



Fishing With The Eagles For the Universal Trout

by Steve Rosen

Things are so mellow on Jim Guercio's Caribou Ranch, those 3,200 acres of secluded headland lying right outside Denver, that even the birds seem to be humming "Rocky Mountain High." Lakes splashed about the vast acreage, trees dotting the rolling hills, all relax in a brief but sensational summer storm which sends rain drops hurling in the 80-degree weather. Don Felder, the newest member of the Eagles, looks out at the downfall from under the lodge overhang, his reflective sunglasses no longer necessary and his cup of hot coffee now a welcome tonic. Felder seems comfort-

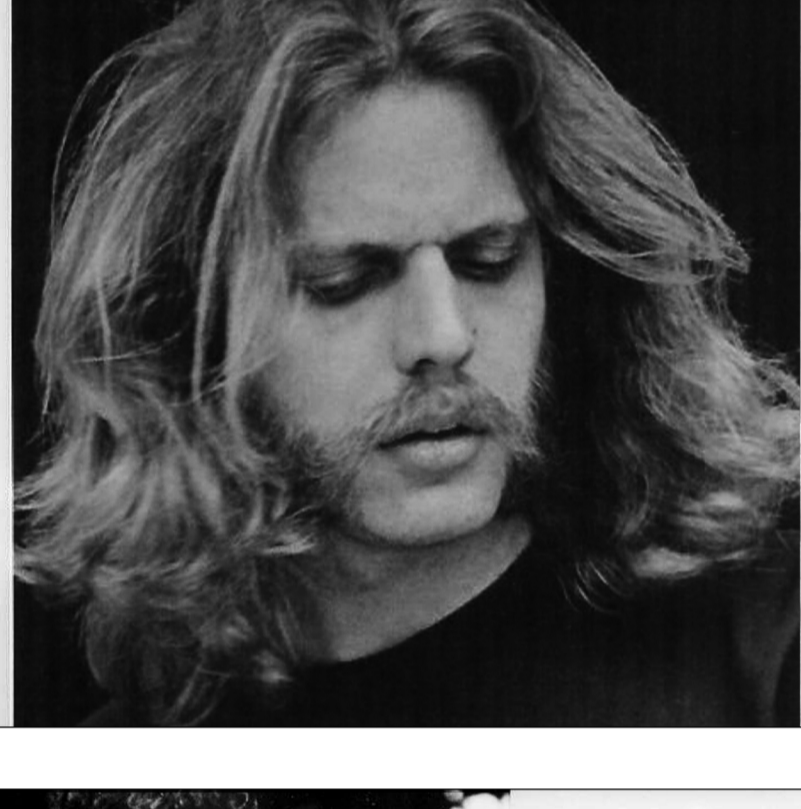
able here among the log cabins, the horses and the studios. He has only been a member of the Eagles since their fourth and newest album, 'One of These Nights,' so success has come quickly. 'Nights' topped 'Billboard's' charts for weeks, and on the Eagles' most recent 59-city tour, some 850,000 people paid \$5-million to see them. But statistics aside, the Eagles pay little favor to popularity; they spend their money searching out new studios, experimenting with yet-untried instruments, all in search of the satisfying sound. On 'One of These Nights' alone, they

racked up a \$160,000 production bill over a three-month period which involved four cross-country trips. **ONE FOR ALL:** What's their secret? Don Felder, dressed in the same boots and pants he wore for the previous night's concert, outlines their standard operating procedure. "A lot of stuff gets rehearsed, worked up, and even recorded," he explains, "and out of 15 or 20 ideas you'll pick nine or ten of the best, regardless of who wrote them." This is a group which appears unconcerned with ego. Personalities and tastes are disparate, but the



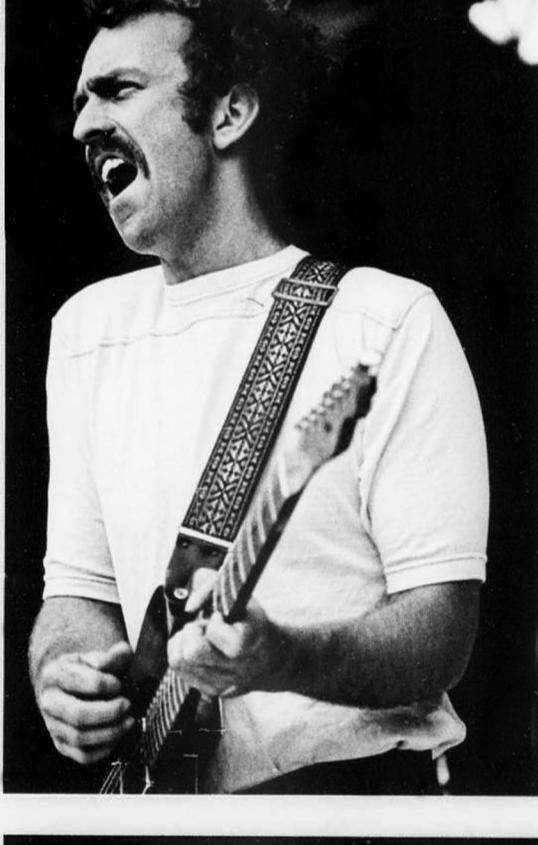
Randy Meisner:

