Cos” is the kind of drummer that holds it together. He is a very straightforward drummer that understands rudiments and technique but has never let that get in the way of his playing. He uses those things very sparingly. It is def-

initely a part of his background, but when he approaches a drum part, the approach is always less is more. The bigger the hole you can leave, the more the listeners are going to feel it and swing to it. If you start playing every note and every beat, you’re going to clog it up and take away the swing. Doug understands what his higher role is in the whole project.”

Doug Clifford on Stu Cook: “Stu and I have known each other for 44 years, that in itself is remarkable. We were born 12 hours and 30 miles apart and are total opposites. We have cheated death at least 3 times in wrecks, a fire, and the Pacific Ocean. We have lived a dream that is still going strong today and we are probably closer today than we have ever

been. It is truly a great story.

We met the first day of school at Portola Junior High School in El Cerrito, California in 1957. Stu joined John and me in 1958 as the piano player in the Blue Velvets and the odyssey started. What a wild and crazy ride it has been.

Stu is more of a brother than a friend, that’s how close we are. When it comes to playing music together, we are joined at the hip. We don’t have to think about it, we just groove. We are part of American musical history and very proud of it, especially in the wake of 9-11.

I consider myself lucky in so many ways and having a long time friend like Stu is icing on the cake.”

VDM: What are some of your favorite recordings that you’ve done?

Doug: I love “Born on the Bayou” which is off the second album. It’s when things weren’t as tight. The sound is just big, free, and open. It just kicks ass. That’s my favorite song that we recorded with Revival.

VDM: What was touring like with Creedence Clearwater Revival?

Doug: We didn’t tour as much as we do now with CCR revisited because we were busy making records. When we did tour, we didn’t make any money because our roadies were in the top ten percent income bracket in the nation. We kept them on salary year round. Everybody had their own suite...we had huge expenses. We traveled mostly by plane or Lear jet. It was not as much fun playing as it is now because there were pressures placed on us. And playing is more fun now than it has ever been.

VDM: When you’re driving down the road and hear a CCR song on the radio, what do you think about?

Doug: Man, am I one lucky son of a gun! These songs are 34 years old. We’ve had tons of airplay on classic rock and oldies stations. We have 8 songs that are still being played on the radio. It’s kind of fun driving down the street thinking that’s us. Dreams do come true!

VDM: Have you always played the same drumset configuration?

Doug: My setup has always been a 4 piece drum set with a ride cymbal, crash cymbal, and hi hats. That’s what I used throughout the whole Creedence experience. Now I’ve gotten really fancy. I’ve added a mid tom and another crash cymbal.

VDM: Did you ever play to a click track?

Doug: I never used a click track. I move the beat around a little sometimes, but that’s the emotion of it. I’m a human being, not a computer.

And I really believe in that philosophy.

VDM: Do you still have the Ludwig kit that was used in the early CCR days?

Doug: No, but I still have my Camco sets. They are in storage and will be refinished. One set will go into Paul Allen’s museum called Experience Music Project, located in Seattle, WA.



photo courtesy of Laurie Clifford

VDM: *Do you have any endorsements with any drum companies?*

Doug: I endorse Paiste Cymbals. When I switched to Camco drums in 1969, I also switched to the Paiste Formula 602's. Back then I had one crash and a ride cymbal, and 18" hi hats. I still use 18" hi hats. The smaller sizes just didn't cut through the amplification back then. My drumsticks of choice are made by Vic Firth, the Doug Clifford signature model, size 2B with plastic tips. I am using Evans heads. Evans has really come a long way.

VDM: *Tell us about Creedence Clearwater Revisited.*

Doug: Stu and I formed Creedence Clearwater Revisited in 1995. He was living in L.A. and I was living in the Lake Tahoe area in Nevada. We decided to put a new band together and Stu moved to Nevada.

