



TRARK STARR



Eagles Great Society

Country Joe

Grateful Dead

II

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Summer always produces memorable hit singles, it might be "Something In The Air" or it might be "I'm Not In Love". But in 1972 on the airwaves of US radio stations it was "Take It Easy" the first single by a new band, The Eagles. Being signed to Asylum meant something in 1972. It meant that you were in the company of Joni Mitchell and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young ... it meant that there was a good chance of airplay. The record never took off in this country although the band enjoyed a small cult following, rather like that of Buffalo Springfield, from whom many thought The Eagles derived their basic music.

The four founder members, Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Bernie Leadon and Randy Meisner, had followed chequered musical careers. Frey had been in a band with John David Souther, another signee to Asylum, and had played on sessions with Bob Seger. Henley had fronted (from behind his drums) a band named Shiloh which played all types of music from Jazz to Folk, but soon split after making their first and only album. Leadon was perhaps the most well-known, being the only Californian in the band. He had joined an LA band called Hearts And Flowers in time for their second album and then joined The Flying Burrito Bros. in time for THEIR second album. He was featured heavily on the two Dillard and Clark albums (writing with Gene Clark most of the songs on the first album) and also played, with several other Burrito's, on a Barry McGuire album. Randy Meisner had been in a band called The Poor, which aroused the interest of Charlie Green and Brian Stone, (the Buffalo Springfield managers for a while). He quit to play at the first Poco gigs and on their first album and moved on yet again to join Rick Nelson's Poco-influenced Stone Canyon Band, which also contained members of his old band, The Poor. He split after recording the live Nelson album, but came back two albums later to record "Rudy The Fifth".

Although all four had played together before (backing Linda Ronstadt on her third album) it was Asylum and David Geffen who first suggested that they should form their own band. Linda Ronstadt gave them her blessing and they started rehearsing at the Gallery in Aspen, Colorado.

Randy Meisner recalls: "The Gallery was a small dance-bar that held maybe five hundred packed in solid, where everybody just danced and drank until they fell down. It was fantastic ... everybody had a great time. We did four sets a night for a month, playing as many originals as we'd written - to work them up ready for the album - and filled out with just about every other song we knew ... loads of Chuck Berry, some Neil Young songs and all sorts of other things from the other groups we'd played in. It tightened the group up pretty well; we learned how to play with each other, and then we went on to a club in Boulder, which is where Glyn Johns came to see us. It was exam week, so the place wasn't very full, but Glyn liked us anyway."

Why did they ask Glyn Johns, miles away in London, to produce their recordings? Bernie Leadon explains: "We wanted a producer who could handle folkie stuff and the rock'n'roll, and we wanted the best producer we could find. So names like Glyn, Tom Dowd, Bill Halverson, Ted Templeman - people who'd had a history of producing the same range of music as we were into - came to mind." The band came over to England and cut their first album "The Eagles" (Asylum SYTC 101) within three weeks. Outstanding tracks include the Jackson Browne/Glenn Frey "Take It Easy", "Train Leaves Here This Morning", written by Bernie Leadon and Gene Clark, and originally recorded on "The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard And Clark", "Witchy Woman", "Peaceful Easy Feeling", "Take The Devil", and "Earlybird". Don Henley's high harmonies are crystal-clear and Leadon's bendy Telecaster is superb. "Most Of Us Are Sad" is a slow, acoustic Glenn Frey composition and "Tryin'" a rocker by Meisner. More ordinary are "Nightingale", one of Jackson Browne's lesser songs, and "Chug All Night", although this song works better in concert.

OUT OF CONTROL

A concert in early 1973 with associate John David Souther established them as another band worthy of the Byrds/ Buffalo Springfield/ Burrito's tradition. They came out with acoustic guitars and sang "Train Leaves Here This Morning" in harmony, and went on to play a set which included most of their first album, several songs from their next, plus "In Dreams" an old Roy Orbison song, and J.D. Souther's "How Long."

