SOLO

URING THE FRANTIC throes of the late '60s, this city devoured more musicians than it rewarded. The situation hasn't changed much since.

But back in 1967, when the Buffalo Springfield was just beginning to latch onto a bit of success while burning up the Whisky stage, across town a band aptly called The Poor was barely surviving.

A one-bedroom apartment served as home for the five members who, collectively, were earning barely enough numerous live shows and the first five Eagles albums. And now that Meisner's burgeoning solo career is taking an upward swing with the release of *One More Song* (his second solo LP, but first for Epic), it's clear that this scenic musical sojourn is far from over.

As a late October evening begins, inside LA's Le Seur restaurant on a surprisingly busy Monday. Randy Meisner is seated and enjoying a glass of wine while light from a table candle illuminates his boyish face and clear blue eyes. He smiles and reflects, "It feels

THE

FRANTIC

numerous live shows and the first five

to pay the rent. Whether staring at the apartment walls, singing tunes on bar stages, or standing on street corners selling copies of the *LA Free Press*, the band's bass player, Randy Meisner, could not have conceived of what lay ahead. In the years that followed, Meisner went on to become a part of the initial Poco grouping, was largely responsible for the creation of Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band (which, as it happens, was made up mostly of former members of The Poor), was a founding member of The Eagles, and contributed his unmistakable highranging vocals and loping bass lines to By Dave Zimmer Photos by Henry Diltz

like my career, my solo career, is starting anew. One More Song reminds me of the first Eagles album, when there was all of this fresh spirit and everything was just beginning.

Even though the parallel seems appropriate from an energy standpoint and because Meisner's new album has frequent flashes of Eagles high flying sound, never before has Randy sung so many lead vocals with such sensitivity, strength and variance of tone. And never before has Meisner written this much material on one album. Collaborating with Eric "Love Has No Pride" Kaz and Wendy Waldman, Randy had a hand in the composing of six of the album's nine songs.

Throughout Meisner's five years

with The Eagles, one or two of his songs would appear per album, and he felt good about his role as backup vocalist and bassist. But by 1977, Meisner reached a point where he realized it was time for a change.

"I'd been singing mostly background my whole life," he explains. "And I figured I was missing something by not singing out more. Listening to Don [Henley] and Glenn [Frey], I knew I could do just as well or better. That's the point when I started thinking about quitting The Eagles. I was 31—a time in your life when you want to make a decision if you want to really go for something. I wasn't going to wait until I was 40."

So Meisner left The Eagles following the band's summer '77 tour and, urged on by musician friend turned producer Alan Brackett, he immediately plunged into a solo project. Bichie Constanza

the band's summer '77 tour and, urged on by musician friend turned producer Alan Brackett. he immediately plunged into a solo project. Richie Constanza also helped out with some initial recording in Brackett's small studio, where. Randy recalls, 'I sang some songs and they got a nice sound out of my voice.' But Meisner had little idea of what direction to take and quickly discovered that "on your own, there's no one covering for you. If it works, it's wonderful. If it doesn't, you can't cry on someone else's shoulder.

Randy Meisner, released on Asylum in '78, had some high points, including a cover of "Cowboy.' Scott Boyer's "Please Be With Me," and a reworking of "Take It to the Limit." But the bulk of the album, made up of material written by Alan Brackett and Seattle songwriter Bill Lamb, didn't hang together as a cohesive whole.

"It was just scatter gun," Randy admits, "We tried to cover all areas and didn't have much of a concept. I'd never been responsible for an album's worth of songs before, and had never sung so many leads; so I really wasn't sure what was going to be involved. I learned."

Meisner also put together a live band

sung so many leads; so I really wasn't sure what was going to be involved. I learned."

Meisner also put together a live band for a short tour of clubs (and opening spots on a couple of shows), and, again, this was a brand new experience.

"It proved something to me," he says. "I was able to get up onstage with an acoustic guitar, sing without a bass in my hand, and hang in with the band. So this was another learning process."

