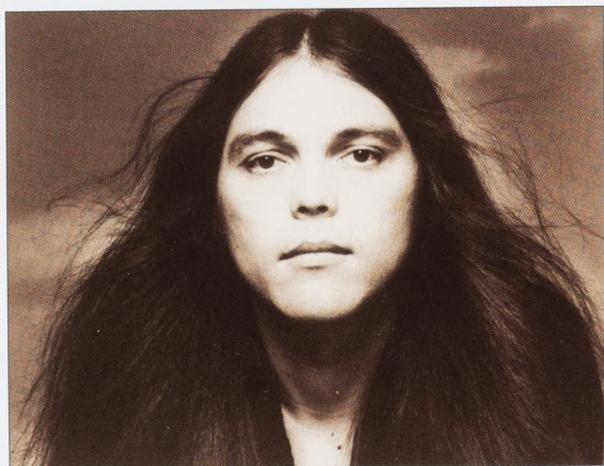
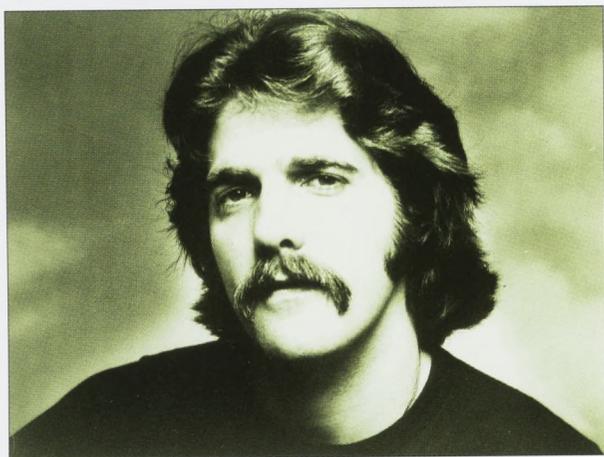
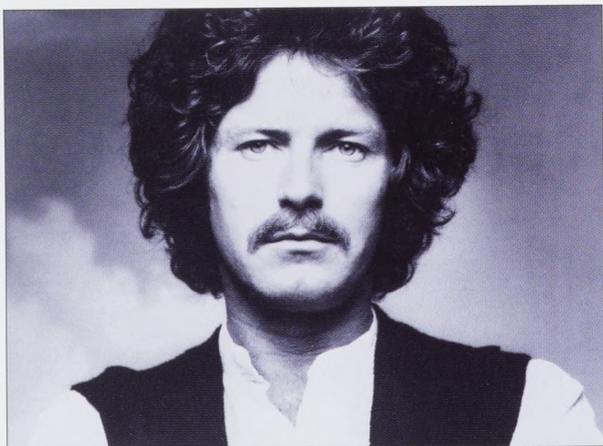


THE EAGLES

THE EAGLES SOARED ABOVE THE RAPIDLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE of America in the Seventies, casting the social mores of those high-flying years into keenly observed songs that everyone came to know by heart. In their flight across a decade that they defined as authoritatively as any band, the Eagles mirrored the larger changes taking place in society. They began as wide-eyed innocents with a country-rock pedigree and ended as purveyors of grandiose, dark-themed albums chronicling a world of excess and seduction that had begun spinning seriously out of control. A Hollywood scriptwriter couldn't have plotted out the parallel history of a band and the decade they inhabited any better than this: The Eagles were born in 1971 and died in 1980. The ultimate plot twist is that they were reborn in 1994 for another go-round as the public demonstrated an insatiable appetite for their music and messages. ¶ The stats on the Eagles are hugely impressive. A best-of collection, *Their Greatest Hits 1971–1975*, has the distinction of being the second biggest-selling album of all time, having sold in excess of twenty-four million copies to date. It was also, incidentally, the first album ever to be certified platinum (one million sold) by the Recording Industry Association of America, which introduced that classification in 1976. How complete was the Eagles' conquest of the Seventies, particularly the latter half of the decade? Consider that they released four consecutive Number One albums between 1975 and 1979 – *One of These Nights*,

The Eagles, 1979: Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Timothy B. Schmit, Don Felder, Joe Walsh (from left)





Their Greatest Hits, *Hotel California* and *The Long Run* – which collectively topped *Billboard*'s album chart for twenty-seven weeks. They had five Number One singles and an equal number that made the Top Ten. They are one of three groups in history (along with the Beatles and Pink Floyd) with two albums that have sold more than ten million copies apiece in the United States. The Eagles sold more albums in the Seventies than any other American band – and that's just part of the story.

