

ON RECORD

BIRDS OF PRAY

THE LONDON PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE RELEASE OF HISTORY OF THE EAGLES REVEALS THAT THE BAND WILL RETURN TO AUSTRALIA. AGAIN.

BY DEBBIE KRUGER

What does one of the world's biggest rock bands do after the thrill is gone?

It disintegrates, leaving four out of five members bereft, then spends 14 years "on vacation," with two members enjoying successful solo careers, one out of control on a ride of alcohol and substance abuse, and the others quietly working on sessions and occasional solo records.

Then the band resumes, more successful than ever, spending the next twenty years touring, recording and making preposterous amounts of money playing its old hits repeatedly around the world in a business-like manner. Soon the band is commemorating its 40th anniversary by making a documentary on its history.

History Of The Eagles premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah last January and the band attended the UK/Europe premiere at the London Sundance Festival on April 25. At a press conference that day, Don Henley, Glenn Frey, Joe Walsh and Timothy B Schmit exhibited little of their usual wry sarcasm. Wise, sober and thankful, they asserted that they take nothing for granted and are in fact surprised that so many people still want to see them play all over the world. (Yes, Australia will get at least one more Eagles tour.)

The three-hour, two-part film out on DVD (with a bonus disc of live footage from 1977) focuses its first part on the most captivating time when the thrill was still there. From 1972 to 1980, the Eagles enjoyed the kind of ride that the young dudes they were could barely comprehend.

Said a bearded, erudite Henley in London, "Even though we were in our twenties, we were kids then. Men grow up slowly, if at all. Especially in the entertainment industry."

The film examines, warts-and-nearly-all, the early ride from country rock wannabes to rock 'n' roll superstars. It's mainly the story of Henley from the small town of Linden, Texas, and Frey from Detroit, Michigan, and their individual journeys to Los Angeles where they met at the Troubadour club bar, joined Linda Ronstadt's backing band, and began

their ascent to life in the fast lane. The film acknowledges Ronstadt's role in founding The Eagles.


Archival footage on and off stage is plentiful and illuminating. Joe Walsh's infamous hotel room antics are almost painful to watch - even for Walsh.

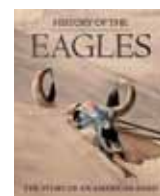
"It's uncomfortable seeing me when I was a mess, but I think it's very important that that be in the documentary," Walsh admitted. "When we stopped, I didn't really have a life, and I didn't know what to do, and I was sad. So I pretended that we didn't stop and I kept going. And basically I ended up alcoholic and dependent on substances, and those things gradually convince you that you can't do anything without them. And that's how I wound up.

"Don and Glenn came to me in 1993 and said, 'We're thinking about trying it again and we can't really do it without you and we can't do it unless you're sober.' That was the reason I'd been waiting for all those years."

Frey is acknowledged as the leader - he alone decided the band was over in 1980 and it was his call the reunited the band in 1994. In the interim, he learned how to handle the interpersonal tensions that would inevitably arise. Even so, it was impossible with guitarist Don Felder still in the band; Frey and Felder had famously clashed in the late '70s, and things did not improve in the '90s. Felder was fired in 2001. He gets plenty of screen time in the film, as do Leaton, Meisner and Meisner's post-*Hotel California* replacement Schmit, who remarks, "In my experience all rock 'n' roll bands are on the verge of breaking up at all times."

Since Felder's departure, relations in the band have stayed on an even keel. "We've learned a lot," Henley said. "We have that wonderful thing now called perspective, which we didn't have so much of then. We have more gratitude now for how fortunate we are and we've learned to accept and tolerate one another. It's not that we don't have our differences, it's just that these days it doesn't become so dramatic.

"I think the lesson to take away from this is that we all survived, we're all alive and well, we've been through the fire. A lot of people didn't survive but for one reason or another we're all fine. And we're grateful for that." 



History Of The Eagles is available through Universal.