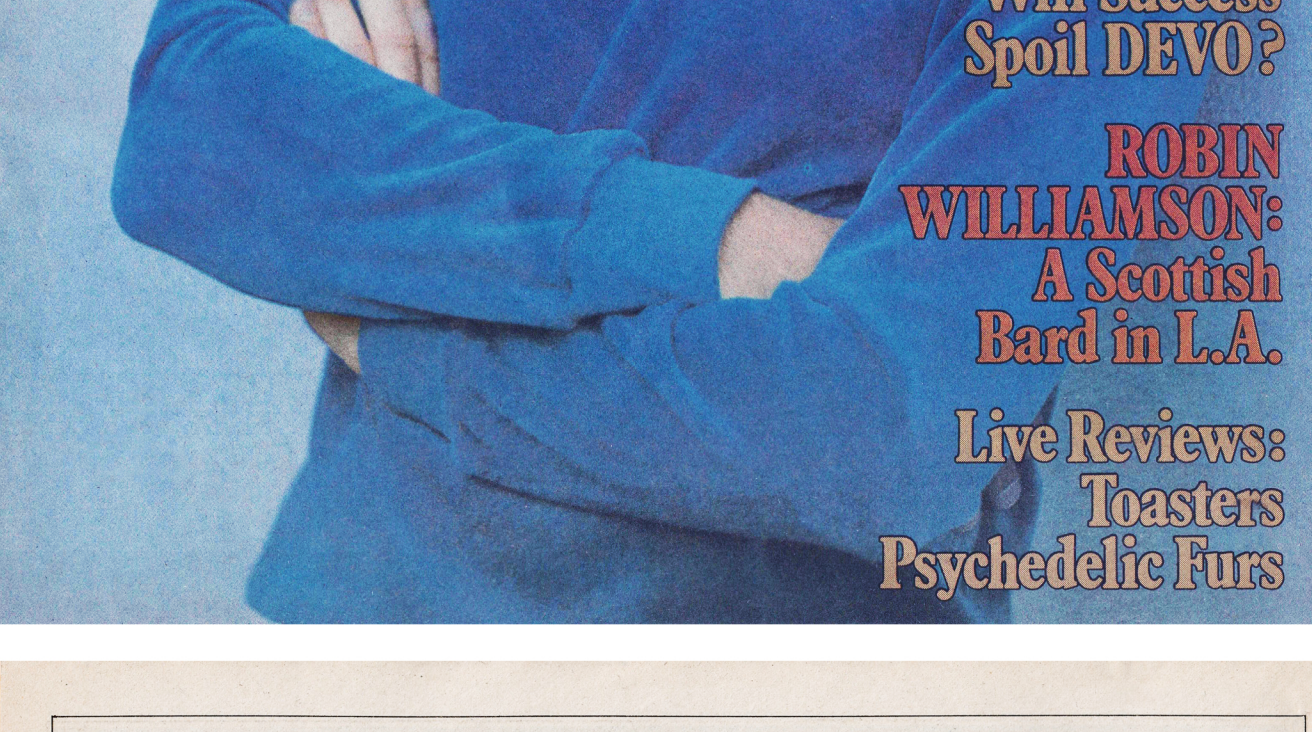


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# Ex-Eagle RANDY MEISNER FLIES HIGH SOLO

By Dave Zimmer  
Photos by Henry Diltz

**D**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 apply 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 Seul 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, "I feel

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. 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 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 ties 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 chat around with. 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. "I wasn't ready to go back to LA. I'd just bought a little house in Nebraska, so Steve moved out here and we ended up writing about 26 songs. They were real B&B-oriented, because we both weren't that style, but the songs just weren't me."



to pay the rent. Whether staring at the apartment walls, singing tunes on bar staves, 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 high-ranging vocals and loping bass lines to

like my career. *My solo career*, is starting anew. *One More Song* reminds me of the first of these albums, 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

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. Garay 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 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." Meisner'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 read 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 other people and end up with a good album."

Meisner did, however, include some outside material on *One More Song*, namely Richie Furay's "Anyways 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.

Rick Nelson, recording in the room next to Meisner at "One More Song," 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 Eagles mates Glenn 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 and set to appear, along with other vintage Eagles live material, on the band's upcoming instrumental 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."

Meisner's grandfather had been a Russian classical violinist and, Randy remembers, "my mother was always singing around the house. I think the first song I ever learned was 'Honeycomb' 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 bass."

"It just felt natural," Meisner says. "The bass was something I felt secure with and I was able to get a lot of feelings out of it."

