

# Grateful Dead quite alive in a new direction

By GLEN OZONWOOD

The San Francisco experience of the mid and late '60s found expression in many ways. It created a culture that spread east and challenged the constipated lifestyles there. It fostered an atmosphere that allowed Bay Area schools to erupt in student violence. And, it gave the world acid rock. Sunday at 8 p.m., The Grateful Dead bring a portion of that experience, albeit matured by 10 years, to Mac Court.

The Airplane, Quicksilver, Big Brother and The Sons each spent time carrying the torch. But, since the early '70s, it's been The Grateful Dead who has embodied San Francisco, both its music and its counter-culture society.

Financed by the money behind the acid tests (one of which happened in Portland) and closely associated with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, the band soon became connected in many people's minds with drugs, especially LSD. The acid tests gave the band a musical freedom they haven't experienced since.

"It was music seriously intended to get you high," bassist Phil Lesh told Hank Harrison in 1971. "In a sense it was both high farce, just like the acid tests, and it was music that actually changed people's personalities. It was warping."

Unfortunately, spacey music doesn't pay the rent and the Dead were forced to strike a balance between artistic freedom and what would sell. One of the first groups to form in the Bay Area, the band was among the last to sign a recording contract. But the dough was in records, and the Dead finally signed with Warner Bros. because the company gave them the freedom to run their own show.

As the acid trips slipped into the past (LSD became illegal in California Oct. 6, 1966) the band began to expand beyond San Francisco. They first came to Eugene 10 years ago, almost to the day; as late as '71 they were playing Eugene and Corvallis two

or three times a year. The rambling, wait-till-it-comes-together style of their early music made their concerts an amazing experience, but their albums only came alive for people who had seen them perform. Then, in the early '70s, the Dead started to hit the big time.

A cut from *American Beauty*

bass is 32 feet high. That's its real size. Clearly nothing that's any smaller than that can produce a sound wave that's that big in the air."

So the Dead had a bank of bass speakers 32 feet high. But the cumbersomeness of the sound system began showing up in all aspects of the Dead's playing.

jams of early releases with the polished style of *Wake of the Flood* to produce a sort of vector music: energy with a direction.

*Blues for Allah* resurrected the Dead for many who felt the band had peaked and was on a downhill slide. *Wake of the Flood* was popular only with dedicated Dead fans, and aside from "Eyes of the

out the band. Donna sings and her husband Keith plays piano and organ. At times, Keith has really stood out. His piano has an icy sound, like fragments skidding across a frozen puddle.

"Either you're alive or you're not," says Keith, "and there's only one side of that that matters."

While the stage has been a major part of the band's development, it's only been a part. Early releases like *Anthem of the Sun* and *Live Dead* were composed of rambling pieces that sounded much like the Dead in Concert. But with the release of *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*, the group began making studio albums with a different aim than live performances. According to Weir, the group had not utilized the special sounds available in the studio. With *Ugly Rumors from the Mars Hotel*, that utilization was there.

*Mars Hotel* represented more than a new direction musically; it was also the first album released by the Dead's new record company. Despite the artistic control of owning their own record company, the marketing and distribution of releases became too much and the newest record, *Terrapin Station*, is on the Arista label. *Terrapin Station* represents a first for the Dead — it is the first time the band has used an outside producer.

Keith Olsen has produced for Fleetwood Mac and is currently working on Weir's solo release. Garcia says that Olsen can make a Grateful Dead record that works but the band didn't turn it completely over to him.

"It was definitely cooperative," says Garcia. "But the band had ultimate control. Olsen got vetoed frequently and he's not a pushy guy."

According to Garcia, the addition of Olsen worked.

"I think the band is in a real good place. This is our best buzz in a long time. It's like new beginnings."

Sunday, the Dead bring their new beginnings to Mac Court. Tickets are still available at the Sun Shop, Everybody's and the EMU Main Desk for reserved seating and behind the stage. Strict smoking regulations will be in effect throughout the concert. Prices go up one dollar the day of the show.

The Dead haven't played in Eugene since 1972, when they played at the Renaissance fairgrounds. Promoters of the event bill it as historic, but even if no history is made, it should be an enjoyable evening.

