

San Francisco Chronicle [1/88]

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08330035 Q & A WITH DON HENLEY San Francisco Chronicle (SF) - SUNDAY,
November 26, 1995 By: JOEL SELVIN, CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER Edition:
SUNDAY Section: Sunday DateBook Page: 41 Word Count: 1,107

MEMO: POP QUIZ

TEXT: On his recently released greatest-hits album, "Actual Miles -- Henley's Greatest Hits," Don Henley included three new songs: a mean-spirited kiss-off song, "You Don't Know Me," his cover of "Everybody Knows" from the Leonard Cohen tribute album, and a seven-minute epic called "The Garden of Allah." Named after a long-since demolished Sunset Boulevard hotel whose celebrated residents during its three-decade heyday included Greta Garbo, Tallulah Bankhead and Errol Flynn, "The Garden of Allah" is something of a sequel to "Hotel California," Henley's '70s signature song with the Eagles. In "The Garden of Allah," Henley, who recently relocated to Dallas with his pregnant wife, envisions the devil visiting Los Angeles, complaining about the state of humanity he encounters and offering himself as an expert witness at the O.J. Simpson trial. Kirk Douglas will portray the character in the video. But the song may prove too potent for former Henley strongholds in radio, more accustomed to his wistful ruminations over love gone bad or lost innocence. Henley was interviewed by phone in Japan, where he is playing to enormous sold-out crowds with the Eagles.

Q: How did "The Garden of Allah" come about?

A: I first heard about the Garden of Allah, the hotel that is, back in the late '70s in an article in the L.A. Times. I'm fascinated with hotels anyway, you might have noticed. This is a symbolic place. It symbolizes old Hollywood, the glamour, the wickedness and even the innocence. There was a lot of debauchery and all kinds of stuff there, but at the bottom of it all it was a gathering place for people and there was a real sense of camaraderie and community.

And besides being a statement on the atrociousness of city government and how Southern California has little or no respect for history and especially architectural history, the song is a commentary on the loss of community that we are experiencing these days, not only in Los Angeles, but I guess in any big city. We live in a kind of dukes-up society now. The mentality is every man for himself and screw everybody else.

Q: So you put Satan into this community?

A: The song basically is about how the lines between good and evil have been blurred in our culture these days. The literal story line of the song has to do with Satan coming to visit Los Angeles in the waning years of the 20th century and finding that he has become obsolete. There's a whole new generation of human beings without

souls.

So the devil shows up in Los Angeles and complains about how hot it is. He appears to a young man who is one of the devil's favorites for some reason, basically because the young man was never afraid of the devil. So the devil decides to unload all his troubles on the young man.

And he starts to wax nostalgic about the good old days when he used to hang around with the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Aldous Huxley and the time he spent at the Garden of Allah, which then becomes a symbol for the Garden of Eden and heaven in general. And the devil reminisces about the old days when good was good and evil was evil and one was able to tell the difference. He also makes a few references to the deities, the deities in Hollywood back in the 1930s being people like Louis B. Mayer, and these are references to the old studio system and the power of it.

All the great writers like Fitzgerald, Huxley, Faulkner, James Agee and Christopher Isherwood all came to Hollywood to make their fortune. They were offered a lot of money to come and write screenplays. Most of them, however, failed miserably because they just couldn't lower themselves to do that. So they became outcasts in a sense. They were living in a community of exiles and the devil really sympathizes with that because he remembers when he was an angel in heaven named Lucifer and he was also cast out for being a little too creative. So the song also makes a statement on creativity and is also probably a veiled reference to not only the system in the movie industry, but also the system in the record industry.

Q: How is radio treating the track?

A: The really different thing about it is the narrative, the speaking parts, which our uncreative friends at radio are having some trouble with. I'm getting a lot of pressure to take all the speaking parts out and just have the first verse, the guitar solo and the second verse. It wouldn't make any sense at all, but they don't really care at radio whether it makes sense or not. It burns me up.

Q: Is this a sequel to ``Hotel California''?

A: It's sort of darker. It's the end of a 20-year slide. That was written in '76. This is '96, almost. ``Hotel California'' was written about the loss of innocence. This is much more evil. This guy, Andrew Delbanco, wrote this book, ``The Death of Satan.'' He pretty much nails what the song is about. I must have tapped into the zeitgeist or something because he declares that Satan is dead. He says that in our society we are in a condition that is marked by a yearning for the moral certainties that were once provided by the devil.

We are definitely now without a criterion for wrongness. I think the O.J. Simpson trial really brought that out. The circus that sprang up around it . . . it was just one of the most tawdry, lowlife things that I have seen in our culture in a long time.

Later on in the song it says, ``This year notoriety got

confused with fame.' That's another theme in the song. In the old days, fame was equated with accomplishment. Notoriety was something you got if you were an outlaw, like Jesse James and Billy the Kid were notorious outlaws. Now notoriety and fame are the same thing. You can get famous and even rich by committing a crime, committing an atrocious act or just by doing something stupid. You can get famous, for instance, by breaking into Watergate. You can get famous for having your penis cut off by your wife. You can get famous for just living in someone's guest house at the right time. It's ridiculous. We have become a nation of spectators. All I can say is that people just have too much free time on their hands.

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