

BY JAMIE RENO

A Close Connection



The Eagles

THROUGHOUT THEIR FASCINATINGLY TURBULENT 33-year history as one of America's most popular bands, the Eagles have enjoyed a curiously close connection with San Diego. Not only has the group, in all its incarnations, attracted a rabidly loyal following here, but current member Joe Walsh now lives in North County, and founding member Bernie Leadon spent a big chunk of his young life here.

Leadon, who formed the band in 1972 with Don Henley, Glenn Frey and Randy Meisner, moved to San Diego from Minneapolis in 1957 and started playing bluegrass with Chris Hillman, later of the Byrds, and other bands. Leadon eventually made his way to Los Angeles, where he immersed himself in the country-rock scene, and subsequently the Eagles were hatched.

Several other San Diegans have had a profound influence on the band. Jack Tempchin, a longtime Encinitas resident, wrote the Eagles classics "Peaceful Easy Feeling" and "Already Gone" and has collaborated with Frey for more than three decades. As unassuming a legendary songwriter as there is, Tempchin, who also wrote "Slow Dancing" for Johnny Rivers (among other hits), still gigs every Tuesday at the Calypso Cafe on Highway 101.

Tom Waits, the gravel-voiced singer-songwriter-actor and former San Diegan, is also a contributor, albeit a somewhat reluctant one, to the Eagles' canon. Waits wrote the pensive classic "Ol' 55," covered poignantly by the Eagles on their 1974 *On the Border* album. Though the song remains a favorite cut among many Eagles fans, Frey once said that Waits didn't like the Eagles' version: "Then he got the check. Since then, Tom and I, we're really close."

One guy most Eagles fans think has San Diego roots actually doesn't—although he's asked about it to this day. Steve

Young, the gifted but elusive country-rock troubadour who wrote "Seven Bridges Road," one of the Eagles' best-loved concert songs and the group's last pre-reunion hit, gets a heartfelt introduction on the group's 1980 live album. Just before the band launches into the memorable a capella start of the tune ("There are stars in the Southern sky"), Frey tells the audience the song was written by "our buddy Steve Young from San Diego." Young has never lived in San Diego.

There has, in fact, been only one California native in the band, Tim Schmit, but the Eagles are unquestionably the most enduring purveyors of so-called California rock. At the heart of the band's ethos are the group's mixed feelings about the state, specifically Southern California, and every time the band plays here, all those feelings resonate.

The band's music still crystallizes our eternally conflicted feelings about the Golden State. If Los Angeles represents the dark side of the California dream alluded to in so many of the band's haunting takes ("Hotel California," "The Last Resort," "Sunset Grill," "King of Hollywood"), then San Diego remains the brighter, breezier corner of the golden obsession in songs like "Peaceful Easy Feeling" and "Take It Easy." Lyrics on the Eagles' live version of "Take It Easy" were changed from "Winslow, Arizona" to "Southern California."

One of the most satisfying outdoor concerts in San Diego history came during the Eagles' 1994 "Hell Freezes Over" tour before a packed and stoked house at Jack Murphy (now Qualcomm) Stadium. Another memorable night is promised when the band hits the Coors Amphitheatre stage in Chula Vista August 17 as part of the "California Tour," which salutes the group's origin in this state and comprises only California concerts, in large and small venues from San Diego to Lake Tahoe. ■