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WHERE EAGLES DARE

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The Eagles (l-r) Bernie Leadon, Don Henley, Randy Meisner and Glenn Frey

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Los Angeles – any slogging session musician unhappy with the prospect of bleak years of backing big names on records, concerts, or even accompanying non-stars and lesser talents, should take heart from this story.

It's about the sudden breakthrough of four players who had run the gamut of gigging around until they believed their future lay in getting together a regular back-up band – then when they finally did that, their own sound became a hit.

The group is The Eagles. They have been together under that name for just seven months, but have belonged to the West Coast country-rock clique for several years. Currently they are breaking through with a USA chart single, a potential smash album, and are on the present Jethro Tull tour of America, reaching huge audiences.

In Hollywood, your taxi driver is quite likely to be a musician (the one who drove me to meet The Eagles said he'd just written some songs for Buck Owens and that his wife knew Neil Young. He seemed honest). This environment of Rock Utopia breeds chain links of musicians who

seem to go round in circles as well as clans. The Eagles could probably be tagged as the ones who got away from the circuit, and "made it."

First, the line-up: Glen Frey (lead guitar), who has worked a lot with Bo Diddley and Linda Ronstadt; Bernie Leadon (rhythm guitar, banjo), ex-Flying Burrito Brothers; Randy Meisner (bass), formerly with Poco; and Don Henley (drums), who regularly backed Linda Ronstadt.

"The best thing about this band is that everyone can sing lead, everyone writes, so you get off both ways!" Bernie Leadon

They got together originally as a back-up for Linda, at the suggestion of Jackson Browne, a friend of Glenn Frey. But after one or two sessions together, they decided their sound was too good to just accompany and, now-or-never, they ought to try to crack the barrier alone.

By February The Eagles had been born and flown to London to record under the supervision of Glyn Johns. There was a power strike at the time,

and Leadon recalls with a smile the independent generator that was hurriedly imported into London's Olympic Studios so that they wouldn't waste too much money by being here and out of work. They are unanimous in their unstinting praise of Glyn Johns: "I've never worked with anyone in Los Angeles who has the sort of mind as Glyn," said Bernie. "We'd all wanted to record in London, ever since we heard those

early Beatles and Stones records – the mystique of British rock! The sound seems just great. It's such a different atmosphere and we love it."

"We just fancied breaking the pattern and recording in London," said Don, "But you look at the liner notes of most of the albums, and most stuff ends up being recorded here. LA is the melting pot for all of today's music and I can't see things changing." Bernie said: "There are so many

musicians around out here, it's almost ludicrous. That's one of the reasons we're lucky to have found each other, really. There are about 50 little cliques in this town, and we just happen to be part of the same musical family."

"Sometimes," interrupted Glenn, "I forget there are people in the world who don't play an instrument. Living in this place is like living in a recording studio – everyone, it seems is signed to a record company, or planning to get signed, or they own a record company."

"Whoever you are," said Don, "if you're a decent musician, you'll get a record contract in Los Angeles. The competition to sign up musicians is terrific among record companies."

That might sound like self-deprecation, but The Eagles have paid their dues. Before going on the road with Jethro Tull and later with Procol Harum, they have rehearsed their act with some gruelling sets – four nights a week for a month in a small bar in Aspen, Colorado. "Three hundred and fifty people a night, elbow to elbow – we loved it," says Glenn, "because we had an audience and we could see their reaction to our music. It was a marvellous run-in."

Musically, The Eagles may best be described as clean, fresh, country-rock, but it's the simplicity of their sound and strength of their vocals that lifts them into something special.

"The best thing about this band," remarked Bernie, "is that everyone can sing lead, everyone writes, nobody lays down the law, and everyone gets a chance to be a back-up singer. So it's much more satisfying than being a solo artist and far better than being a back-up band. So you get off both ways!"

The simple name Eagles was coined by Bernie, who had read books on Indian mythology. "Certain spiritual powers were attributed to eagles," he said. "It's high soaring, flying closer to the sun than any other bird, and it's spiritually the richest of them all."

"Eagles also sounds athletic, or like a street game, and anyway it's very American in a funny way," chipped in Glenn.

They seem to have the credentials and vitality needed to inject some new blood into the transatlantic rock scene.

Ray Coleman