

THE EAGLES MAKE CALIFORNIA SOUNDS

by Joseph Rose



The Eagles: not an endangered rock 'n' roll species as far as they're concerned.

"Please help preserve the American Bald Eagle, our national symbol of freedom," says the message on the inside back cover of the Eagles' official program book. And although they can lay claim to the title of America's top rock and roll band with more substance than almost any other group, the Eagles sometimes seem to consider themselves as threatened as their namesake.

Why they should feel this way is difficult to see. After all, each of their albums has sold over a million copies, with the latest, "Hotel California," no exception. When they go on tour, they perform to sellout audiences in the 20,000 range in huge indoor arenas all over the world. It's safe to say they are one of the most popular bands in history.

But tell that to Don Henley, the vocalist - drummer - songwriter; Randy Meisner, the bassist - vocalist - songwriter; Joe Walsh, the guitarist -

vocalist - songwriter; or J.D. Souther, the longtime friend and songwriting collaborator of the band. They're sitting around a coffee table in a hotel room around 2 a.m., and it's as if the wild ovations at the concert earlier that evening were for another band.

"With no personal references or anything," says Don Henley, looking right through me, "the press tends to - once you are established and no longer struggling, they tend to knock you a little bit more, I think, than when you are coming up."

"You're bigger targets," says J.D. Souther. "It's easier to take a shot at you."

"I mean, it's a pattern that I've seen time and again," continues Don, "even if you are as good as you were before. You always have to try to one-up yourself, it seems like, to stay in the good graces of the press."

I tried to put myself in the position of the eagles, with all their platinum albums, wealth, success and adulation, and I decided that I wouldn't care one fig about what the press wrote about me. But that's one of the many reasons I'm not in the Eagles. The Eagles do care — and care a lot — about the critics, about other musicians and bands, and about you, the reader. They care what you think. And the one thing they are most afraid of is that you might someday decide their songs aren't among the best, that their music isn't terrific, that they aren't what they used to be.

That's why they took more than a year and a half to make "Hotel California." The Eagles don't record albums, they sweat albums. They go over and over every tune, every syllable of the lyrics, polishing, changing, improving — until finally, reluctantly, they allow the recorded tapes to be sent to be converted