MUSICIAN
PLAYER & LISTENER

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GRATEFUL DEAD

KID CREOLE
DAVID JOHANSEN
JOURNEY, REO

KOOL JAZZ
MILES DAVIS
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NO. 36, SEPT.—OCT. 1981

MUSICIAN

PLAYER & LISTENER

Skunk Baxter's guitar energy was laced all through the first three Steely Dan albums and changed the Doobie Brothers into a new band. Now he's back full time in the land of the studio, with his hands behind the board and his ears at the ready.

The Grateful Dead have a lot to say about the special quality of live improvised discovery, as well they should. Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzman, Mickey Hart and Phil Lesh have been doing it longer and better than any rock 'n' roll band; Vic Garbarini hears some Dead memories and converses at length with Jerry Garcia.

The Koolathon this year's version of the Newport Jazz Festival, went down in Manhattan in an action-packed week. Miles came back, Max Roach generaled, Ornette blew mountains and many others had floats in the summer's biggest parade. Musician flooded the city with reporters who got every M'Boom and glissando, while Ernie Santosuosso got a few words with Miles.

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Cover: Grateful Dead by Steve Smith, Jeff Baxter by Terry Miller

IN SEARCH OF THE GRATEFU

By Vic Garbarini

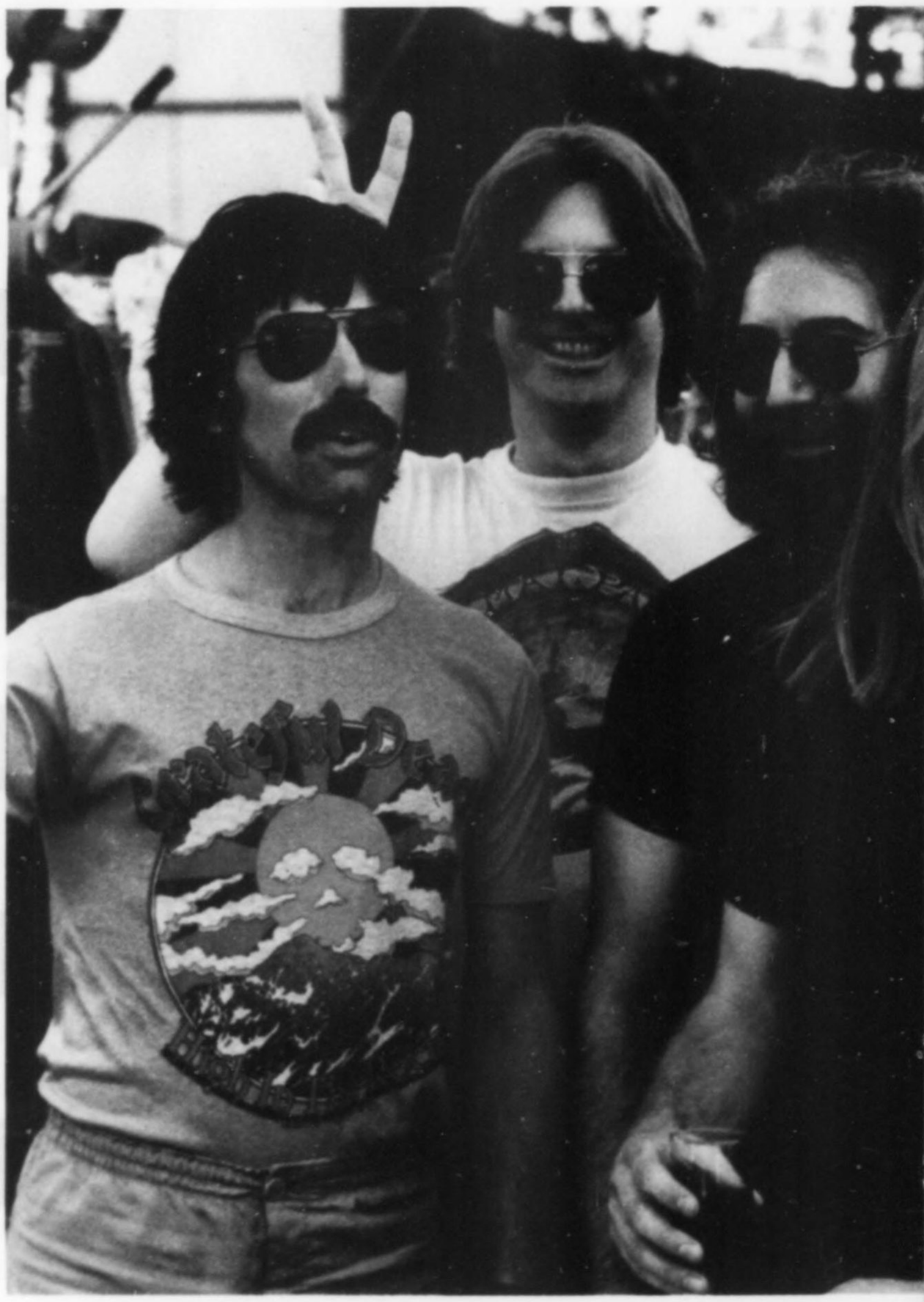
He's a 35-year-old happily married father of four — the respected director of a research institute in Washington, D.C. But Jerry Toporovsky has a secret obsession, and on this cool All Hallows Eve he's about to drive six long hours to New York's Radio City Music Hall to indulge it. "Sometimes I try to reason with myself," explains Toporovsky. "I'm pushing 40, I've got a family and a full-time job — I've gotta be *crazy* to be doing this. But then I think of the last time I saw them and realize it's going to be worth it. It always is." Yes, friends, it's sad but true: Jerry Toporovsky is a confirmed Deadhead.

There is no known cure.

There are thousands like him who follow the Grateful Dead's moveable feast around the country like medieval pilgrims pursuing some mobile Canterbury. They range in age from 16 to 60, and some have been "on the bus," as Ken Kesey might put it, since the band's inception over fifteen years ago. What is it that attracts them? Certainly not nostalgia. The Grateful Dead are *not* the Beach Boys — a traveling oldie show cranking out sentimental favorites for aging hippies. No, the Dead are a living, evolving phenomenon who are still capable of acting as channels for the special quality of energy that can transform an ordinary concert into a transcendent event. Unfortunately, very little of this magic (what Garcia refers to as their "x chemistry") finds its way onto vinyl, making it difficult for the average un-Deadhead to understand what all the hoopla is about. "There are a few passages on 'Dark Star' and some of the other material from the live albums or old concert tapes that capture that 'otherness,' but they're the exception," explains Toporovsky. "We just don't play with the same fire in the studio," concurs guitarist Bob Weir. "We've even toyed with the idea of taking the time off from touring to learn how to make records in the studio; desperation being the mother of invention, we'd have to come up with something!"

Well, maybe.

True, *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* came close, but those were albums of simpler, more concise material that sidestepped the real problem of how to deal with the more free-form exploration of a "Dark Star" or "Saint Stephen." It's not simply a question of capturing the spirit of the jam; there's another dimension that emerges when the Dead



