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07240108 DON HENLEY DOES IT AGAIN Boston Globe (BG) - FRIDAY, August 27, 1993 By: Steve Morse, Globe Staff Edition: THIRD Section: ARTS AND FILM Page: 79 Word Count: 1,274

TEXT: So you think putting on a benefit concert is easy? Yeah, sure. Maybe it's easy if you just recruit any local Tom, Dick or Harry, but rock singer Don Henley always shoots for the moon. He chased and wooed Elton John, Sting, Aerosmith and Melissa Etheridge for his Walden Woods benefit at Foxboro Stadium on Labor Day.

And he bagged them all in what could become the biggest benefit show ever in New England. Henley hopes to net \$1 million from the stadium event, which will be broadcast nationally by Westwood One radio, as well as excerpted on VH-1 and covered by MTV.

"It gets really complicated to put something like this on," Henley said this week from his Los Angeles home. "Especially when Sting is touring and you have to find him in Italy and the time difference is eight or nine hours. And when Elton is in England and Aerosmith is all over the map.

"I'm amazed every time we get one of these things together," said Henley, whose last local Walden Woods benefit was in 1990 at the Worcester Centrum with Bob Seger, Bonnie Raitt, Jimmy Buffett and Glenn Frey. He's since done Walden Woods benefits in New York and Los Angeles.

"It's very difficult for me to call up people and ask them to do something because I know on a very personal level how many requests people like Aerosmith and Elton and Sting get every day. I know how much they get hit on and I know how tired of it I get. I really have to work myself into a certain state of mind. It's almost like going on stage for a performance before I call people up.

"That's why I called Sting first," said Henley, who has reciprocated by playing benefits for Sting's Rainforest Foundation. "We can be very frank with each other. He can say to me, 'Well, what is it now?' And I'll say, 'You know what it is.' And he'll tease me, you know, joke around for a while before he'll agree to do it.

"Once I get one or two people, then I get momentum going," said Henley. "That gives me the courage to call other people. And once you get a couple of people like Elton and Sting, you've got the makings of a great show. When Elton signed on, that was the key. We knew we could play the stadium. And then when Aerosmith said yes, we knew we were home."

Of course, it takes a well-connected, Grammy-winning old salt like Henley to pull an event like this together. "I'm lucky because I have a lot of friends in the entertainment industry. There's still even a few I haven't tapped yet," said Henley. "I've got a rain check for a concert from Bob Seger. He's currently on his

honeymoon or he would have appeared in this one. I'm just extremely grateful to all these people for wanting to help out."

Then there's the anxiety of pulling this show together on short notice -- and during the peak of the summer concert season. "It's a little rough because the market is saturated right now. I mean, Jimmy Buffett is going to do four nights at Great Woods, and that's directly in front of our show. He's already sold out, so I guess that won't have too much of an effect. But I hope we sell this thing out. At my last check, I think we've sold 27,000 tickets. And the place will hold, what, 50,000? By the way, there's still seats available."

The initial momentum is impressive, though, since the concert is on Labor Day -- a day when many people already had plans.

"The show was originally scheduled for Sept. 5, but then somebody couldn't do it on the 5th. I forget who it was. So we kept juggling it around. We were also looking at dates later in September, but we felt like our chances for good weather were greater in early September. And Labor Day was really the only day that all these people could do it."

Henley remains a tireless defender of Walden Woods, which he's been in love with since reading Henry David Thoreau as a boy growing up in Texas. And though he was at first attacked as an "outsider" to the project (this very newspaper shot him some barbs), he's shown a Yankee-like perseverance in buying and preserving land around the woods, via concerts, walkathons, sponsorships (he just posed for a magazine ad for a watch company, which netted him \$100,000 for the cause) and anything else he can scratch together. That includes proceeds from a country music tribute album to his former band, the Eagles, which will be out this fall. Performing on it are Tricia Yearwood, Clint Black, Vince Gill, Travis Tritt and others.

Henley devotes 30 to 40 hours a week to the Walden Woods project, keeps a Boston office with an overhead of close to \$300,000 a year and is fighting to pay the \$4.5 million debt on land his organization has purchased.

"The Foxboro concert will get us by until the spring, then I'll have to figure out something else," he said. "This project is like a beast that constantly needs feeding. It's like going to the zoo and sort of throwing raw meat between the bars. We cannot afford to get behind in our payments, so I'm sure this won't be the last concert."

Meanwhile, Henley's own recording career has suffered. He hasn't had time to write many new songs, though he's also been knee-deep in a feud with his label, Geffen Records. He's wanted to leave the label ever since owner David Geffen sold it two years ago to MCA Records. Henley's lawyers think he can get out of his contract. Geffen's lawyers think he owes the label two more albums. The upshot is that Geffen has filed a \$30 million lawsuit against Henley.

"It's going to get more bitter, and we'll probably go to court in a couple of months," said Henley. "So that's piled up on top of this other project."

No wonder Henley is thinking his next album will be "very raw and

basic. . . . I want to go in a different direction from my past couple of records," he said, even though one of them, "The End of the Innocence," was a multi-Grammy winner.

"I want to do something that's not so technology-oriented. I want to do what a lot of artists do eventually, which is go back home. And by home I mean to Texas, to take advantage of a lot of the great musical talent that exists down there. I've learned over the last few years that T-Bone Walker and Scott Joplin were both born in my hometown of Linden, Texas. So I want to go back and do some research and some music that pertains to the area, which would be blues-based. That's certainly not an original idea, but I'd like to take my turn at it. I want to give it a fresh approach as it pertains to me and my life. I'm a blues singer anyway. That's what I grew up doing, basically, singing blues and rhythm & blues."

Meanwhile, he'll keep fighting to preserve Walden Woods by any means he can. "My father brought me up not to quit," he said. "And this has been a very rewarding experience. I've gotten an education that you just can't get in school."

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CAPTION: PHOTO

Henley wooed Sting and Elton John for a Labor Day benefit concert. (COLOR)

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