

Don Felder

2019 ARTIST BIO – LONG VERSION BY MIKE METTLER, A.K.A. THE SOUNDBARD

No matter how you look at it, 2019 is shaping up to be the Year of the Fingers — Don “Fingers” Felder, that is. Felder, a true American rock and roll guitar hero, is very much looking forward to building upon his rich legacy as one of the most innovative riff-generating songwriters of the modern rock era while continuing his growth as a featured touring and recording solo artist.

To that end, Felder finds himself most decidedly back in the driver’s seat with the April 2019 release of his first solo album in seven years, *American Rock ‘N’ Roll* (BMG). *American Rock ‘N’ Roll* covers the gamut of the man’s artistic talents, consisting of 11 high-energy rockers mixed with touching, thoughtful ballads. From the state of the guitar-rock union salute to “American Rock N Roll” to the funky crunch of “Hearts on Fire” to the fierce, unrelenting declaration of “Rock You” to the mutual heartfelt honesty of “Falling in Love” and “You’re My World,” Don Felder has once again tapped into the current music zeitgeist to emerge with an album that represents the peak of his creative prowess.

ARnR also boasts an impressive guestlist of contributors who comprise a veritable who’s who of modern rock music, including Sammy Hagar (vocals on “Rock You”), Slash (a wicked guitar solo on the title track), Richie Sambora and Orianthi (dual guitar soloists on “Limelight”), Peter Frampton (Telecaster-blasting and background vocals on “The Way Things Have to Be”), Joe Satriani (a blistering, lightning-fast solo on “Rock You”), Mick Fleetwood and Chad Smith (trading off drumming duties on the title track), Bob Weir (background vocals on “Rock You”), David Paich (keyboards on “Hearts on Fire,” piano on “The Way Things Have to Be”), Steve Porcaro (keyboards on “Falling in Love”), Alex Lifeson (acoustic and electric guitar accents on “Charmed”), and many, many more.

This time around, Don felt he wanted to share the fretboard wealth and cut heads with as many of his peers on *ARnR* as he could gather. “On my last solo album, [2012’s] *Road to Forever*, I had only one guest on guitar — Steve Lukather [of Toto] — and I played every other guitar part on every other song,” Felder points out. “I didn’t want to do that this time. I wanted to have people come in and light it up. My goal was to play with them and have a good time. It was a ball!”

It’s easy to see why Felder garners such a level of respect. Not only is he a proud, longstanding member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, having been inducted with the Eagles back in 1998, he was also inaugurated into the Musicians Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville in 2016 and the Florida Artists Hall of Fame in 2017. Fact is,

Felder spent 27 years with the Eagles, who have sold over 150 million albums worldwide to date and own the fine distinction of recording the top-selling album of all time — *Their Greatest Hits (1971-1975)*, which has sold over 38 million copies (and counting). “I’m honored and blessed enough to have contributed to and been a part of a very talented mixture of voices, writing, guitar parts, and production,” he says of the group. “It was a magical, unique combination that happened in a certain place and time. I’m very proud of that. Every time I hear the work we did on the radio, I go, ‘Oh! You were really good!’”

Don left the band in 2001 and has since forged an impressive career as a top-tier solo artist, having placed the hard-driving “Heavy Metal (Takin’ a Ride)” in the pole position of the same-named 1981 animated film (a song that remains one of the most requested staples of his live set to this very day), along with a pair of fully realized full-length albums, 1983’s sonically soaring *Airborne* and 2012’s multifaceted song-cycle treatise, *Road to Forever*.

Felder added “best-selling author” to his ever-impressive C.V. when his spellbinding 2008 memoir, *Heaven and Hell: My Life in the Eagles (1974-2001)*, became an instant *New York Times* bestselling smash. “There’s still a lot of excitement about it,” he observes. “I still get all these posts about it on Facebook and Twitter, and there’s a huge grass-roots thing that goes on every time I play live. As many as 50 people come up to the front of the stage who have the book and want me to sign it at just about every show.”

The “Fingers” nickname is well-warranted, as anyone who has ever watched the man’s hands blaze across whatever guitar fretboard can readily attest — whether it be acoustic or electric, single-neck or double-neck. In fact, the inherent prowess of those dexterous digits helped Felder navigate the burgeoning rock scene in his native Gainesville, Florida, while he was growing up there in the 1960s. That formative time included a stint teaching guitar to a young sandy-haired Southern gentleman by the name of Tom Petty. “Who knew he would become such a rock music icon?” Felder muses. “I was so proud to see Tom become as popular and influential as he did.”

As an eager teenager, Felder formed The Continentals with Stephen Stills. After Stills left, the band morphed into the British Invasion-influenced frat-party band known as Maundy Quintet, which included his future Eagles bandmate Bernie Leadon. After the MQ fizzled out, Felder joined Flow, an Ocala, Florida-based jam-fusion band, circa 1970 to better stretch out his burgeoning jazz chops. Always in search of learning as much as he could, Felder further expanded his playing palette by concurrently learning slide guitar from his longtime friend Duane Allman, not to mention having incorporated the more melodic principals of jazz icons like Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Miles Davis alongside the core values of the blues he gleaned from the likes of Albert King and B.B. King into his own milieu. “I’m primarily influenced melodically by horn players,” he reveals. “I learned about pacing from Miles Davis, who would take a breath and leave you hanging on a note while he finished his phrase — that was very influential on me. I

realized most horn players can only play one note at a time, and you have to be very selective about the melody you choose.”

