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MEMO: Andy Gill on the Eagles' return from a 14-year vacation. Plus
Black Crowes, Carpenter and Coolio

TEXT: The Eagles Hell Freezes Over (Geffen GED 24725) There was never really any doubt that the Eagles would one day re-form. The odds were simply too high, and too risk-free, for any sensible person to overlook, and men like their manager, Irving Azoff, and label boss David Geffen did not become the powerful business players they are by looking a gift bird like this in the beak. The figures alone tell their own staggering story: The Eagles are the only group ever to sell over 10 million copies each of two albums in the USA alone, Hotel California and the Greatest Hits collection shifting an astonishing 18 million units in one 18-month period in the late Seventies. That's the kind of baby-boomer zeitgeist-tapping most acts can only dream of, and even if only a tiny fraction of that potential audience buys into this career re-launch, all concerned will be chortling merrily in the deposit queue.

So should that audience bother? Barely: Hell Freezes Over is a classic Nineties reformation exercise, with only I'd like to find your inner child and kick its little ass".

It's downhill from there, though: the listless ballad "Love Will Keep Us Alive" could have been written to order for the group, while their dude-rock roots show to less than full effect in the steel-guitar whine of Glenn Frey's abject "The Girl from Yesterday". In their transition from peaceful, easy-feelin' California cowpokes to rather more sinister premonitors of Eighties' Yuppie oligarchism, however, it was always Don Henley who provided the artistic spine of the group. And the subtle undertow of the apocalyptic which ran through their later work (and his solo material) continues on his portentous "Learn to Be Still". This is another song attempting to peel back the veneer of moneyed insulation from his generation's supposedly paradisiacal life.

As for the concert material, it's a patchy selection performed impeccably, bookended by the sentimental western strains of "Tequila Sunrise" and "Desperado" but coming dangerously close to stalling completely in between with a succession of moodily self-important songs. The Mexican-flavoured version of "Hotel California" gets the best reception, but the most magical moment comes immediately after their pompous set introduction - "For the record, we never broke up, we just took a 14-year vacation" - when the rousing cheers are followed by a perfectly belated shout of "Right On!" from some stoner at the back.