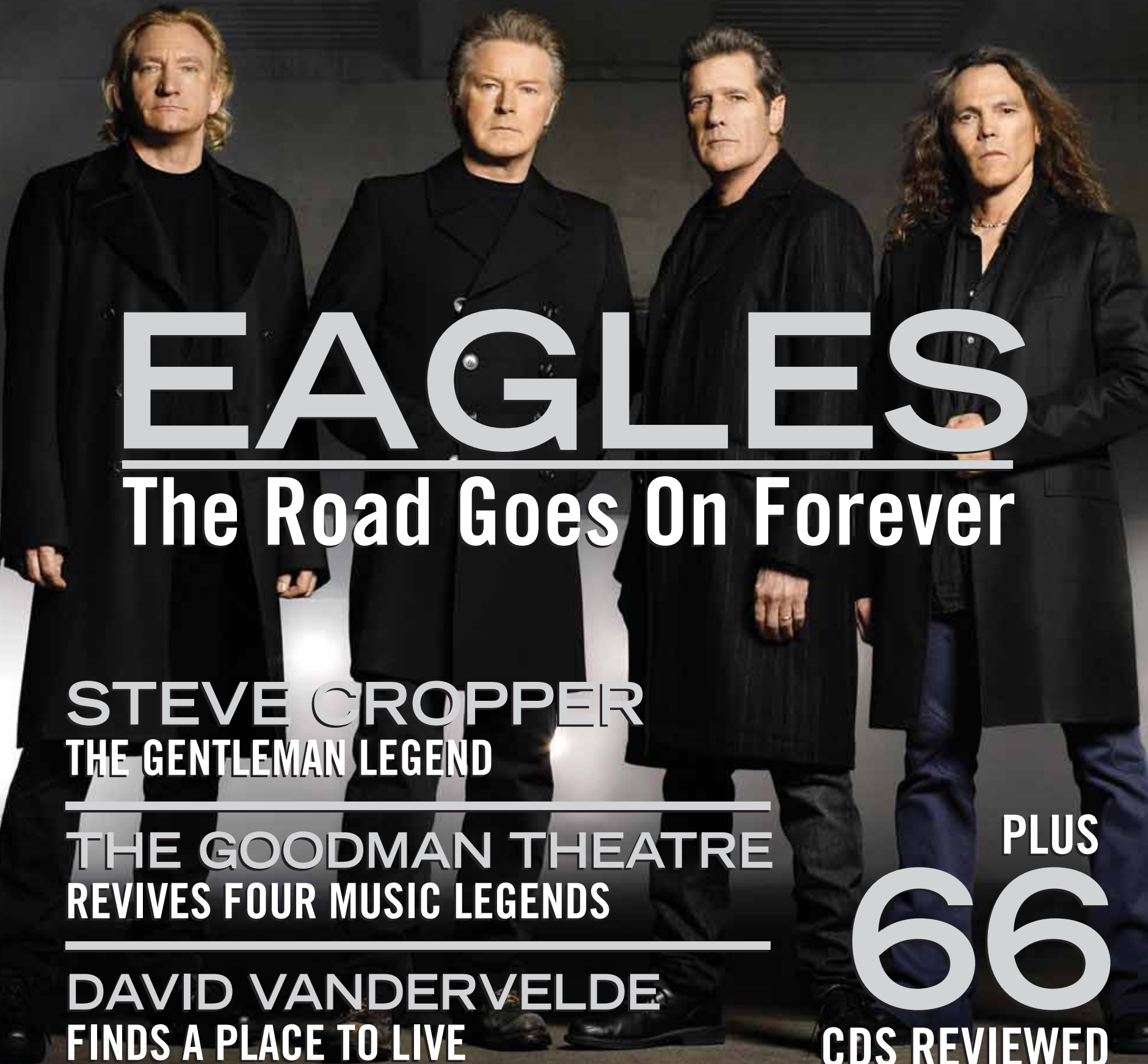


CD & VINYL BUYERS' GUIDE

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CHICAGOLAND'S MUSIC MONTHLY
SEPTEMBER 2008
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EAGLES

The Road Goes On Forever

STEVE CROPPER
THE GENTLEMAN LEGEND

THE GOODMAN THEATRE
REVIVES FOUR MUSIC LEGENDS

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FINDS A PLACE TO LIVE

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CDS REVIEWED



EAGLES

It's hard to think of a band whose members have had more time to themselves than the Eagles. A 14-year breakup from 1980 to 1994 allowed them to recharge their nerves, and even then they didn't have to really do anything but tour and make appearances. Last fall, 13 years after reuniting and 18 from their final studio effort, *The Long Run*, they issued the double-disc *Long Road Out Of Eden* (Polydor). Only by tinkering with it on and off since 2001 have they escaped Boston and Guns N' Roses-style ridicule.