Although the band was on hiatus for the whole of the Eighties, their back catalogue continued to sell a million and a half copies annually. Moreover, the seeds they'd sown as a group bore fruit in their respective solo careers – particularly those of founding members Don Henley and Glenn Frey – while their influence helped spark the renegade “new country” movement. When a baker's dozen of country's hottest stars recorded the tribute album *Common Thread: The Songs of the Eagles* in 1993, its unexpected triple-platinum success prompted the Eagles to reunite a year later. The subsequent album and tour were titled *Hell Freezes Over*, a droll appropriation of Don Henley's response to a journalist's question – “When will the Eagles get back together?” – way back when the wounds were still fresh.

What went right and what went wrong with the Eagles is an archetypal Seventies tale of inspiration, hard work, success, excess, conflict and, happily, resolution (albeit fourteen years after their unofficial breakup). The Eagles formed in Los Angeles at the start of a new decade as a quartet of musicians from different backgrounds and locales. Drummer Don Henley came from Texas with his band Shiloh (which recorded a lone album he's described as “awful”). Guitarist Glenn Frey was a rocker from Detroit who headed west, where he befriended and roomed with then-obscure fellow musicians Jackson Browne and John David Souther. He formed a duo with Souther, cutting one album as Longbranch Pennywhistle. Bernie Leadon, who plays a variety of stringed instruments, came from a bluegrass background and belonged to the proto-country-rock outfits Hearts and Flowers, Dillard and Clark and the Flying Burrito Brothers. Bassist and high-harmony singer Randy Meisner played with such country- and folk-rock mainstays as Rick Nelson, James Taylor and Poco. Piece by piece, the four original Eagles first came together in 1970 as Linda Ronstadt's backing band. By 1971, they'd gone off on their own and had honed their repertoire at an Aspen, Colorado, club called the Gallery.