Don Felder: The fifth Eagle, he was invited to join when Frey decided he was as good a guitarist as Duane Allman or Eric Clapton.



motivating desire to make the best possible record produces a creative union. The "I" syndrome has been subsumed into the whole—and here again the band has hooked into another element of longevity. In a Florida twang mixed with West Coast slang, Felder explains.

"That's a big concern of everybody, making the best record—and the best band. Without anybody getting on an ego trip of, 'Well, I wanna have another song on the record or I'm not singing enough onstage or I don't have enough solos.' It's not an 'I' trip, it's like to make the best band, and everybody's willing to give what it takes. If I have to play acoustic rhythm guitar on some songs I don't really get off on it, but if that's the combination that makes that song then hell, I'll play that all day long. And that's pretty much everybody's attitude. When it becomes an 'I' trip and somebody starts thinking that all the money and all the applause and all the fame is because of me and not you guys in the band . . . when that



Bernie Leadon: He left the Flying Burrito Brothers to join the Eagles when they were formed.

Glenn Frey: The group's Detroit-born singer got his start playing with musicians like Bob Seger.

starts happening it gets real vain and real egotistical and the music's lost and gets real artificial. What art there originally was, is lost and it gets gonzo."

MAGIC MEDICINE: Grounded in the teachings of Carlos Castaneda and his magic medicine man Don Juan, the Eagles have found their "power spot" in the company of each other. Most sessions take place in groups of two and three, sometimes four, and originate from a single idea.

"Somebody will have an idea and spit it out, whether it's one line, two bars, no words but a chord change, words but no chord change. Henley's a really far-out lyricist. He and Glenn [Frey] work really well on the lyric part of it, and Bernie [Leadon] and I work primarily on the musical end of it."

For example, Don Felder cites the procedure behind "One of These Nights": "Glenn would go 'One of these nights, cha cha chachacha cha cha chachacha,' and that's it, no chord changes. Then I sat down and played bass on it and dubbed the bass part to it and it was just me and Henley and Glenn sitting around and jamming. It's just being around, listening to ideas, criticizing ideas, and just working together.

"That's usually how it comes to-

gether on certain things; on other things Randy [Meisner] and I will work on like 'Too Many Hands' or Henley and I will work on like 'Visions.' The ones that come together as part of a band instead of one guy writing the song and presenting it are the ones that come out best. There is just a certain magic this band has when it works together."

This chemistry accounts for the group's in-studio technique, in which all five instruments are recorded simultaneously, with little overdubbing. To avoid the sterility which comes from multiple overtracking, the group cuts all basic tracks together and then embolders with added percussion and melody instruments.

"That's to try and get as much of the band and the groove that's happening. We use as few overdubs as we can because when you get into, 'Yeah, that's good, I'll put this guitar on top of that, and we'll put this vocal here,' you have a clinical, therapeutic approach and it gets Clorox clean and sparkly white. It's like an operating room. It's too dry, it loses that spark of magic."

Don Juan's wand has touched few other people with the Eagles' kind of stardust. This summer, the group won the "Best Band" award in Don Kirshner's Rock Music Awards, the televised presentation set up to recognize rock and R&B performers. Voting was handled by critics, deejays and journalists across the country, most of whom found the Eagles more satisfying than either Led Zeppelin or the Rolling Stones (two other nominees in the same category). Huzzahs might have been in order for the low-key camp, but the reaction was so low-key it's possible the group never even heard.

THE EAGLE AND THE FISH: The rain now stopping, Bernie heads for the lake with fishing gear in hand. Casting out, he immediately tenses as the line pulls taut. Witnessing the scene, Don answers the question in non-poetic form, but one is sure he is drawing silent analogies about the struggle before him between Eagle and fish. Most songs, he seems to be sensing, are won by Lorelei.