After this mini-tour, Meisner severed cise with manager Irving Azoff (who Meisner says still had ideas of getting Randy back into The Eagles): left Asylum (which Meisner felt had put little effort behind his solo album); tried, unsuccessfully, to manage himself for a while: then headed back to his hometown. Scottsbluff. Nebraska.

"At that point, I wasn't sure if I was going to do another solo album," Randy says. "I just wanted to get away and be with my family. I thought I might retire." Randy pauses and smiles. "I collect antique cars and thought I'd tinker with them, ride my Harley and just have a good time for a while.

"But most of my friends had jobs during the day," he continues. "There was no one there to chum around with. So after about six or seven months, I was going nuts."

Around this time, Meisner received a girle and shope self from Stays. Edwards a girle.

after about six or seven months, I was going nuts."

Around this time, Meisner received a phone call from Steve Edwards, a guitarist who had played on Randy Meisner. "He wanted to get together and start writing." Randy recalls. "But I wasn't ready to go back to LA. Tel just bought a little house in Nebraska, so Steve moved out here and we ended up writing about 26 songs. They were real R&B-oriented, because we both liked that style, but the songs just weren't me."

Meanwhile, back in LA, Meisner's accountant and lawyer were checking out record company interest in Meisner and began nagging Randy to return to LA and record another album. Eventually, Meisner did return and secure a record deal with Portrait Records. When word got out that Randy Meisner was back in town, recording engineer Val Garay came calling. Ga-ray had known Randy since the Poco days, and had since worked with Peter Asher in the studio recording James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt. He talked

NOVEMBER 7, 1980/BAM

days, and had since worked with reterd to Randy about producing his next album and Meisner was all for it.

"Val had been wanting to produce me for a while," Randy says. "So, he had a lot of ideas about how I should approach the album and the musicians I should work with." Garay's first suggestion was that Meisner team up with songwriter Eric Kaz.

"When Val introduced me to him," Randy says, "I was frightened to death. Steve [Edwards] was the only other person I'd written closely with. Doing that first helped me break down a few barriers. But Eric's such a pro, he made me feel comfortable right away and let me just express my thoughts.
"Eric ended up working a lot on the music, because I don't play guitar very well and can't read or write music. But I'd hum a melody to Eric, spit out ideas, and he'd condense it down."

Driving, emotional songs like "Hearts On Fire" and "Deep Inside My Heart" (featuring a background vocal by Kim Carnes) resulted, and then, when Garay called in songwriter/vocalist Wendy Waldman, she added her ideas and voice to several compositions, the best of which, "Trouble Ahead," moves at an engaging pace with a haunting melody and stinging lyrics." "By writing these songs with Eric and Wendy," Meisner says, "I was able to put a lot of real feeling into the compositions, as opposed to just collecting songs, It's really hard, as I found out, to collect songs by at he proposed to gust collecting songs, It's really hard, as I found out, to

positions, as opposed to just collecting songs. It's really hard, as I found out, to collect songs by other people and end up with a good album."

Meisner did, however, include some outside material on *One More Song*, namely Richie Furay's "Anyway Bye Bye" (which Randy relearned from a tape of himself singing the song with Poco at the Troubadour in '69), and a couple of Jack Tempchin songs, "White Shoes" and the title track. Jackson Browne, recording in the room next to Meisner at Record One, suggested Randy record "One More Song." The composition's lyrics paint a

touching portrait of a player's last night with his band, The Silverados (the name Randy has since given to his solo band). "Jackson thought the song was right for me, so we sat down at the piano, made a demo of it and added one lyric. Instead of 'packin' away my guitar,' I sang 'packin' away my bass guitar.' "For the actual recording of the song, former Fagles; mates Clenn Frey and

