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# Relix

music for the mind



## Year-End Issue

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## POCO 1989

### Jim Messina

by Mick Skidmore

**I**f ever there was a group whose music simply made you feel good, it was that of pioneering country/rockers Poco.

Originally, the band was formed from the remnants of the Buffalo Springfield in 1968 by Jim Messina and Richie Furay along with session steel guitarist Rusty Young (he'd played on "Kind Woman" on the last Springfield album.)

Young brought in two friends of his from Colorado, drummer George Grantham and bassist Randy Meisner, to complete the group. This line-up only lasted until midway through the recording of the first album, *Pickin' Up The Pieces*, although, like all other Poco line-ups, they created some magical sounds, especially live. Poco did, with many comings and goings of personnel, record some 18 albums, Rusty Young remaining the constant factor throughout. Commercial success eluded them for most of their career. It wasn't until their 14th album, *Legend*, in 1979 that they hit big with the singles "Crazy Love" and "Heart Of The Night."

Nevertheless, they certainly were influential, paving the way for groups like Loggins and Messina (formed by the departing Messina in 1971) and the Eagles, a band that featured both original Poco bassist Meisner and, upon his departure in 1977, his replacement in Poco, Tim Schmit. Even Steely Dan acknowledge some influences from Poco.

Now, over two decades after they first meshed sweet harmonies with country rock, and four years since the last incarnation of the

band called it quits, they are back with a hot new album, *Legacy*, and the original lineup.

The album, released at the end of August on RCA, is a fine effort. Richie Furay's opening bouncy autobiographical song, "When It All Began," is an absolute classic and sums up the band's sound perfectly.

In fact, the album captures many sides of Poco's music and comes over like a balanced crossing of Poco old and new, with hints of the Eagles and Loggins and Messina, as well as a few new twists.

"Call It Love," a powerfully infectious number with great harmonies, is another standout. Messina's wistful "Follow Your Dreams" and the rocking "Lovin' You Every Minute" are also excellent, as is Young's delightful "What Do People Know." But aside from the mundane rocker "The Nature Of The Beast," which sounds like a bad Eagles outtake, the album doesn't have a bad cut. Even pop/rocker Richard Marx's contribution "Nothin' To Hide" is superb. It's sung by Meisner and has a similar feel to his classic "Take It To The Limit."

If you are feeling down or just want to feel good, give this album a spin. Poco always was a fun band that tried to make people happy, and they've proved they can still do it.

Founding member Jimmy Messina talks about the Poco reunion.

**Relix:** Why don't you just start by telling us how the reunion came about?

**Messina:** How it came about was that Rusty and I had been talking over the years and we'd always wondered how it would be if we could do this thing. I have always enjoyed working with Rusty. He is a great musician and I told him that if we got the original band back together I'd be interested.

So we did, by communicating it. About a year ago, we got together in my studio in Santa Barbara, and sat down and talked about what our interests were and what we wanted to do. Richie has become a pastor, and one of the points we wanted to be real clear about was that we were making rock 'n' roll that we weren't going to use this for any one of us to stand up and deliver our religious or political beliefs. The understanding was that we'd do rock 'n' roll music, and we agreed to this. At that point, we really started writing our songs and submitting them. What we decided we'd do was have a record producer other than Jimmy Messina, which was fine by me because I wanted, for once in my life, to make a record where I was the artist and not have the responsibility of the things that go along with trying to please everybody.

**Relix:** Who did you actually get?

**Messina:** We chose a man named David Cole, who happened to be affiliated with Allen Kovac of Left Bank who had produced Richard Marx. It turned out that Richard Marx had had a relationship with Randy Meisner by which Randy had brought him Joe Walsh and Tim Schmit and a few other people to help Richard Marx on his album. So when it came time for us to submit these songs, I submitted about 12-14, Rusty had eight, Richie had four, and we had outside writers, plus Richard Marx who had submitted a song. They chose the material that they thought would make the best and most rounded-out album. We were subsequently notified as to which songs would be recorded and we took them and went into a rehearsal period and made it work for us. What ended up happening was Rusty had three songs, I had three, Richie had a couple and we used three outside songs including Richard Marx's song.

When we went into recording, Richard Marx produced his own song. From the beginning he'd wanted to make a production contribution to the album, but we thought it would be impossible for Richard to do the whole album. We are fairly seasoned fellows and have produced, and what we really wanted was someone who had total experience as a producer, as an engineer, someone who had a relationship with a lot of the musicians around town, and someone who was mature enough to work with any problems that could arise, and I think David Cole is really the best choice. He got a good sound. He did good mixes, and he has a sense for FM pop and contemporary radio.

