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Flying high again

The Eagles are only one of a number of classic rock bands that are hitting the road this summer



Photo: Courtesy

The Eagles from left to right: Joe Walsh, Timothy B. Schmit, Don Henley, Don Felder, Glen Frey. Felder is no longer part of the group and currently has a lawsuit pending against the band.

By Tony Lombardo

Iowa State Daily

Classic rock bands have come back with a vengeance. This summer alone, fans can catch The Allman Brothers Band, The Who, Santana and Bob Dylan somewhere on the road. Arguably the most successful classic rock band that has toured in the '90s and will be touring again this summer is the Eagles.

And it's not just the old burned out Woodstock-era hippies trying to relive their glory days attending the shows either; even the kids are rocking out to the classics.

"The reason classic rock is doing so well with kids these days is ... the parents; the parents listened to that crap and they had it on around the house," says J.D. "Stoneman" Stone, assistant program director and music director for KGGO in Des Moines.

"I was doing a remote somewhere and this kid came up to me and knew more about classic rock than I did, and I said, 'Where in the hell do you know all this?' and he said 'Oh, my dad,'" Stone adds.

Speaking of family fun, the Eagles will bring its enduring brand of mellow, California rock to town Saturday for what promises to be a memorable evening.

Ryan Sheeler, co-instructor for the History of Rock and Roll course at Iowa State and an ardent Eagles fan, says classic rock bands are classic simply because their songcraft transcends time and place.

“Their songs are sort of universal, and you have songwriters in the band of the caliber of [Don] Henley and [Glenn] Frey — who are really amazing lyricists and arrangers — and [their records] are constructed well musically,” he said.

Like many other bands that have made several albums together, the Eagles has had its share of infighting. Formed in Los Angeles in 1971, the group has gone through several personnel changes over the years, with Glenn Frey and Don Henley as the only two core members who have worked together through every phase of the band’s career.

The band underwent a full-fledged breakup in 1981, hence the aptly titled tour and live album of 1994–1995, “Hell Freezes Over.” And just as recently as last year the band fired longtime Eagles member and multi-instrumentalist, Don Felder, who has brought a \$200 million suit against the band.

Both Sheeler and Stone say the firing is unfortunate.

“True Eagles aficionados know how much Don Felder really contributes to the Eagles music. He puts [in] a lot of really super fine guitar fills and really tasty kinds of things, and he’s a really good multi-instrumentalist too; He plays mandolin and the pedal steel really well. I was kind of bummed about [his being fired]. When I read about that I was like, ‘You guys don’t know what you’re doing,’” Sheeler said.

Stone is more blunt.

“I don’t understand the logic behind that, but I guess someone pissed off Don Henley,” he said.

In addition to the lineup changes, the band’s music has evolved as well. Sheeler, who personally favors the group’s later work, says the band began by doing country rock on the first two albums, then transitioned to a pop and album-oriented rock sound in the middle years, and finally produced concept-type albums for the last two studio releases.

You pay for what you get, and when you’re getting the Eagles — whose total album sales are over 83.5 million copies, the third highest total of all time — you are going to pay a healthy sum. In fact, Sheeler says, the Eagles may have started a trend.

“It’s probably because of the Eagles that the ticket prices are just astronomically high these days — they kind of have the highest of the high ticket prices,” he said.

“When they did the ‘Hell Freezes Over’ tour a few years ago, I was up in the balcony in the nose bleeds, and I paid 50 dollars for those seats,” Sheeler adds.

With such high ticket prices, the cynic might wonder if the band's summer tour is primarily greed-driven, especially given the band's history of tumultuous relationships between members.

"You can play devil's advocate and say, 'Hell yeah [they are in it for the money],' but look at KISS. I'd say they were in it for the money because near the end, they hated each other again," Stone says. "With The Eagles, I think they will always hate each other, but they'll just take more lawyers on tour with them."

Like the Osbourne family, the Eagles seems to have perfected the art of dysfunctionally functioning. In the Eagles' case, when they are together on a musical level, four people could not be more right for each other.

Stone, who will be in attendance Saturday night, says he can't wait to see the show.

"You don't look for one thing in particular, you're just looking for a great show because you know they're going to put on a hell of a show," he said.



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