

Don Henley and the yen for the innocence

By Steve Horne
CLASSIC WRITER

Eleven years between albums is a pop-culture eternity, but not for Don Henley. First he toured behind his last solo album, "The End of the Innocence," then he founded the Walden Woods Project, and published a book about the environment, then fought with Griffin Howard and sued them for his release, then reunited and toured with the Eagles, then fathered three children in the last five years.

Life in the fast lane, to quote an Eagles song.

New music "Inside Job," a new solo album, due out Tuesday. It's worth the wait, as Henley combines graceful acoustic ballads with shimmering funk and crass-looped rock tracks, all graced with articulate, rapier-wit lyrics about social issues and his new family-man status.

"I've always said that I'd rather make a few good albums than a whole lot of mediocre ones," says Henley, now 52. "The experience that I had during those 11 years made it possible for me to write these songs. So I don't worry about how much time has gone by."

Henley also has an illusion about the target audience for the new album, which will be bookended by his appearance at the FleetBoston Pavilion June 3. (It's a Walden Woods benefit, with tickets \$44 to \$99.50.)

"There are 26 million baby boomers who don't really have a whole lot to listen to, and I'm hoping that I can at least partially fill that void," he says. "I think that this album speaks to concerns that members of my generation deal with on a daily basis, including the environment, parenthood, and the relevance and utility of parenthood in a corporatized world."

Politics in parenthood

Henley deals with environmental politics in the piece he'll call "Goodbye to a River" (with the line "the rapists of industry are killing everything"), with parenthood in the musing "Daring 'Yes Home'" about bringing home a newborn daughter, with the verse, "In this love I found strength, I never knew I had," and, as a corollary comparison in "Inside Job," "In the factor, he sings, "While you were sleeping they came and took it all away." It was an inside job, it always is. Clank it up to kitchen as usual."

Cynical? Yes — and that's always been part of Henley's world view. But that is countered more than ever by the sensitive songs including the acoustic "For My Wedding" that address the loss of love.

"I think the album is an example of joy and angst. It deals with light and darkness," says Henley. "I try to achieve a balance because I think there's more of a balance in my life now. People have used words like cynical and negative to describe me, which I don't necessarily agree with. I've always been skeptical about certain things and situations. . . . But I'm now finding a great deal of wisdom in my family."

"When I tried to say in some of



Henley is releasing his first solo album in 11 years.

these songs is that in an litigious world, in a world where reasons don't get necessarily proved, where one can be found in the family, in nature, in an experience, in an object, in an experience, there are no things. No law has always been my refuge, but now my family is my refuge as well."

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Henley is not an cynic at all, of course. In the corporate world, which he attacks with even more rancor than usual on the album, in "Warrior's," he offers a Dylan-esque way and this last assessment:

of some corporate executives: "We're running up everything, but we can't afford to quit! Before this thing is over, we've got to get out of here or we're dead!"

"The corporate climate, and not just in the record industry, is frightening," says Henley. "They're grabbing up everything. And it's just not good for art. It's not good for culture. It's not good for all reality, it's not good for the truth. It's not good for fairness. And the government seems to have refused the art of following the other way. It's a completely lousy policy. There's one in Washington, but that's not big and as consequential as you want."

Except for Minnesota, Henley is reminded. A federal judge recently ruled that the software giant violated antitrust laws.

Media monopoly

"They're the one taking artificial limits" he says. "But there are anticompetitive practices going on all over the place. And it's all in the name of economics. Every logical argument now that can be made in behalf of maintaining this planet has to take a back seat to economics. I know about this first-hand because I'm from Texas, the most polluted state in the union."

"I'm also disturbed by the formation of monopolies of various

kinds within the media industry. They tend to use one explanation like globalization, multi-nationalism, merger, and conglomerate — but those are all explanations for monopoly. Back in Teddy Roosevelt's time, some of this would have been allowed. He would have been trouncing us up a storm."

Henley also takes some shots at the Internet in "Warrior's," with the biting line, "We've got the software, hardware, CD-ROM, we've got the exploitation.com."

"The Internet is a double-edged sword," he says. "It's a bit like television. Even by a wonderful tool for good, for education, and communication. Or it can be a repository for all our cultural garbage. There's a lot of litter alongside the information highway."

"I don't go on the Internet. If the Internet has some information that I need, I ask someone else to do it for me. And I don't use e-mail, largely as a matter of privacy. There are serious privacy issues with regard to the Internet. Large corporations are gathering information on each and every one of us, which I deal with on the song "Outside Job." Big Brother is here. And he's watching!"

Henley, who will also make an appearance at the Kin 500 Concert June 3 at the Forester Center, is clearly back in business and ready to go. However has a new band, now he holds over guitarist Frank Simon.

"I wanted people who were a little bit progressed and more intellectual," he says of the changes. "I was looking for a little hunger, so to speak. Not that some of my previous band members weren't great musicians, but they weren't."

And getting tired of going on the road and wanted to stay put. I don't mind them for that, and my all-around friends. But I just thought it was time for a change. New faces, fresh start."

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