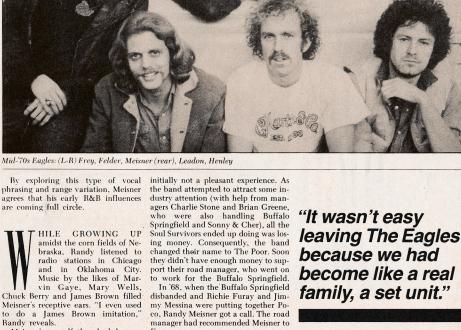
former Eagles mates Clenn Frey and Don Henley sang background vocals. Meisner had just added some vocal tracks to "Take It to the Limit," the version recorded initially at the Forum version recorded initially at the Forum and set to appear, along with other vintage Eagles live material, on the band's upcoming in-concert album. These sessions (which Val Garay helped bring about) were the first time that Randy, Glenn and Don had sung together in almost three years.

"It was a good feeling," Randy says. "We hadn't talked to each other in a couple of years. Little grudges lingered. But we've patched things up. It was great singing together again; Hen-

ley and I in particular really got off."
Throughout One More Song, Meisner's vocal performance dips into pure Eagles and reveals a richer, lower range as well. "I tried to work past any preconceived limitations I'd previously set for myself." Randy says. "On the first solo album, I hadn't had a lot of experience as a lead singer, so I played it real safe. On One More Song, I discovered I could sing quite a bit lower and still go up to my real high voice that, I guess, has become my trademark."

high voice . . . like mine," Meisner remembers. "The band had seen me play and I guess that was enough. They asked me to join."

Randy saw this as a chance to leave behind the rather staid Nebraska musical environment, and no sooner had Meisner joined the Soul Survivors than the group headed for Los Angeles. "For musicians growing up in the Midwest." Meisner says, "California was the only place you dreamed about being." But the realization of this dream was



Chuck Berry and James Brown filled Meisner's receptive ears. "I even used to do a James Brown imitation,"

Randy reveals. Meisner's grandfather had been a Russian classical violinist and, Randy remembers, "my mother was always singing around the house. I think the

singing around the house. I think the first song I ever learned was 'Honey-comb' by Jimmy Dean.' With the advent of Elvis Presley and Conway Twitty. Meisner picked up the guitar and, he says, "I learned a lot of their songs because they all had only three chords.' At the urging of his high school guitar teacher, Randy switched to has: to bass.
"It just felt natural," Meisner says.
"The bass was something I felt secure
with and I was able to get a lot of feeling out of it."
The Thunderbirds and The Dynam-

The Thunderbirds and The Dynamics were the bands Randy joined as a teenager. "We played whatever people wanted to hear," he recalls. "We went through a Beatles phase, did some Ventures, some soul and R&B stuff." The Dynamics eventually made a trip out of Nebraska to Denver for a talent contest, where a Denver-based band called the Soul Survivors spotted Meisner. "The Soul Survivors had just lost their bass player, and he had a real

band he was forming. Meisner new band he was forming. Meisner took the job and also recommended that Nelson recruit what was left of The Poor. Along with steel guitarist Tom Brumley, this combination became known as the Stone Canyon Band. Randy stayed with Rick Nelson & the Stone Canyon Band for two albums, a tour of Army bases in Europe, and selected club gigs in California. "Bick's a very sincere person, but. "Rick's a very sincere person, but, when I was with him, he was trying to write for the media, it seemed, instead of just doing his own thing," Randy

manager had recommended Meisner to "When I arrived at their house for an audition," Randy recalls, "Tim Schmit was playing. So, I auditioned right after him. A couple of days later, they called me back and said, "We want you." Meisner was in Poco for about a

year, during which he played numer-ous live shows (the most memorable were at the Troubadour) and was a part of Poco's first LP, Pickin' Up the Pieces.

