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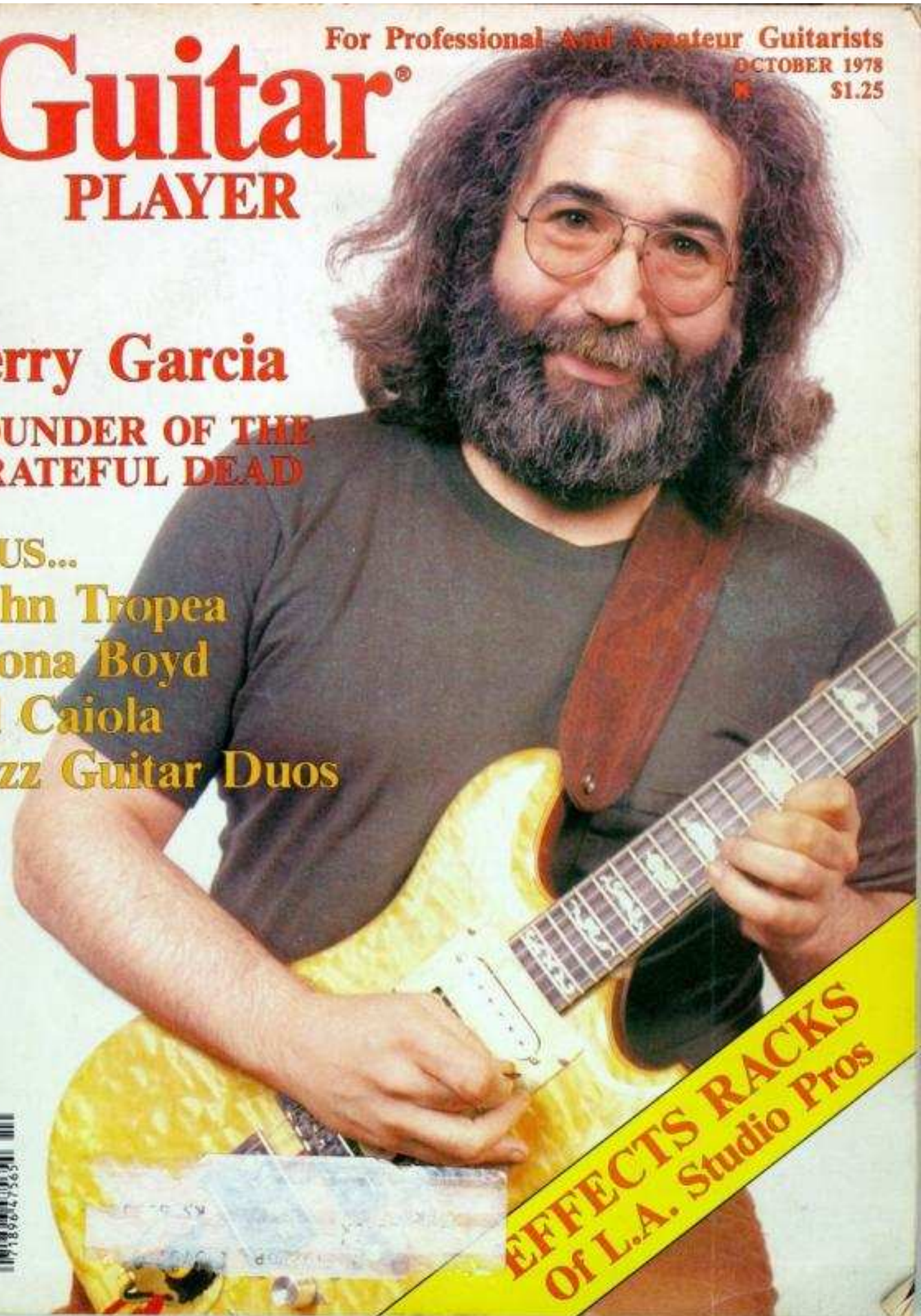
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JERRY GARCIA

For More Than A Decade The Patriarch Of The San Francisco Sound

By Jon Sievert



JERRY GARCIA AND THE GRATEFUL DEAD have become cultural institutions, though they never planned it that way. Other bands have achieved a similar status, but for different reasons: unlike the major rock attractions who are idolized afar, the Dead are seen up close, enjoyed, and respected. They were patriarchs of San Francisco's psychedelic colony of the 1960s, city fathers in a community of crazies. As perceived by the general press, Garcia and company were the hippie band, playing music for getting stoned, seeing God, dancing, singing along, blowing bubbles, mellowing out, or whatever—good-time music without rock-star pretensions. But the Grateful Dead were more than that, and they have produced an extensive catalog of music that transcends the experiences of late-60s San Francisco. Even today, without hit singles, they remain heroes to their confederacy of loyal fans, or Dead Heads.

Looking back, the Dead's popularity marked a change in popular music. By mainstream commercial criteria, they should have failed. They lacked a charismatic central figure, did not pursue any of the tried and true Top 40 formulas, and did not wear spiffy outfits. They weren't cute. They didn't aspire to be chartbusters or darlings of the mass media, and they weren't; they couldn't have been. To most promoters, producers, and disc jockeys the aggregation of San Francisco musicians was nothing more than the noisiest cage in a menagerie of freaks.

The Dead were and are a part of their brotherhood of fans. More than a decade ago, instead of seeking the isolation and celebrity of big-bucks show biz, they gave free concerts. Their go-with-the-flow approach to live performing involved half-hour tuneups, long breaks between songs, marathon concerts, an eventual 23 tons of privately owned equipment [see *GP*, Jul.-Aug. '73], and a lesser amount of drugs. These sometimes impromptu events were promoted by word of mouth or by flower children with rainbow clothes and pinwheel eyes, passing out handbills, perhaps balloons, and sometimes LSD, which was legal until August 1966. Concert posters with kaleidoscopic, highly stylized artwork were tacked up in head shops and on telephone poles. The Dead often comprised the house band for the multi-media, multi-drug extravaganzas organized to a large degree by novelist Ken Kesey and his pals, the Merry Pranksters, and documented in Tom Wolfe's book, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* [Bantam].

The do-your-own-thing philosophy of the Grateful Dead should not be mistaken for a lack of seriousness; the Dead were simply serious about doing their own thing. The commitment to their own codes, sometimes interpreted as anarchy by straight record industry execs, provided the band with enormous staying power; it is somewhat ironic that the hang-loose Grateful Dead hung together for many sometimes turbulent years, outlasting almost all of their rock and roll contemporaries. Furthermore, that commitment was likely the essential reason for the awesome Dead Head allegiance. By succeeding on their own terms—they were much loved, sometimes financially stable, but rarely "commercial"—Jerry Garcia's band helped change the 1960s fan/artist relationship and perception from a hopelessly distant, sometimes hysterical worship to an identification born of shared experience. The Heads and Dead groove together in a self-stoking alliance of spirit.

Though the band's music was a virtual soundtrack for the Haight-Ashbury psychedelic experience, it was not what became known as acid rock. The late journalist Ralph J. Gleason once asked Garcia if the Grateful Dead came from diverse musical backgrounds. "Diverse isn't the word for it!" Garcia exclaimed. The band's music was a mixture of urban blues and mid-tempo rock that brimmed with a whole slew of influences, including folk ballads, country and western, bluegrass, traditional, early rock and roll, jug band, and others. As Garcia pointed out in a previous *GP* interview [Apr. '71], the music itself was always more important than the general public's conceptions (or misconceptions) of the counterculture. Like his various bands, Jerry Garcia—as a solo artist, Dead member, occasional session player, and bandleader—has evidenced an extraordinary range of influences.

