

Grateful Dead Return to Hall; People's Band Plays to 'Dead Head' Crowd

by Jonas H. Bernstein
Special to the FLAT HAT

The Grateful Dead were given an enthusiastic welcome by the near-capacity crowd at William and Mary Hall last Friday night. The audience, mostly "Dead Heads," were unquestioning in their devotion. True to form, the Dead played a tight three hour set — a long performance for a group of super-star status.

To do a fair review of the group is a difficult task. For instance, I was told by a Grateful Dead enthusiast that the ideal review of one of their concerts should be written by a

dedicated fan. Perhaps this is true in a sense. An integral part of a Dead concert is the "unconcert-like" atmosphere.

A Dead concert can be viewed as a "gathering of the tribes" where people of similar lifestyles and psycho-chemical states get together to have a good time. In this respect, the music is merely a means to an end, and I believe the music was secondary to many in the crowd Friday night. I went to critically evaluate the live performance; I did not go as a fan of their music, nor did I go "blitzed," so perhaps I missed the boat.

The Dead were definitely into the role of "people's band" as opposed to "space band" Friday night. This was reflected in their selection of many 1-4-5 rock and roll numbers from their repertoire, as opposed to such pieces as "Dark Star" or "St. Stephen" which are geared toward improvisation. Well, people don't trip as much these days anyway, and the audience was definitely of the "boogieing" variety.

The Dead began the first set with a rousing version of "The Promised Land" and then launched into another rocker, "Deal," off Garcia's first solo album. Highlighting the rest of the first set were the old favorites "Sugaree," "Tennessee Jed," and "Playing In The Band" which was more in the West Coast tradition of extended jamming than anything else played at the concert. A good phase-shifted guitar solo was included by Jerry Garcia, along with some interesting counter-point

provided by Keith Godchaux on electric piano. The Dead have a knack for dynamics, which they exhibited in "Playing In The Band." This was the first challenging music of the evening.

The second set began to cook with an up-tempo version of "Help On The Way," the first song of a trilogy off Blues For Allah, which flowed into "Slipknot!" Both of these pieces showed that the Dead are capable of diversity. "Slipknot!" incorporates diminished harmony and complex syncopation, with a

resulting sound not unlike some European Jazz-rock groups.

After Garcia's solo in the middle of the composition, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart did a double drum solo (with a brief, disco take-off). This brought up the tempo considerably, and the band brought in the melodic theme at this speed quite impressively. They then slipped into "Franklin's Tower," the third part of the trilogy.

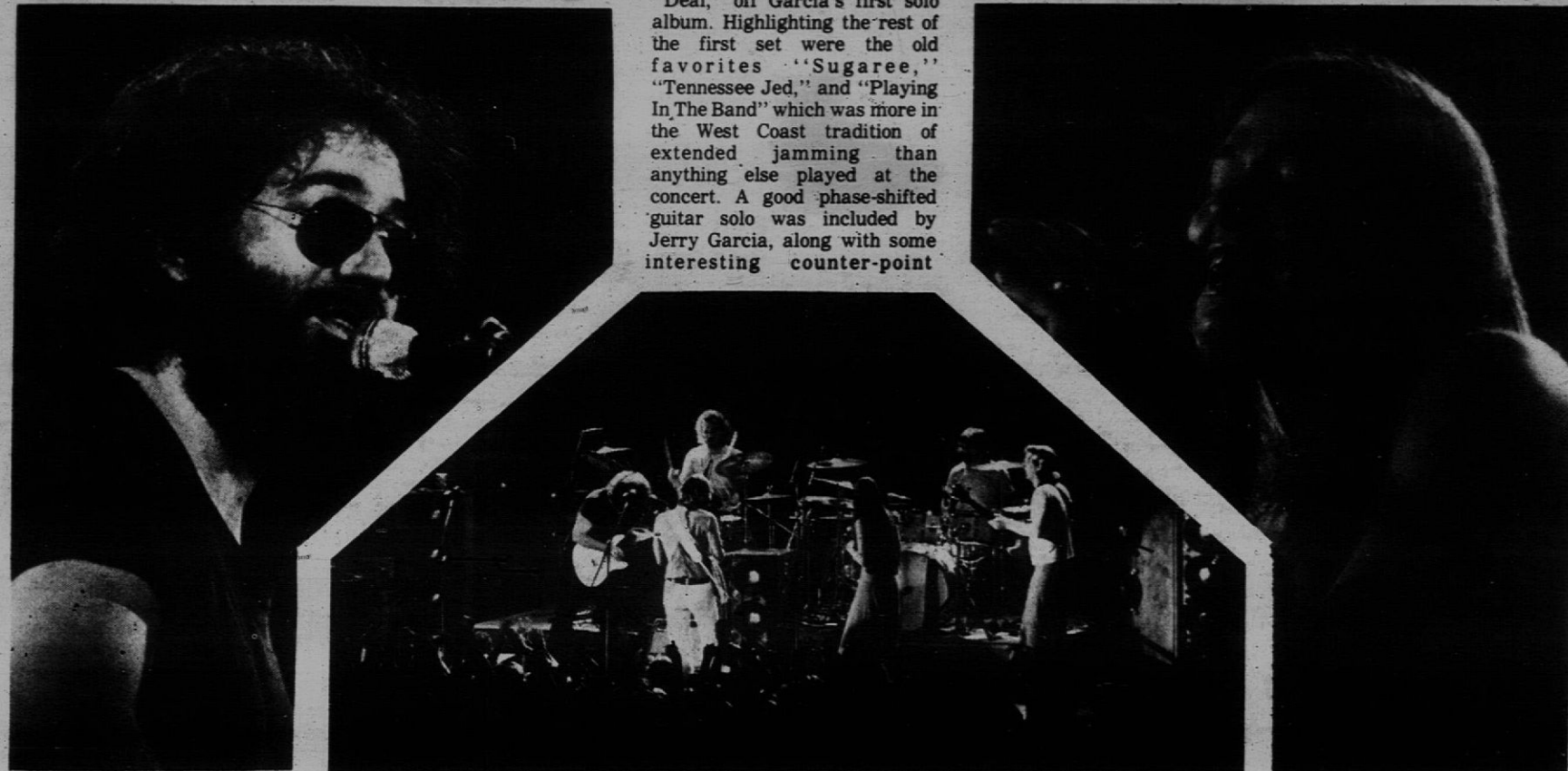
"The Music Never Stopped" featured some solo singing by Donna Godchaux, who had spent

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most of the evening contributing back-up vocals. The set finished with an old rocker, "Around and Around." The Dead returned to the stage for an encore, pleasing the zealous crowd with a version of "U.S. Blues."

There was one thing about the concert that was puzzling: Dope and The Grateful Dead have been closely related for over ten years. What troubled me was that many members of the audience seemed to be incapable of following the music because they were so inebriated. I sat next to two people who were comatose for most of the concert. They were in bad shape, and it was frightening that people merely passed by them, looked, laughed, and walked away. When it was established that they were alive and not in danger, it struck me how difficult it must be to appreciate music in an unconscious state. I realize that this was probably an extreme case and that such things do not only occur at Dead concerts. But it did reinforce my view that a Dead concert is as much a sociological phenomenon as it is a musical one.



Jerry Garcia, Donna Godchaux, and the Dead unite "the tribes" last Friday in William & Mary Hall. Photos by Braithwaite and DeBoer