

RECORDS

(London) Independent [10/88]

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07824033 RECORDS Independent (IN) - Sunday, November 20, 1994 By:  
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41 Word Count: 584

MEMO: The Eagles: Hell Freezes Over (Geffen, CD

TEXT: For those not in on a bitter joke that lasted 15 years, the title refers to the insiders' guess at a probable date for the Eagles' reunion. One can only guess at what persuaded the five of them to talk to each other again, and to tour and record for the first time since 1979, but this package - 11 live tracks, four new studio numbers, the whole thing perfunctory to the point of cynicism - suggests that artistic reasons were way down the list. Here was a chance to prove something, to support those who argue that the six albums recorded by the Eagles in the Seventies made a defining contribution to modern culture. What Don Henley and Glenn Frey achieved, in evoking the dream-like lure of southern California, remains a match for the best American short-story writers; neither Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" nor Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" said much more about their territory than "Lyn' Eyes" or "New Kid in Town". But none of the four new songs here approaches that league. They even include a song not written by any of the band - and if no Eagle could come up with a better ballad than Jim Capaldi, Paul Carrack and Pete Vale's pallid "Love Will Keep Us Alive", they should be ashamed of themselves. Only Henley and Frey's "Get Over It", a bog-standard country-rocker, shows signs of creative life: a sour rant summarising the ground covered by Robert Hughes's *The Culture of Complaint*, it boasts one good line - "I'd like to find your inner child and kick its little ass". Well, quite good.

Of the tracks recorded on last summer's high-grossing tour of America, nine are greatest hits (from "Take It Easy" to "I Can't Tell You Why" via "Desperado" and "Tequila Sunrise"), while the other two - Henley's "New York Minute" and Joe Walsh's "Pretty Maids All in a Row" - are borrowed from solo careers. On the principle of giving the people what they believe they want, the flourish of Gypsy Kings guitar bolted on to "Hotel California" is the only real variation from the original arrangements, which are reproduced with high precision. These performances no doubt sounded wonderful in concert; those of us who were not there can only imagine the effect of Henley's spoilt-choirboy delivery of the final verses of the epic "The Last Resort" at, say, the Pasadena Rose Bowl, in a purple sunset under the San Gabriel mountains. In different conditions, the impact is somewhat less dramatic.