"Yeah, we won. I don't know how or why! It doesn't mean a whole lot, it really honestly doesn't. I mean it's a flash, a little adrenalin pump to be watching the television and not knowing what was going to happen and then win. That's another crazy thing, like all of your life, from 13, 14, you think, 'Boy, what would it be like to have a really big hit record and go on tour?' And when you get there and look in the Holiday Inn mirror when you hear that your album is number one for the fifth week in a row, you don't feel

any different. You're just the same person, the same cat, the same guy. A lot of people have all sorts of drastic reactions, ego trips, but that's bull. You can't get too blown out about it or too high on the hog because it's like a pro ballplayer, you only run three or four years, five years maybe, and then you either get too old or too tired or too rich and you quit."

The Eagles are quite possibly rich enough right now to stop. But they won't. They plan to enter the studio shortly to begin construction on a new album.

THE MAGIC EXPLAINED: It's not so much of the physical writing or reproduction of a song which is the greatest obstacle to them, it's the effort to capture the feeling of the moment, taking the mood of a generation and translating it into vinyl. Felder considers this the band's strongest talent—and so their seemingly magical popularity is once again grounded in pure and graspable terms.

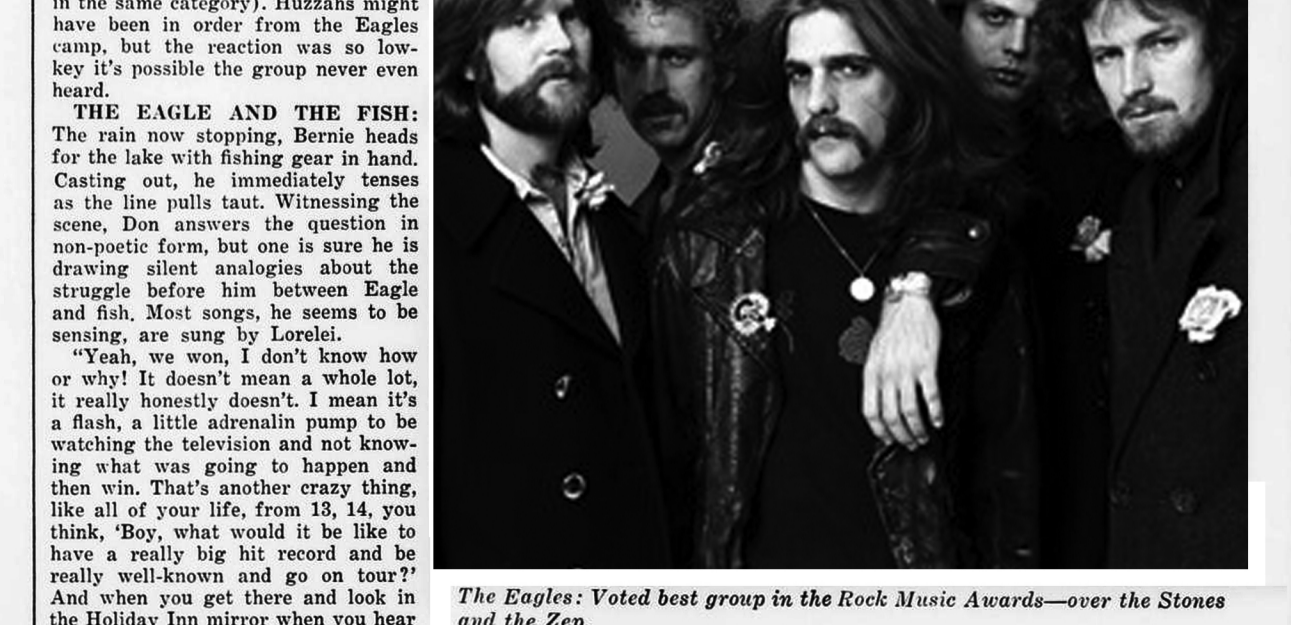
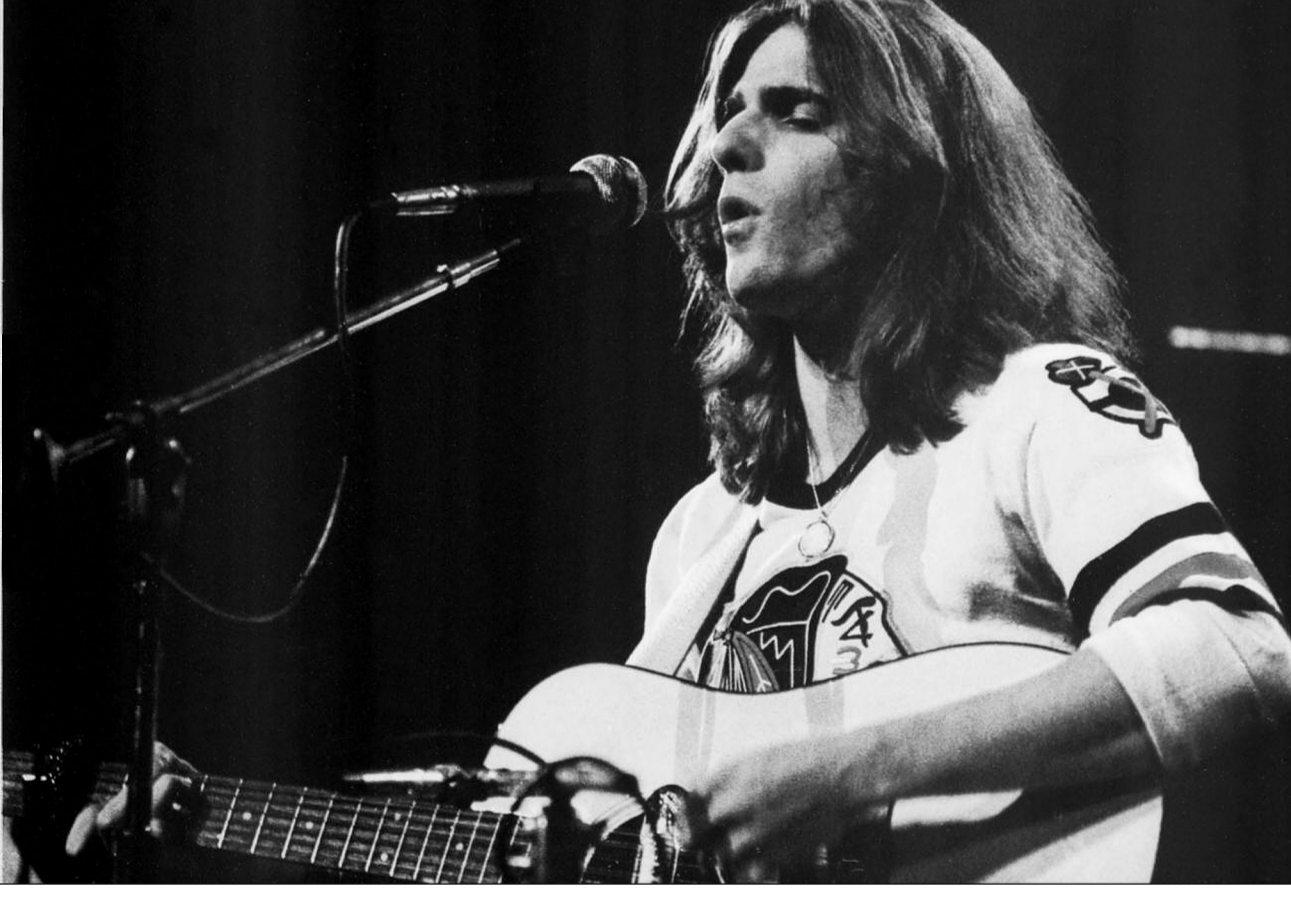