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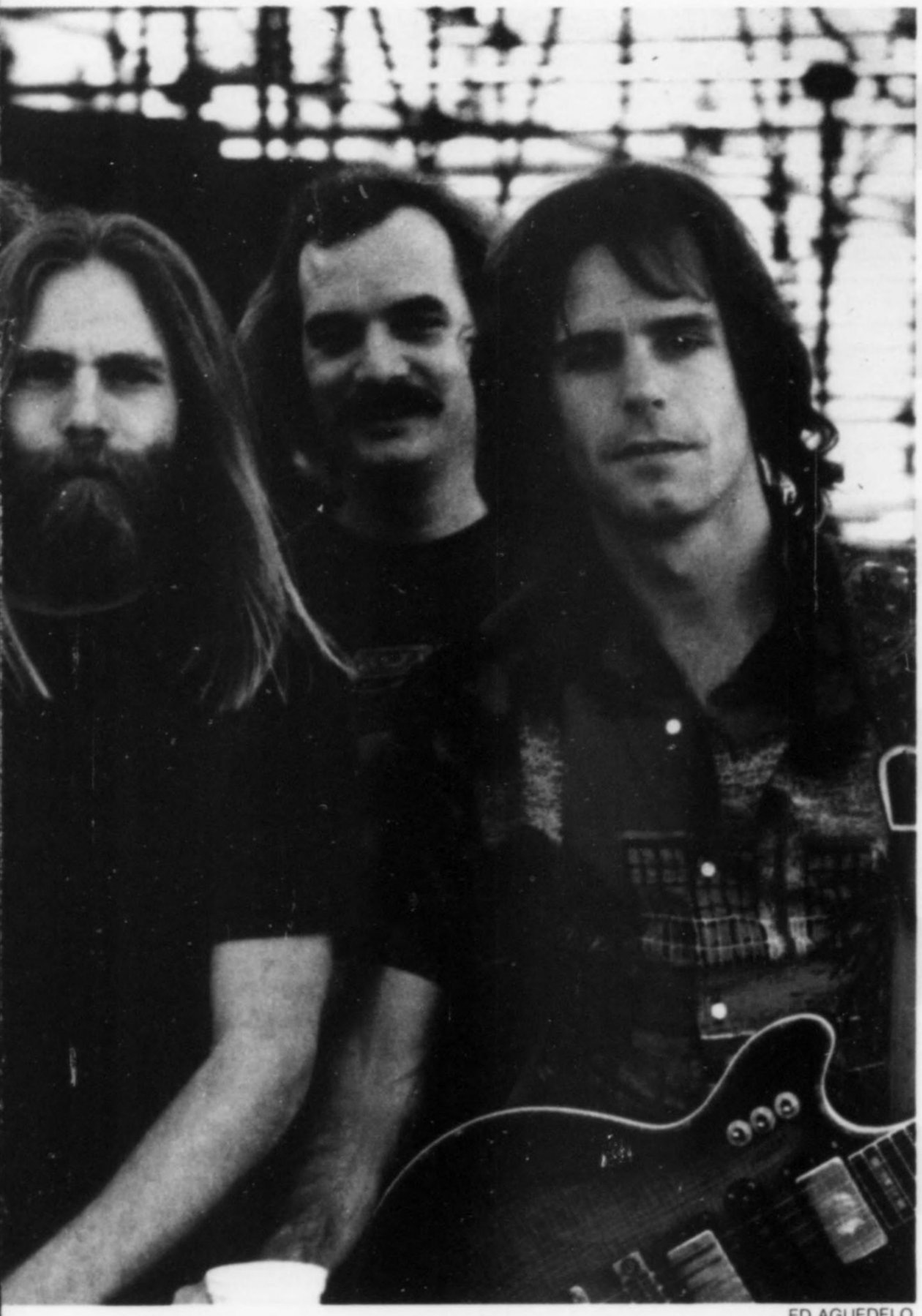

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walk into their free-wheeling improvisation, a quality that seems impossible to recreate in the studio. "It's not just a question of jamming — it's a little bit like jazz, but that's not it either," says Toporovsky. "It's a question of really connecting on a higher level with each other." Since a principal difference between the Dead live and the Dead in the studio involves the presence of an audience, it would follow that interacting with said audience is an indispensable part of the Grateful Dead experience. "Sure, we can get that magic on a record," laughs drummer Bill Kreutzman, "just cram about 5000 people in a studio with us while we record!"

Considering the band's early involvement with psychedelics, some have claimed that this "x chemistry" is entirely dependent on drugs. "Not true," argues Toporovsky. "Acid can give you a headstart in getting to that 'other' place, but it's not required in order to plug into the experience. I haven't taken psychedelics in over five years but I still get the same high at a Dead concert now without drugs as I did on acid in the beginning." In addition to having an audience to work with, the other indispensable factor in the Grateful Dead equation is their commitment to taking risks. Not just propositional and conceptual risks, but a willingness to step out over the edge every night in concert.

"That spirit of adventure is crucial," claims Weir. "We're dedicated to pushing everything a little further each time. Every time another verse comes up, even if I've played it a thousand times before, I try to play it a little differently, to understand and make it a little better each time...and then when we're *really* loosened up, we go for something we've *never* played before." In short, nothing is allowed to ossify into a predictable pattern — everything is kept alive, fresh, and evolving: the Rolling Stones may be content to gather moss, but not the Dead. They have firmly grasped the idea that the only way to maintain their connection with the ineffable is through constant growth and change.

As the band's newest member, keyboardist Brent Mydland discovered just before his first Dead concert two years ago, living with the unexpected can be a bit disorienting at first. "The day before the concert I asked what tunes we'd be doing, so I could concentrate on those songs, but no one would tell me. It freaked me a bit, but then when we got on stage, I

realized that *nobody* knew what we were going to play. Keeps you on your toes..." Once into those swirling, birth-of-the-universe jams, almost anything goes; even long forgotten songs may emerge from the maelstrom like time travelers popping out of a black hole: "'Cold Rain and Snow' just reappeared after six years in the middle of a jam 'cause Garcia realized he could superimpose it over what we were doing," reflects Weir. Band members encourage each other to step out at any point; if somebody states a theme emphatically enough, the rest will inevitably follow. "Well, *almost* always," corrects Weir. "Sometimes only *half* the guys will come along — but that's rare." Of course, the same is true of the mysterious "X factor:" "We can prepare ourselves to be proper vehicles for it, but we can't guarantee it'll happen on any given night," explains the Dead's other drummer, Mickey Hart. "We can raise the sail, but we can't make the wind come." Toporovsky agrees: "Out of any five given concerts, one will be mediocre, one or two will be very, very good, and one or two will be utterly incredible." In the old days the dead would often come into an area for a sustained engagement of half-a-dozen shows, guaranteeing compulsive Deadheads at least one or two transcendent performances. Today, engagements are generally limited to two or three per city, and the faithful often have to catch the band in at least two different towns to secure their cosmic hit.

But the amazing thing is that those moments *do* happen. In the course of interviewing all the band members (except Phil Lesh, who wasn't available), I tried to get them to articulate what they'd discovered about the principles that sustained this matrix, that kept the cosmic dance between performer, audience, and the music itself from collapsing into a chaotic jumble. This was more than a matter of mere curiosity on my part; the problem of longevity is one that must haunt every band as their youthful passion and energy wanes. Any group that's been around for 15 years and can still call down that illuminative power has something to teach all of us. Maybe something that could even save somebody's life. I can't help but think of a Bruce Springsteen concert a few weeks back. The magic just wasn't happening during the first set, and Bruce knew it. But being Bruce, he insisted on pushing himself and his band with a harsh urgency bordering on desperation, as if he hoped to break through to the other side on sheer bravado alone. It hurt to watch him struggle like some beached swimmer, who thinks he can bring back an ebbing tide if he just continues to flail away hard enough on the sand. "My God," said a voice in the next aisle, "if he keeps that up, he'll kill himself." It was a frightening thought, and one that came back to haunt me the other day when I heard that Springsteen had cancelled a series of midwestern dates on account of exhaustion.

After a decade and a half of experimentation, the Dead are convinced that sheer force alone isn't the answer. "It is not even a question of concentration," insists Weir. "You've got to let go and surrender to it; drop your cares, and be there for it." Okay, but who calls the shots? "Nobody calls the shots," counters Weir. "The Dead is bigger than the sum of its parts," adds Garcia. "We go where it leads us." Sounds simple enough, but how the hell do you keep everybody's egos from tearing apart the delicate balance needed to keep things open? According to the Dead, the answer involves standing the normal traditional Western attitude towards music on its head: concentration and individual assertiveness give way to a more diffuse awareness and the commitment to ensemble playing. According to Weir, "You have to reverse gears from the way you originally learned things. For a musician to master his instrument requires excruciating concentration; each note has to be conquered, then strung together to form riffs and passages. For ensemble playing you've got to let all that go and be aware of others. The key here is *listening to what everybody else is doing.* You can always tell when somebody's not listening, because they play too much and spoil the chemistry." So you divide your attention between what you're doing and what the group is doing? "No," insists Weir, "that's not it. Dividing your attention implies a separation between yourself and the music where none exists. Actually, I *am* the music and all that's necessary is to maintain a little concentration, just enough to articulate my part so it blends with the whole."

Stoned? The Dead in '67, peering fearlessly through doors of perception.

The Dead are guaranteed to constantly confound your expectations: every time you think you've got them pegged they toss you another curve. On their debut album they were cleverly disguised as an electric jug band, progressive-minded, but obviously tied to their blues and folk roots. Then came *Anthem of the Sun* — an about-face if ever there was one. It was an acid-drenched psychedelic garage sale that owed more to Stockhausen and Coltrane than Kweskin or Seeger. Next came *Aoxomoxoa*, a noble if not entirely successful attempt to compress all that weirdness into traditional three-minute segments.