Some months later, their second album was released. In no uncertain terms "Desperado" (Asylum SYL 9011) ranks as one of the best albums ever released. It consists of a series of cowboy stories - a theme based on seeing the West Coast musicians in their immediate circle (Browne, Souther, Doherty, etc.), as modern day outlaws. Concept albums had been tried before in boring and pretentious ways by the Moody Blues and in just boring ways by Jethro Tull, and so it is perhaps surprising that an album on such a hackneyed theme as cowboy life can succeed at all. Much of the credit must go to Don Henley for original and sensitive lyrics and in particular for avoiding the standard Wild West cliches

so common in other cowboy efforts. It is a real pity that the idea to put the story in front of movie cameras was never followed through. Songs from outside the band, such as colleague David Blues' "Outlaw Man" fit in superbly with Blues' "Fifty Six Chevrolet" changed to "Riding Night And Day". "Certain Kind Of Fool" was the story of a young kid impressed with the idea of owning a six-gun who practises until he becomes a wanted man. The "Doolin'-Dalton" episode, involving the legendary Dalton Brothers, complete with opening prairie dog harmonica, serves to encapsulate the other dates in the diary, with a reprise at the end which contains some excellent picking by Bernie. His own "Bitter Creek" is my personal favourite on the album, although "Saturday Night" and the best-known track "Tequila Sunrise" come close. From the feel of this album you'd never believe it was recorded in London, again with Johns.

A real turning point occurred at this stage when the band played one of the best-received concerts of their career so far, to a packed house at the Berkeley Community Theatre on 16th June 1973. It was the prestige gig of the tour, and served to clinch their fame in the annals of country-rock music. Their set was almost two complete hours and apart from songs from both albums also featured "How Long" by John David Souther (from a JD's album on which Frey appears) and a tight version of Gram Parsons' "Lazy Day" - right at the end of the intense set - which displayed Leadon's Burrito roots admirably.

In late 1973 the Eagles returned to England to play a series of concerts with Neil Young. It was a shortened set which left out highlights such as "Desperado", "Bitter Creek" and "Fool", but they came over well. "Tryin'" (the last song in the set and the only occasion that Randy Meisner sang lead) contained a great bass solo, as did "Outlaw Man" ... try playing that one with the bass on full. They played a selection from their two albums, plus "Don't Be Mean To Your Badman" which they wrote with Souther. It was intended to go onto their third album, which they informed concert-goers was to be called "Out On The Borderland", and which they said was to include a song by Richie Furay.

In fact, neither song appeared on the third album, which was finally called "On The Border" (Asylum 7E 1004). Although a much bigger commercial success than "Desperado", the album was a disappointment musically. Only two tracks from the London sessions at Abbey Road were kept, "You Never Cry Like A Lover" (written by Don Henley and J.D. Souther) and "Best Of My Love" (by Henley, Souther and Frey, the Eagles' biggest hit so far). The other eight tracks on the album were produced by Bill Szymczyk at the LA Record Plant. Among these is "My Man" - probably the best Eagles track - a Bernie Leadon song about Gram Parsons and Duane Allman, and featuring some fine Leadon steel guitar. Gram Parsons is also the subject of the rocking slide guitar



led "Good Day In Hell". "James Dean" (by Souther, Henley, Frey, and Jackson Browne - the quartet responsible for "Doolin'-Dalton") is an elegy for Dean in non-elegy style, fast with Leadon's guitar hitting those high notes ... another hit single in the States. The band are joined on "Good Day In Hell" and Jack Tempchin's "Already Gone" by Don Felder on guitar as the fifth Eagle (or seventh if you count Browne and Souther.) "01 55", though not as effective or as poignant as Tom Wait's own definitive recording (also on Asylum), is still very good with Henley and Frey sharing the vocal credits and ex-Manassas Al Perkins on steel guitar. The following track, "Is It True" by Meisner, certainly suffers by comparison. I get the impression that "01 55" and several other tracks (including "Good Day In Hell") were recorded during the time when Bernie Leadon "went away for a few days", as he is nowhere to be heard. "Midnight Flier" features Randy Meisner singing and playing great bass, with Bernie on banjo. Unfortunately, the track disintegrates into a slide guitar free-for-all with Frey drowning out Meisner and Leadon's more interesting contributions. "On The Border" itself, inspired by the R.M.N./Watergate saga, is credited to Henley/Leadon / Frey, although Leadon's only contribution appears to be the guitar riff. Nevertheless, with "Already Gone" and "Best Of My Love", they made sure that they became an album and singles band of high calibre, the first since Creedence Clearwater Revival. As Don Henley says: "Best Of My Love" did it, bein' number one... we'd been so close. "Take It Easy" was number seven, "Witchy Woman" was five. When "Desperado" came out no one took it seriously; now they regard it as a masterpiece, it's back in the charts again, it's gold." "Refreshingly self-indulgent' they call it now" said Frey.