We found Elliot Easton from the band, "The Cars". Elliot plays lead guitar. Regarding his work with Revisited, Easton says, "my deep, spiritual love for folk, blues, soul, ex-cello swamp-rock, rockabilly, San Francisco psychedelia, and Bakersfield chicken-pickin' country, places me in a unique position to not merely parrot the original versions, but perhaps add something of my own. Next, we found Steve Gunner who plays keyboards, acoustic guitar, harmonica, percussion, and sings. Steve has been on the Los Angeles music scene since 1982, having spent 4 years before that living and playing in the Deep South and another 4 years before living and playing in the San Francisco Bay area. We now needed a lead vocalist. A friend of Stu said "I've got the guy for you". His name is John Tristao. We rented a small rehearsal studio and auditioned four guys. When we got to Johnny, we knew we had found our singer. John is also a talented drummer, guitar player, singer, and actor.

We have not changed anyone in the band since we started. We're a band, that's the way we want it, and that's why it works. We have 5 members in the band and 5 crew members. Lighting director, stage monitor mixer, out front mixer, stage technician, and road manager. When we do our bus tours, we travel with our crew. We don't have that hierarchy. We're all a family.

VDM: *How do you keep the songs fresh to yourself and the audience?*

Doug: They are great songs. We hadn't played them for 25 years. The songs are fun to play. Each night and each venue is different and the audiences react differently. There are also things you can do with the tempo within the framework of the song to change things around a bit. Elliot improvises and helps us to play off of what he creates. He always comes up with something lively that adds a real spark to songs like "I Heard It Through the Grapevine", "Susie Q", "Run Through the Jungle", and some of the other songs that we have stretched out. I just love playing the music.



VDM: *Has Creedence Clearwater Revisited done any recordings?*

Doug: We recorded "Recollection" in 1997. It's a recording of one of our live shows. There are no overdubs. What you hear is the band the way that it really is. The double CD is on Fuel 2000 record label.

VDM: *Do any drummers of today have an influence on you?*

Doug: There are a lot of great young players out there, but I have found my style.

VDM: *What do you tell young drummers about playing drums?*

Doug: Be musical. Don't be a drum machine or a metronome. Find the beat; there are times when you should be right before, times when you're on the beat, and there are times when you should be ahead. Al Jackson told that to me. I used to try and be a metronome, but it doesn't work.

VDM: *Tell us about your family and what your children think about the music that you were a part of.*

Doug: I've been married to my high school sweetheart, Laurie, for 34 years. We have three children, Brent, Grady, and Jaime. Brent, age 33, plays drums, guitar, keyboards, sings and writes songs. He is very talented and plays in a jazz and rock band. Grady, age 30, plays the sitar and is a computer whiz. Our daughter, Jaime, age 26, plays four instruments, guitar, piano, flute, and harmonica. They all are artists, as well as Laurie. Laurie designed the debut CCR album cover.

As far as my kids go, they are proud of what I've done in my career. Moreso now than they did when they were little. Back then I was just Dad, and that's exactly how I wanted it. Now that they are adults, they see accomplishment and they appreciate it!

Doug Clifford on Record

Creedence Clearwater Revival

Creedence Clearwater Revival
Bayou Country
Willy and the Poor Boys
Green River
Cosmo's Factory
Pendulum
Creedence Gold
Mardi Gras
More Creedence Gold
Live in Europe

Russell Dashiell

Elevator (1978)

Tom Fogerty

Zephyr National (1974)
Myopia (1975)

Don Harrison Band

Red Hot (1976)
Don Harrison Band (1976)
Not Far from Free (1977)

The Sir Douglas Quintet

Day Dreaming at Midnight (1994)

The Smithereens

Downbound Train (1998)

Creedence Clearwater Revisited

Recollection

Doug Sahn & the Sir. Douglas Quintet

Groover's Paradise (1974)

A short biography

Doug Clifford was born in Palo Alto, California on April 24, 1945. He now lives in Reno, Nevada with his family.

Doug graduated El Cerrito High School in 1963. He dropped out of San Jose State in his Junior year for Rock and Roll.

The Blue Velvets played at their high school reunion.

Special thanks to Linda Kalin at Fantasy Records for being so kind and supplying some of the photos to help make this article possible.



Early photo of
The Blue
Velvets
featuring
John Fogerty,
Doug Clifford,
Tom Fogerty,
and Stu Cook.

Photo courtesy of Alec Palao