It wasn't until the double *Live Dead* that the record-buying public got a glimpse of what all the excitement was about. Although it remains for many, including most of the band members I polled, the quintessential Dead album, the fact that it's simply a taped concert performance served to highlight the Dead's inability to produce a studio recording that reflected their essential nature. They decided to shift gears once again, this time abandoning their complex improvisational material in favor of simpler musical forms whose spirit might be easier to capture on tape. The resulting albums, *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* are the musical equivalent of the Gothic flying buttress: slender, delicate structures that somehow support a cathedral of sound and feeling. About this time the Dead were presented with a challenge of a different nature, with the death of the lead vocalist and keyboardist, Ron McKernan (alias Pigpen). Mickey Hart remembers: "A lot of people may not realize it now, but Pigpen was the boss in those days; it was

his band, he was the leader, not Jerry or Bob. When he died, his responsibilities fell on everybody else's shoulders." It was also a time when rock bands were undergoing fundamental changes in their relationship with their audiences. The sense of communion, of oneness between player and listener was disintegrating as musicians became unreachable superstars, and the audience in turn chose entertainment over communication. Instinctively, the Dead opted out of the whole mad game. They gave up the chance to become superstars, but it didn't matter. They had discovered how to keep that inner dynamic alive within themselves, and there was no way they could commercialize that without crushing its essence. They had something that money couldn't buy (besides, the very thought of Jerry Garcia in a gold lame jumpsuit is too painful to bear).

Compelled by what Garcia refers to as "the call of the weird," the Dead returned to experimental themes on albums like *Blues For Allah* and *Terrapin Station*. The latter album's orchestral sweep, pristine production values, and superb ensemble playing qualify it as probably the most successful attempt yet at a studio rendering of their concert persona. Producer Lowell George brought a taste of funk to *Shakedown Street* and in the process showed the band how to take greater advantage of the rhythmic dynamics inherent in their two-drummer configuration in the studio. Last year's *The Grateful Dead Go To Heaven* was disappointingly tame AOR fare, though Garcia's peppy 'Alabama Getaway" was the closest thing they've had to a hit in years.

This summer the Dead have presented us with a double-double dose of what they do best: two double live albums, one acoustic and one electric, both recorded last fall in New York and San Francisco, the twin capitals of Dead-dom. (The band jokingly refers to the N.Y.-Long Island area as "The Grateful Dead Belt".) These releases are being heralded as the "definitive" Dead albums, and on the evidence presented by the acoustic set, which is the only one available now — the electric record should be coming out by the time you read this — that may be a fair assessment. Dan Healy's recording and production are state-of-the-art, and the performances are among the best I've ever heard from the band.

Is the Grateful Dead satisfied enough with these live efforts to give up their eternal quest for perfection in the studio? Are they finally willing to concede that it can't be done without the help of an audience? "Well, maybe," says Garcia, sitting like a Buddha in a black T-shirt in his San Rafael home, "but I feel it's time for another wave of weirdness to hit, and I was thinking about trying a few ideas in the studio..."

During a break in the interview, I buttonholed Brent Mydland, figuring as the new guy in the band maybe he'll give me some tips on dealing with the Ancient Ones. "I'll tell ya' a funny thing," says Mydland. "When I first joined these guys I had the feeling I was on the outside of a massive inside joke, but I think I'm beginning to catch on." Gee, Brent, can you toss me any clues? "Of course not!" he replies in mock anger. "Are you trying to get me in trouble or something!?"

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The audience, the "eighth member" of the Grateful Dead, drives them to spaces they seldom reach in the studio.

We knew that the only kind of energy management that counted was the liberating kind. So we were always determined to avoid the fascistic, crowd control implications of rock. It's always been a matter of personal honor to me not to manipulate the crowd.

That's what I like about the Dead: they never preach or proselytize. Instead, they quietly go about constructing a working model of what might be a brave new world, based on openness to change and risk, diffusion of ego, sensitivity to the needs of the moment, and receptivity to higher forces. Rather than mere relics of a mythic past, Garcia and company may yet prove to be touchstones for a viable future.

Jerry Garcia: In Search of the X Factor

MUSICIAN: You guys have probably put out more live albums than anyone I can think of — two double live releases this summer alone. Is the mysterious "x factor" that sometimes transforms a Grateful Dead concert impossible to capture in a studio situation?

GARCIA: I'm not sure if it can or can't be captured in the studio, though I agree that so far *we've* failed to capture it there. But we've never really been set up to perform in the studio. Our idea of performance is what we do live, and making records is more of a concession to the realities of the music business than a real expression of our natural flow. Let's put it this way: if making records was a thing you did as a hobby, it's possible we might have turned to it at one point or another. But I really think live music is where it's at for us.

MUSICIAN: How about playing live in the studio?

GARCIA: Yeah, we've tried that, but it's difficult to do with the type of band set-up we have, especially the technical problem of recording two drummers at once. We can't baffle or isolate them; they have to be together, they have to communicate. So live in the studio the microphone hears them as one big drum set, and that's not something you can straighten out in the mix.

MUSICIAN: But isn't there also a psychological reason having to do with the role of the audience?

GARCIA: Very definitely. But that's something we have to talk around; we can't talk about it directly. It's not an exact science, it's more an intuitive thing, and you're right, it does have a lot to do with interacting with the audience. But we don't manipulate them, we don't go out there and try to psyche them out or anything. It's quite involuntary.

MUSICIAN: Can you feel when its happening?

GARCIA: There are times when both the audience and the band can feel it happening, and then there are times when we have to listen to the tapes afterwards to confirm our subjective impressions and see what really happened. That's the way we've been able to deduce the existence of this "x" chemistry. In any case, it doesn't have to do with our will.

MUSICIAN: Is there something you can consciously do to facilitate it?

GARCIA: Well, in a way that's what we're all about: making an effort to facilitate this phenomenon. But the most we can do is be there for it to happen. It just isn't anything we can control on any level we've been able to discover.

MUSICIAN: All right, if it isn't what you do, maybe it's who you are: the chemistry between you; the internal dynamics of the band; your value system; what you eat for breakfast...

GARCIA: I'm sure that's a major part of it.

MUSICIAN: Can you delineate some of the principles that you feel help maintain who you are?

GARCIA: Actually, trying to pinpoint those principles is our real work — it's what we're all about. As far as I can tell, they have to do with maintaining a moment-to-moment approach, in both a macro- and micro-cosmic sense. It's hard to maintain that moment-to-moment freedom in large-scale activities because things like booking tours have to be planned well in advance. So it's in the smaller increments, the note-to-note things, that we get to cop a little freedom. You can see it in our songs, where there's an established form and structure, but the particulars are left open. In terms of the macrocosm — the big picture — we know the tune, but in terms of the note-to-note microcosm, we don't know exactly how we'll play on any given night, what the variations might be. Even simple cowboy tunes like "Me and My Uncle" and "El Paso" change minutely from tour to tour. "Friend of the Devil" is another tune that's changed enormously from its original concept. On *American Beauty* it had kind of a bluegrassy feel, and now we do it somewhere between a ballad and a reggae tune. The song has a whole different personality as a result.

MUSICIAN: How much improvisational space is built into the longer, more exploratory pieces like "St. Stephen" and "Terrapin Station"?

GARCIA: An awful lot...it depends on the piece. "Terrapin" has some sections that are extremely tight, that you could actually describe as being arranged; there are specific notes that each of us have elected to play. The melody, lyrics, and chord changes are set, but the specific licks that anyone wants to play are left open.

MUSICIAN: Would you say that this looseness, this willingness to stay open and take risks is a crucial factor in creating a space for that special energy to enter?

GARCIA: Absolutely! It's even affected the way I write songs. In the past, when I had an idea for a song, I also had an idea for an arrangement. Since then I've sort of purged myself of that habit. There's simply no point in working out all those details, because when a song goes into the Dead, it's anybody's guess how it'll come out. So why disappoint myself?

MUSICIAN: Who or what gives the Dead its overall direction, then?

GARCIA: It's been some time since any of us have had specific directional ideas about the band...the Grateful Dead is in its own hands now; it makes up its own mind, and we give it its head and let it go where it wants. We've gotten to be kind of confident about it at this point. It's become an evolving process that unfolds in front of us.