But these are busy people, folks. Don Henley couldn't commit to an interview because, aside from his activist mind churning in an election year, he has back-to-school responsibilities with the kids. Bassist Timothy B. Schmit has his youngest son's entry to music school to contend with, but, after hammering out his exercise routine, he could squeeze *IE* between morning and utter chaos.

"I made it to the shower and barely got here in time for your call," he says, catching his breath. "I have a couple of appointments, etc., etc. I've got a son who we're trying to get out of here by the end of the month to go to the Berklee College Of Music. So my wife and I are preparing to make that happen."

From the sound of it, the Schmit household is the least

oppressive environment known to man. It doesn't hurt that his speaking voice could make a decent tool for a kindergarten teacher, but chasing artistic pursuits seems to supersede all else.

"My other two [kids] are college grads," Schmit continues. "One went to the local university here, CSUN [California State University At Northridge]. She's actually quite musical – written a lot of songs and used to play around town in clubs a lot. My other daughter got her degree in Fine Art; she's going on to graduate school. My wife is a really great artist. She paints and has her own studio here at the house as well."

Soon, however, Dad will have to go to work, something for which he keeps in shape year-round. "I think that it's really important as we get older – or at any time in your life – to keep moving." Why? "Touring's a grind and it does get exhausting by the end of a leg."

But certainly these aren't the same self-medicated Eagles of the '70s, the symbols of arena-rock excess. "It's a different way, a different lifestyle now," he admits. "We used to be on the road a good portion of the year and we would play five, six nights a week. Now it's much cushier, but we put in a lot of work, we do three-hour show. The most we do back to back is two. Once in a great while we do three in a row, but very rarely. When you're on the road your job is to be prepared, rested, fit, fed, and whatever you need to do to be

your best at the show. And that's always been the case, except we have to pay a little more attention to the downtime now," he chuckles.

With personalities such as Henley, Glenn Frey, and Joe Walsh hovering, it's easy to see how some former appetites have been transferred to micromanagement. A touring apparatus on the Eagles' scale has enough bosses and pointmen to staff an island nation, but the band haven't outsourced responsibilities – simply delegated them.

"The mechanics, the actual process is kind of the same," Schmit explains, "but the dynamics have changed. Even though we fly privately and have our own dressing rooms and stay in the good hotels, you still have to be ready for the show to give your all – as corny as that sounds. We work really hard at doing that. We soundcheck every day, before every show and oftentimes go over something that didn't go over quite so smoothly the night before – even if it's an old song we've been doing forever. We pay attention to pretty much every detail. If there's a lighting miscue, somebody catches it and we talk to the lighting guy. We try and give our audiences their money's worth, and I think we do."

Money was a touchy subject the first years of the reunion because the band were accused of vaulting concert-ticket prices into the stratosphere (they wouldn't have gotten there any other way, right?). Any return on investment was questionable, as the band tightly replicated decades-old songs

BY STEVE FORSTNEGER



PACKING'EM IN

with a fraction of the energy of their former selves. But the *Long Road Out Of Eden* tour offers their first new material since an EP's worth of tracks on 1994's *Hell Freezes Over*, and the prospect of a whole new show. Granted, "Here's a new one" generally coincides with a surge in beer sales, but with a million albums sold and a year for them to sink in fans have a chance to make a new contract with the Eagles. There's a chance for some relative spontaneity.

"Because it's a newer album," Schmit says, "ever since then we've decided to change our show up. We've got new lighting, a whole new stage, added quite a lot of new songs – that's tricky in itself because people generally are happiest to hear 'Witchy Woman,' 'One Of These Nights,' and 'Hotel California.' So the placement of those songs, the new songs, has to be right."

This seems like a recipe for meltdowns and not taking it so easy. Don Felder might be out of the mix, but 20 new tracks will force plenty of salty compromise.

