

“A certain Western charisma”

— MELODY MAKER APRIL 12 — randymeisnerheartsonfire.com

ONA CLEAR day in Hollywood, Glenn Frey can see from his living room right out to sea, right across the Pacific to Catalina, the island off the coast of Southern California. On a not so clear day, he can see layers of orange smog, the product of the internal combustion engine, which is God in this part of America.

Today is clear and the view is quite breathtaking. Certainly conducive to writing those typical Los Angeles soft-rock melodies with which the Eagles have become synonymous.

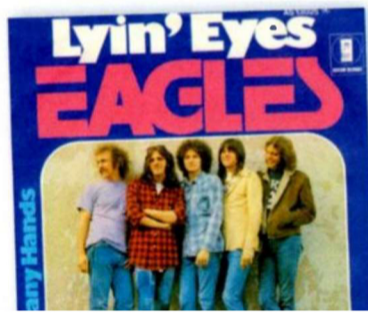
It doesn't take a fortune teller to predict that 1975 is going to be the big year for the Eagles. They've been clicking their boot heels for three years now, steadily building a reputation in the wake of The Byrds, waiting for the breakthrough that their third album, *On The Border*, has seemingly now brought about. Although it's easing down the charts right now, it's established the band as a force to be reckoned with.

"*On The Border* was the best-sounding record we ever made, but that's also experience. We're starting to learn how to become recording artists, which is a little different from learning how to be a member of a band or how to become a singer-songwriter.

"There're definitely things we've learned slowly over a couple of years of making records. I know when we made *Desperado* we were very conscious of having a group identity running through the songs, and that was something we learned out of doing the first album.

"After doing that one, when we went in to do *On The Border* we tried to bring in the best elements from both the albums. That probably had something to do with it, but I think it was a better album anyway. I think we just progressed and played with a little more confidence. But mainly I think it's that we stayed together."

Another factor which Frey credits as being important to the group's recent success is the introduction of Don Felder on slide guitar. Felder, »



76 | HISTORY OF ROCK 1975

says Frey, put extra punch into the Eagles' live show, with the added result that they picked up more followers. "I believe in selling records on the road, and I believe that if you work hard and have a good album out, it will sell.

"Since we got Felder in the band we've had a much better second half, the rock 'n' roll half, in our shows. The other part, the vocal-harmony softer part, was always real good, but Felder nails down the harder stuff.

"He's like Duane Allman: he drives the band on certain songs. Some slide players, myself included, just slide along with the song, but when Felder plays slide he drives the band and the whole thing revolves around him. So the year that we promoted *On The Border* we had a much better show together."

Desperado was a concept album in as much as many of the tunes dealt with the old West. It seemed curious, I remarked, that a band would travel to England from America to make that kind of record.

"Well," mused Glenn. "I guess you're right, but Clint Eastwood made all those cowboy movies of his in Italy. Some of the best Western movies have been made in Europe. You get a whole new perspective working in England. All of a sudden you're a foreigner, and it put us and LA and everything into perspective. Now I like staying here, although we tried going to Miami for part of this new album. We got some stuff accomplished there, but not nearly as much as we did recording here."

Another factor which possibly aided the success of the last album was their decision to tour with some of the material before it was put down on tape. Thus not only were audiences already familiar with the tracks, but the band had an opportunity to work on them before they reached the studio.

"I think we did about five songs on a college tour," said Glenn. "We were out there testing them, mixing them in with the better-known songs. I think it's good to do it that way sometimes, because it forces you to make a presentation immediately.

"It forces you to give a rendering immediately so vocal parts get simplified, and backing parts and guitar parts get honed down to what you can do best to present the song. By the time we get to the studio there's a whole basic sketch already done.

"With this next album we haven't done that, but again this album so far is nothing but our own songs. On the others we usually included a song by another writer or called in a friend like Jackson [Browne] or John David [Souther] to help on a track. We may do that in the next two weeks, though.

"This is maybe a reason why it's taking longer to make than other albums, but another reason is that Don Henley and I are trying to change the traditional symbolic rock 'n' roll lyrics that most people use on albums.

"The songs have been finished for a while but we've sat around thinking whether we ought to change them. All we have to do now is to go in and sing the parts, and that's when it'll begin to sound like an Eagles record. Whenever I hear backing tracks, I can't think of it being the Eagles at all, a long way from 'Peaceful Easy Feeling'."

Last summer, the Eagles backed Neil Young at a Native American benefit concert near San Francisco, an experience which may be

repeated this year, and one which Frey recollects with more than a little pride.

"The guy that put it together was our art director, and he knows the native California Indians and he approached Neil Young who said he'd do it. He didn't commit himself until three or four days before the concert, though, because he didn't want it to be advertised.

"We had a great jam on 'Cowgirl In The Sand' with



“When Felder plays slide, the whole thing revolves around him”

me and Felder and Neil trading solos for about 12 minutes. We hope to make it an annual event as we're doing another one this May. I'm into doing things for them because I figure we're living on their land even if I don't have one iota of guilt about it.

"The Indians knew how to live here properly and a lot of people are starting to think this way and realise their Old West consciousness. I'm into the western civilisation mysticism. Over here people are always turning to the east, but I figure it's all right here if we want to look for it.

"I'm sure some of this Indian and Mexican influence was with us when we were doing *Desperado*, as we had a great time doing the little links between songs, the banjo and traditional things. I would like to do another concept album, though I'm not sure what the premise would be."

Frey's song "Best Of My Love" undoubtedly gave *On The Border* sales a boost. It was, he says, an attempt to work off a guitar tuning that Joni Mitchell had demonstrated. "Actually, I got into a totally different tuning and that's how the song ended up.

"I had a little help from John David Souther, who worked on the bridge and rang me up from LA when I was in England to play it over the phone. We actually worked on it over the phone until he came to England to see us. 'Cry Like A Lover' came about the same way, working on the phone over all that distance."

Collaboration with other LA musicians is a way of life in California, as can usually be detected by reading album credits as well as noticing various similarities in the actual music.

"On songwriting, I do it all the time," admits Frey. "If I get something I can't finish by myself, it's always good to take it to someone else. We collaborate among ourselves, but Souther helps us out sometimes.

"It's not so much calling up for help in an emergency as just calling and suggesting we spend an evening writing together and picking up on fragments. The funny thing that we find with the guys in the Eagles and Souther and Jackson is how much we think alike. Whenever anyone plays something, we tend to pick on it right away."

This summer the Eagles are making their first trip to England in over 18 months. They're tentatively scheduled to appear with Elton John at Wembley Stadium on June 21 along with stablemate Joe Walsh.

"What I like about playing in England," said Frey as we drew to a close, "is the attentiveness of the audience. In America we tend to play to very boisterous crowds, but in England they sit and listen and I just thrive on that.

"We found when we played our first ever gigs in England that being American helped us. Being an American unknown in America is a drag, but being an American unknown in England is cool. We found we had a certain amount of Western charisma. I didn't realise it until people started looking at my cowboy boots and asking where I got them."

Chris Charlesworth