MUSICIAN: As a band you guys seem to have a dual personality; on one hand there's the improvisational, exploratory material like "Anthem" and "Dark Star," while on the other there's this very structured, tradition-bound sort of music. It was generally the earlier material that was stretching boundaries, while the albums from *Workingman's Dead* onwards have been more structured. So I was wondering if that was because the relationship between artist and audience was falling apart at that point, and that 60s energy envelope you were tapping into was beginning to disintegrate, forcing you to resort to simpler, more formalized material that didn't depend on that energy field?

GARCIA: No.

MUSICIAN: Darn...it was such a great little theory...

GARCIA: Let me straighten that out right now. First of all, you're right about the audience/artist communication thing falling apart, although that didn't happen to us. Let me give you a time frame that might shed some light on all this: at the time we were recording and performing the *Live Dead* material onstage, we were in the studio recording *Workingman's Dead*. We weren't having much success getting that experimental stuff down in the studio, so we thought we'd strip it down to the bare bones and make a record of very simple music and see if *that* worked. Time was another factor. We'd been spending a long time in the studio with those exploratory albums, six to eight months apiece, and it was really eating up our lives.

MUSICIAN: You didn't feel any aesthetic conflict?

GARCIA: No, not at all. Because those two poles have always been part of our musical background. I was a bluegrass banjo player into that Bakersfield country stuff while Phil was studying Stockhausen and all those avant-gardists.

MUSICIAN: Is that where the...

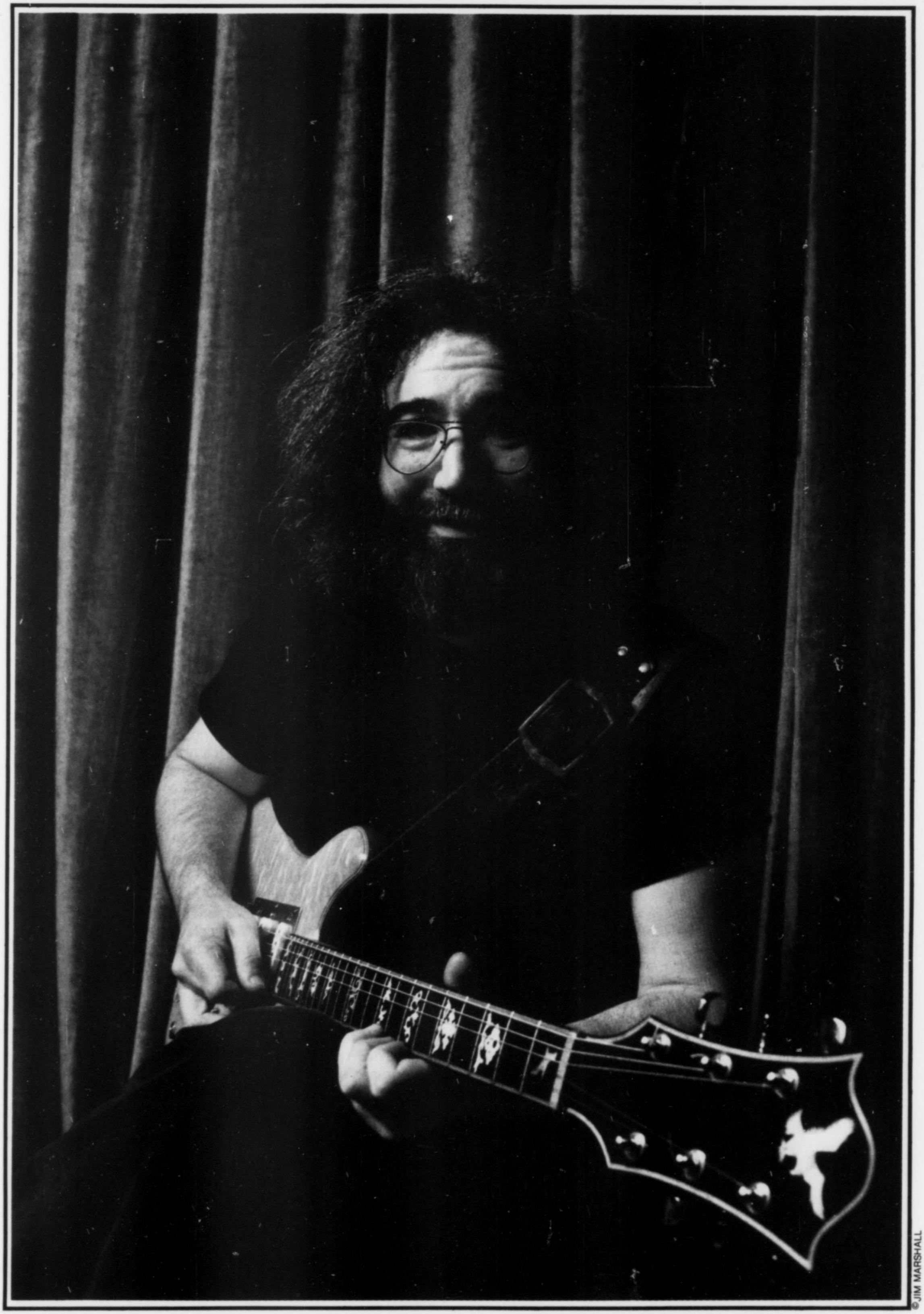
GARCIA: ...prepared piano stuff on "Anthem" comes from? Sure.

MUSICIAN: *Wait a minute, how did you know I was going to ask that?!*

GARCIA: (Smiles)

MUSICIAN: Okay, never mind, but what happens when you reverse the procedure and play *Workingman's Dead* in concert? Can you still get the same kineticism?

GARCIA: Yes, it turns out we can. For the last year or so we've been doing some of those tunes, like "Uncle John's Band" and



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Until his death in 1972, vocalist and keyboardist Pigpen (a.k.a. Ron McKernan) was actually the leader of the group.

"Black Peter," and they fit in well in that they become poles of familiarity in a sea of weirdness. It's nice to come into this homey space and make a simple statement. It comes off very beautifully sometimes. And inevitably it draws some of the weirdness into it. What's happening with the Grateful Dead musically is that these poles are stretching towards each other.

MUSICIAN: Which of your albums do you believe come closest to capturing the band's essence?

GARCIA: I'd pick the same things that everybody else would: *Live Dead, Workingman's Dead, American Beauty, Europe '72*. I'd take *Terrapin Station*, too, the whole record. I'd also definitely recommend the two live sets that just came out.

MUSICIAN: How important is the acoustic approach to the band?

GARCIA: Not very, because we only do it in special situations. In fact, there have only been two periods in our career when we did acoustic material: first in the early 70s, and then again just lately.

MUSICIAN: Why did you come back to it?

GARCIA: It's something that's fun for us because of the intimacy involved; it brings us closer together, both physically and psychologically, and as a result we play with a lot of sensitivity. I mean, I can just turn around like this and go (swats imaginary band member) HEY, WAKE UP! Lotsa' fun...

MUSICIAN: Speaking of direction: some people are wondering if you've gone totally off the experimental approach, since you haven't released anything in that vein since *Terrapin Station* back in '77.

GARCIA: Yeah, but '77 isn't really so long ago in Grateful Dead terms, you know. That's just a few records ago! Ideas around here take a year or so just to find their way to the surface, much less achieve their expression, which can take three or four years. We're always looking at the bigger picture. People have been hollering for us to bring back "Dark Star" and stuff like that for some time now, and we will. But in our own time.

MUSICIAN: You're not afraid of your old material?

GARCIA: Oh, absolutely not. It's partly that there's a new guy who hasn't been through all that with us, and we have to bring him up through all those steps slowly. It's not that he's a slow learner, it's because we originally spent months and months rehearsing those things that were in odd times.

MUSICIAN: Like "The Eleven"?

GARCIA: Right, that was tacked onto the "Dark Star" sequence. It's called "The Eleven" because that's the time it's in. We rehearsed that for months before we even performed it in public. Luckily Brent's a much better musician now than we were then, so it shouldn't take that long. But we've still got to find the rehearsal time to put those songs together again.

MUSICIAN: Are you ever concerned that any of you will fall into cliched patterns, either as individuals or as a group?