Even broader than Garcia's multifaceted musical persona is his stature as a cultural symbol of sorts. He has been called a guru and

hailed as an avatar. Sociologist/author Charles Reich sees him as "a symbol of everything that is new and changing and rebellious in America." Tens of thousands of Dead Heads analyze his music in exacting detail and hitchhike thousands of miles to Grateful Dead concerts to be entranced by his graceful guitar lines and lead vocals.

Garcia himself doesn't think too much about the roles assigned him by his fans. He prefers to consider himself a musician who through fortune and circumstance became a part of something bigger than the music while simply playing and getting high. He has demonstrated his commitment to his work by generally keeping a low profile, choosing his interviews carefully and responding thoughtfully, and producing a vast amount of material. In the nearly 14 years since the Grateful Dead embryo was formed, he has played on almost 40 albums, including 15 with the Dead. His four solo efforts include his most recent release, *Cats Under The Stars* [Arista, AB 4160]. He has also forged for himself something of a reputation as a "playing junkie," turning up in bars—guitar in hand—in the middle of Dead tours that feature five- or six-hour sets.

Ever since Jerry took up pedal steel several years ago, he has had some sort of steady recording/performing situation outside of the Grateful Dead. First came the country-rock New Riders Of The Purple Sage, and then the outside jazz work with guitarist Howard Wales, which produced one album on Douglas. Following that Jerry entered into a fruitful relationship with jazz organist/keyboardist Merl Saunders; they produced three albums. Next came a return to his 5-string-banjo roots as he teamed up with some of the finest bluegrass musicians alive for one very popular album (named after the band), *Old And In The Way*.

Finally, three years ago, came the Jerry Garcia Band, a quartet with Nicky Hopkins on piano, Ron Tutt on drums, and John Kahn on bass. That group, with some changes in personnel, continues a steady touring/recording schedule up to this day. For the last six years, Jerry has been a member of *GP*'s advisory board.

Garcia was born 36 years ago on August 1, 1942, in San Francisco. His father was a Spanish immigrant and a working jazz musician who played clarinet and saxophone. His mother was a nurse. Jerry was introduced to music early; there were instruments all around the house, and the family often sang. His father died young, and his mother remarried and moved to the Palo Alto area south of San Francisco. Because there was a piano in the house, Jerry took a few "aborted" lessons. On his 15th birthday his mother gave him an accordion, which he promptly took to a pawnshop and traded for his first electric guitar, a Danelectro.

Not knowing anyone who could give him lessons or even how to tune the guitar, Jerry adjusted it to an open tuning that "sort of sounded right to me." Soon he was emulating the licks of his first idol, Chuck Berry. Following another move and a transfer to a new high school, Garcia dropped out of school and joined the Army at age 17.

The Army hitch lasted about nine months, until Jerry and the Army came to an agreement that service life was not for him. The experience was not entirely a waste, because Jerry developed an interest in the acoustic guitar and began to work on rock-oriented tunes. After leaving the Army he returned to Palo Alto and soon struck up a friendship with another recently discharged GI, Robert Hunter, later the Dead's nonperforming lyricist. Hunter also played a little guitar, so he and Garcia teamed up for their first professional gigs. It wasn't long before Jerry developed an attachment to the 5-string banjo, and for three years he practically abandoned the guitar in favor of its round-body cousin. A series of acoustic string bands followed, including the Hart Valley Drifters, which was a bluegrass band that featured Hunter on bass, David Nelson (later of the New Riders) on guitar, and a mandolin player named Ken Frankel. That group won the amateur Blue Grass championship at the 1963 Monterey Folk Festival.

In the meantime, various musical elements were beginning to fall into place around Palo Alto. One was the establishment of Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, which featured Garcia on acoustic guitar and banjo, Bob Weir, Bob Matthews (an engi-

neer who later helped to form the Alembic company and is still part of the Dead family), the late Ron McKernan (also known as Pigpen), and John Dawson (later of the New Riders). In late 1964, the jug band went electric at Pigpen's suggestion, and the die was cast when the group was renamed the Warlocks. Bill Kreutzmann became the drummer, and Phil Lesh [see *GP* Nov. '77] took over on bass shortly thereafter. It wasn't long before they decided that they needed a new name and chose the Grateful Dead after spotting the term on a page randomly selected from a dictionary.

Through all the years, and despite a somewhat checkered recording career, the Dead have continued to grow, both as group members and as individuals. And the old saying that "There is nothing like a Grateful Dead concert" still holds true today.

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PREVIOUSLY YOU'VE SAID that you seem to go through cyclic learning stages. What causes that to happen?

I think it's something that happens to every guitar player as he keeps on playing through the years. You're struggling to learn a whole body of material, and you finally learn it and can play it expertly, and then you get bored. It becomes a Now What? situation. You're struggling to obtain ground and you reach a plateau, and then your boredom finally drives you to develop to new levels. I think that's a healthy and normal thing. I seem to go through it about once every year and a half or two years pretty regularly. That's pretty much how my metabolism seems to work. I think of myself really as a guitar student as much as a player or performer, because there's so much being developed and so much



that's already been done that I'll never learn it all.

What kind of things do you do during these stages?

First I go out and buy all the new guitar method books that have come out since the last time and read through them and try out ideas and exercises. I find it really helpful to see somebody else's handle on it, because it's possible they can show me new ways of looking at the instrument or music that I hadn't considered before. The state of guitar education today is incredible compared to just 15 years ago. You can learn an astounding amount from just reading books that are available today. I'm working very hard now. I'm working hard on things that I haven't worked hard on before. I have certain exercises that I do, but it's more like working out little bits and pieces of unfinished ideas. A lot of it is just free playing, exploring for places where all of a sudden something is vague or awkward—like suddenly finding yourself in a position that's odd in relation to the key you're playing in. Or, for example, you're doing a run that's going down scale intervals, and you're on like the top E string, and you're ending one part of the passage on your first

(Continued on next page)

finger and then jumping a position and starting the next part with your little finger and moving down. That's a difficult thing to do on the guitar.

How do you learn to master that kind of passage?

I'll just keep going over it until it's smooth, and then it starts to turn up in other places. Anything you work at technically always turns out to have unexpected rewards. You realize later, not only is this convenient for me to make a very full, long run, but it also gets me conveniently from position A to B to C. You start to really see interconnections.

How is your picture of the fingerboard developing?

Finally the complete pattern of the fingerboard is becoming more apparent. I'm forcing it into shape in my own psyche, in my own way of seeing and feeling. I'm spending seven or eight hours a day with it. I'm trying to rebuild myself; I feel like it's time for me to do that in my playing. I don't know whether it will amount to anything, but in six months I'll know. I'm sort of in a two-year plan right now—the first pause of the next level.

When you're not going through these intense learning periods, how much time do you usually spend with a guitar?

