

# Breaking Boundries

Steely Dan still rocks after a 30-year roll.

Magical musicians Donald Fagan and Walter Becker, known together as Steely Dan, have one of the most eclectic fan bases going. With groupies ranging from grade-school kids to grandparents — well, just about — they are legends in their own time, heavy studio cats that have been digging the scene for going on 30 years. Hardcore cutting-edge musicians that spin magic.

When the group came to Orange County June 16, enthusiastic fans packed the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater (formerly the Irvine Meadows Ampitheater) while minor nines and suspended 13th chords blasted blissfully through the summer evening sky. Universal, cool, jazzy, silky — Steely Dan's music is that and more. Complete with a perfectly placed horn section and sultry backup singers that crooned alongside them, there was a coolness in their out-of-placeless: Fagin looked like a crazed Jewish New York shrink gone mad with his sidekick and mad-scientist pal, Becker.

Halfway through the concert, they turned up the house lights and took a break. Returning to the stage, they played a Henry Mancini instrumental from the '50s just because when you are a rock-and-roll legend you can pretty much do anything you want.

Or perhaps this was letting the crowd, or Orange County, know they haven't



lost touch with their humble beginnings. (Their 1974 album "Pretzel Logic" included a wry postmodern reading of the classic "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," penned by Duke Wellington and Bubba Millie.) Overall, their sound was timelessly familiar — anyone who has ever been in earshot

of a radio has most likely heard the familiar "Peg," "Rikki Don't Lose That Number," and "Play It Again."

A jazz-rock-R&D hybrid, Steely Dan has a comforting style that is readily identified. Reminiscent of that '80s L.A. sound a la Toto, the Doobie Brothers and even Boz Scaggs, the group's songs make it evident that they apply their vast knowledge of living and larger-than-life experiences directly into their music. Forget about the fact that they

haven't put out an album of all new Steely Dan material for 20 years. The tunes and the atmosphere they create are classic and all-encompassing as they continue to have a common thread in all that they create.

Odd characters and situations abound in quite a few of their tunes and get talked about in songs like "Cousin Dupree": "well we used to play when we were three, how about a kiss from your Cousin Dupree?" Some of the older tunes are best listened to on a moody, gray day in New York walking in Soho, wondering where it all went wrong, while others are ideal for driving along Pacific Coast Highway, ocean in view, with your best girl riding shotgun, running from responsibility and inevitable old age.

One can always count on a bevy of strange lyrics and idiosyncratic musical complexities from this duo and the original, hopeful, harmonic colorings they produce almost always break some form of boundary.

The band has always been an anomaly: sophisticated when it's contemporaries were simplistic, uninterested in trends to

the point of disdain, wickedly sarcastic and ironic before such attitudes were popular.

Steely Dan is right for the times — or maybe the times are right for Steely Dan. Unlike many so-called "classic rock" groups that have been coasting for decades on energy and imagination they once possessed, Steely Dan is still vibrant and relevant.

Their latest endeavor is in the film genre. The new Farrelly Brothers' movie starring Jim Carrey, "Me, Myself and Irene," includes 11 Steely covers performed by various artists. The Brian Setzer Orchestra does "Bodhisattva," Leon Redbone does "Chain Lightning" and Wilco covers "Any Major Dude."

Just last month these troubadours were honored with the Founders Award, ASCAP's top honor for lifetime achievement in songwriting.

Steely Dan recently played to sold-out crowds in Japan and are presently taking over the world with a touring schedule that covers major cities in the U.S and Europe. Check below if you're interested in following them around the world. **ah**



**BY TIM MÅSTERSON**