GARCIA: No, because the musical personalities of the various members have been so consistently surprising to me over the years that I'm still completely unable to predict what they would play in any given situation. In fact, I'd challenge anyone to check out any Grateful Dead album and listen to, say, what Phil plays, and look for stylistic consistency. You won't find it. These guys are truly original musical thinkers, especially Phil. Let me give you an example: Phil played on four songs for a solo album of mine called *Reflections*. Now, I write pretty conventionally structured songs, so I asked Phil to play basically the same lines on each chorus so I could anchor it in the bass. But I didn't really see the beauty of what he'd done 'til later when I was running off copies of the tape at fast forward. The bass was brought up to a nice, skipping tempo, right in that mellow, mid-range guitar tone, and I was struck by the amazing beauty of his bass line; there was this wonderful syncopation and beautiful harmonic ideas that were barely perceptible at regular speed, but when it's brought up to twice the speed...God, it just blew me out.

MUSICIAN: Considering all the improvisations you do, I'm surprised you don't acknowledge jazz more as an influence on your playing. You had to be listening to Coltrane, at least.

GARCIA: Oh, definitely Coltrane, for sure. But I never sat down and stole ideas from him; it was more his sense of flow that I learned from. That and the way his personality was always right there — the presence of the man just comes stomping out of those records. It's not something I would've been able to learn through any analytical approach, it was one of those things I just had to flash on. I also get that from Django Reinhardt's records. You can actually hear him shift mood...

MUSICIAN: The humor in his solo on "Somewhere Beyond the Sea" is amazing...

GARCIA: Anger, too. You can hear him get mad and play some nasty, mean little thing. It's incredible how clearly his personality comes through. It's one of those things I've always been impressed with in music. There's no way to steal that, but it's something you can model your playing on. Not in the sense of copying someone else's personality, but in the hopes that maybe I could learn how to let my own personality come through.

MUSICIAN: So it's a question of imitating essence, not form.

GARCIA: Right. My models for being onstage developed from being in the audience, because I've been a music fan longer than I've been a musician. A very important model for me was a bluegrass fiddle player named Scotty Sternman, who was just a house-a-fire crazed fiddle player. He was a monster technically, played like the devil. Anyway, he was a terribly burnt-out alcohol case by the time I saw him, but I remember hearing him take a simple fiddle tune and stretch it into this incredible 20-minute extravaganza in which you heard just *everything* come out of that fiddle, and I was so moved emotionally that he became one of my models...I mean, there I was standing in that audience with just tears rolling out of my eyes — it was just so amazing. And it was the essence that counted, none of the rest of it.

MUSICIAN: Looking back, were there any other groups or artists that were pivotal influences on your concept of the band?


PETER SIMON

Although they seldom perform acoustic material, the Dead enjoy the closeness and nuance of the quieter medium.

Our music isn't something we decided on or invented. In fact, it's inventing us, in a way. We're just agreeing that it should happen and volunteering for the part.

GARCIA: There have been a couple of different things for a couple of different people. For myself, I was very, very impressed by the music of Robbie Robertson and the Band. There isn't any real textural similarity between what we play; I just admired their work very much.

MUSICIAN: Is there anybody on the current scene that you feel a particular kinship or identification with?

GARCIA: The Who. I think the Who are one of the few truly important architects of rock 'n' roll. Pete Townshend may be one of rock 'n' roll's rare authentic geniuses. And there's also the fact that they're among our few surviving contemporaries...I'm just really glad they exist.

MUSICIAN: I was talking with Ray Manzarek recently and he remembered reading Kerouac describe this sax player in a bar who had "it" that night, and how badly Ray wanted to get "it" too...whatever the hell it was.

GARCIA: Hey, that same passage was important to us! Very definitely. Our association with Neil Cassidy was also tremendously helpful to us in that way.

MUSICIAN: And of course there was Kesey and the Acid Tests. That must also have been about going for the essence and not getting stuck in forms...

GARCIA: Right, because the forms were the first thing to go in that situation. You see, the Acid Tests represented the freedom to go out there and try this stuff and just blow.

MUSICIAN: Did the acid simply amplify that impulse, or did it open you to the possibility in the first place?

GARCIA: Both. The Acid Test opened up possibilities to us because there were no strictures. In other words, people weren't coming there to hear the Grateful Dead, so we didn't have the responsibilites to the audience in the normal sense. Hell, they didn't know what to expect! Sometimes we'd get onstage and only tune up. Or play about five notes, freak out, and leave! That happened a couple of times; other times we'd get hung up and play off in some weird zone. All these things were okay, the reality of the situation permitted everything. That's something that doesn't happen in regular musical circles — it took a special situation to turn us on to that level of freedom.

MUSICIAN: Had you experimented with either acid or musical "weirdness" before?

GARCIA: Yeah, we'd taken acid before, and while we were on the bar circuit playing seven nights a week, five sets a night, we'd use that fifth set when there was almost nobody there but us and the bartenders to get weird. We joined the Acid Tests partly to escape the rigors of that 45 on, 15 off structure that the bars laid on us every night.

MUSICIAN: Did you have ideas about what all this might open you up to, or was it just "let's step through this doorway"?

GARCIA: Just that: let's step through this doorway. We didn't have any expectations.

MUSICIAN: Do you feel any ambivalence about it now? Acid had a down side for some people...

GARCIA: No, I loved it. I'd do it again in a second because it was such a totally positive experience for me, especially when you consider that we were at the tail end of the beatnik thing, in which an awful lot of my energy was spent sitting around and waiting for something to happen. And finally, when something *did* happen, boy, I couldn't get *enough* of it! When we fell in with the Acid Test, I was ready to pack up and hit the road. We all went for it.

MUSICIAN: How did that evolve into the whole Haight-Ashbury scene?

GARCIA: What happened was that the Acid Test fell apart when acid became illegal, and Kesey had to flee to Mexico. We ended up down in L.A. hanging out with Owsley in Watts, then moved back to San Francisco three or four months later.

A Tale of Two Drummers

Bill Kreutzman's music career did not begin auspiciously; his teacher tossed him out of the school band because he couldn't keep the beat. His revenge was twenty years coming but well worth the wait. Encouraged by a sympathetic high school music instructor, Bill eventually wound up teaching drums in a Palo Alto music store, where he and another instructor named Jerry Garcia got the idea of starting a band. The Warlocks soon metamorphosed into the Grateful Dead, and a debut album was cut for Warners. Shortly after its release, Kreutzman faced a crisis when the band invited Mickey Hart to join as a second percussionist. "In my darkest moments," admits Kreutzman, "I was sure he was trying to get me out of the band so he could take over. But in the end I saw it wasn't so, and that spirit of conflict served as a catalyst for getting me off my duff and deeper into the music." Thus began one of rock's most successful double-drummer combinations.

Both drummers soon discovered that their styles were naturally complementary. "I tend to play the more rudimentary, straight ahead stuff," explains Kreutzman, "while Mickey handles the embellishments, tom fills, and other exotica." Hart agrees: "Usually Bill winds up doing the straighter, rock 'n' rollish stuff, while I'm turning it in, out and around. But there are no rules." How do they determine their respective responsibilities on any given tune? "Normally we just attack it and see what happens," says Mickey. "We might then discuss it, but we find the best work doesn't come from our minds, but from somewhere deeper. We actually *breathe* in the same time. It's not just two good drummers playing together; something is different between me and Bill. We feel our pulses before a show to get in common time, and we really are beating together."

"You can never be afraid to take chances," says Kreutzman, "We may play the same song a lot, but it's different every performance. If you try to hold on to something you inevitably kill it." Hart takes it even further: "It's more than just an option — we *have* to take risks. I go up there every night hoping that someone will have a great idea that will take me away, that'll really make me understand what music is about after all these years. But you're part of an ensemble, so you wait for a good idea to come up, and if it's right, something makes you do it and it inspires the rest of the band." Sometimes this creative risk-taking spills out beyond the boundaries of the songs to fill in the spaces between tunes. "Call it rhythmic modulation," offers Bill. "Instead of a sudden modulation or key shift between songs, we try to establish a rhythmic relationship so we can slowly amble from one to the other. It's one of my favorite exercises, but it's damn tricky to pull off."