"All recordings are the attempt to catch something that's in the air right there at that minute. If something is kind of real exciting and groovy and you can catch that, that vibe, and it's on tape later, then you can hear it and dig it again later, then that's all that makin' a record is. It's trying to catch that magic, trying to put that falling

star in your pocket, trying to put that thing in a jar. And people who listen to records, whether they're conscious of it or not, are listening for that."

Felder is not glassy-eyed; he realizes that the Eagles will not be remembered 100 years from now. But his feelings on their impact now are sound.

It appears that Bernie's catch was nothing more than a line snag on the bottom of the lake. And like Don, like the Eagles, and like all the rest of us, he's still fishing for something new, something real, and most importantly, something ours.

"I don't think our music will go down in the annals of history as a living classic or be printed and bound in leather textbooks and handed down from generation to generation," says Don, "but I think it's a real good statement of the head of earth people. The people who have perhaps had drug experiences, the people who have done a lot of thinking about what's going on . . . I think it's a real valid statement about a certain group of people. And their evolution at this point in time. I think it's very non-pretentious, it's very non-egotistical, I think it's just a real straightforward, 'Hey, this is what I've seen and I think you guys have seen the same thing.' Real human experiences . . . but universal."



The Eagles: Voted best group in the Rock Music Awards—over the Stones and the Zep.