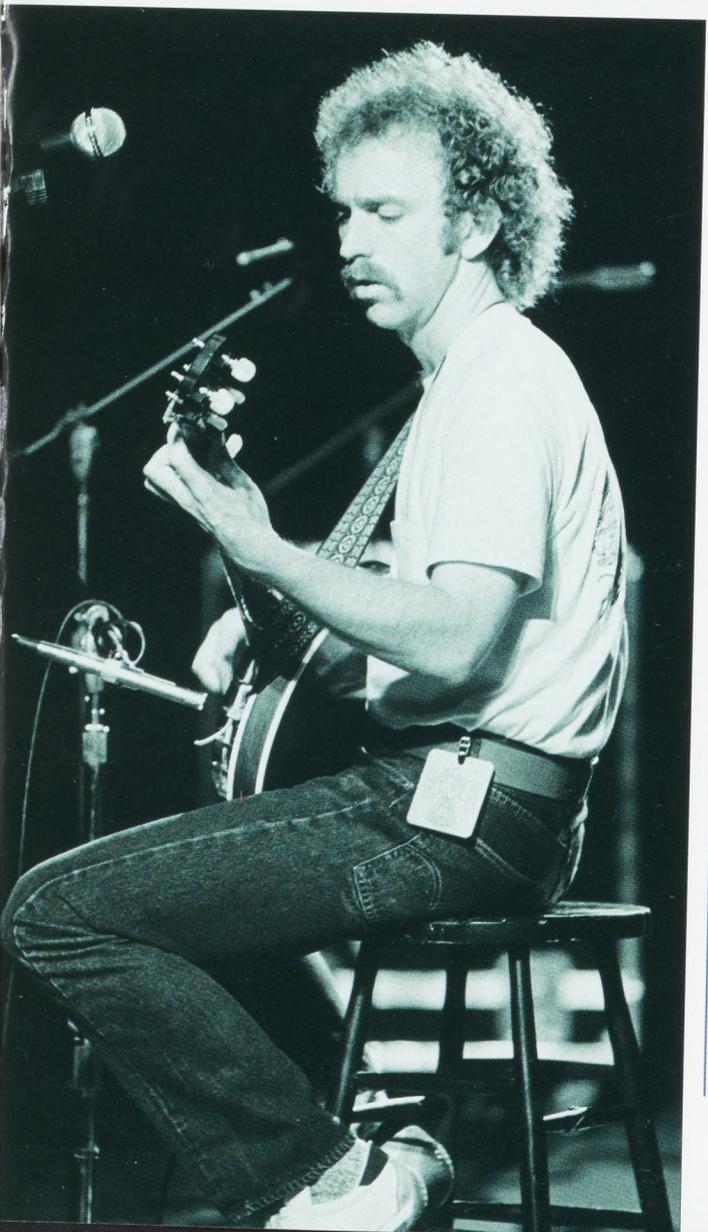
Their manager, David Geffen, released the Eagles' debut album on Asylum Records, a label he formed as a vehicle for artists like them and Jackson Browne. (It would also provide asylum to such kindred spirits as Joni Mitchell, Linda Ronstadt and Warren Zevon, among others.) Early pressings of *Eagles*, released in 1972, had a gatefold sleeve that opened to reveal a picture of the group members gathered around a fire, absorbed in an Indian peyote ritual. At this point, their music was as pure and full of sparkle as spring water, and their songs evoked the broad and boundless vistas of the Far West. The album's first single, the rousing, anthemic “Take It Easy” (cowritten by Frey and Browne), and tracks like “Peaceful Easy Feeling” and “Witchy Woman” have become Eagles standards. “The whole country-rock movement . . . was very much connected to the earth, and everybody was wearing earthy clothes and celebrating the outdoors,” Henley reflected in a 1990 *Rolling Stone* interview. “I lament that loss, that contact we had with nature.”

In the Seventies, the way of Southern California became the way of the world, and the Eagles were in the thick of that social and musical milieu. It was in a very real sense a new kind of social frontier, and it directly

They're not solo yet:
Henley, Frey, Felder and
Schmit (from top), circa '77



The Eagles' front line, live circa 1974: Randy Meisner, Glenn Frey, Don Felder, Bernie Leadon (from left)



inspired the central metaphor of their second album, *Desperado*. In that album, the Eagles explored the notion of rocker-as-outlaw, retelling the story of an Old West gunslinger – Bill