It depends on the schedule. When I'm on the road it's a lot more, but when I'm home I'd say I spend no less than an average of two hours a day at the absolute worst. That's like really screwing around. I think four hours is more normal for me, on the road it goes up to about six, including the show. I lose my edge in a day if I don't stay on top of it constantly. Anything more than two days and it's like being a cripple. And the more you play, the more you notice it if you miss a day. But then there's also the thing that if you're away from the guitar for two or three days sometimes you can come back with something else. Now that's not one of those things you can depend on, but sometimes it does happen just in the flow. You come back and you have a little more of something. I don't know what—confidence, new ideas, or something.

What do you see as your major limitation?

A lack of an early musical education. I've been able to compensate for it some, but having an early education means that a lot of things become reflexive, automatic. Now, sometimes that can perpetuate bad habits on a technical level, but in terms of things like sight-reading and the like, I wish I had started earlier. I'm not unhappy with my progress, but that's the one thing. As it is, I'm glad to have been able to develop an intuitive approach to music, and I can see that there could be disadvantages to having a completely schooled approach. Sometimes that blocks out the intuition; there are people with great technique who have nothing to say.

How did your early process of music education work?

My first orientation was learning from my ear. So I learned mostly from records—Freddie King, B.B. King extensively—and, you know, everybody else. That was my first exposure, mostly because the [San Francisco] Bay Area didn't have that many guitar players back when I started playing, and there really wasn't a lot of local information, or at least I wasn't able to uncover it. For me, I would describe my own learning process as wasting a lot of time. I did it the hardest way possible, or it seems that way now. I had to spend a lot of time unlearning things—bad habits and so forth. I think I went through as many of these unlearning cycles as I could. It was around 1972 or '73 when I finally unlearned all the things that had hung me up to that point.

Like what, specifically?

Oh, like playing out of preference to certain positions. Like tending to think along certain positions because they were more available to my hand, rather than for musical reasons. It became a serious problem for me to correct onstage. I think that's an easy trap to fall into—doing things that are merely easiest for you and are within your immediate grasp with the excitement of playing onstage. And other things I would describe as rhythmic and idea habits in addition to technical habits—having a more or less limited kind of vocabulary and tending to depend on my ability to exploit it rather than developing a greater vocabulary. I've been

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Garcia's picking technique.

Garcia's left-hand finger position.



PHOTOS BY JON SNEYDER

JOHN OATES

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Each instrument has its peculiar way of phrasing, and if you can adapt your fingering to an alien way of phrasing, it will make your playing more interesting, and you'll tend to not sound like every other guitar player.

How would you answer claims that Hall And Oates are getting away from R&B and trying to get into mainstream rock and roll?

Well, I would say that it is somewhat correct. It's wrong in that we are not trying to get into mainstream rock—we are trying to develop our own side of rock. You see, Daryl and I have done a lot of music—R&B, rock, classical—and we have been involved in all facets and phases of music. As people we are feeling more aggressive and less laid-back, and we are trying to develop that side of ourselves. It's not something we are trying to do artificially; it's just a side we are trying to develop. The R&B side comes so naturally, and we have been doing it for so long, that it is no longer interesting to us as musicians. It is not that we are against it or trying to put it down, it is just that we would rather go on to something that challenges us more. Our roots will always be there in some way or another. You can never deny your roots. They are always going to pop up—they arise in our melodic

structure or in our chord structure. But we are consciously trying to offset our sound with a more progressive approach—it's boring to go for what you know. It's more exciting to take chances.

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through a lot of things like, for example, deciding never to play anything shorter than a half-note during a solo for a year in order to cut down the busyness. I get tired of busy stuff, and I decide that I want to exploit the single-note capability and the tone of the guitar, so for a period I play really slow leads regardless of the rhythmic path. After awhile I get tired of doing that and start working on developing speed.

How do you keep track of the changes in your style?

For me the most useful thing is recording the show. That's something that a lot of musicians do. They just take one of those little cassette machines and put it right in front of their speaker or monitor. Pretty soon you realize that you've been playing nothing but eighth-note runs, for example. Using that with feedback from others can help you get through your boredom and enthusiasm cycles.

What kind of guitars are you playing these days?

My off-and-on favorite is one that was custom-built for me by Doug Irwin [3900

Sonoma Hwy., Santa Rosa, CA 95405]. It's more or less patterned after a Strato-caster. The next order of preference are the Travis Beans that I play a lot; I have a couple of them. The Ibanez people have also made me a guitar that I'm intrigued with and may use sometimes. I get stale on a guitar if I play it exclusively for a long time. Also, I've never been able to quite get what I want out of any guitar. I'm always changing it and updating it by changing pickups and things like that. I really seek a kind of universal guitar, something that will sound like anything I want it to at any given moment.

Does that require a guitar with a lot of controls on it?

Yes, maybe. For instance, I've just put two DiMarzio Dual Sound pickups that switch from humbucking to single-coil on my Irwin guitar. They're really neat. The Ibanez also has that feature. That's my idea of something in a compact package that allows a tremendous variety of sounds. My Irwin guitar also has a DiMarzio single-coil pickup in the front position.

So you do use all the controls available to you on the guitar?

Yeah, whatever's there. If there were five more things I would use them, just because for me the guitar isn't really as important to me as music is. I love the guitar and I'm trying to become a guitar player, but it's the music that counts, so

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JERRY GARCIA

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the more variety I can gain, the better off I am. There are times when I wish I were a combination of a French horn and an oboe. Anything that will give me more possibilities, I'm a nut for. The other side of that is that there has to be no hassle; the guitar should be predictable and repeatable. Usually I have a general category of tone that I'm involved in for any particular tune, and I just work off that. I think most of the changes I get in terms of dynamics and tone are a result of touch rather than fooling with the knobs, although I do fool with the knobs.

When did you get your Irwin guitar?

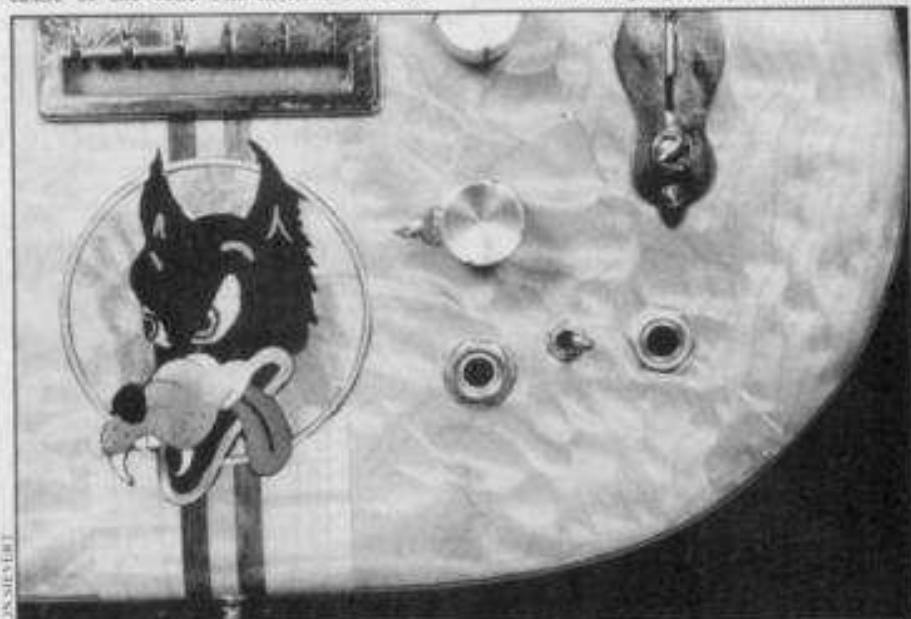
I got it around the end of 1972, and it was the first guitar that Doug built with his name on it. He used to work for Alembic. We worked together on the design, and it's been through a constant transformation process since—the DiMarzio pickups were just recently installed. The guitar body is western maple with a core of purpleheart wood [amaranth], which is very hard. The wolf inlay was originally a decal that I put on when I got the guitar. I sent it to Doug for some kind of work, and when it came back he had duplicated the decal exactly with inlays. In fact, it was a week or so before I had even noticed what he had done.

