

Eagle eyes

The desperados are back – planning a UK tour and a new album. But that's not all... it's always life in the fast lane for Timothy B Schmit

words Roger Newell portrait Henry Diltz

Although respected for his part in Poco and credited for guest work on a colossal list of albums, Timothy Schmit has gained his highest profile in The Eagles. His bass playing and vocal prowess helped to keep the band at the top when he replaced Randy Meisner, who left in 1977. When they split up in 1982, Timothy's distinctive vocals guaranteed him an amazing amount of session work with top artists; enough demand to last a lifetime, you might say. But creative urges beckoned and nostalgia stirred. And the result? The release of his first solo album in 11 years – *Feed The Fire* – alongside a busy schedule preparing for a UK summer tour with The Eagles. Yes, they are reunited. Speaking to *Guitarist* from his studio at home, Timothy seemed clearly pleased with both the solo album and the band's reunion...

I had plenty of time to hone this down and I'm pleased because I'm doing it myself. I have my own new record label, so everything goes through me. I don't have to answer to anybody or fight about taking a song out. I had a lot of songs but, on sorting through them, some of them weren't actually that good. My theory on writing is to go ahead and, unless it becomes obvious that it's not good, then I go with it, because it could be surprising in the end. It soon becomes obvious what's the cream of the crop. I was being objective about it too, because at the last minute I couldn't decide about a certain song on the album. One was written by me, the other wasn't, but there was no question that the song I didn't write was better, so I kicked mine off for the sake of good music, you could say.

THE TRACK THAT'S begun getting airplay in the UK is *Every Song Is You*. There's also a Dylan number on there and a Stylistics tune, both of which work beautifully.

Well, I'm an old R&B fan. Some of it's almost corny but I just love that stuff. You Are Everything I cut in my studio with one of my songwriting friends, Hank Linderman, who works as my engineer as well. I love this song, so it's been in the back of my mind for years. We cut it over a couple of days even before I was serious about making an album. It was cool, exactly what I wanted to do. Then when we were working on the album the song still sounded really good – an obvious contender. I

heard the Bob Dylan number, *Make You Feel My Love*, on his album and I immediately thought it would be so much fun to do. Obviously it's very different; I could never sound like him even if I wanted to, but we thought it was a gorgeous song, so we put it in a gorgeous context. Then I heard it sung by Garth Brooks, and apparently Billy Joel did it, and Joan Osborne and I started to feel that I'd missed the boat! But you can't keep a good song down. It fits me and I love the way I did it, so why not?

YOU DID MOST of the instrumentation on this record yourself...

I played a lot of acoustic guitar on it and a tiny bit of electric. I'm really a singer first and then a bass player. I didn't play bass on everything, but I sang almost all the harmonies. My friend Mark Hudson sang with me on his songs. The stuff I did at home in my studio was mostly Hank and me – he's a multi-instrumentalist. Scott Crago, the other percussionist drummer with The Eagles, played drums on almost all the tracks. He's fun and masterful,

and one of those guys who make it look easy.

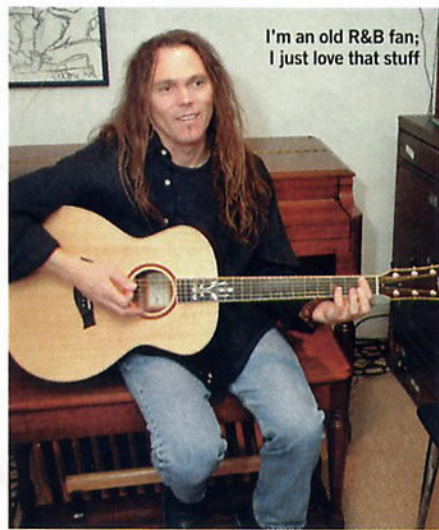
WHAT ABOUT THE title, *Feed The Fire*? It's part of the lyric from *The Shadow*, but is there any other significance?

Not really. I was searching for titles and I like the idea of taking a line from a song. I think it works. There's a line right after that – *Stir the wind* – and I was thinking about that for a while too but I thought *Feed The Fire* was sort of representative of how you have to work at making things good in your life.

WHAT'S USUALLY THE first spark for you when writing a song? Is it a chanced chord sequence, a lyric or a melody?

I still write songs in front of an old Sony ghetto blaster from the seventies, which has a pair of condenser stereo mics that they don't put in any more. It's been repaired a few times and I have difficulty finding parts, but I love it. It's always loaded and I document all my ideas. I start playing and if something strikes my fancy, I write it down. It's pretty well organised but my days of going, *Er, this is*

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technical, but I'll remember it tomorrow, are gone. I know a lot better than that now! I don't usually come up with lyrics first. I'm not a poet; I get a musical idea then see how it goes.

BEING A BASS player, do you ever come up with a line and think, I could build something around that?

Well I should be able to do that, but for 25 years I've never been able to yet. A guitar you can pick up any time, but I don't practice my bass every day – it can be a very lonely instrument, so it's only when I know I'm going to record that I'll practice. I think of it as part of the rhythm section, part of the foundation, and practising is not something that I'm drawn to. Luckily I'm able to play it well enough.

YOU'VE DONE A lot of sessions over the years, but mainly vocals...

➤ Yeah. Quite honestly people want me for that. I have played bass on other people's things here and there, but it's actually more stressful for me, because I have to sit with something for a while to make it really good. I have to work it out. I'm not really great at improvisation, I'm more comfortable with rehearsing it. That's the way I work best.

THAT'S YOU SINGING on Toto's, I Won't Hold You Back, isn't it?

Oh yes, and I'm still blown away that they used that much of my voice, as I wasn't part of the band. Yeah there's a lot of me on that and on a few others of theirs. When I first got computerised, which is not really that long ago, I got on the Net and thought, I'll type in my name and search, and I was blown away! I found a discography and I've never seen it all listed like that! There's still some missing, but I'm working on my own site now.