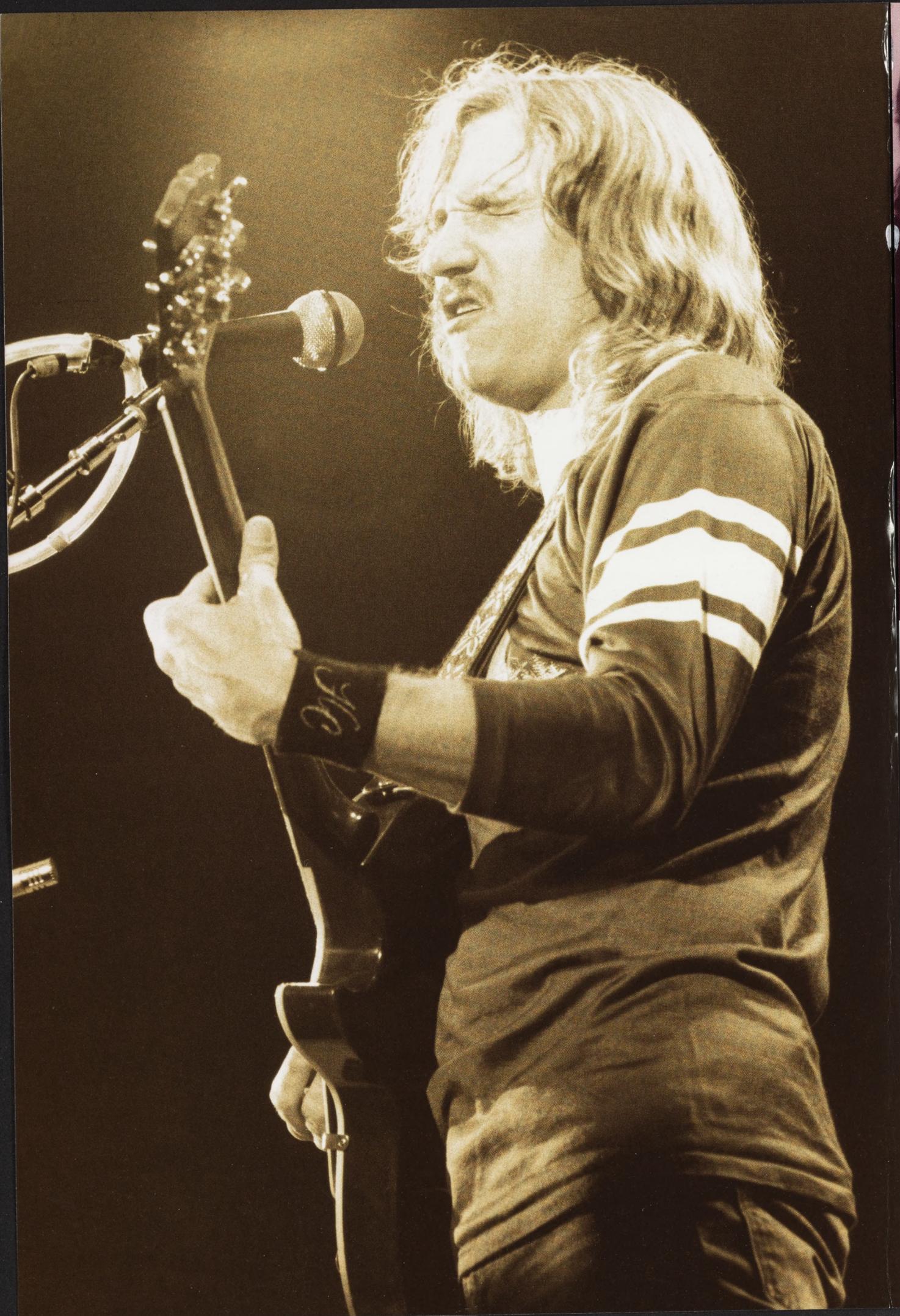
Doolin, of the Dalton gang – as a kind of parable about their generation, in general, and the rise and fall of rock stars, in particular. Released in 1973, it yielded such Eagles favorites as “Tequila Sunrise” and the richly moving and metaphorical title track. It also served notice that the Eagles possessed an ambitious intelligence that refused to be confined by the strictures of genre.

The recording of the Eagles' transitional third album, 1974's *On the Border*, witnessed a shift in producers (Glyn Johns to Bill Szymczyk) and locales (London to Los Angeles). A harder-rocking album than its predecessors, it also saw the Eagles beef up their sound with the addition of guitarist Don Felder late in the sessions. Ironically, after the middling success of two uptempo rockers, “Already Gone” and “James Dean,” it was an acoustic ballad, “The Best of My Love,” that served as the Eagles' breakthrough single. It carried them to the top of the charts in March 1975, where they'd remain for most of the rest of the decade.