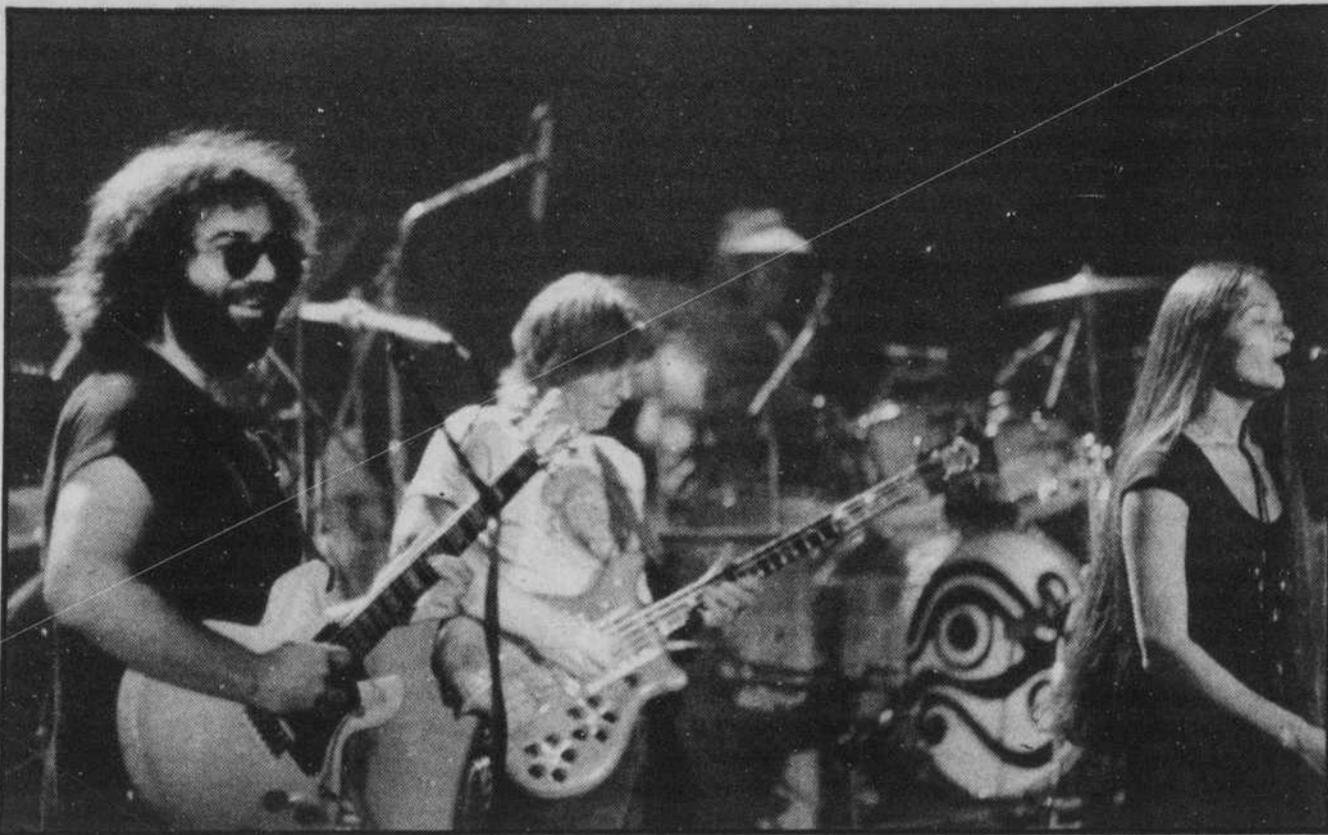


Photo by Greg Wasson

The Grateful Dead, shown here at their June concert last year in Portland, will make their first Eugene appearance since 1972 this Sunday at Mac Court. Lead guitarist Jerry Garcia is at left, with rhythm guitarist Bob Weir and singer Donna Godchaux.

("Truckin'") got a lot of AM airplay and "Europe 72" became gold. The band began filling up caverns like the Memorial Coliseum and as the size of the auditoriums increased, the band developed an awesome sound system.

So large it required two 40-foot trailers to haul it, the system was the logical extension of the love for technology shown by Kesey and the Pranksters. Lead guitarist Jerry Garcia described the system as the physical embodiment of sound.

"In other words," Garcia told BAM, a California music magazine, "the lowest note on a

The crowds grew and grew and the money the monster was consuming increased with them. Finally, in '73-'74, concerts quit being fun.

"It had turned into a thing that was out of control," says Garcia, "and nobody was really doing it because they liked it. We were doing it because we had to."

So in October '74 the band took a vacation, indicating that it might be a permanent one.

But, an era shouldn't end without proper notice and the Dead scheduled five retirement shows at Winterland. All captured on film (the finished movie is now making the rounds), the five concerts sent the Dead out with a bang.

Members of the band began touring with different groups and dedicated Dead heads had to be satisfied with the music of Jerry Garcia and friends, the Keith and Donna Band and Kingfish. But, in the spring of '75, *Blues for Allah* was released. The Dead was not gone.

On that album (the Dead have been recording since '68, having released close to 15 albums) the band combined the spontaneous

World" had little of the kind of music that left an audience straining to remember where the music had begun and how the hell it ended up where it did.

In June, '76, the Dead burst back into the concert reality. Two performances in Portland kicked off a tour of the other side of the country, Micky Hart in tow.

Hart, a percussionist, played with the band earlier, but left after *American Beauty*. With Hart back on percussion, a lost balance is returned to the band. The exchanges between Hart and drummer Bill Kreutzmann add variety and life to the group's sound.

Not that the drums dominate the band. The mellow tones of Lesh's bass, which he claims has the widest range of any bass in history, thread their way through to work with Garcia and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir. Playing his bass like a lead guitar, Lesh shows an understanding of music few possess. Schooled in classical music and jazz, Lesh learned to play bass because that's what the Dead needed.

Finally, the Godchauxs round



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