Boylan, with plans now to build this "supergroup," contacted guitarist Bernie Leadon, who had recently part-ed ways with the Flying Burrito Broth-

ed ways with the Flying Burrito Broth-ers. Once a line-up was set, David Gef-fen stepped in, financing the band and inking a record deal with the freshly formed Asylum label. But before doing any recording or live shows in LA, the newly named "Eagles" took off for As-pen, Colorado, to hone their music, temporarily playing as house band at a club in the record town. Clyn Chys. an

club in the resort town. Glvn Johns, an

club in the resort town. Glyn Johns, an English producer chosen to mastermind the recording of The Eagles' maiden album, was initially not impressed with what he heard. "We were a little hard for him," Meisner recalls. "Too much rock and roll." But Eagles, recorded at London's Olympic Studios in 1972, displayed a balanced blend of rock, folk and country. And when the album hit the air-

try. And when the album hit the airwaves and record stores that summer, led by the Glenn Frey-Jackson Browne collaboration "Take It Easy," it flew up

of Poco's first LP, Pickin' Up the Pieces.

"There were some real good times during that year," Meisner says. "And I saw the potential there, but we could never get heard by the right people." What made Meisner's stay in Poco a short one was a direct result of an "ultimatum" he gave, principally to Messina and Furay. "I told them I wanted to be in the studio when they were mixing," Randy says. "I said, 'If I'm in the group, I feel I should be able to come down there.' They said 'No'; that's when I quit."

But Meisner wasn't unemployed long, Rick Nelson, who had seen Randy playing bass with Poco at the Troubadour, wanted him to play bass in the

Easy Feeling' and the like; we gave them that and a lot more."

This more concerted turn into rock and roll was not a direction country-oriented Bernie Leadon was interested in pursuing. When Leadon left The Eagles in 1976, Joe Walsh filled the vacancy. Besides his obvious hard-edged instrumental and vocal contributions to The Eagles, Meisner says, "Joe was the only guy I could get crazy with anymore. By then, Glenn had settled down a lot and he and Don were getting real serious about everything. Walsh came in and we started doing the duck-walk across the stage. Henley was on pins and needles, thinking we were going to trip over the cords or blow it.

"Whether I was playing in front of

NOVEMBER 7, 1980/BAM 27

blow it.
"Whether I was playing in front of 60,000 or 7 people, it made no difference to me. [Most Eagles concerts at this juncture were in huge arenas or baseball stadiums.] They're all just people. If you blow it, they understand, If you do well, they understand, too." Playing to the greatest numbers for Playing to the greatest numbers for the most dollars is obviously not a motivating factor behind Randy Meisner's music. Otherwise, he never would have left The Eagles. But a year after the release of Hotel California and following a summer '77 tour. Meisner left; Tim Schmit, who eight years earlier had taken over for Meisner in Poco, became The Eagles' new bass player and high harmony singer.

"It wasn't easy leaving The Eagles," Randy admits, "because we had become like a real family, a set unit. But for me to have stayed any longer would have been going against a feeling I had

for me to have stayed any longer would have been going against a feeling I had to go with."

What does Meisner think of The Eagles current music?

"I can't hear my high end," he says with a smile, "but it's coming together. When you lose a bass player you've been playing with for years, it's hard to immediately establish a tight connection with someone new. It's a matter of learning when Don is going to kick down on the bass drum, and when to fill in. But Tim's a great bass player and has a really strong voice. I'm looking forward to hearing their next album."

How about Randy Meisner's next venture?
"When I finished One More Song

How about Randy Meisner's next venture?

"When I finished One More Song last August, I was all set to start another album right away," he says. "I was buzzing so much from working on these new songs. But after going to Palm Springs for a week, I wound down and realized I needed a break. Now I'm getting set to go on the road in a couple of months, with The Silverados [Don Francesco, percussion and vocals: Bryam Garafalo, bass; Craig Hull, guitars and pedal steel; Craig Krampf, drums; Sterling Smith, keyboards; and, possibly, Wendy Waldman on guitar and vocals, and Eric Kaz on keyboards]. The Silverados really is a band. We're all helping each other. And the music that is evolving feels so natural to me.