**Relix:** How was it working with the guys after all these years apart? Especially since most of you have gone off and had success in your own bands, it's almost like five group leaders together.

**Messina:** The interesting thing is when you are in a situation like that it kind of makes you equal, doesn't it? We have all had our series of successes, and I don't think anyone was there to say "Hey, I've had more successes than you, so screw off." None of that really happened. It was really a mutual respect and consideration for each person and their songs. There was a lot of mutual support. The fact that Richie used to write most of the songs and was really a

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self-appointed leader in those days was real different now. He only wrote two songs.

From the beginning we had said [to Richie Furay], "We want you to be a part of this, but we don't want it to interfere with your particular life or your profession at this time" We let him come in and work on the things that were his and things that really needed his performance, and Randy, Rusty and myself did the rest of the record, pretty much. We did the background parts and the vocals, and as I said, it's real different because our relationships are real different.

**Relix:** Is there any chance that you will take the band on the road?

**Messina:** We are working towards that. We have to see what the success is going to be and see what the demand is going to be. We also have to take into consideration what Furay's availability is going to be, so we know what we can rely on and how many dates we can do.

Once we get those things sorted out we can see. In light of that we might even consider asking Paul [Cotton] or Timmy [Schmit] to come out and do some songs with us. That way we could do Loggins & Messina stuff, we could do Eagles stuff, we could do some Poco stuff from then, from now and it would give us an array of possibilities. We could even do Buffalo Springfield material to really give our audience a good show.

**Relix:** Over the years, Rusty has seemed to get away from playing pedal steel and switching more to slide and straight guitar. On the album, are you playing most of the lead, or is it shared?

**Messina:** On the album I think I am playing the lead guitar pretty much except for the slide,

which Rusty does. I'm doing most of the acoustic lead. Rusty plays mostly second or rhythm guitar parts and banjo. I do acoustic guitar, electric guitar, mandolin and various other colors that use the Strats and Gretschs.

**Relix:** A few years back, when I interviewed Rusty he said that Poco's lack of success was because they were always too country for the rock market and too rock for the country market. In *Legacy* you seemed to aim more directly at a rock audience. Was that a conscious attempt?

**Messina:** It was more of a deliberate attempt. We don't consider ourselves a country band. We are a rock 'n' roll band. We always were. We just have always had certain rural influences. It's how we grew up. What we like and our lifestyles. I like animals around me and pets. I'd rather live on a farm than in a city. Things like that. Our lifestyles are such that it lends to that connotation. I grew up listening to country and western music, Chet Atkins, The Ventures, Scotty Moore, James Burton. So, my influences are obviously going to have some rockabilly influences. Rusty grew up playing steel guitar, but just because you play a mandolin, it doesn't mean you're necessarily a bluegrass player, or because you play violin that you are a fiddler. But if you've grown up with all these influences they just become a combination of who you are.

**Relix:** Is this going to be a long-term reunion or a one-off project?

**Messina:** We are looking at it. Our agreement is that we'd do one album and a tour. If it is received overwhelmingly by the masses that will certainly dictate what we do next. I have my

career that I am concerned about, and want to devote time to that. Poco for me is a reunion album with friends and people I worked with a number of years ago. It's been very exciting to do it, but I don't look at it as a way of life for me. It's an extension of my creativity, and if it can be I'd love to do some things with Randy and Rusty on their own, maybe they'd work with me on some of my stuff. I'm in the process of recording a solo album for my label, Warners.

**Relix:** How do you feel now looking back at the three albums you did with Poco?

**Messina:** I'm very proud of all of them.

**Relix:** Most of Poco's albums stand the test of time remarkably well.

**Messina:** If I could technically criticize, I wasn't technically happy with the first record. Materially there were some very good songs on it. I love the second Poco album. I think Alex Kazangas did an excellent job on the mixing. Some very high quality stuff was recorded. The third album, *Deliverin'*, I really haven't heard in a long time. I'd really like to hear that.

**Relix:** Actually, *Deliverin'* would be a great album to remix and bring out on CD. It captures the early Poco at what a lot of people consider their best.

**Messina:** It might be a good idea. I have really seriously been thinking of going back and seeing if we could remix that stuff and make it sound better.

**Relix:** I hope the reunion's a success and that we get to see this current incarnation of Poco on the road, especially if you bring Tim Schmit and Paul Cotton along.

**Messina:** I think if your readership appreciates it, it will make a difference. ■