In between this album and the next all we heard of the Eagles in the UK was the occasional review of a US gig, usually very favourable. One of the best was at the Ontario Speedway on April 6th, 1974. Part of this was released by those dastardly bootleggers Phoneygraf Records on an album called "Eagles/America Live: America plod away at their boring and turgid best on side one, whilst an amazing "Tequila Sunrise" warms you to side two. It starts off with Leadon's incredible Telecaster playing and demonstrating his use of a Clarence White string-bender. The other songs featured on this album are "Witchy Woman", "Earlybird" (with a brilliant piece of banjo playing not on the studio version), and "Take It Easy", which I think boasts

Jackson Browne on piano as for some reason Don Felder didn't make this gig. This side is well worth the price of the album, and if you can put up with "Horse With No Name Of Gold" ... fine.

Around this time the five-piece Eagles recorded a "Don Kirschner In Concert" programme for American TV, in which they played a selection from their three albums, although great emphasis was placed on the third. They also backed Linda Ronstadt for three songs, "Silver Threads And Golden Needles", "I Guess It Doesn't Matter Any More" and their own "Desperado". To top it all, special guest Jackson Browne appeared with David Lindley performing two songs, including an as yet unrecorded gem "Bright Baby Blues". As the programme lacked the best Eagles' songs, and relied far too heavily on songs sung by Frey, it cannot be judged as representative of the group as a whole, but it was reworked over the entire United States, saving them the need for another gruelling concert tour. Subsequently segments of the show have been screened in Belgium and Holland, and just recently a part was shown on "The Old Grey Whistle Test".

The Eagles' latest album "One Of These Nights" (Asylum 7E 1039) was the first to score on both sides of the Atlantic. It is an album which on first hearing seems superior to "On The Border" but on repeated playings is found to be a very formulated and emotionless piece of work. One of the few good points was the skillful and sympathetic string arrangements by Jim Ed Norman (like Don Henley, a one-time member of Shiloh) who was also responsible for the strings on "Desperado". Randy Meisner has the two

best songs, although neither can be described as "classic" Eagles. "Too Many Hands" co-authored with Felder) is an ecology song in a similar vein to the Byrds' "Hungry Planet". His other song, "Take It To The Limit" (writing credits shared with Frey and Henley) is a love song featuring some excellent vocals. Never before had Meisner had so much time allocated to his material. They are the runaway best tracks, far superior to "One Of These Nights" itself, which is a pseudo-Philly soul recording, with erotic lyrics similar to "Witchy Woman". "Lyin' Eyes" is a half-hearted quasi-mystic effort, falling flat on its face, simply because it sounds more like a badly-scored Eagles impersonation than the real thing.

Leadon's "Journey Of The Sorcerer", the subject of many harsh words, is a banjo-led instrumental with strings in the background. It sounds a little like a movie score and would have been more suitable for a Bernie Leadon solo album (which I am now hoping for more than ever). His other song, "I Wish You Peace" is wispy and slow, with a sleazy nightclub atmosphere. "After The Thrill Is Gone" is another superb track, with strong lyrics and vocals by Henley - his best effort to date. Altogether, the album has more good tracks than "Border", but nothing to surpass "Border's" powerful "My Man".

Although neither of the post-"Desperado" albums carried any single concept, they do reinforce the band's underlying theme. Henley intellectualises it thus: "The theme of all our albums has been basically the same, and that is LOOKING FOR IT, whatever it is, just

lookin' for it. Whether it's a woman, happiness, satisfaction, success, peace of mind, riches or any of that. Your whole life is a journey, right? And the journey is more important to us than the journey's end." As to their LA Cowboy image, Frey comments: "The kids on the East Coast call out to us 'Tell us about the desert' - You see our strongest area outside Los Angeles is the East. Gettin' back to the idea that what people want to do is escape from reality. I mean I know because I'm from the East, from Detroit. I saw Surfer magazine, I got the Beach Boys albums. I took acid and I bought the first Buffalo Springfield album an' got chillibumps an' had to lay on the floor an' stuff. I got into this whole "California consciousness". I saw the



