

# MOVIN' UP WITH EAGLES

Cameron Crowe

The legendary fertility of the Los Angeles folk-rock scene, ever since it's 1966 inception, seemed to have in actuality spanned twice as many heartbreak stories for every one of success. Matching every Byrds or Buffalo Springfield, there was a multitude of struggling talents whose short-lived careers peaked with a 15-minute third bill set at the Whisky.

Eagles is the result of four spirited singer-songwriter-musicians who have all been down the road of minor success and major frustration and have finally found a band that clicked.

Don Henley, Eagles' drummer, initially played in a high school band for six years. The group, Shiloh, actually cut a record on Epic that no one at Epic seems to know anything about except the members themselves.

Bernie Leadon, rhythm-lead guitarist, first became involved in the business through a group by the name of Hearts and Flowers. From there, he secured a position as guitarist and vocalist for Dillard and Clark and later went on to be the same for The Flying Burrito Brothers.

Randy Meisner in the band's bassist. A very quiet person, Meisner made the rounds in a handful of Midwestern bands before helping Richie Furay and Jim Messina form Poco, after Meisner left, the band changed it's name to Poco and released *Pickin' Up The Pieces*. According to Furay, most of the bass and background vocal parts on that album were of the un-accredited Meisner.

Glen Frey may well be the dominating musical personality of Eagles. His rhythm-lead guitar work and vocals present an image conspicuously present on "Take It Easy" and "Peaceful Easy Feelin'". Before joining/forming Eagles, Frey was one half of the duo Longbranch Pennywhistle with John David Souther.

On stage, Eagles play a clean, uncluttered set with a euphoric touch of joy. The aura surrounding them is one of impending super-stardom, much like the presence of Yes, Jethro Tull, Carole King and Procul Harum in their earlier days.

Meisner kept silent through the following conversation, choosing to remain quietly attentive. Later he responded with a "I like to listen". Hopefully, it was sincere.

*How did Eagles form?*

Henley: We formed through friendships with Linda Ronstadt. We had all done gigs with her at one time or another, sitting in on sessions and so forth. That's how we all met and decided to form the band. Bernie came one night and sat in on a gig at Disneyland.

*How have you found the crowd's reaction to you change with the success of "Take It Easy"?*

Henley: We went on a tour with Joe Cocker and Jethro Tull even before the single was released. With Tull, it wasn't so hot because the band's a supergroup. Everybody wanted to hear them and no one else. After the single and the album came out, we did a tour with Procul Harum which was great. We were getting familiar reactions and the people were willing to listen.

*What do you think of stage theatrics?*

Leadon: They're kind of an English tradition.

Henley: Yeah, Glyn Johns, our producer, seems to think so too. American groups just like to stand up there and play the songs...try and get by on just the music. It really depends on the age your audience is. Younger kids dig to see all that shit, but older kids just come to listen more or less.

*Do you have a favorite audience. One that's easier to play to than others?*

Frey: Yeah, an audience that can get up and dance when they feel like it. An audience that isn't confined by chairs.

*Is the group past it's growing pains yet?*

Henley: Not really.

Leadon: I think we're past the first batch at least.



Photo by Gary Elam

Henley: Yeah, we passed the first set, now we're into the second set. The adolescent growing pains. That's good, though...when you're not having growing pains, you're stale.

*Do you feel yourself evolving in any particular direction?*

Frey: We just want to do more songs. There's only four of us...

Leadon: There's only four of us, but then there's just four of us. Everybody's pretty strong in their own right, and everybody's got a lot of background. We've all got different music in our background. So...the first album was maybe...in those ten tunes we were able to squeeze...

Frey: More of a statement of our background than anything else.

Leadon: Yeah. One song from each area of our roots. We could do another album of just songs out of our backgrounds. *Easy*. There's so much in our backgrounds...there's country music...there's blues...rock 'n roll, gospel, bluegrass, gospel bluegrass, gospel rock...

*Why don't you add a steel guitar to your stage act?*

Frey: Bernie's the steel guitar.

Henley: Yeah, he pretty well covers that. He has one of those things that bend your guitar strings to make it sound like a steel guitar.

Leadon: Sneaky Pete from the Burritos isn't working. We could have gotten him. But the reason we didn't was because the two of us (Frey and himself), when we started this band, could just barely hold it together. We want to get really strong by forcing ourselves to do it.

Frey: When you've got five guys in a band, someone can always be lazy on a song. They'll always be four other guys working. We have to play harder, and it's a lot leaner, but there's a little more air...there's a lot more open spaces.

Leadon: We thought about all that, but we just decided that four guys is enough. Everybody's pushing harder. That's the whole thing.

*What were you trying to accomplish with Eagles?*

Leadon: The hardest thing for any musician to do is to be doing what music they think they should be doing...doing the music you dig, and having it still be commercial accessible enough to have it sell and make enough money so that you can keep on doing it. That's what we were trying to accomplish...I think we did.