One of These Nights, the Eagles' fourth album, appeared in June 1975. The album reflected the onset of a strain of disillusionment that infiltrated both the political and personal realms at mid-decade. With the nation poised between the jarring near-impeachment of a scandal-ridden president and the jingoistic celebration of a Bicentennial that missed the point, the Eagles unerringly captured the prevailing minor-keyed mood of uncertainty and distrust. For their labors, the group was rewarded with their first Number One album and a trio of hit singles: “One of These Nights,” “Lyn' Eyes” and “Take It to the Limit.” But success came at a cost. *One of These Nights* took six months to make, and the grueling experience occasioned by

the group's increasing studio hermitage drove Bernie Leadon to leave the band. He was replaced by Joe Walsh, an old friend who added

At left: Founding Eagle, ex-Flying Burrito Brother Bernie Leadon, 1974





more hard-rock ballast to the Eagles' sound.

By now, the Eagles were an in-demand concert attraction and one of the first bands of Seventies vintage who could justifiably be called superstars. Rising to the challenge of how to top themselves, even as they were informally competing against such standard-bearers of Seventies songcraft as Jackson Browne and Steely Dan, the Eagles upped the ante and then showed a royal flush with their fifth album of new material, the masterful *Hotel California*. In that album's title track, they devised another potent metaphor, this one for the decadent malaise that had settled over America during the excessive Seventies (otherwise known as the "Me Decade"). Writer Anthony DeCurtis insightfully noted *Hotel California's* "depiction of a gorgeous paradise transformed into a kind of sunny hell of unsatisfying pleasure." *Goldmine* journalist William Ruhlmann compared the album to *Desperado*, with both serving to tell "a cautionary tale about the passage from innocence to experience and disillusionment." Around this time, the Eagles had T-shirts made up that expressed their credo as musicians: SONG POWER.

Largely composed in the studio over a long period of time, *Hotel California* was released in December 1976 – it had been a goal of the band's to issue an album of musical commentary during the Bicentennial year – and leapt to Number One by January. (While waiting for *Hotel California*, Asylum issued *Their Greatest Hits 1971–1975*, no doubt little suspecting that it would become a landmark best-seller.) Obviously, the band struck a responsive chord, as *Hotel California* remains their best-selling album (outside of compilations). Among other things, the Eagles added a phrase to the popular lexicon: "life in

the fast lane," which was the title of a key song. Though the album was exquisitely manicured, especially the graceful and deliberate unfold-

At left: Ex-James Gang guitarist Joe Walsh onstage as an Eagle, 1976

ing of its guitar-driven title track, there was a discernible undercurrent of tension that reflected a smoldering discontent. Citing exhaustion, bassist Randy Meisner left in September and was replaced by Timothy B. Schmit, late of Poco. Meanwhile, intragroup relations – particularly between Frey and Henley, the Eagles' main songwriters and creative core – were growing strained.

Sessions for the next album, *The Long Run*, dragged on for two years and drove the Eagles to the breaking point, as the perfection-obsessed group endeavored with difficulty to improve upon *Hotel California*, which cast a long shadow. Though it was in commercial and even critical terms a successful album, yielding yet another trio of hits ("Heartache Tonight," "The Long Run" and "I Can't Tell You Why"), *The Long Run* had been a draining experience that ultimately spelled the demise of the Eagles. Their swan song was *Live*, a double album released late in 1980, by which time the group was effectively defunct, though no formal announcement to that effect was ever made. Thus, Glenn Frey wasn't exactly lying when he announced at the outset of a 1994 concert for MTV's cameras that the Eagles' fourteen-year vacation had ended. "We see this not as a reunion but a resumption," Frey explained.

As for the specter of resuming their life in the fast lane, "We grew out of it," Henley told *USA Today's* Edna Gundersen in 1994. "We survived the Sixties, the Seventies and the Eighties. We survived mentally and physically, and our music survived. That is no mean feat."

Indeed, that canny survival instinct – along with a decade's worth of incredible music – is good reason to celebrate the Eagles' induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame tonight. Long may they fly.

Desperadoes with a bullet, 1974: Randy Meisner, Bernie Leadon, Glenn Frey, Don Felder, Don Henley (from left)