How is it wired?

The wiring approach is fairly simple. It almost completely duplicates the normal Stratocaster, except that I go for a better match in the volume and tone pots because of the tone I'm after. It's a con-

extreme bass end of my tone controls to get a kind of horn-like sound. It's one of those things I don't have a formula for—you just sort of have to feel your way.

What's the purpose of the two jacks on



Detail of Garcia's Irwin guitar; the jacks connect to the effects system.

stant matchoff between capacitors, resistors, and the values of the pots, so I have to fool around with it until I finally get what I want. I've found a way to use the

the front of the Irwin guitar?

That's the one real wiring innovation, a very useful one. It allows me to have all

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JERRY GARCIA

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my effects pedals wired to the guitar with the ability to bypass them all with a switch. I use a stereo cord, and the signal goes from the pickups to the tone controls and pickup switch, and on down the "A" side of the cord to a network box that controls a Mu-tron octave divider, Mu-tron envelope filter, MXR Distortion Plus, MXR phaser, Mu-tron wah-wah, and an analog delay. The signal goes through the devices, back into the network box, and up the "B" side of the cord, back into the instrument before the volume pot, and then out to the amp.

What's the advantage to this setup?

All of those gadgets are voltage-sensitive. If you have them after the volume control, their behavior is affected by the loudness setting on the guitar. With my system, on the other hand, the effects always see the guitar as if it had full output voltage. The effects are also controlled by a DC power supply rather than batteries. Since the effects' input voltage—the guitar's output—is always fixed, they behave exactly the way I want them to. The whole thing is so stable that it's completely repeatable in every situation, and I never run into a weirdness of any sort. I'd used effects in recording before, but they were always too unstable for me to use onstage until we came up with this. If something

goes wrong with the effects, or if I want them out of the circuit, all I have to do is flip a switch to completely bypass them without a jump or loss in gain at the amp.

How do you decide which guitar to use?

I'm always poking around. Because the



Garcia jamming on 5-string banjo.

Irwin guitar was custom-made for me, it's not like a production model. I know that if something happens to it I can't replace

it, because there's no guitar similar to it. Only the Travis Beans offer that level of consistency. I'm the kind of player who generally plays one guitar at a time so I can learn its idiosyncracies, and ideally the guitar that doesn't have idiosyncracies is the one I like. I have a couple of Beans, and they are virtually identical in terms of their setup, neck, and fingerboard, so there's no question of regaining chops in the event one breaks down on the road or something. No other production guitar is like that—they're all completely different. That level of consistency in the Beans means a lot to me. I also think the Bean single-coil pickups are the best I've heard. As far as I'm concerned, the Travis Bean is the finest production guitar on the market.

Who does the work on your guitar?

Just about everybody, Bob Matthews, Dan Healy, Ramrod, who's my main equipment guy—they've all been with the Dead for years, and they've been through the routine so many times. If I need major work on a guitar I send it back to the guy who made it, in this case Doug Irwin. The Travis Beans don't seem to need much.

What kind of problems do you tend to have?

I have a tendency to wear out my pickups, strangely enough; I don't know how I do it. I think it's a combination of hard use and material fatigue. The pickups lose their magnetic field. Standard Strat pick-

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ups last me about two years and they're gone. That is one of the things that's kept me looking around and changing pickups. The first time it happened it really surprised me, because I had no idea that would happen.

Do you have an Alembic guitar?

Yeah, but I've never used it on a gig. I used it on recording sessions a little bit—mainly with Merl Saunders. It sounds fine, but it has balance problems. It doesn't hang right with a strap, and I have to support it with my left hand. It was one of the first guitars Alembic made, and they were still learning, so unfortunately I've never had a chance to play one for a long period of time.

Have you had any experience with a guitar synthesizer?

Yes, I have a Slavedriver by 360 Systems [18730 Oxnard St., Tarzana, CA 91356] which I used on *Terrapin Station*. I've also been looking at a unit called a Zetaphon [Holt Electro-Acoustic Research, 1122 University Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702]. It's a polyphonic version, and it's way cheaper than anything else I've seen. And it's also laid out with more or less guitar nomenclature rather than synthesizer language.

Do you use your own guitar with it?

Yeah, if you want. I think it's the nicest one yet, but I haven't really had a chance

to get into it. It's a whole different thing working with them, but I have a pretty good understanding of how synthesizers work. My technique fits well with them. A synthesizer likes to hear a cleanly noted

Could you discuss your approach to fingering?

I think it has something to do with my early 5-string banjo playing. Most guitar players I've noticed seem to use a kind of



Garcia at Haight-Ashbury outdoor concert with the Dead, c. 1967.

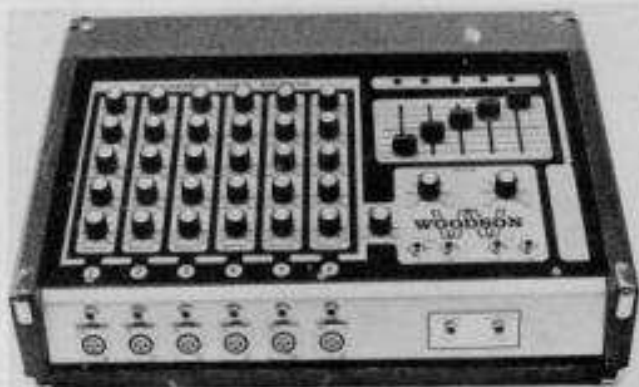
sound, and I think it responds better with a guitar that's set up like mine—with sort of a high and stiff action. It shouldn't be too difficult for me to make the transition.

flat fingering. I've somehow trained myself to come straight down on top of the string. I play mostly on the tips of my

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fingers, so the high action doesn't get in my way at all. I'm not pulling other strings along with it and so forth.

Do you use the little finger on your left hand much?

Yes, early on I was lucky enough to have someone point out the usefulness of that finger. As a result it is one of my stronger fingers, and I prefer to use it even more than my ring finger. That's always made me different from most rock guitarists that I know—even the really good ones. I think in rock and roll a lot of guitar players favor something that lets them use the ring finger for greater articulation and vibrato effects. For me, I've got to be able to do it with every finger. I find it ridiculous to have to close all my ideas on my ring finger just so I can get a vibrato. That eliminates a lot of possibilities automatically.

How do you achieve your vibrato?