Frey: We've got four voices to sell our records, so instrumentally we're free to get better playing the music we want. It's like the yearly modifying of a V-8 engine. You make basic modifications on it every year or analogically, every album. So we'll just keep changing the stage...the music... with the vocals being the main entity.

*Will you ever get into solo albums?*

Frey: Not me.

Leadon: I don't think so. I must say, though, that all four of us could have easily done a solo album.

Frey: If Eagles broke up, you'd find us looking for bands. I don't think you'd find us doing solo albums.

Leadon: A lot of piece groups are pretty weak because of being locked into one vocalist and a certain type of instrumental treatment. But, because we've got so many singers, we can shape a song whichever way we want to.

*Do you have a certain eagerness to get into the studio to do your second album?*

Leadon: Oh yeah.

Henley: Sure.

*When are you gonna do it?*

Henley: Looks like November.

*How do you think that second album will differ from the first?*

Leadon: It won't be more complicated. I would hope looser. I would hope more free.

Frey: We might try a couple of longer numbers.

*Do you have any particular policy to go into the studio with? For instance, no song should be overdubbed on...?*

Leadon: There's two ways to record. You can prepare and go in to the studio, trying to get the record done as soon as possible, with the feeling that a song tends to deteriorate with age. Or you can go in with a tune not really formed, and let it develop in the studio. You let it evolve on tape, more or less. That way you've captured the initial idea on tape, whereas the other way you try and get the best performance. Sometimes the spontaneous shit is better.

Henley: With the first album, our songs were really rehearsed. We rehearsed them for months. This time we're gonna go in...

Frey: A little bit looser.

Henley...with less rehearsal.

Frey: The basic structures this time, more or less. We're comfortable with our producer and everything now. We'll be more loose. A little more natural.

*Were you under a certain amount of pressure for the first album?*

Frey: Why, of course, it's your first album. It's something that you can never be happy with. It's like the New York Mets' first baseball season. It's got all the heartwarming ingredients and all the disappointments. I've forgotten about our first album already.

*Your first album has done great for a first album. What do you attribute that to?*

Henley: We have a very good manager and a very good record company and a very good producer.

Leadon: We were all part of the L.A. scene. We'd all been studio musicians to some extent.

*Did you have trouble getting signed?*

Frey: Naw.

Leadon: No. In other words, we were all known, not only with other L.A. musicians, but among different record companies as well. So far I've been on Capitol, A & M and Asylum. Everybody else has been on a different record company also. Everybody else has been on a different record company also. Everybody knew us. So, when it was known that we were together, and that Glyn Johns was going to be producing us we got signed...Just on paper it sounds like a good combination.

*Was there a situation in recording the first album where some of L.A. musician friends were dropping in on the sessions?*

Leadon: No.

Frey: We were completely alone in Ohland. We worked every day for seventeen days. Just Glyn and us.

Leadon: It was wintertime. There was nothing to do.

Frey: It was ugly weather, real cold.

Leadon: We worked twelve hours a day.

*Are you ever gonna get into that scene where "famous" friends'll drop in on your sessions?*

Frey: Oh, you can do it after a while, but you gotta be tough in front and show everybody you are before you get into that. We could have got Nicky Hopkins to come and play keyboards for us, but...

Leadon: We want to record ourselves.

Frey: It's too easy to make records with eight people playing on them. It's just too easy to have a conga drummer and a tambourine player, and...

Leadon: Everything we recorded we did four piece, so we could do it live. Most of the people with eight-nine guys in their band can't play their lp stuff live.

*So there wasn't a lot of overdubbing?*

Leadon: No. I didn't go in and put two different guitar parts on the album that I wouldn't be able to play in person.

*Right. The only part that's noticeably overdubbed is the banjo in "Take It Easy"?*

Leadon: Right.

Frey: He recreates that on stage to a certain extent, by picking his guitar like a banjo.

*At what point does performing become a chore for you?*

Leadon: When circumstances are fucked. When you have to fight it all the way. When technical problems are harming you and the crowd doesn't want to hear you.

*When you work out your tunes, do you write lyrics to fit the mood of a particular riff, or do you...*

Frey: That's usually what I do. I usually sing nonsense lyrics, whatever comes into my head, just trying to establish some kind of melody with the chords...then I sit down and write lyrics.

Leadon: I don't even do that. I make a guitar instrumental up.

*When you went in to do "Take It Easy" did you know it was going to be a single?*

Frey: We sorta tried to make a single out of it, that was one of the songs we treated with special care.

*Were you under pressure to cut a single?*

Frey: No. They (Asylum) heard the album and they picked the single.

*Do you plan on becoming a singles band?*

Henley: We don't necessarily want to become a hit singles group.

Leadon: That means you're a pop group and you get to play Vegas.

Frey: We'll probably always do albums. I don't know if we'll ever cut a forty-five.

Henley: We chose to do it that way in the beginning 'cause it's faster and easier than coming up without a single. If it wasn't for "Take It Easy", we probably would have had to cut three albums before reaching the point we're at now. There's two schools of thought on that.

*How much of your success do you attribute to "Take It Easy"?*

Frey: We've sold a couple albums thanks to "Take It Easy"