ON THE HELL Freezes Over video performance, the vocals are perfect. Is that as it really was, or was there a bit of tweaking done, strictly between you and me of course?

(Laughs). We take great pride in The Eagles and in making the vocals beautiful and as nice and tidy as possible; let's just put it that way.

YOU RECENTLY APPEARED one night on Don Henley's tour. Did you enjoy that?

Oh yeah, it was great. He's just finished his tour and we just had a photoshoot for the new

tour just a couple of days ago, and the fire and the energy couldn't be better. We're ready, and we're going to attempt a studio album and I really think we're going to pull it off. We're going to give it our best shot and it tells me that the resilience of this band is really amazing, with all the highs and lows between members and that. We actually tried a couple of years ago to attempt an album. It didn't work, the timing was all wrong, but we didn't walk away in a huff or say, This is it, it will never work; we just let it go. So now we're back again and that shows the resilience of the band.

WE'RE HEARING ALL sorts of rumours about who's actually going to be in the band when you come to England.

The band is four guys: Don Henley, Glenn Frey, Joe Walsh and myself.

SO DON FELDER is no longer in the band?

Correct. I won't go into it too much. There's a lot going on but I can't talk about it right now, other than to say it was in the best interest of The Eagles. Even when we were a quintet we took back-up musicians with us to help fill up the sound, and we will continue to have back-up. We'll simply have somebody playing the necessary guitar parts. That's really all I can say. I mean, what's the point of a replacement? Look at The Stones, they had their pictures taken with just four guys, and they hired a bass player. I have to tell you a really funny story. I wrote them a letter and they gave me an

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audition, and it was so much fun. You know I was in the same room with the four guys, and I played for about an hour. I never expected to get the gig, but I went away feeling good about how I did. It was like Cinderella time; they were really great. At the time I didn't know they were just hiring a bass player; it sounded like they were looking for a replacement. We're just going from five to four, too – and we won't have any problems with the guitar or vocal parts.

YOU'VE USED A Fender Jazz bass at various times with Poco and The Eagles, but recently you've also been using a Carvin bass and a fretless Pedulla.

Yes that's the one that I use on New York Minute, one of Don's solo tracks.

DID YOU ENJOY playing Pino Palladino's lines on that?

Hey listen, I'm not that kind of player. I literally got a hold of Don's track and learned it, and just learning that part was an education in itself. So yeah, it was really enjoyable – a challenge. I also used the Pedulla on Boys Of Summer, which was a lot of whole notes and a pretty simple part, and I put a dab of chorusing on it, too.

YOU'VE SAID YOU'RE a vocalist first, but do you still enjoy playing bass?

Oh yes, I love it, I really do. I am the most comfortable on stage when I have a bass and a microphone.

WHAT BASSES WILL you be taking with you on this tour?

That's a timely question. First of all that white Carvin we touched on; I got that kind of accidentally. I went into the Carvin store quite a few years ago, looking for a simple home recording instrument, and the guy recognised me and put me in touch with their PR guy. He wanted to make me some basses, and I thought, Oh God, but I said okay.

I don't have flashy basses, so I thought I'd get this pearl white thing and asked them to take out all the crap, put the pickups internally and just give me a volume pedal. I had them take all the dots off the neck so it's real simple, but it just sounds great. I wish it was a better colour now, but I'm afraid to paint it in case it changes the sound or something. I'm using that on the whole album with the exception of You Are Everything, which is really bottom heavy, and that's the Fender Jazz.

I also played a Music Man bass a few years

ago and liked it, so we got hold of them and they've made me two, one black and one sunburst. I haven't really played them with my rig yet, but you may be seeing me playing a little with a Music Man. So the Carvin is definitely coming with me and the Pedulla, even though I don't know if we'll do New York Minute, as we haven't started rehearsing yet.

AND WHAT RIG will you be using?

I've been using Trace Elliot. They're a really good company. I've had no problem and I love the way they sound, but just recently SWR has come up. They really want me to try their stuff out, and Trace is going to show me new stuff too. It's kinda funny, when you first start playing with borrowed instruments in your mother's garage you can't even get the time of day, yet later when you become successful and you can actually buy this stuff and write it off, they give it to you! It's really strange.

You know I consider myself extremely fortunate, and I'm thankful for all these companies who provide stuff, although I realise it's beneficial to them too. But at the same time it kinda blows me away. I'm totally amazed that it happens the way it does. **LG**

Acoustically feeding the fire

■ I used several guitars on the album. One was hand made for me by a guy in Austin, Jamey Kinscherff, who did his apprenticeship with Taylor. My writing partner's got one and I just loved it, so I got Jamey to make me

one and that's what you hear on the opening cut, The Shadow. A guy put a beautiful inlay on the headstock, a little Hell Freezes Over devil in red. It's a great guitar. I also acquired a Taylor 25th anniversary model, the Grand Auditorium.

For the Hell Freezers Over tour I decided to get myself a J200 because my old friend Richie Furay from Poco had this beautiful sounding J200. When Gibson brought some out to me to try, none was quite good enough. Finally the head guy met me. I said, I want beautiful flames; I want it to look like a piece of art as well as play like a dream! And right now it really is all that! The flaming is all over the back and the neck and it sounds better than any others I play. And they made it for me! There's another guitar I love, that I bought for my wife. It's a Martin 00016M with a little body. I have it strung high like Nashville tuning. That's the one on the first song on the album. I try to take care of them, but if you play every day you get little nicks on it. It doesn't hurt me any more though; it's all part of the deal.



**Play like a dream,
look like a work of
art; that's what
Timothy expects**