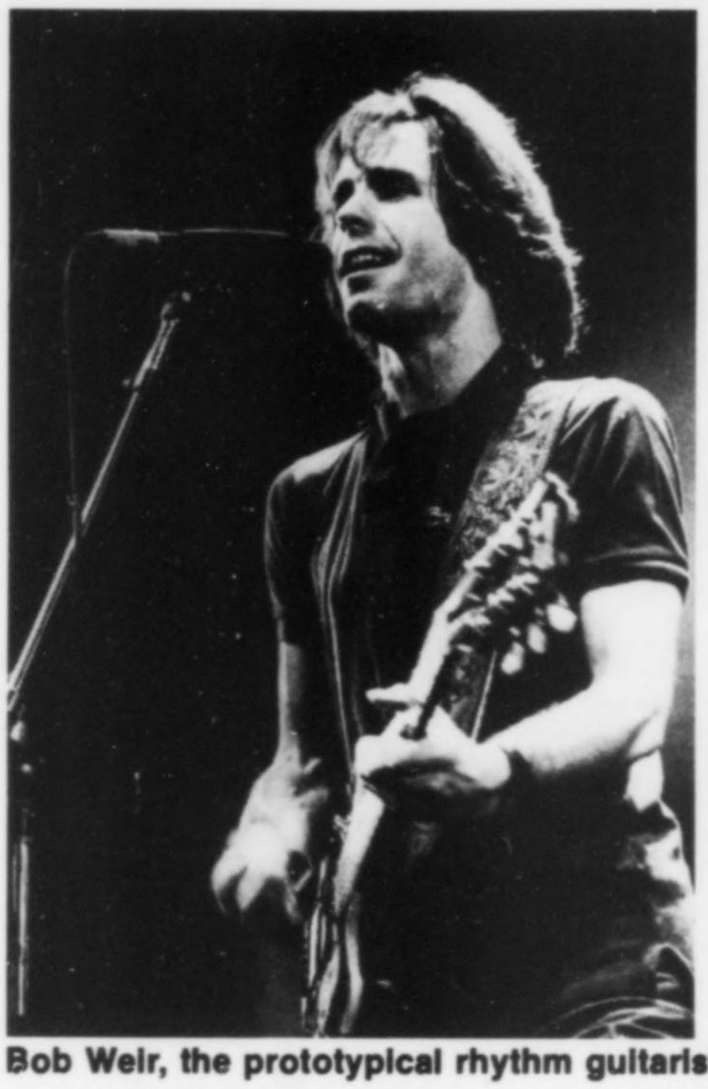
Both Kreutzman and Hart are deeply involved with Asian, African and American ethnic musics. For Hart, interest centers on what he refers to as "pre-entertainment music:" "It's music that's not based just on entertainment; it deals with activities such as making work easier or chasing away demons or washing clothes."

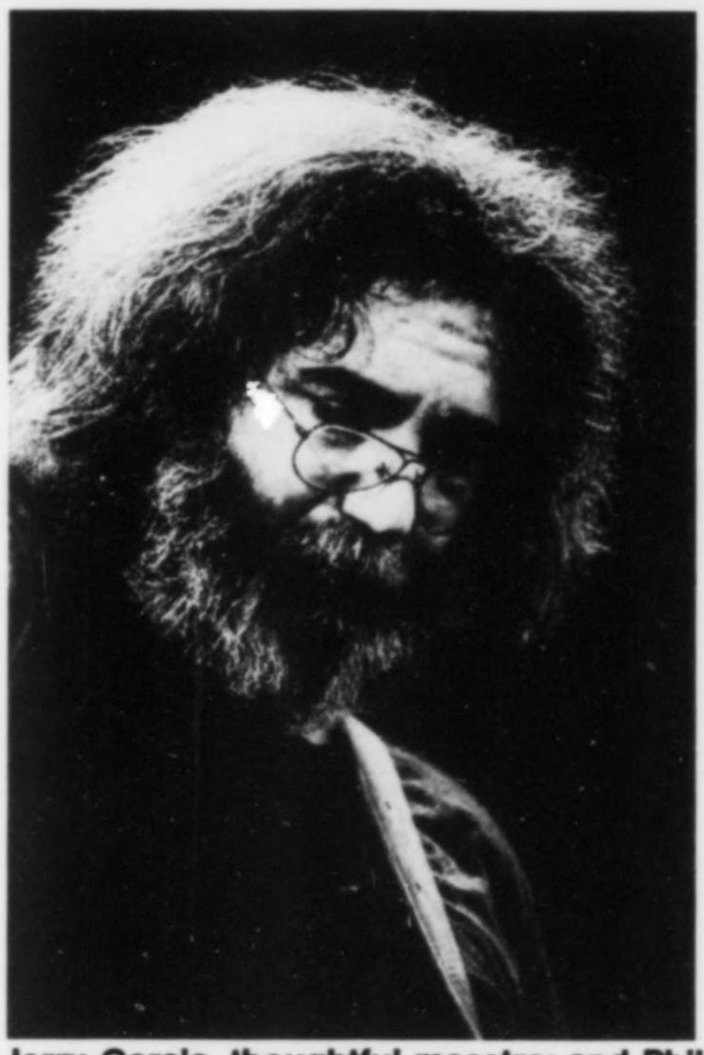
One incident that helped Hart develop a healthy respect for the innate power of this kind of music involved a gift from his friend, Airto Moreira, the noted Brazilian percussionist. "Airto gave me this Brazilian stringed instrument called the berimbau. He gave me a quick lesson in how to play it, and I took it home to practice on. Well, I wound up just staring into the fire and playing this thing for weeks. It just took over; I wouldn't accept phone calls or anything," laughs Hart. "Three weeks later I called up Airto and asked him what the hell was going on!' He explained that in Brazil the berimbau was used to induce an altered state of consciousness for practicing the martial arts." Hart pauses. "The weird thing is that I've been into the martial arts for years, but had let it go for a while, and then got back into it when I started playing the berimbau... And there was Airto talking about how this jungle instrument could take you without you even knowing it!"

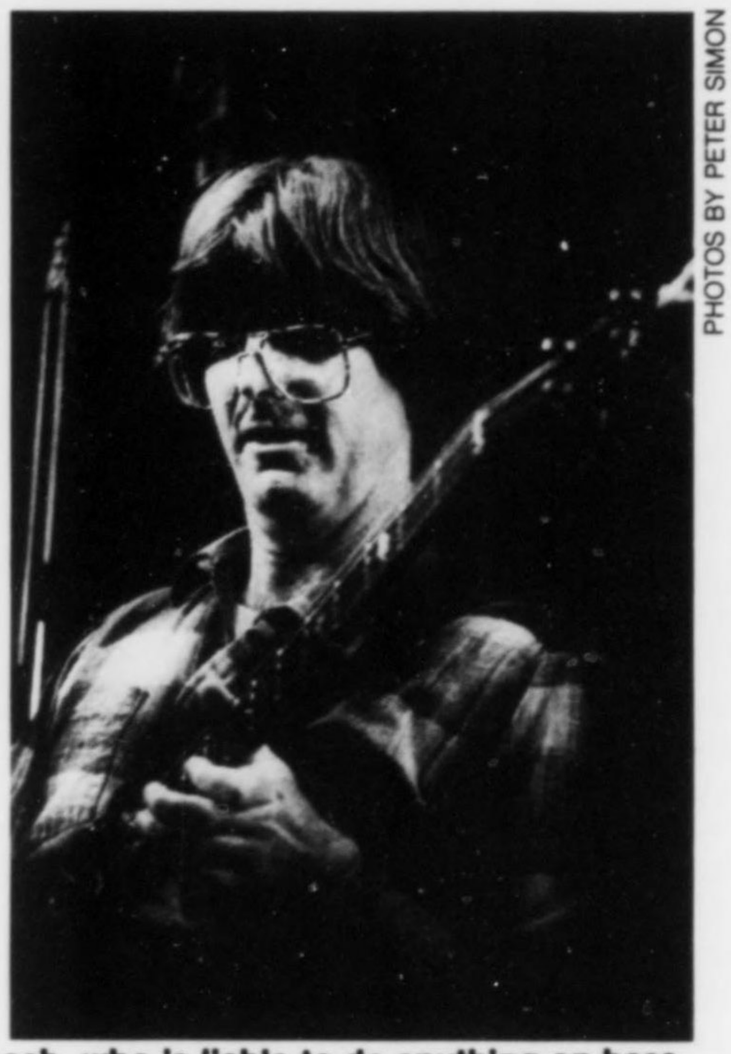
Both Hart and Kreutzman cite Sudanese oud player Hamza El Din as a major source of both musical and spiritual inspiration. "It's so great to meet someone who could be so damn strong and yet not exude even a trace of evil, meaness, or fear." A few years ago, Hart accompanied Hamza on a journey up the Nile to visit his ancestral village in the Nubian Desert. "The first thing those Nubian drummers taught me was that Bo Diddley didn't invent that beat," said Mickey. Not speaking Arabic, Hart utilized the universal language of music to exchange ideas and converse with the Sudanese, who were impressed with his dexterity. "Hamza had taught me to play the tar, a single-membraned African drum, and his people were really blown out by the rhythmic exercises I'd worked up." The Nubians would often hold the same rhythmic groove for hours, with different sections of the ensemble coming forward to improvise over the basic pattern. But when Hart's turn to solo came up he met with an unexpected reaction from his hosts. "My polyrhythms startled them at first. I asked Hamza why they were staring at me, and he explained that when they heard the off beat and polyrhythms they felt I was forcing the drum. They feel the drums should tell you what to do, and not vice versa, which they see as artificial. They say, 'Excite the drum and it will tell you what to play'," reflects Hart: "It's a great concept, and I've found it works if you approach the instrument with the right attitude."

