



RANDY MEISNER TODAY AND WITH THE EAGLES (INSET, SECOND FROM RIGHT): AT THE LOW POINT, HE JUST DRANK BEER AND CRUISED AROUND IN CARS.

randymeisnerretrospective.com

An Ex-Eagle's Flight From the Nest

By Liz Lufkin

Hollywood

HE DRANK beer. He cruised around in cars. Mostly, he just sat around his farm in Scotts Bluff, Nebraska, and told people he was "retired." He had a lot of time to think, and what he thought most about was his career. What Randy Meisner remembered wasn't always so pleasant. At the age of 31, Randy looked all washed up in the music business.

It had been good in the beginning, with Meisner playing bass for the Eagles and belting trademark harmonies. It was one smash LP after another. But in 1977 he'd become a dissatisfied member of rock's royalty and he wanted to fly solo. So, after completing the Eagles' record-breaking "Hotel California" LP and tour, he flew the nest.

It didn't take Meisner any time at all to fall flat on his face. He'd switched to rhythm guitar and taught himself to sing lead vocals, but nothing could save his lackluster, turgid debut LP, "Randy Meisner."

It was an unmitigated disaster for someone with Meisner's influential connections. Even before the LP was released, manager Irving Azoff (who also handles the Eagles) dumped him. And so did the record company.

And now he sat on the farm in Nebraska with plenty of time to think it over. He hadn't realized just how much work a solo career took, but now he saw it as a new challenge. "I'm a gambler," he would say later, "and I

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like to go against the odds."

After that you couldn't keep Meisner down. Producer Val Garay, best known for engineering LP's for Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor, helped Meisner round up a band nicknamed the Silverados. But more importantly, Garay introduced Meisner to singer-songwriter Wendy Waldman and fellow tunesmith Eric Kaz.

It was a combination that clicked. Before, Meisner had found songwriting a slow, difficult task — painfully obvious on his first record. But working with Waldman and Kaz improved his skills. Two tunes he co-wrote for his second LP, "Deep Inside My Heart" and "Hearts on Fire," became hits.

This time Meisner made sure he had heavyweight backing. Singer-songwriter Kim Carnes contributed back-up vocals; Jackson Browne convinced him to record his rewritten version of Jack Tempchin's "One More Song." That tune became the title track, and it also enticed Eagles Don Henley and Glenn Frey into singing back-ups after not seeing Meisner in years.

Such stellar contributions paid off this time. The

"One More Song" album owes a lot to the Eagles' brand of laid-back Southern California rock and roll, but Meisner added a cheerful, bouncy twist that sent two singles soaring up the pop charts.

In Los Angeles recently to tape a "Fridays" TV show, the 34-year-old Meisner showed no bruises from his rocky road. A diet of beer, sushi, shrimp, salads, and vitamins has streamlined his 5-foot-10-inch frame, which once ballooned up to 170 pounds, and he looked tan and healthy in a red velour jogging suit.

For someone who once forced himself to sing in a lower register, Meisner sounded quite confident as he belted a tune and bounced around the stage. "I love what I'm doing right now," said Meisner after the show, flashing a big grin, popping open a beer, and lighting the first of a steady stream of cigarettes. "You know, I could have stayed with the Eagles and made a lot more money, but that wasn't the point. After years of singing high parts and playing bass, I wanted to sing lead. I had to do it," he continued. "I wanted to be on my own. Now I'm so happy I can't believe it."

Some people may find it hard to believe that Meisner couldn't find satisfaction with the Eagles. The grandson of a classically trained Russian violinist, Meisner immigrated to Southern California from Nebraska in 1967, after a short stop in Denver. His band, once called the Soul Survivors, soon became the Poor to match its lifestyle.

Stints with Poco and Rick Nelson's Stone Canyon Band followed, and then Meisner landed a gig playing with Linda Ronstadt. Unfortunately, Ronstadt hated his bass playing and canned him. But Ronstadt's drummer

Randy Meisner appears tonight at the Keystone Palo Alto and Monday night at the Old Waldorf.

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Don Henley and guitarist Glenn Frey felt differently. In 1972, when they set out with the backing of record company bigwig David Geffen to form a supergroup, they asked Meisner to join.

The Eagles quickly became one of the decade's biggest rock attractions, turning Meisner into a superstar who could afford life in the fast lane. But he said Henley and Frey's total control of the group bothered him, although persuading the ever-diplomatic Meisner to elaborate proved nearly impossible.

"The Eagles were into standing on stage and being statues," said Meisner. "You know, like if you moved wrong, you blew it. I didn't like that, because I like to jump around and have fun."

Not having a chance to sing lead or contribute many songs also disturbed him. "Take It to the Limit," which he co-wrote with Henley and Frey, did become a Top

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Five hit in 1976, but by 1977, Meisner ignored the Eagles' fantastic fame and fortune — not to mention the band's pleas — and left.

"They were disappointed," Meisner said, probably understating things somewhat. "But I had to say, 'I gotta do what I gotta do.'"

Later, when pressed, Meisner also admitted, "There was some bitterness. But it's over now. We're all friends again. It was just the idea of me quitting and making them take a chance."

Nowadays, Meisner insists he doesn't mind the constant questions people ask him about the Eagles. "I'm

very proud of what I did with them, very proud," he said. "It was a great group. It's still a great group. I have no insecurity about it at all."

Meisner also still enjoys beer and cars — he owns a total of 25 autos, including Corvettes, Jaguars, Sprites and vintage Fords — but doubts if he'll ever return to Nebraska again. Instead, he rents a place in Los Angeles and lives in Palm Springs, a rather unlikely home-base for a busy rock star.

"I like it," he said. "It's quiet, it has a lot of sun and good restaurants. There is no fast lane there, except for the cars that follow you too close."

Meisner probably won't get to see much of that idyllic town for a while. Good album sales have prompted a nationwide tour, and then he'll return to Los Angeles to record another album. Not that he minds working again. When asked if he feels proud of his newfound commercial acceptance, he responded, "You betcha. To me, success is succeeding within myself and pleasing people with music. But," he paused and then laughed, "the money helps."