"I've learned that if I try to do something that is really hard, where there is a lot of resistance, it usually doesn't work out, But when I let things flow, it's like I have no control over what happens. I'm a believer in predestiny. I was given a voice, gifted with parents who brought it out of me, and I have no idea what makes certain things happen. When I went back to

says of his tenure with the band. After briefly returning to Nebraska in 1971, Meisner went back to the Stone Canyon Band and began work-

Stone Canyon Band and began working with bassist guitarist Steve Love (a recent addition to that group who eventually also played with Roger McGuinn and the New Riders). Randy was beginning to think about moving on to another situation, but he wasn't sure where or with whom.

That's when John Boylan entered the picture. He was producing both Rick Nelson and Linda Ronstadt, and one day in 1970. Ronstadt's bass player mysteriously fell ill. Meisner was asked to sit in at a show at Chuck's Cellar in Los Altos. "I still don't know if that was planned or not," Meisner says. like one that had already been written. I'd sing the other lyrics that would fit the melody exactly. Sometimes they listened, sometimes they didn't."

As the sessions for On the Border began. Bandy recalls. "We needed a different style of guitar, some harder rock lead. We wanted someone who could really go up and down the neek." So Don Felder, who had previously played with David Blue and Crosby & Nash, became the fifth Eagle. Felder's blistering lead work, paired up with Meisner's rumbling bass lines, Leadon's country-tinged picking. Frey's aggres-

Los Altos. "I still don't know if that was planned or not," Meisner says.
Regardless, this gig brought Randy together with Ronstadt's guitarist, Clenn Frey, and her drummer, Don Henley. Frey, according to Meisner, remembered hitching a ride on Sunset Boulevard from Randy during the Poco days. Meisner still doesn't remember the incident, but he'll never forget this gig.

led by the Clenn Frey-Jackson Browne collaboration "Take It Easy," it flew up the charts.

Frey and Henley handled most of the writing, and, Meisner remembers, "Clenn and Don were and still are a team—and a good team. But it was hard to get inside that team. I wasn't experienced enough with writing songs at that point. Don and Glenn, living with Jackson [Browne] and J.D. [Souther] for a while, had quite a head start."

Even before The Eagles were formed, this songwriting team had conceived a rock and roll outlaw concept album, depicting rockers as modern-day "desperados." In 1973, this concept became a reality on vinyl. "I went to visit my family in Nebraska during that period," Randy says. "When I came back, the Desperado album was all planned out. I'd try to work in a song about something and hear, Well, this one we've got already kind of covers that. Certain Kind of Fool was written in England while we were recording. We stayed up all night and burned it out, and that was my song on the album."

EISNER FEELS HE ALSO served as a critic, a devil's advocate while in The Eagles. "I was very conscious of 'songs sounding too much like some-body else's," Randy says. "If I'd hear a song someone in the group wrote that sounded too much like one that had already been written, I'd sing the other lyrics that would fit

Meisner's rumbling bass lines, Leadon's country-tinged picking, Frey's aggressive riffing and Henley's drum hammering, opened up a fiercer, more powerful brand of rock and roll.

The next album, One of These Nights (released in 75), included a Meisner-Felder original, the churning "Too Many Hands," and the soaring Meisner-Henley-Frey song, "Take It To the Limit."

the incident, but he'll never forget this gig.

"Ronstadt hated my bass playing," Randy recalls. "She gave me some looks that could kill. It may not have worked out with her, but it sure got The Eagles had been presented up to that point, a lot of listeners came to expect mostly material like "Peaceful".

"This was the first time we really stepped out," Meisner says. "The way to have no idea what makes certain things happen. When I went back to Nebraska the last time, I realized I had to be here. My music is what I do. This is where I should be."

doesn't you can't cry on someone else's shoulder."

"On your own, there's no one covering for you. If it works it's wonderful. If it

28 NOVEMBER 7, 1980/BAM