

Eagles' thread not so common

By TOM ROLAND

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Hell froze over, but California is still cookin'.

After a six-month delay, the poster boys for the Southern California country/rock sound of the '70s — The Eagles — brought their Hell Freezes Over tour to sold-out Starwood last night. With surgically-repaired Glenn Frey and Joe Walsh in Hawaiian shirts and a stage dressed in figurative earthquake-broken freeway girders, the band opened with a quartet of songs from their definitive *Hotel California* album.

From there on out, they gave ticket-buyers — including those who paid \$89.50 for the best seats — their money's worth with a show that featured well-sculpted San Gabriel peaks and Simi valleys in energy.

The valleys included a well-designed unplugged segment that led off the show's second half, with the sparse instrumentation on *Tequila Sunrise* and the group's current *Love Will Keep Us Alive* showcasing the soaring three- and four-part harmonies that became an enduring trademark.

Despite their influential standing as a country/rock force, however, the emphasis was on the rockin' end rather than the lighter fare as the

concert proceeded to build through-out. Frey's fiery *Smuggler's Blues*, Walsh's riff-laden James Gang-era *Funk #49* and Don Henley's pulsing attack on vicious, cut-throat journalists (updated to "She can tell you 'bout the O.J. with a gleam in her eye") had feet stomping and fists pounding seats.

Performing their first tour following a 14-year split, the band's reunion brought new meaning to many of the lines — "So much has happened, nothing has changed" or "nice to hear from you again" — and the concert took a broad look at The Eagles' group and solo accomplishments.

Alongside Eagles classics such as *New Kid In Town* and *Lyn' Eyes*, the guys rounded the set with such familiar pieces as Henley's thoughtful *Heart Of The Matter*, Walsh's quirky *Ordinary Average Guy* and Frey's pounding *You Belong To The City*.

Though The Eagles have obviously aged (haven't we all?), its abilities are still intact. Don Felder still played lyrically and emotionally, even though the bulk of his solos are photocopies of the original recordings; and Timothy B. Schmit still hits all those melting falsetto high notes. Henley, it must be noted, seemingly

taped the high parts for his vocal vamp at the close of *One Of These Nights*, but who cares? It's still amazing he hit some of those suckers on the original 20 years ago, and he delivered all the others flawlessly, even though he spent most of the evening slamming the sticks.

The Eagles' performance at Starwood (they play again tomorrow night) was an essential part of their reunion tour, since they've acknowledged that the Nashville-produced *Common Thread* album — featuring numerous country stars faithfully re-making their material — played a role in their reformation.

Naturally, a huge number of musicians turned out, including Clay Walker, Steve Winwood, Lorrie Morgan (accompanied by Sen. Fred Thompson), Ronnie Dunn, Doug Supernaw and Tim McGraw, who sat immediately behind *The Tennessean*.

But the focus was still on a show that spanned more than three hours (including a half-hour intermission), and material that spanned some 25 years.

"Why do we give up our hearts to the past?" Walsh questioned in *Pretty Maids All In A Row*.

In part because some of the past still holds up well — including a little history made out in California. ■