Both Hart and Kreutzman were afforded an opportunity to draw on their work with African and Brazilian musics when they, along with with bassist Phil Lesh, Airto, Flora Purim and others, accepted a commission from Francis Ford Coppola to compose the score for *Apocalypse Now — The Rhythm Devils Play River Music*. Hart's marching orders from Coppola were short and to the point: "All Francis said was 'you know what I want — you know how to make magic. Do it!' " recalled Hart. "I watched the film constantly. I had it on video cassette in my kitchen, in my bedroom, and in the studio. It played continuously for three months." Their task was complicated by the fact that the battle sound effects Coppola brought back from the Phillipines sounded unconvincing. In the end they were asked to find a way of simulating the cacophony of war in the studio. "Try reproducing the sounds of a napalm attack using wooden instruments and bells;" suggests Hart wryly. "The artillery sounded like cheap firecrackers, so we had to reinforce that, too, with steel drums I had built, and other percussive devices. We had over fifteen hours of material!"

For all their inventiveness, both drummers are surprisingly self-effacing about the Dead's success. "It's the audience that's the key," reveals Kreutzman. "They're really the eighth band member. There is some power, be it God or whatever, that enters the Grateful Dead on certain nights, and it has to do with us being open and getting together with the audience. If we can do that, then it comes...and spreads everywhere."







PHOTOS BY PETER SIMON

Bob Weir, the prototypical rhythm guitarist; Jerry Garcia, thoughtful maestro; and Phil Lesh, who is liable to do anything on bass.

MUSICIAN: Were psychedelics really the main catalysts in initiating the Haight scene?

GARCIA: I think it was a very, very important part of it. Everyone at that time was looking hard for that special magic thing, and it was like there were clues everywhere. Everybody I knew at least had a copy of *The Doors Of Perception*, and wanted to find out what was behind the veil.

MUSICIAN: What closed that doorway?

GARCIA: COPS!!

MUSICIAN: Just cops?

GARCIA: That's it, really, cops... It was also that this group of people who were trying to meet each other finally came together, shook hands, and split. It was all those kids that read Kerouac in high school — the ones who were a little weird. The Haight-Ashbury was like that at first, and then it became a magnet for every kid who was dissatisfied: a kind of central dream, or someplace to run to. It was a place for seekers, and San Francisco always had that tradition anyway.

MUSICIAN: Sort of a school for consciousness.

GARCIA: Yes, very much so, and in a good way. It was sweet. A special thing.

MUSICIAN: Sometimes I think that whole scene was a chance for our generation to glimpse the goal, and now we've got to find out how to get back there.

GARCIA: Right, and many people have gone on to reinforce that with their own personal energy. It *is* possible to pursue that goal and feed the dog at the same time. It just takes a little extra effort.

Many people have gone on to reinforce Haight-Ashbury with their own personal energy. It's possible to pursue that goal and feed the dog at the same time. It just takes a little extra effort.

MUSICIAN: Can you talk about your relationship with the Hell's Angels? I played in a band backed by them in Berkeley and it was, uh...an ambivalent experience.

GARCIA: Well, that's it. It *is* ambivalent. I've always liked them because they don't hide what they are, and I think all they require of you is honesty — they just require that you don't bullshit them — and if you're out front with them, I think you don't have anything to worry about.

The Angels are very conscious of their roots and history, so the fact that we played at Chocolate George's funeral way back during the Haight-Ashbury was really significant to them. They didn't have many friends in those days, and so anybody who would come out for one of their members was demonstrating true friendship. And with them, that really counts for something.

MUSICIAN: What do you fee! attracted Kesey to them in the first place? The noble savage concept?

GARCIA: No, I think Ken saw them for what they are: a definite force of their own which you can't hope to control. When they come around, it's reality, and you go with it.

MUSICIAN: What about Altamont?

GARCIA: Horrible.

MUSICIAN: It sure was. But having been in the Bay area at the time, I can understand how you might have thought it a good idea to recommend them as security people...

GARCIA: *We* didn't recommend them!!

MUSICIAN: I thought the Stones people said you suggested it?

GARCIA: Absolutely not! No, we would never do that. The Angels were planning on being there, and I guess the Stones crew thought this might be a good way to deal with that fact.

MUSICIAN: The Angels aside, as soon as you entered that place you could feel this incredible selfishness — the complete antithesis of what went on at Monterey and Woodstock.

GARCIA: Yeah, that's what it was: an incredibly selfish scene. Steve Gaskin pinned it down best when he said that Altamont was "the little bit of sadism in your sex life the Rolling Stones had been singing about all those years, brought to its most ugly, razor-toothed extreme." Kind of ironic, since they were the ones who started that "Sympathy For The Devil" stuff.

MUSICIAN: You guys have avoided falling into the darker side of things. Did that require constant vigilance on your part?

GARCIA: It did for me at any rate. During the psychedelic experience the fear and awfulness inherent in making a big mistake with that kind of energy was very apparent to me. For me, psychedelics represented a series of teaching and cautionary tales, and a lot of the message was *"Boy, don't blow this!"* Back in the Haight there really were some Charlie Manson characters running around, really weird people who believed they were Christ risen and whatever, and who meant in the worst possible way to take the power. Some of them saw that the Grateful Dead raised energy and they wanted to control it. But we knew that the only kind of energy management that counted was the liberating kind — the kind that frees people, not constrains them. So we were always determined to avoid those fascistic, crowd control implications of rock. It's always been a matter of personal honor to me not to manipulate the crowd.

MUSICIAN: Did that temptation present itself?
GARCIA: Yeah, sometimes we'd discover a little trick that would get everybody on their feet right away, and we'd say let's *not* do that — if that's going to happen, then let's discover it new every time. Let's not plan it.
MUSICIAN: Back in those days there was a real bond between the audience and musicians. Something changed around '71, and it became a spectacle, with the audiences sucking up your energy and the band falling into egotistical superstar routines. It was entertainment rather than communication, and something special was lost. Were you aware of this change, or am I crazy?
GARCIA: Yeah, it was obvious, because in spite of all that talk about community, we knew it couldn't happen among the musicians, because each wanted to be the best and overshadow the others. A truly cooperative spirit was not likely to happen.
MUSICIAN: Was it the record companies and the materialistic orientation they represent that spoiled it?
GARCIA: I don't think so. To me, the record companies have never been a malicious presence...they're more like a mindless juggernaut.
MUSICIAN: I didn't mean that it was intentional on their part. I just feel they represent a set of values and a means of organization that are at odds with the goals of music. They created an environment in which the soul of music couldn't survive...
GARCIA: Yeah, I agree it was the music business and entertainment as a whole that killed it, because in entertainment there's always this formula thinking that encourages you to repeat your successes. All that posturing and stuff is what show business is all about, and that's what a lot of rock became: show business. It's just human weakness, and I guess it's perfectly valid for a rock star to get up there and...
MUSICIAN: But wasn't what happened in San Francisco a few years earlier on a much higher plane of experience? Audience and performer were meeting and interacting in a real way...
GARCIA: That's true, but that was something that just happened in the Bay Area, you know. It never made it to the East Coast, and it definitely didn't make it to England. And so those people were coming from a much more rigorous model of what it meant to be a rock 'n' roll star. That came from their management and business levels, as things were lined up for them in advance and they were given those models as the way to do things. When we met English rock stars at the time, it was like meeting birds in gilded cages; they really wished there was some way of breaking out of what they were into, but they were trapped.
MUSICIAN: What happened to the energy field you'd established with your audience when you went to, say, New York or London?
GARCIA: We found that we'd brought it along with us, and the people who came to see us entered right into it. And that's what's made it so amazing for us, because our audience, in terms of genuineness, has been pretty much the same as it was back in the 60s. And so has our own experience.
MUSICIAN: Including your new generation of fans?
GARCIA: Sure. The 16-year-olds coming to see us now are no different than they were in the Haight; they're looking for a real experience, not just a show.