The Thunderbirds and The Dynamics were the bands Randy joined as a teenager. "We played wherever 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

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



Mid-'70s Eagles: (L-R) Frey, Felder, Meisner (rear), Leadon, Henley

By exploring this type of vocal phrasing and range variation, Meisner agrees that his early R&B influences are coming full circle.

**W**HILE GROWING UP amidst the corn fields of Nebraska, Randy listened to radio stations in Chicago and in Oklahoma City. Music by the likes of Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells, Chuck Berry and James Brown filled Meisner's receptive ears. "I even used to do a James Brown imitation," Randy recalls.

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initially not a pleasant experience. As the band attempted to attract some industry attention (with help from managers Charlie Stone and Brian Greene, who were also handling Buffalo Springfield and Sonny & Cher), all the Soul Survivors ended up doing was losing money. Consequently, the band changed their name to The Poor. Soon they didn't have enough money to support their road manager, who went on to work for the Buffalo Springfield.

In '68, when the Buffalo Springfield disbanded and Richie Furay and Jimmy Messina were putting together Poco, Randy Meisner got a call. The road manager had recommended Meisner to Furay.

"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 numerous live shows (the most memorable were at the Troubadour) and was a part 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 ahead by the right people."

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

## "It wasn't easy leaving The Eagles because we had become like a real family, a set unit."

band. "I was very conscious of songs sounding too much like somebody 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 the melody exactly. Sometimes they listened, sometimes they didn't."

As the sessions for *Oh, He Brought the Rain* were in progress, Meisner was impressed with what he heard. "We were a little hard for him," Meisner recalls. "Too much rock and roll."

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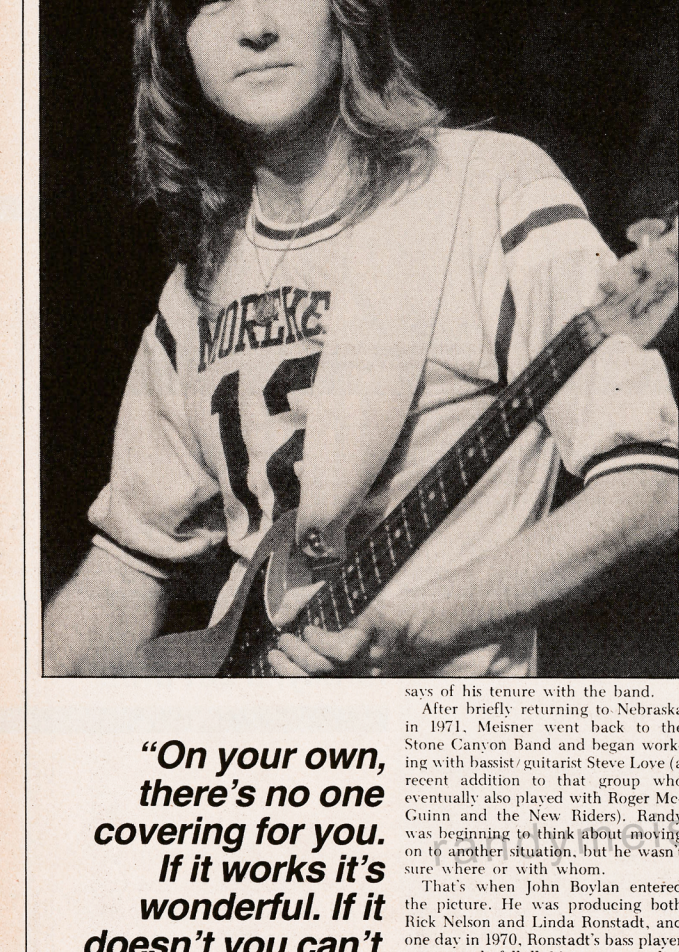
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new band he was forming, Meisner took the job and also recommended that Nelson recruit what was left of The Poor. Along with steel guitarist Tom Brunley, this combination became known as the Stone Canyon Band. Randy stayed with Rick Nelson & the Stone Canyon Band for two albums, a tour of Army bases in Europe, and selected club gigs in California. "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

together. Boylan, with plans now to build this "supergroup," contacted guitarist Bernie Leadon, who had recently parted ways with the Flying Burrito Brothers once a line-up was set, David Geffen 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 Aspen, Colorado, to hone their music, temporarily playing as house band at a club in the resort town. Glyn Johns, an English producer chosen to master the recording in England while we were in the States, was initially not impressed with what he heard. "We were a little hard for him," Meisner recalls. "Too much rock and roll."

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