Well, I have about four or five different families of vibrato. Some of them are unsupported; that is to say, nothing is touching the guitar but my finger on the string. Other methods are supported, and I just move the finger for the sound. Sometimes I also use wrist motion, and other times I'll move my whole arm. I also use horizontal and lateral motion for different sound and speed. Each has its own separate sound,

and it depends on what I'm going after and which finger I'm leading with. For example, if you're playing the blues, it's generally appropriate to use a slow vi-



Garcia in the late '60s.

brato. Generally speaking, I tend to be style-conscious in terms of wanting a song to sound like the world it comes from.

Do you play many notes by hammering-on and pulling-off?

Generally I like to pick every note, but I do tend to pull-off, say, a real fast triplet on things that are closing up—intervals that are heading up the scale. I do it almost without thinking about it. I almost never pull off just one note. I seldom hammer-on, because it seems to have a certain inexactitude for me. I think that was a decision I made while playing the banjo. My preference is for the well-spoken tone, and I think coming straight down on the strings with high knuckles makes it. So my little groups of pull-offs are really well-articulated; it's something I worked on a lot.

How do you approach right-hand technique?

Generally I use a Fender extra heavy flatpick which I sometimes palm when using my fingers. The way I hold the pick is a bit strange, I guess. I don't hold it in the standard way but more like you hold a pencil. I think Howard Roberts describes it as the scalpel technique. The motion is basically generated from the thumb and first finger rather than say, the wrist or elbow. But I use all different kinds of motion, depending on whether I am doing single-string stuff or chords.

Do you find your middle-finger injury causing any problems?

Not at all. My brother cut it off with an axe when I was four years old, so I've been without it for a long time. Actually, it

Continued on page 122

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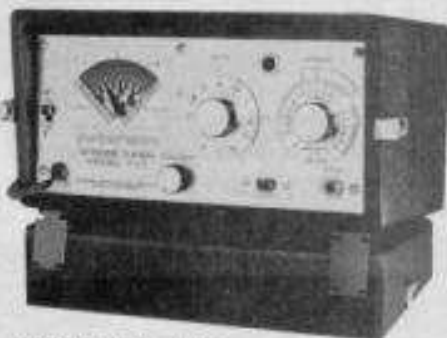
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JERRY GARCIA

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might have even helped me because of the independence I've developed. Normally your first two fingers and your last two fingers tend to work as units. I used the first and ring fingers to develop my three-finger banjo style, so I have total independence in the fingers. Also, I can tuck the pick between the first finger and the stub and easily switch to fingerpicking.

You've described yourself in previous interviews as a playing junkie. Do you still play all the time?

It's what I do. And now I think I'm probably playing more nights per year than I ever have.

Does that include groups besides the Grateful Dead and the Jerry Garcia Band?

Those are really the only things I'm involved with on a continuing basis, because right now they're both sophisticated, demanding, interesting, and fun enough. They're both very satisfying, and that's all I really could deal with right now and do it right.

Who does your band consist of right now?

John Kahn, my old partner from way back, is playing bass. Buzz Buchanan, a young guy from L.A., is playing drums, plus there's Keith and Donna Godcheaux from the Dead, and Maria Muldaur when she's around and she wants to. It has a

nice balance of instrumental proficiency and a fine vocal thing, too—both of which I like a lot.

How is your musical approach affected when you play with a different rhythm section behind you?



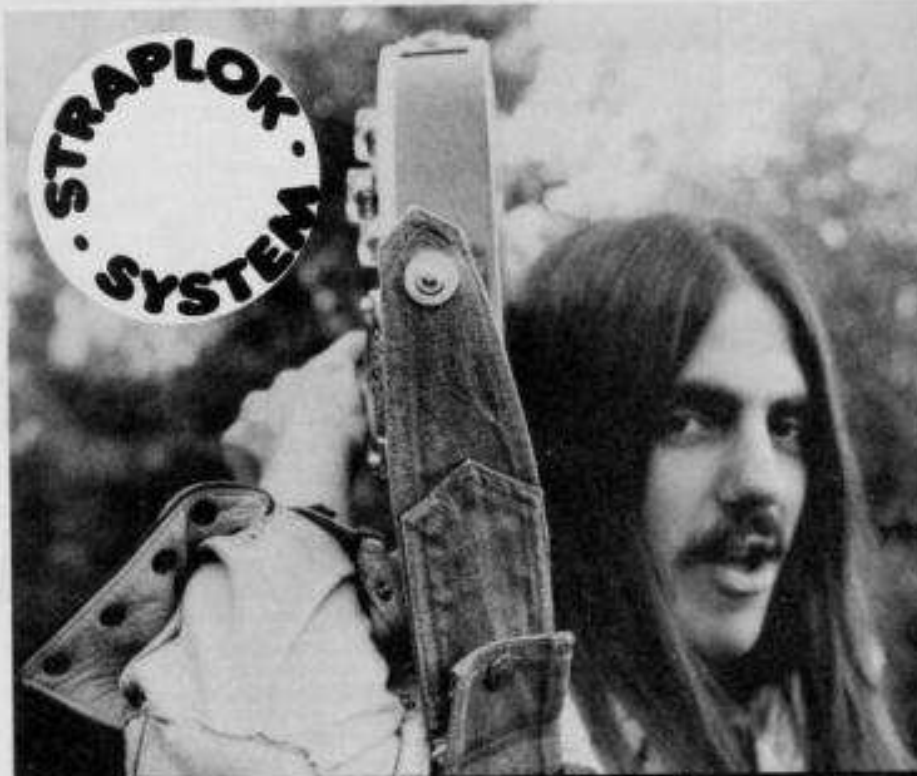
I play with what I hear, or at least I like to think I do. That way, whatever happens becomes a new situation. Ideally that idea is not fixed, because nobody stays the same. For instance, I've been

playing with John Kahn for a long time, and his playing and ideas continue to evolve. So it stays dynamic on that level. Same with the Grateful Dead.

Could you discuss your distinctive approach to accenting?

Again, a certain amount of it is related to banjo playing, where you have problem-solving continually going on. There are three fingers moving more or less constantly, and you have to change the melodic weight from any one finger to any other finger. What that really involves is rhythmic changes. So for me it's always been interesting to have little surprises like, for instance, accenting all the off-beats for a bar. There's also the constant playing in odd times with the Grateful Dead that contributes to that. For instance, if the band is playing in 7/4 time, I might play in 4/4. When you do that sort of thing, you begin to notice certain ways in which the two rhythms synchronize over a long period of time. Thinking in these long lengths, you automatically start to develop rhythmic ideas that have a way of interconnecting. If you're in the right kind of rhythmic context, then you have the option of being able to continually re-evaluate your position in time. For me it then becomes a thing of syncopations based on other syncopations. For example, I like to start an idea when the music is in flow on a sixteenth-note triplet off of

Continued on page 126



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JERRY GARCIA

Continued from page 122

four. So that's like intensely syncopated on its own, and if I start my phrase there, it's like constructing one sentence off of another one before the first sentence is completed. That sort of linguistic analogy is something I'm very attracted to.

Going back to the early days, why did you switch from electric to acoustic at first?

Well, economics were involved: I could get work as an acoustic player. And also, in terms of accomplishment, I wasn't very good when I stopped playing electric. I didn't really start to develop an understanding—more than just a feel for the music—until I got into acoustic. It gave me that chance to be more reflective about it.

How significant did playing electric prove to be?