"Maybe a little," he allows. "It's nothing anybody's ever gone away angry about. It's obvious we've gotta play those familiar songs, so it's a matter of placement and a matter of where to place the new stuff, too. Even though a lot of people have listened and bought the new album, they still wanna hear the old stuff more. We can't keep doing that for our [own good]. For ourselves we have to have some sort of forward momentum. Hopefully some of these newer songs will join

up with the older ones as far as people wanting to hear them. We're certainly not getting *bad* reactions, at all, from the new stuff. But it's not quite as familiar."

It goes without saying age affects energy, but Schmit isn't afraid to admit priorities and pragmatism have shifted as well. Eagles the *band* aren't four desperados, while Eagles the *business* needs tenders.

"We do a lot of formal rehearsing, a *lot*," he emphasizes. "Do we hang out together a lot? Not much anymore. We're all certainly friendly and have gone way back with each other – some more than others – but this band has been together quite a long time and now everybody has children and families. The other guys have young kids. It's not like *we're* young. Our motivation is different. We still love to do it and it's obviously lucrative and all that, but I think our priorities lie – and I can safely say I speak for all of us – with our families, the well being of those we love. And this just happens to be a really great job."

The "four guys against the world" motif is outdated anyway, as the Eagles' touring incarnation boasts several supplemental musicians. Felder's guitar has been replaced by Stuart Smith, and old hands such as Scott Crago (percussion) and Al Garth (brass) remain onboard. Three additional horns and keyboardists share the stage as well, giving the band a formidable live presence. Everyone is geared toward strict reproduction.

Schmit says, "We've tinkered very little with the old stuff. Very little. People seem to want to hear them as close to the record as possible. It's all a matter of taste, isn't it? I've seen acts where 'I'm really glad to hear this song,' and they've taken it in a completely different place and I'm not sure if it was that satisfying for me. As far as our legacy, time will tell. That's not really our concern. Our concern is to have quality songs that are innately good. Whatever happens with those, happens."

What almost didn't happen was *Long Road Out Of Eden*. Not because of friction. Not because of disinterest. Because this is where Eagles tinker. Endlessly. Henley can be heard griping in a recent *Rolling Stone* interview how his perfectionism wasn't sated.

"If you took out all the breaks," Schmit attempts to recall, "which were numerous and sometimes also [as long as] a year, I have no idea what that would be. I don't. But there's a song on this album from 2001. Between then and last year we, on and off with a lot of off, we really hit it hard toward the last few months. When we figured out it was gonna be a double album."

What was the holdup?

"We definitely had to re-record a few things here and there. And then there's songs we recorded a long time ago. There's definitely a lot of tracks that we didn't use. There's also tracks that we cut at the last moment – the last weeks – and finished it. It kind of went through everything. Then you

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EAGLES

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have to decide what you're going to do. We had so many songs recorded or about to be finished, we had the option of picking out the best 12 or holding off 10 or 12 for another album. We decided to just go for it. The album was what, \$11 for 20 songs? Not a bad deal at all, with a great package and everything. We figured we get a lot out of this – it wouldn't be a bad idea to put out something people could get their money out of.

"But honestly," he continues, "until the last four, five, six months, probably more like the last four months, it was unclear as to what the hell we were doing. I mean that as we knew we were trying to make this album, but we were never gonna put it out unless there was some huge motivation."

Enter Wal-Mart. "We cut a deal with [them], and there was a *deadline* in order to get it out for Thanksgiving and Christmas last year. I truly believe without that deadline we could still be in there, throwing this song out, redoing that one, writing new ones, recording them. I think it would be endless. The game had to be over by a certain time."

So the result is an album heavy on examples of each of the band's moods. For the "I don't care what I'm listening to as long as it's Eagles" superfan there's "I Don't Want To Hear Anymore," "You Are Not Alone," and "No More Cloudy Days." For latent rebellion, sneer with the title track and "Business As Usual." Margaritaville immigrants will flock to "Last Good Time In Town"; "Frail Grasp On The Big Picture" echoes those feistier days.

"There's a few songs that are still not finished that could have made it had the deadline been a little later," Schmit insists, somewhat mind-bogglingly. "We were sure about all the songs that went on. Within a group, you try to be as democratic as possible, but it's a compromise. You can't be 100-percent happy with everything. I'm sure if you were privy to everybody's thoughts about going down the list of songs, some would be liked more than others. Some people might not even like some [at all]."

