

Dead success a mystery to guitarist Jerry Garcia

It's easier to yank meat from the jaws of a shark than to track down Jerry Garcia. But 25 minutes before the Grateful Dead was to play before a sell-out audience at Rec Hall, Daily Collegian Staff Writer Chris Reilly managed to capture the living legend for a brief interview.

COLLEGIAN: Is there any particular guitar player you emulated when you were younger?

GARCIA: Oh lots of them, but no one in particular. I mean I listened a lot to the obvious, the early rock and roll guys — Chuck Berry. And then later on I listened to blues players. Freddie King probably influenced me more than any other single blues guitar player . . . and then B.B. King of course.

COLLEGIAN: Recently a lot has been said about the band compromising its approach to music for greater com-

mercial appeal. What is your feeling about that?

GARCIA: Well we have not succeeded. No, so far we have not been commercially successful with anything we've ever done, including the last one. We would love to be commercially successful because it would make life a lot easier for us.

COLLEGIAN: What about commercialism?

GARCIA: Well that has never been our intention, it's not the sort of thing you can do on purpose. I think it's something that happens. I mean we don't have commercial thoughts. It's just like our music doesn't end up being commercial, regardless. Even if we sat around and planned, for example, to make a record (commercially), I doubt very much that it would end up being commercial.

COLLEGIAN: Is there a similar fashion in which most of your songs are

initiated, composed and arranged?

GARCIA: No, not really. The thing is that any of us who are writing tends to have more or less of an arrangement in mind . . . which we then try to communicate to everybody else.

COLLEGIAN: Has the absence of Keith and Donna Godchaux caused adjustments in the musical direction of the band?

GARCIA: Yeah, it has. Now we have a new guy (Brent Mydland — keyboards), so he's adding his energy to the music and I think affecting the music in a real positive way.

COLLEGIAN: Guitar Player magazine labeled your picking style unorthodox. Does that bother you?

GARCIA: No, not yet. (Laughter)

COLLEGIAN: Do you foresee any more personnel changes in the future?

GARCIA: Well, it's hard to tell, but I don't see any right away.

COLLEGIAN: Can you tell me about "Spring Tour '79"?

GARCIA: Well, actually this is a very short tour. We're playing arenas about this size (Rec Hall) or larger and mostly what we're playing is college campuses and the sort. Similar to this (Penn State). This is typical.

COLLEGIAN: Do you prefer smaller auditoriums to the super-arenas?

GARCIA: It depends. There are some small places that are really dreadful to play in, some that are great. Some big places that are dreadful, some that are great.

COLLEGIAN: Rec Hall?

GARCIA: I don't know yet, I won't know until we play there.

COLLEGIAN: The band seems to be on the road more than most.

GARCIA: Yeah, that's what we do for our living. (Laughter)

COLLEGIAN: You don't spend much time in the studio?

GARCIA: Not a whole lot. Yeah, we do spend some time in the studio but not a whole lot of time.

COLLEGIAN: How do you cope with life on the road?

GARCIA: Well we're pretty well adjusted to it. I mean after a while you have to learn to adjust yourself to this way of life and that's part of the challenge, that's part of surviving it. We've done pretty good. We've been able to adjust pretty well.

COLLEGIAN: Last year you visited Egypt. Do you plan any future expeditions?

GARCIA: Yeah, we've thought of it, but we don't have any specific plans yet.



Photo by Chip Connelly

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We had such a good time in Egypt that we're really turned on to the idea.

COLLEGIAN: South America?

GARCIA: Probably not. We're looking at possibly the Orient.

COLLEGIAN: What is the idea behind these excursions to the ancient and remote?

GARCIA: Uh, fun for us, you know. It's interesting to see what happens to us, and the music when we go some place that's a very different environment. It's a way of us fooling with our own little laboratory.

COLLEGIAN: Are you getting the same kind of response in other countries?

GARCIA: Yeah, they got into it.

COLLEGIAN: Do you have any recording projects on the drawing board?

GARCIA: Yeah, we're gonna start recording pretty quickly after this tour. After this tour is over, we'll start working on our next album.

COLLEGIAN: Will the next album take a different direction than "Shakedown Street"?

GARCIA: Well, it's hard to tell. So far we don't have the material together for it. After we come back from this tour, that's when the material will be coming together. At this point it's a little early to tell.

COLLEGIAN: The "Shakedown" album was put together rather quickly. Is this characteristic of most of your albums?

GARCIA: No, some of them take a long time and some don't. It's tough to measure the individual success of an album. I have to judge in terms like — is

it close to what I had in mind — those kinds of things.

COLLEGIAN: Was "Shakedown Street" close to what you had in mind?

GARCIA: Some of those tunes were.

COLLEGIAN: To what do you attribute the longevity or staying power of the Grateful Dead?

GARCIA: I don't know, I really don't. I can't attribute it to any one thing. I have to assume that it has something to do with us doing something that we feel is the right thing to do. You know, I guess it's our instincts are proper for who we are. I really can't say for sure.

COLLEGIAN: You've lasted through Vietnam, Watergate and now Three Mile Island. How long do you plan to continue?

GARCIA: As long as it's fun and interesting.



Photo by Chip Connelly

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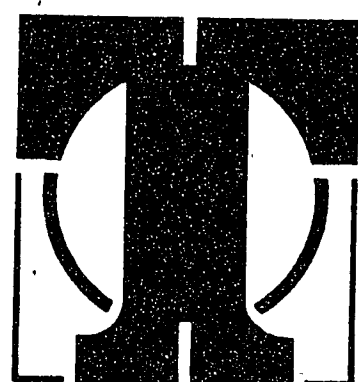
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