For me it was like finding my musical identity. That's what it really boils down to, just because everything I was looking for led to it. Something about the rhythmic quality of fingerpicking and banjo was getting at something I wanted to develop further, but the rigidity of the banjo stopped me. Going electric meant really being able to satisfy that rhythmic complexity, and then it became the desire to have the ability to sing, to be spontaneous and not to be locked into one form of music. When we were doing the jug band—

Weir, Pigpen, and I—our inventory included some Jimmy Reed tunes and Muddy Waters things that really cried out for electric treatment. The transition was very easy when the time came.

What was your first electric guitar with the Warlocks?

The first one was a Guild Starfire. It's the guitar you hear on the first Grateful Dead record. It had a thin body and two humbucking pickups and a kind of bright sound. I just liked the feel of it for some reason. It was before I was really developing what could be described as taste, and at the time I just liked the thin-body sound. My first amplifier with the Warlocks was a Fender Twin Reverb. I bought it in the first year they came out, around 1963 or 1964, I guess. It may actually still be in use. I sold it to Mike Wilhelm of the original Charlatans. My second amp was also a Twin Reverb. I'm still using it, but only as a preamp. From the preamp it goes through a McIntosh 2300 that drives four JBL 12" speakers. It's simple and gives me another point of stability. The more elements you have stable, the more you can concentrate on your playing and not be continually adapting your technique to your equipment.

It would seem that you've tried all the guitars and effects.

Yeah, but I still haven't found the ultimate; I'm still looking.

Do you use the same stage equipment

with both the Dead and the Garcia band?

Yes. It's really a matter of having a sound that travels well, no matter what kind of microphone is put on it. It's like finding a category of guitar that will sound good in almost any kind of room through almost any kind of PA. That's what I aim for, and that's a simple aim really.

What kind of amps do you use in the studios?

Primarily a Mesa Boogie [Box 116, Laguna Hills, CA 94938], but I do use a whole variety of small Fenders that seem to record really well regardless of what microphone you throw on them. I have an old Fender Harvard that I use a lot. Generally I have a concept of what the guitar is supposed to sound like on any particular tune—you know, whether it's supposed to sound warm or have a little bite or whatever. Then I use anything that I can to bring out that idea. I usually know what I want before I start, but sometimes I have to experiment for a couple of days until I realize that I'm completely in the wrong neighborhood—one tone just disappears, for example, or contrasts too much or whatever.

Do you ever record directly into the studio board?

Sometimes. My amps are wired with a preamp out, so I can come out of the amp at line level and go right into the patch panel. So I'm actually going through both.

Continued on page 128

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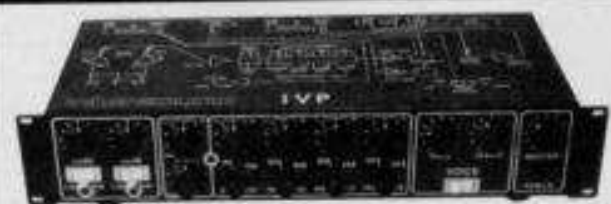
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JERRY GARCIA

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I've got my preamp sound—the general tone of the thing—and then I go through the board to blend with the track according to what I want it to sound like. Sometimes I use a speaker, sometimes a lot of speakers; sometimes I mike it close and sometimes from a distance. I do it all different ways depending on what the guitar's function is in the tune.

How do you string your guitars?

With Vincis. They package up a special set for me consisting of a .010, .013, .017, .027, .037, and .047. Weir has just started using the same set.

What are some of the things you've gained playing with people like Merl Saunders?

When I was playing with Merl we did a lot of instrumental material—standards and jazz tunes and things like that. That required a whole lot of quick education for me, and Merl was responsible for that. He really helped me improve myself on a level of harmonic understanding. Playing with him required a whole different style from three-chord rock and roll or even ten-chord rock and roll; it was a whole different thing. But what I was able to bring into that situation was the ability to use odd-length runs in conventional formats. I was able to use ideas that were rhythmically uneven because of working

in odd time signatures so much with the Dead. Because Merl did not work in odd times, my relationship with his rhythms made it possible for me to create ideas that were, for example, seven bars long against something that was fundamentally a 4/4 feel.

How about your work with Howard Wales?

With Howard we never had tunes; Howard would just play through tremendously extended changes. That developed my ear to an amazing point because I had nothing to go on. I didn't even know what key we were in. Here were all these extended chords coming out, and I really had to be able to hear a correspondence somewhere. Merl helped me improve my analytical ability and to understand more about how substitution chords work in standard musical forms. Howard was a great in-between there, because his playing was so outside and totally unpredictable. Also, playing with Merl gave me a real feeling of freshness that carried over to later work with the Dead. So for me, it's very healthy to work with other people. I like doing sessions when I can, but my favorite stuff is really my own band and the Dead. Those are the two most complete experiences for me.

How did Old And In The Way happen to come about?

That band was like scratching an itch I'd had for a long time. I got very much

into playing 5-string banjo early on but was frustrated insofar as never really having a good band to play with. Bluegrass is band music, and I've always loved that aspect. In fact that's what I like best—band music rather than solo music. Playing with Old And In The Way was like playing in the bluegrass band I'd always want to play in. It was a great band, and I was flattered to be in such fast company. I was only sorry that my banjo chops were never what they had been when I was playing continually, though they were smoothing out toward the end.

What is your relationship with the pedal steel guitar these days?

I haven't played it much for quite a while, though I played it pretty steadily for about four years. I really got into it, but it kind of became an either/or situation: I found it very hard to play half the night with a pedal steel and a bar in my left hand and then switch to straight overhand guitar. The difference between a solid finger configuration and a moving arm, wrist, and fingers was too great. It was painful to the muscles. It got to where I couldn't play either of them very well, and I realized it just wouldn't work. I don't consider myself a pedal steel player, and I'm always embarrassed to see that I've placed in the *Guitar Player* poll.

Could you talk about your process of composition?

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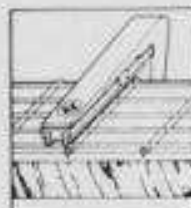
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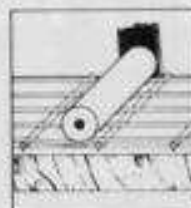
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JERRY GARCIA

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I usually compose on the piano; the melody usually comes first, then the accompaniment. Most often I'll record it on a cassette, though there are certain things that I feel must be written out, or I'll definitely lose them. I can play things on a piano and have no idea what they really are unless I analyze them. I don't play piano that well, but it's possible to come up with a six-note chord that could be anything when I hear it on a tape. So sometimes I find it helpful to keep track of how I arrive at an idea, though I do find that if the idea has enough weight it sticks with me, and I rediscover it again later. I'm a lazy writer, not at all diligent.

How do you and Robert Hunter work together on songs?

It works just about every way. Sometimes I have a melody that must have a certain kind of phrasing, and it becomes a matter of discipline for him. I get down to very specific terms in telling him what musical qualities a lyric must have—at this point I want a vowel, at this point a percussive sound. Then other times he gives me a sheaf of lyrics, and I'll go through them and find ones that appeal to me or whatever and start to work on them. Then sometimes when we're working together to polish things up, a whole new idea will emerge, and we'll go with that. We trust each other. He trusts my ability as an edi-

tor; and I edit extensively—sometimes it drives him nuts—but we work together pretty well. It's been a long working relationship.