Unanimity prevailed at least once, however, going nearly literally back to the beginning on "How Long," an early-'70s live staple that never made it to vinyl.

"This goes back before I was in the band, when the original four members had just put out their first album in '72. That was a song they did live for a short while. The story goes, it's written by our old friend J.D. Souther [co-writer of 'Best Of My Love,' 'Victim Of Love,' 'Heartache Tonight,' and 'New Kid In Town']. Back when [Eagles] were doing it live, another friend of ours had a song out in the band Ace called 'How Long.' 'How long/has this been goin' on,'" Schmit sings, "written by Paul Carrick who, like I said, is a really good friend of ours. Anyway, they decided not to record it because this other song had so much influence. Apparently, one of Glenn's kids were going through You Tube and saw a live version from Holland of that original Eagles band, and it clicked with Glenn and Don that this would be a really roots, country-rock, early-Eagles thing to do. So that's how it happened."

It's an instance of the band absolutely nailing the decision. "How Long" even has the power to remind the band's staunchest detractors (Craig Kilborn once cracked on "The Daily Show," "The Eagles, or, the rock band for people who don't like rock") how effortlessly addictive they can be. Everything about it reeks of familiarity (Grateful Dead, Beach Boys, and, um, themselves), but sails away into the Pacific with a smile.

The crush of good feelings built by it,

however, was nearly wiped out by the news *Long Road Out Of Eden* would only be sold under Wal-Mart's domain (on a two-year contract, though MP3s are available via Amazon.com). Eagles might have a red-state core audience, but the band members' – specifically Henley's environmental – activism stands in garish contrast to the big-box behemoth.

Schmit, rather refreshingly, doesn't explain the decision away: Eagles are a business separate from the members' individual pursuits. "Exactly who approached whom is hard to say," he says, "in the big-business wheel-deal thing. I think they were probably courting us through [longtime manager] Irving Azoff, and Irving, you couldn't have a better manager. He really does righteous by his clients. He's a tough businessman and he and the business people at Wal-Mart were talking. I believe they had done something with Garth Brooks and a couple other people that was similar, but Irving cut a deal that we really couldn't refuse. It was controversial because of a few reasons, one being how green is Wal-Mart. On a strictly business level, they might be the biggest retail outfit in the country. We're not into them forever. The Eagles is a big business monster."

It doesn't mean the band have started special-ordering travel cases for their adding machines. "How all that stuff gets seeded in the business world is mysterious to me," Schmit admits. "It's constantly amazing me. I think we're all incredibly grateful for what's happened to us. It is truly huge. Just the road thing alone, we travel with 12 semis just for our stage, equipment, lights, and what not. That alone is amazing, coming from different bands with somebody's borrowed van, cramming everybody and the equipment in, and lifting all your own stuff. It's come a long ways. And to have this kind of longevity at the age we are is really, truly awesome, in the true sense of the word, even if it's overused."

On the business of being Timothy B. Schmit, the bassist is like any other and trying to stretch the days a little longer. A 40th-anniversary Poco reunion in New York will miss him because of the Eagles' tour. During our call, his wife tries to consult him on one of her paintings, a candidate for the cover art of his next solo album.

Though not as hopelessly open-ended as the *Long Road Out Of Eden* sessions, the record gets worked on "when I can fit it in," he laughs. "I'm still working and getting closer to the end. I was hoping to get it out this year, but [Eagles are] working so much I don't think it's going to happen now. So, sometime next year I'll be able to release my album. It's sort of a hobby of my work, because I don't answer to everybody and I'm writing the whole thing. I'm having other musicians play on it whom I admire and are willing to do it – that kind of thing."

Was his songs cupboard stripped bare by *Long Road Out Of Eden*? "Just because you write a song you think is good for the Eagles doesn't mean everybody else will," he jokes. "It's kind of a crap shoot. Most of the time, I think our motivation for writing comes from whatever we're into, our everyday life, what we're feeling, or whatever. It's not like, 'Gee, I'm gonna sit down now and write an Eagles song.' I've tried that, but songs usually morph while you're writing them."

Schmit can get down to that on his own time. Right now it's can't stop working 'til the working's done. **ie**

Appearing: 9/24-25 at United Center (1901 W. Madison) in Chicago.