Don’s discerning musical taste ultimately bore much great fruit in iconic, prime rock-era Eagles songs. Bear witness to how his matchless lead-guitar tone added extra fuel to “Already Gone,” “One of These Nights,” “Take It to the Limit,” and “New Kid in Town,” in addition to his co-writing “Victim of Love,” “Those Shoes,” and his most popular co-creation, “Hotel California,” which he recast in an entirely new way for the Eagles’ *Hell Freezes Over* in 1994. “I will tell you the version of ‘Hotel California’ that I re-recorded on nylon-string guitar for that reunion is the *only* song I know of — and I’ve asked the people in the RIAA — that has been recorded twice by the same band, and then nominated for Grammys both times. Isn’t that something?” (Indeed it is, for the original “Hotel California” single won Record of the Year in 1977, and the *Hell Freezes Over* single version was nominated for Best Rock Performance by a Duo or Group With Vocal in 1995.)

“Hotel California” has served Felder quite well over the years — as well it should. “People love the music, the guitar solos, and the overall vibe that song has,” admits Don. “When I got up and played ‘Hotel California’ at the United Nations a few years back, everybody in the room knew the song and was singing along with it — even those heads of state and presidents who *didn’t* speak English! I got an *enormous* standing ovation for it. At that point, it dawned on me what a global impact that one song had. And now, by the time ‘Hotel’ appears at the end of the night in my live set, everybody is standing on their feet, ready to go and ready to receive that powerful electric energy.”

Felder has also recorded with and performed alongside top-drawer artists all throughout his career such as The Bee Gees, Peter Frampton, Michael Jackson, Alice Cooper, Warren Zevon, Diana Ross, Stevie Nicks, Vince Gill, Barbra Streisand, Elton John, Joni Mitchell, Paul Simon, and the aforementioned Stephen Stills. (Don’s impressive list of collaborators, like the road, could literally go on forever.) “I grew up with Stephen Stills,” Felder confirms, “and before I joined the Eagles in 1974, I toured with Crosby & Nash in ’73, ironically by *being* Stephen Stills, playing and singing his parts.” Felder clearly left a distinct impression on that storied duo, as Graham Nash himself notes, “I’ve always been an admirer of Don’s. As a guitar player and a singer, he’s so great. He learned all of our stuff overnight, and he played with us the very next day. I’m a fan, you know?” When the Eagles started searching for an ace guitar player to join their ranks in 1974, Crosby & Nash were the first in line with a hearty recommendation for Don. “We said to them, ‘We just finished a tour with this kid — you have to check him out,’” Nash recalls. “And look at what happened. It kinda worked out, don’t you think?”

Spending more and more time on the road as the frontman of his own tight-knit solo band made Felder realize he needed to put in the time to hone his own distinctive voice into a finely tuned instrument. “That’s just how I work,” Don explains. “A lead vocal has to fit the song — it has to fit the timbre and texture of the song. Otherwise, you’re a one-note samba.”

Felder counts extended road runs with Foreigner and Styx — including holding down the opening slot for both bands on the 2014 Soundtrack of Summer tour, in addition to being a special guest of Styx's during a pair of residencies in Las Vegas in 2017 and 2018 — as well as other storied runs with Peter Frampton's Guitar Circus, The Doobie Brothers, and REO Speedwagon, as touring highlights.

One of his favorite tours remains 2014's above-noted Soundtrack of Summer. "It was *the* most fun tour I've done, maybe in my whole life," he assesses. "It was stress-free and just a lot of fun, with great guys, no drama, and unbelievably great music. The crews were fantastic, and the bands were amazing — it was just a really, really good summer tour. I was sad when it finally wrapped up."

A number of his tourmates wholeheartedly agree. "It's so much fun to work with people like Don. It's never really *work*, and you can just relax," Styx guitarist/vocalist Tommy Shaw says with a grin. "Don and I get along great. It's a mutual admiration society — at least I hope so. I know I admire him. Don's solos are always very beautifully crafted and constructed, but he's also a guy who can pick up a guitar and just *jam*."

Adds Foreigner co-founder/lead guitarist/chief songwriter Mick Jones, "Don was an eye-opener for everybody on that tour. He really got it together. He faithfully did those songs he used to do with the Eagles, some of which he co-wrote. Would I call what we had a case of mutual respect? Yeah, that would describe it well."

Concurs Foreigner bassist/producer Jeff Pilson, who also produced that year's remake of "Hotel California" that featured not only Felder, Shaw, and Jones trading signature guitar licks but Felder, Shaw, and Foreigner's Kelly Hansen trading lead vocal duties, "Don is one of the most extremely precise and tasteful guys out there. I love him stylistically and sonically — I've always loved everything about his playing, in fact. He made the Eagles rock a little harder, and I really love his voice too. I think he's an underrated singer."

In addition to his musical proficiency as a double-threat guitarist/vocalist, Felder is most proud of his ongoing charity work for the likes of Starkey Hearing Foundation in 2018, the Ruck N Roll Charity Ball in Hong Kong for underprivileged children in 2016, and Autism Speaks in 2014, to name but a few of the worthy causes he supports.

What's next for our man Fingers Felder? Extensive touring is most definitely already locked into place to get behind the majestic sounds and broad shoulders of *American Rock 'N' Roll*, which the man plans to tackle with his own unique brand of mixing equal parts style and grace: "It's not the quantity, but the quality and the choice of the notes you play," he concludes.

Stay tuned for more on Felder's exciting days, months, and years to come. In the meantime, let us continue to admire the essence of Don Felder, a man who continues to push boundaries and expand horizons. It's the only way that he can travel down that road.

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