Once you have a tune together, how do you communicate with other members of the band for the recording process?



Well, I make a demo with the vocal and the changes and any arrangement ideas I feel are part of the essential construction of the tune. Then the Grateful

Dead get together and everybody offers their interpretation; sometimes it's better than I would have conceived it, and sometimes it's not what I want. So we talk about it and try to find some way to make it work musically. One of the things I've learned is that the Dead's contributions to my compositions are invaluable. Same with the stuff I do with my band. John Kahn's contributions there are really important and necessary. By preference I'm a band player.

Do you consciously consider musical factors such as counterpoint and harmony between your guitar and voice?

In a way. More in performance than in conceptualization. Like I'll be performing a tune and realize, Oh—there's a hole here. My guitar and voice are almost interchangeable. I'm in my best state when I really know the song and can sing it well, and I know the chords perfectly and where I am on the guitar at all times. It's a thing of feeling very continuous between the person who's the guitar player and the person who is the singer. It's a very neat feeling, almost magical.

What process do you go through for building solos?

The way I start is to learn the literal melody of the tune if there is one. Then I construct solos as though that were happening, and I'm either playing with it or against it. That's a pretty loose description, obviously, because there are a lot of

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JERRY GARCIA

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other factors involved. Later on I start to see other kinds of connections, but one of my first processes is to learn the literal melody in any position. I am very attracted to melody. A song with a beautiful melody can just knock me off my feet, but the greatest changes on earth don't mean anything to me if they don't have a great melody tying them together in some sense.

It seems that you really enjoy playing rhythm in the Garcia band, which has no other guitarist.

Oh sure, and I'd do it more with the Dead except that Weir is such a great rhythm player. We all feel he's just the finest rhythm guitarist on wheels right now. He's like my left hand. We have a long, serious conversation going on musically, and the whole thing is of a complementary nature. We have fun, and we've designed our playing to work against and with each other. His playing, in a way, really puts my playing in the only kind of meaningful context it could enjoy. That's a hard idea to communicate, but any serious analysis of the Dead's music would make it apparent that things are designed really appropriately. There are some passages, some kinds of ideas that would really throw me if I had to create a harmonic bridge between all the things going on rhythmically with two drums and Phil's innovative bass

style. Weir's ability to solve that kind of problem is extraordinary. He also has a beautiful grasp of altering chords and adding color. Harmonically, I take a lot of my solo cues from Bob. He's got very large hands; he's able to voice chords that most people can't reach, and he can pull them off right in the flow of playing. And now he's taken up playing slide leads quite a bit, and that's neat, too, because that's another context for me to play against.

Have you noticed any particular logic to the way the Dead has progressed through the years?

No, and that's one of the things that I constantly find interesting about the band. Each one develops in a different way and with a different sense of his own development. All of a sudden there's somebody with a whole bunch of ideas that you haven't stumbled on and might never have. That's the fun part of playing with other people and exposing yourself to different musicians. You find all these possible ways to grow. The Grateful Dead has never developed as a group. I mean, we've developed as a group in a certain kind of large sense, but everybody's individual development has that thing of being surprising, interesting, and entertaining. That's one of the things that keeps the Dead interesting to be involved in.

Could you say a few words about any merits or disadvantages of playing stoned?

There's a thing about playing stoned

without having pressure on you to play competently. If you have the space in your life where you can be high and play and not be in a critical situation, you can learn a lot of interesting things about yourself and your relation to the instrument and music. We were lucky enough to have an uncritical situation, so it wasn't like a test of how stoned we could be and still be competent—we weren't concerned with being competent. We were more concerned with being high at the time. The biggest single problem from a practical point of view is that obviously your perception of time gets all weird. Now, that can be interesting, but from a practical standpoint I try to avoid extremes of any sort, because you have the fundamental problems of playing in tune and playing with everybody else. People have to pay a lot of money to see us, so it becomes a matter of professionalism. You don't want to deliver somebody a clunker just because you're too high. I don't, anyway.

Do you have a practice schedule?

I have about a half a dozen things that I regularly do. They are mostly involved with standard scale intervals working out of different positions. I do a lot of two-octave chord arpeggios and a couple of other things, but they are all designed fundamentally to develop the ability to move from any position to any other position, from any note to any other note on the

Continued on page 134

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JERRY GARCIA

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guitar. Most of them stress alternate picking. One good thing is to take a scale or exercise from any competent guitar book or from *Guitar Player* or even something you already know and play it through, starting on a down-stroke. You alternate-pick the whole pattern. Then repeat it, but start on an up-stroke to get an understanding of where the rhythmic bias falls. Practicing that way will give you a consistent flow to your playing no matter what you want to do; how you draw things out of it is your own business.

Do you practice dynamic variation?

Yes, I'll turn my guitar all the way up with a practice amp and start doing arpeggios, playing very quietly at the beginning and then getting gradually louder as a function of touch. That makes it so you have a smoothness from your loudest, hardest picking to your softest picking while keeping the same position. Many guitarists change the way they hold their hands when changing dynamics. As a result they end up with a light-touch group of licks—the very fast stuff—but they can't develop any power. For me the thing is continually making those conversions back and forth from quiet to loud picking. It was something that hung me up for quite awhile. The dynamics of a solo are something I think about a lot.

Do you have any suggestions concerning ear training?

Listen to a lot of music. I like to amuse myself by trying to figure out intervals whenever I listen to something. I realize I've gone through all kinds of processes learning how to do that, and they wouldn't necessarily apply to someone who is in the initial process of learning; it seems to be a cumulative thing. One very important exercise is to familiarize yourself with the sound of different kinds of chords. Listen and decide if it's major or minor. Is it the I chord? The II chord? Is it part of the dominant chain of chords? Does it have a raised or flatted 5th? A raised 9th? Everybody's ear is different, so each person has a different approach. My inclination is to hear the logic of the melody. Somebody else has a better ear for hearing the progression.

Have you ever done any teaching?

Yeah, I taught for awhile before I could really play well—in Palo Alto. I learned a lot by doing that, and I still run into my old students occasionally, and some of them turned out to be quite good. Teaching gives you a lot of opportunities to observe how people learn and that's very good feedback. You have to become more analytical to transmit it to someone.

How did you approach the teaching process?

I really stressed teaching my students how to hear and how to learn things off of

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records, because that was the way I knew best. I remember that one of those guitar instruction books—I can't remember who wrote it—said that people basically learn by one of three approaches or a combination: Some people learn best by having something explained to them conceptually; some learn best by seeing somebody play—seeing fingers on fingerboards; and some learn best by hearing. I know some guys who can't learn if you try to show them something but can pick it right up if they can hear it. It's helpful to know which kind of learner you are, and once you've gotten into learning from one source—be it books, records, or a teacher—you can become aware of the other ways of learning. For example, if you have a teacher, it might be helpful to develop your ear on the side if your teacher wasn't turning you on to that sort of thing. If you're listening to a lot of stuff, it might be helpful to look at books. It's all interesting to me. You can find out virtually anything these days about the guitar. Also, I've had a lot of luck with clarinet and piano books.

Do you read music?

