

THE EAGLES - Glen Frey & Don Henley Interview, December 1976

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by Chris Charlesworth
for Melody Maker *Part 2 of interview*

Neither Glenn Frey nor Don Henley expected their *Greatest Hits 1971-1975* album to do as well as it did. "I never expected it to do five million," said Frey with genuine disbelief. "The numbers this year are staggering, and I try not to look at them anymore. It's a different kind of person that buys 'Greatest Hits' albums... people who buy them for gifts for children and not the kind who buy regular albums. I think you reach more people with them... you reach the over 25's and the under 15's a lot."

Henley seemed vaguely embarrassed by the success of the record. "Let us say that we aren't really advocates of 'Greatest Hits' albums," he said. "They are more or less a ploy by the record company to get free sales. They don't have to spend any money to make them and they get a lot of money back. We got a couple of hate letters after the *Greatest Hits* album came out that said we were selling out... they said that us and Steve Miller were the last bands who were holding off selling out this way."

"But we didn't have anything to do with it. The record company put it out and we couldn't stop them. We had a say in picking the tracks, sequencing them and doing the graphics."

"I must say," said Frey, "that the eagles' skull which appeared on the sleeve is not very good karma in terms of the American Indian. By putting this shiny Eagles' skull on the album we felt like we knew where the 'Greatest Hits' thing was at."

"That was what we looked like after writing all those songs," quipped Henley. "But another reason why I didn't feel bad about putting a 'Greatest Hits' album out was that it definitely marked the end of a phase for us. It marked the end of five years, and this new album opens up a whole new era for us."

"Ever since 'Best Of My Love' kicked off a whole big thing for us, moving us from the top 90 per cent of bands in America to the top 10 per cent, we've been running and I never had time to stop and think about how well the *Greatest Hits* record did. We just wanted to stay busy."

A pattern, coincidence perhaps, seems to be emerging with the release of *Hotel California*. The Eagles' first album contained three hit singles - 'Take It Easy', 'Witchy Woman' and 'Peaceful Easy Feeling' - and was followed by a concept album *Desperado*; the *One Of These Nights* album contained three hit singles - the title track, 'Lyn' Eyes' and 'Take It To The Limit' - and is followed by their second concept approach.

"Like *Desperado* it didn't necessarily start out to be a concept album but it became one after all," said Henley. "It's a more urbane version of *Desperado* inasmuch as the symbolism isn't set in the past but is here and now."

"We had all those hit singles off *One Of These Nights* and that gives you more room to breathe and make an album more like the kind of album we really want to make," said Frey. "We took some artistic liberties with the new record which we hadn't taken before, and part of it was because we felt a slight ease of pressure because the last album had done so damn well."

"Hit singles are no crime," said Henley. "Some people view them to be something that can't be good artistically and that's total nonsense as far as I'm concerned. Paul Simon has hit singles, Bob Dylan has hit singles, Neil Young has hit singles, and the Beatles had lots of hit singles."

"The way the record business is structured these days... if you don't have singles you can forget it. You can work for 10 years making eclectic and artistic underground albums and maybe you'll get the recognition you deserve when you're half-dead."

"But even the FM stations here are playing singles just to stay in business. Admittedly there's a lot of fucking rubbish in the singles charts. I won't mention any names though we all know who they are, so I think AM needs a shot in the arm and I am glad that we can contribute something that I consider quality music to the AM airwaves. God knows... it needs something."

"There'll be some singles off the new album, but they'll be long songs. None of the tracks is much under five minutes long, but we're going to release a double-sided single of 'New Kid In Town' and 'Victim Of Love'."

A Hammond organ makes its first appearance on an Eagles' album in *Hotel California*, and Walsh was also brought in on various synthesizers, a talent which came as a bonus surprise to the rest of the band. Extra keyboard instruments are now accompanying the Eagles on the road.

"We have to beef up the act to stay in there," said Henley. "We don't want to beef it up with flash and meaningless theatrics like funny clothes and flashlights, or smokebombs or any crap like that. The group has to keep growing musically on stage, even though we do have to keep playing old material."

"When Joe arrived, the older songs began sounding different. I think we were tighter and less cluttered on stage. I can still sing 'Witchy Woman' as inspired as the first time I ever sang it because people want to hear it, and that's enough for me. Sure I can get tired of it after I've been out on the road for three weeks, but each night seems to bring out a little more inspiration in any particular song."

"For me this summer it was Joe's stuff that excited me," said Frey. "It was good to know that after three more Eagles songs we were going to do one of Joe's. And, of course, the new stuff is always more interesting. It was good to see if we could pull off 'Hotel California' and 'Wasted Time', to see if we could make them happen and make the audience dig new tunes."