The Grateful Dead's P.A. **By Marc Silag**

Specs alone have never determined the Grateful Dead's selection of P.A. reinforcement systems. To Dan Healy, the Dead's sound mixer for fifteen years, attitude and philosophy are as important as crossover points and speaker configurations. Over the years the Dead and Healy have made some formidable contributions to P.A. theory and practice. The Wall of Sound, the band's first and last excursion into the P.A. business during the mid-seventies was recognized as a major step toward accurate reproduction of stage dynamics and fidelity. The Dead's press kit has nearly as much to say about the band's technical direction as it does about their musical route.

Like many groups who perform in coliseum-type venues, the Dead favor the systems built and maintained by Clair Brothers of Lititz, Pennsylvania. These systems depend on two Clair Brothers exclusives, the S-4 speaker cabinet and the 32x6x2 portable mixing console designed and engineered by Bruce Jackson with the cooperation of Ron Bothwick.

The S-4 consists of two 18" speakers, four 10" lo-mid speakers and two hi-mid horns utilizing JBL 2405 Type Drivers using passive crossovers. The cabinets, when suspended from the ceilings of a typical large venue, are strapped in vertical stacks to promote "Line Source Coupling." This affords Healy with more directionality and forward loudness. Each box requires about 1000 watts of power and Clair provides banks of Phase Linear 700 power amps to drive as many as 64 cabinets, depending on the size and acoustical characteristics of the venue.

The Jackson-Bothwick board is a self-contained unit featuring 32 inputs and six stereo submasters, with two main outputs. Three-band eq is parametric and four effects sends are provided with equalized returns. A unique "bar graph fader" design displays peak *and* average signal readouts, pre- or post-fader. Steve Dove, an engineer familiar with the board under the duress of touring, has never known one of the six Clair Brothers' boards of this type to fail.

Outboard equipment includes dbx 162 compressor/limiters for each band-width, Crown D-75 power for headset monitoring, a White Spectrum Analyzer/Noise Generator and White 1/6 and 1/3 octave equalizers.

There have been three notable occasions when the Dead have used an altogether different system than the one outlined above. For shows in San Francisco, New York and the Oakland Coliseum last year, Healy brought three separate audio companies together and fabricated a "super system" so elaborate in its engineering and logistics as to make carrying it on tour an economic impossibility.

Healy's trademark is an open attitude towards new methods of producing full-bodied live sound, eliminating the shackles imposed by electrically produced phase distortion and harsh room reflections that debase the intended sound image. Using documented and patented theories of linear response established by John Meyer and his company, Meyer Sound Labs (MSLI) of San Francisco, the Dead are capable of producing "three dimensional" live reinforcement. Healy is the only sound engineer we've run across who uses the term "holographic" in discussing his work.

McCune Audio of San Francisco supplies the Dead with stage stacks consisting of twelve 12" woofers, six mid-range horns and thirty tweeters per side. The system, known as the JM-10, incorporates Meyer's theory of linear response in which accurate imaging is dependent on the electrical *pre*-distortion of the P.A. signal before it reaches the speakers and drivers. In the case of equipment listed here, speakers and drivers are manufactured in Europe to Meyer's specs. By carefully matching each transducer to the circuitry employed to pre-distort the signal, it is possible to compensate for phase distortion created when the transducer changes electrical energy into acoustic energy. Elimination of phase distortion is the prime mover of this system and both the JM-10 and the Bill Graham Presents System 80 that flies over center stage are "time corrected," using another design of MSLI, the Group Delay Equalizer. The GDE shapes the wave forms to be projected by the system(s) by delaying specified frequencies within a given bandwidth, allowing all frequencies to arrive at the listener's ear at the same time. This also makes room reflections more controllable, and the ping-ponging of certain frequencies in a room is greatly reduced. The System 80 is a cluster arrangement consisting of sixty 12" woofers, twelve MSLI horns and twenty-four Heil tweeters. The third company using Meyer's technology is Ultrasound of Larkspur, California, who provide sub-woofer assemblies Meyer designed for the sound track of *Apocalypse Now*. These cabinets house 18" ferro-fluid speakers to handle the low end of the Dead's sound.

In the house, McCune equips Healy with a 22x4 mix console with 3-band eq, augmented by a Tangent 2402 mixer for the drums. Although outboard eq is available, Healy uses it sparingly. Healy claims the only usable form of eq comes in the selection of placement of stage mics. No special outboard equipment is used aside from some special effects, the nature of which Healy would not divulge.

The sound of this system is extraordinary. It played a major role in the recording of the recently released live Dead LP, in that Healy relied heavily on room mics in the mix of the album. For the audio-conscious Deadheads of the world, it is Healy's hope that such a system will eventually join the Dead on tour.

MUSICIAN: Going back to the idea that there was an opening for a while to a different quality of experience that gave people a taste of something other, it seeems — and I don't want to sound mawkish — that you guys are one of the guardians of that experience. On a good night, anyway. It's as if you guys serve as a touchstone for some people.

GARCIA: Well, that's the way it's sort of working out, but it isn't something we decided or invented. In fact, it's inventing us, in a way. We're just agreeing that it should happen, and volunteering for the part.

MUSICIAN: I wonder how many people really believe this is a bona fide phenomenon you're talking about, and not just a purely subjective impression.

GARCIA: Deadheads already know, but they disqualify themselves just by being Deadheads. We try to measure it all the time, but it's hard to communicate to people. But that's okay, 'cause it probably isn't everybody's cup of tea. But it ought to be there for those who can dig it.

MUSICIAN: This conversation keeps bringing me back to something I heard in an interview a few months ago. It was the idea that maybe music is looking for a musician to play it...

GARCIA: There's more truth in that than you can know. It just chooses its channel and goes through. And you may be able to spoil it in other situations, but you can't spoil it in the Grateful Dead.

MUSICIAN: But couldn't you destroy that matrix by egotistically closing yourselves off from each other and the audience. Lots of other bands have.

GARCIA: Certainly, but luckily for us the music has always been the big thing for the Grateful Dead, and all that other ego-oriented stuff is secondary. I mean, we've had our hassles, who doesn't? But all of those things have only added more and more into the experience. Nothing has made it smaller. It's been a fascinating process and...

MUSICIAN: ...a long, strange trip?

GARCIA: (Laughs) Yeah! And it still is. M

The Dead's Equipment

The Dead have gone through enough equipment during the past decade and a half to outfit a small musical army. Guitarist Garcia started his recording career with a Guild Starfire, then switched to Gibson (a '57 Les Paul and '60 SG) for *Anthem of The Sun*. But by *Workingman's Dead* he'd changed again, this time opting for a Stratocaster. "I decided that Strat sound was what I was really looking for, so I played standard models for a while, and then in '73 settled in with a couple of custom models designed for me by Doug Irwin. It's a basic Strat set-up, with three DiMarzio Dual Sound Pickups that allow me to still get that Gibson sound if I need it, though I generally prefer the Fender tone." Garcia uses Vinci strings and Fender Twin Reverb Amps for both concert and studio performances. Effects include a Mutron Octave Divider by Mutronics, and MXR Distortion Plus, Phaser, and Analog Delay units. Rhythm guitarist Bob Weir is another custom guitar man. In his case it's an Ibanez "Bob Weir" model, designed by Bob and Jeff Hasselberger. Weir also favors the Ibanez UE400 Multi Effects Unit and Flanger/Delay, as well as a Furman Reverb, Peavey Mace Guitar Section, and IVP Pre Amp. Bob uses D'Addario Strings on his Ibanez. Like Garcia, bassist Phil Lesh uses a Doug Irwin Custom model and Dean Markley Bass Strings, which is fed into an IVP Myers Sound Lab Amp and/or a Great American Sound "Godzilla" Power Amp. Relative newcomer Brent Mydland's arsenal includes a Fender Rhodes Piano, Prophet 5 Synthesizer, Mini Moog, and Hammond Organ, plus an Ibanez Effects System. Both Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzman play Sonar Drums and Zildjian Cymbals. (They make a yearly pilgrimage to Zildjian's Massachusetts factory to select complementary sets.) Kreutzman prefers Pollard Heads and uses a Tama snare.