Sort of. As I mentioned earlier I'm a very poor sight-reader. I need a little time with something. I can read enough to figure out a lead line or chord chart if it's put in front of me. I've more or less taught myself to read as I go along, and I find it necessary. Reading notes has been mostly a matter of access. What good is a book of

Django Reinhardt solos if you can't read them? Being able to read means there's more material out there I can pick up. It's certainly not something I'm called on to use a lot, but there are times when I find it necessary to sketch out an idea to somebody who has a legitimate background—a string player or whatever.

What kind of music do you listen to?

Just about everything, really. I buy lots of records, and I trade tapes. I also have a lot of friends turning me on to things, so I'm continually exposed to new music. And not only modern American music or guitar playing, but I listen to keyboard players a lot. I go through little fevers, like one time I suddenly got excited about orchestration and started listening to all of the Duke Ellington I could find. I went through a period—actually I'm still going through it—of listening to as much [jazz keyboard legend] Art Tatum as I can find. So much great music has already happened that catching up is a hell of a job. And there's so much new stuff coming out all the time that's so impressive.

What do you like that's new?

It's really hard to draw a line on what's considered new. I really like Al Di Meola, George Benson, and Pat Martino. Pat's really one of my favorites; rhythmically he's really fine. There's a young flamenco player named Paco de Lucia who knocks me out. He has a beautiful flow to his

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JERRY GARCIA

Continued from page 135

music that's really rare to guitarists. And every once in a while I hear something on the radio, and I can't believe it and have no idea who it is I'm hearing.

Elvis Costello recently said that he really likes your playing.

Oh yeah, too much. How flattering. I like his music, too. I like most of the new wave stuff—if he's considered new wave. It's obvious as they pass by who's here for keeps and who isn't. Some people have something to say, and it really gets to you no matter what you believe or think that you like. I keep an open mind. I like disco music a lot. All that stuff is interesting to me—it's all music. I like music from other cultures, too.

Do you hear many of your licks turning up among new guitarists?

Well, it's hard to say. I hear echoes and bits and pieces of myself here and there, but it's hard to say if people are getting them from me or from where I got them. I really don't know who I've influenced, but I'm sure they'd know. Every once in a while I hear something and say, Oh yeah, I remember that.

What do you have to say about the state of guitar playing in general?

There are more good guitar players alive today than have ever existed. I welcome it. It's been a long time getting here,

the legitimizing of the electric guitar. Everybody has something to say. I really feel that you can't avoid finding your own voice if you keep playing. You have a voice, whether you recognize it or not. I

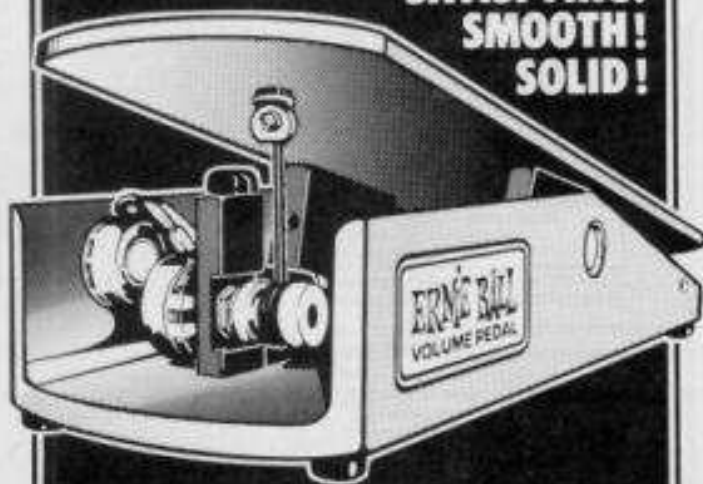


remember reading the Oscar Peterson interview in *Contemporary Keyboard* magazine, where he talks about seeing Art Tatum play. Tatum told him he knew a guy down in New Orleans who could only play one chorus of the blues in C, and that Tatum would give anything to play that

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JERRY GARCIA

Continued from page 132

chorus the way that other guy could.

Are there any disadvantages to music from the particular perspective of the guitarist?

For me, I think the only danger is being too much in love with guitar playing. The music is the most important thing, and the guitar is only the instrument. Any musician can gain something by analyzing his or her role in the context of whatever music they're playing. A guitar player who can back up tastefully, who can find something interesting to say behind a vocal, and who knows what music is all about is someone who is doing the whole job. I see the guitar as one of the leading voices in the evolution of ensemble music. For me, playing in my band—it's like a four-piece band, essentially—is like playing in the new string quartet. It's the new conversational music where the instruments speak to each other, and you have that kind of tightness and dynamic happening—the stuff of string quartets.

Do you have any ambitious projects in mind that you haven't begun yet?

No, not really. I do them as they come. I don't have plans. I get surprised because suddenly an interesting project will come up sort of on its own accord. It's a matter of inspiration rather than long-range plans. I'm working as much as I want to now. If I

wanted to work all day long, every day, I could do more, but what's the point? Right now I have more to keep me interested and occupied than I ever expected. ■

A Selected Garcia Discography

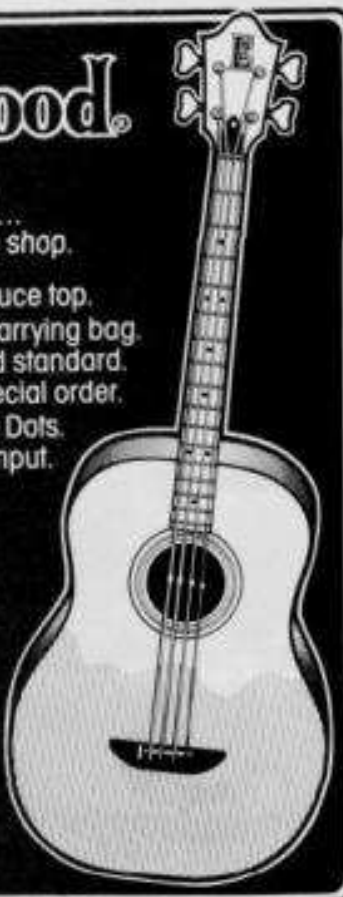
Solo albums: *Garcia*, Warner Bros., BS 2582; *Reflections*, Round Records (dist. by United Artists), RXLA-565-G; *Compliments Of Garcia*, Round UA, RX-102. **With the Grateful Dead** on Warner Bros.: *Grateful Dead*, 2WS-1935; *The Grateful Dead*, WS-1689; *American Beauty*, WS-1893; *Anthem Of The Sun*, WS-1749; *Aoxomoxoa*, WS-1790; *Best Of The Grateful Dead* (*Skeletons From The Closet*), W2764; *What A Long Strange Trip It's Been: The Best Of The Grateful Dead*, 2W-3091; *Bear's Choice: History Of The Grateful Dead, Vol. I*, BS-2721; *Europe '72*, 3WX-2668; *Workingman's Dead*, WS-1869; *Live/Dead*, 2WS-1830. On Grateful Dead Records (dist. by United Artists): *Wake Of The Flood*, GD-01; *Grateful Dead From The Mars Hotel*, GD-102; *Blues For Allah*, GDLA-494-G; *Steal Your Face*, GDLA-620-J2. Others: *Terrapin Station*, Arista, 7001. **With Old And In The Way:** *Old And In The Way*, Round UA, RX-103; **With Merl Saunders:** *Live At Keystone*, Fantasy [10th & Parker Sts., Berkeley, CA 94710], 79002; *Fire Up*, Fantasy, 9421.

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