"I guess 'Take It To The Limit' as well. Randy (Meisner) gets a standing ovation whenever he hits the high notes, and sometimes the applause goes on for two or three minutes. In the last year and a half Randy has really found himself as a vocalist. 'Take It To The Limit' and 'Too Many Hands' were sung with so much brilliance on the record that he is a changed singer in the solo vocalist category. In the group he's always been phenomenal," said Frey.

"Randy has always been the ribbon on our package. He provides all the bottom and the top, but we have to find the right song for his high voice and that usually means it must be in the ballad category. He delivers on such high intensity too... he even sounds a little like Gene Pitney."

"He's kind of a quiet, shy guy with a family, and he's also been doing it longer than we have," said Henley. "He was in a band called the Poor out here in 1968 and then in Poco, and he doesn't care about interviews and so forth. As far as he's concerned he'll just let Glenn and me shoot off our mouths and make fools of ourselves. He does his job and goes home to Nebraska when it's done."

"We've come to learn that we are different people," said Frey. "We learned through the experience of this group that you can't try to change people to the way you want them to be. Randy is a very dedicated musician and when he goes home he gets to work on new ideas for the next album in a little studio he has built. Felder lives here in Malibu and he stays there in his own studio recording like a madman. These things are going on all the time in this group. We have been together almost non-stop for the past 11 months."

"And that's much too much togetherness," said Henley. "When we do get away we like to get away properly. We all have ladies and other friends, and this year we've neglected our relationships with other musicians like Jackson Browne, J. D. Souther, Linda Ronstadt and other people we would like to hang out with and write songs with a little more. In the next two or three months we'd like to re-open all those doors and think about our next album."

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"John David had a great deal to do with *Hotel California*, and had Jackson Browne not been in the studio making *The Pretender*, I'm sure that he would have been involved as well. J. D. helped us do 'New Kid In Town' and he helped us finish 'Victim Of Love' too."

"Bill Szymczyk (the band's producer) was also very instrumental in helping us with the musical side of this album," said Frey. "He's always influenced us in the R&B direction and in the rock'n'roll side. I think that the recording technique that we developed and perfected by the time we got to *One Of These Nights* reached a conceptual peak here."

Although it appears that, as almost always, the band are writing about the state of California, Henley insists that it is just a microcosm for the rest of the country. "It's the Bicentennial Year, and this is our Bicentennial statement," he said. "It's kind of about the demise of the sixties and the decadence and escapism we are experiencing in the seventies. It's also about the kind of limbo we're experiencing in the music business while we're waiting for the next big surge of inspiration, like The Beatles or whatever."

"It's an attempt to shake people out of the apathy they are going through, and also a comment on the destruction of the air and the planet and the ecology. I think California represents all that because it is the vanguard of America, the farthest place you can go."

"We've often been criticised by people on the East Coast for marketing the Southern California lifestyle... the beautiful girls, the houses in the hills, the footloose people and all that kind of thing, but I think people have spoken too soon on that. We think that this album represents the whole worlds, not just California, as something elegant which has been corrupted," said Frey.

"This used to be a beautiful place and it still is fairly attractive, but America used to be too before we came over here and fucked it up," said Henley. "We have a love-hate relationship with California. Like anything you love, you're capable of hating it, too. On this album we're simply holding California up as an example. I wouldn't live anywhere else, though. I wouldn't run away, I'd rather stand here and fight. The song 'Hollywood Waltz' was about people who came here and corrupted it then moved on somewhere else, but we're not doing that."

"This place has given us all we've got because we became successful here and we're proud of it, but people from the East Coast have really nailed us to the wall for something that they think we represent. I think it's really a personal vendetta rather than a criticism of the music."

Current plans are for the Eagles to play two dates in December - shows they had to cancel earlier this year because of recording commitments - and then take three months off before a European tour in April. "There needs to be a period of input after all the output," said Henley.

"Then we're going to Europe to play various countries we haven't played before," said Frey. "We've never played in Germany and never played in France so that needs to be done. We're also planning to play in Scotland this time around. The only time we ever did that before was with Neil Young. The last time we went to London was really the only time I could enjoy it properly."

"We work so much because it's therapeutic," he added. "Sometimes it's easier to be the underdog. We have to keep changing our goals so much now. What we have to look for, what I'm doing to keep me going, is to try and get better each time. I try to make my singing a little better, and my music a little better. At this point it's either grow or stagnate, and we won't do that."