

EXCLUSIVE

# Eagles: the earthpeople's band



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**C**ARIBOU Ranch is 3,200 acres of prime headland lying an hour-and-a-half outside Denver. Built by Chicago's manager James Guercio, it offers the lifestyle best described by *mellow*: gentle rolling hills, calm lakes, log cabins, and horses. Even the birds sing 'Rocky Mountain High' while working.

The Eagles were hanging out here for a few days, gauging the recording facilities and just generally getting away from the endless stream of Holiday Inns and Hyatt Houses. Newest member Don Felder was sitting on one of the lodge porches, sucking in the mountain air and sipping down steaming coffee.

For Felder, success has been quick with the Eagles. On their recent tour they grossed a million dollars and played to capacity houses everywhere; their fourth album, 'One Of Those Nights', topped the charts for weeks and has already been certified gold. 'Nights' was Felder's first outing with the band and his contributions have been substantial. Perhaps it was the incentive of first work? Or the memories of 16 previous years sleeping on floors and carrying all this belongings in a cardboard box? Whatever the case, he's still the same.

"The money doesn't mean anything, it really doesn't," he confesses, watching guitarist Bernie Leadon preparing to fish. "You have to look back at 16 years of grease and bars and fraternities and the worst gigs and starving to death. If the money was what was involved with the whole trip then I'd been a lawyer.

All the money means is that you have another tool to obtain the tools, like studios or tape recorders or guitars, to make music. That's all I ever buy besides jeans, boots, and sneakers, is guitars."

Searching for the elusive sound, that one record, has been a guidelight for the band since they first released 'The Eagles'. Though Felder hasn't been with the band that long, his outside reflections are curiously reflective and insightful. Felder is still concentrating on Leadon's efforts down by the lake; he seems to have hooked one but catching fish, like making records, is a slippery business.

"Every album has been drastically different, nothing has followed the same commercial trend. You hear so many bands who put out one good record and the next one that comes out sounds sort of like it. Clapton is the same way, everything he puts out is sort of different, it's in a different vein.

"That's the only way you really stay alive; if you keep playing the same thing on every record then people get bored with it. It's not gambling but ... it's sort of saying, 'We don't really care. All we want to do is make a good record with some new ideas and some new music. And if you guys dig it, great, and if not ... we dig it anyway.'"

The band has proven itself on record, 'Nights' was No. 1 on the charts for weeks and earlier releases have been either gold or platinum certification. Evidently, the group has been able to take this magic and transport it to the concert stage. Their past tour was a staggering success and virtually a day does not go by where the outfit's manager receives a call asking for more dates. It is not that the Eagles are a polished

**They say they play real music for real people. Sounds dull. But the Eagles do it with a kind of magic that has made them America's hottest band. They gave a rare interview to Steve Rosen**

rock and roll ensemble or provide a decorative stage show; rather it's the earthiness and solidarity they convey which has been the key.

**"N**O, the Eagles is not an exciting stage act but they are a real stage act. When you have five guys there in ragged Levis, sneakers, dirty boots, and T-shirts, not really givin' a shit ... no smoke screens or stacked shoes or theatrics, none of the other gimmicks that makes a stage act to a lot of people exciting, you're seeing five real guys. Trying to be at the same humane level as everybody else and just trying to make good music.

"It's not pretentious or gimmicky ... it also draws a real crowd, too. This band was opening for Yes where there were 5,000 people on reds and sopors and stuff, and you walk out and do 'Peaceful Easy Rieking' in your jeans and T-shirt and they go (in exaggerated drug tones) 'Let's boogie, rock and roll, get off the stage and let's boogie.' Those people are looking for something completely different. But this band draws a crowd of real people and they dig the band for that reason because we're not pretentious about it."

Yet the band has avoided interviews like bee-stings (this year they only did them with *Rolling Stone*, *Time* and *SOUNDS*), and certainly this speaks of a preten-

uousness not keeping in the character just described. But Felder disagrees with this line of reasoning; in past interviews quotes have been taken out of context to mis-represent the band and the feelings expressed on that certain day weren't the same months later when the article was printed. It's not being in command of the situation.

"You don't have any control over that media. So it got to the point where people got really tired doing interviews and especially when the same guys all over the country from every newspaper asked the same questions. I felt like pretty soon you should just type up a list of 20 questions and 20 answers, and when they want an interview just go, 'Here you go,' It gets real old and boring."

The critics certainly don't think this way. Recently, Don Kirshner (who produces Rock Concert, a television programme which films bands playing live), organised the first 'Rock Music Awards', the musical equivalent of the movie industry's Academy Awards. The Eagles were voted (by 250 journalists, critics, and music-related persons across the country) as Best Group (in a category which included the Rolling Stones, Steely Dan, and Led Zeppelin). Like the money aspect, this did not mean a whole lot to Felder.

"Yeah, we won (laughter) but I don't know how or why. It doesn't mean anything, it really,

honestly doesn't. I mean it's a flash, an adrenalin pump to be sitting and watching the TV and not knowing what was gonna happen and you won. That's another crazy thing, you think like all of your life ... 'What would it be like to have a really bit hit record and be really well-known and go on tour' and when you get there and look in the Holiday Inn mirror and hear that your album is No. 1 for the fifth week in a row, you don't feel any different. You're just the same cat, the same person.

"Lowell George, what song does he say, 'People you misuse on your way up/You might meet up with on your way down', that's the sort of thing it is. So you can't get too high on the hog. It's like a pro-ballplayer or anything else; 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."

It's quite likely that the Eagles are rich enough right now to retire but they won't. The group has plans to enter the studio in November (in the meantime, expect a 'Best Of' album) for which material has already been written. These songs may never find their way on to any record as the band usually works out 15 or 20 songs out of which the nine or 10 best are chosen. Whatever compositions will make the best record is the main concern — not "I haven't written enough" or "I want more solos." Ego hassles are non-existent and the "I trip" is not in the dictionary.

The creative process does tend to work in groups, though. Usually a single lyric line or chord change is enough to spark the magic which begins in groups of two and three members. Don

Henley and Glenn Frey usually concentrate on the lyric end while Bernie Leadon and Felder handle musical responsibilities. While the actual composing takes place in small gatherings, the recordings are done as live as possible with all five members playing simultaneously."

Felder admits the Eagles capture a certain magic in their records. He realises it will not go down in the annals of history and be remembered in 100 years time but is quite sure it provides an accurate statement of the "head of earthpeople." A Summer shower has driven everybody inside and Felder, now grasping the cup of coffee, tries to shrug off the cold.

"I think it's a real good statement of the head of earthpeople, the people who have had some drug experiences, the people who have done a lot of thinking about what's going on. Without getting into the whole cosmic rap like the Grateful Dead. I think it's a real valid statement about a certain group of people and their evolution at a certain point in time. And that's what music is, it's a reflection of what's happening. Because you can only produce through art what you have seen and what you know and what you have experienced in life.

"I think it's very non-pretentious. I think 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. I'm pretty sure you have.' Real human experiences that are universal.

"It won't be found in leather books and handed down from generation to generation. And that's all you can ever hope to do in music or in any art is to relate something to someone else. That's all."