

The Grateful Dead come back to life

by Robb Frederick
The Collegian

There's nothing quite like a Grateful Dead concert.

For 25 years, the band has mesmerized audiences with raw harmonies, flowing solos and an unparalleled stage spontaneity.

It's been ten years since the Grateful Dead last tried to capture the magical sound of their live performances. *Without a Net*, a polished sampling of 16 songs that weighs in at a whopping 140-plus minutes, comes close to achieving that goal.

Recorded live between October 1989 and April 1990, the tracks on *Without a Net* demonstrate the musical improvisation that has become the centerpiece of the band's sound. Several songs flow beyond the 15-minute mark as group members exchange solos and explore the possibilities of

The often covered "Dear Mr. Fantasy" closes the two-disc package, appropriately ending the Dead's latest with a performance by late keyboardist Brent Mydland, who died of an overdose in July.

Although well chosen, the performances on *Without a Net* are typically uninspired. Since the band allows taping of their shows, many heads may already have better renditions of these tracks.

But those bootlegged tapes pale in comparison to the fantastic recording quality and engineering that goes into professional recordings.

The true value of *Without a Net* is its technical superiority to the band's other live recordings. Tripping fans don't bump into the microphones, and the tape doesn't run out and prematurely end a fantastic jam. And it's even

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each groove.

The material on *Without a Net* spans the band's career and settles on some usually overshadowed gems. Sure, the Dead could have released new versions of "Truckin'," "Touch of Grey" and "Sugar Magnolia," but most fans already have several bootlegged versions of each.

Instead, *Without a Net* serves up respectable renditions of "Looks Like Rain," "Cassidy," a great "China Cat Sunflower / I Know You Rider" jam, and more.

The flowing mix of "Help on the Way / Slipknot! / Franklin's Tower" is incredible, and a guest appearance by Branford Marsalis perfectly accentuates a 16-minute version of "Eyes of the World."

Marsalis' airy saxophone compliments the alternating guitars of Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir and provides an unusual twist to the Dead classic.

better on CD.

The release's packaging, unfortunately, fails to maintain the high quality of *Without a Net*. The liner notes include some great color photos and the typical record sleeve "thank-yous," but never mentions where the songs were recorded.

The exclusion may be a minor oversight, but for fans who want to find bootlegs and hear the continuation of a particular set, the oversight is extremely frustrating.

For the most part, *Without a Net* is a good investment for Dead purists. The overall sound quality offers a welcome break from third-generation bootlegs that are plagued with microphone trouble and annoying feedback, and the performances are solid enough to remind fans of the live magic of the Grateful Dead.



Marylene Dosse
French pianist

Tuesday, Nov. 13th
8 p.m. Reed Lecture Hall

Entertainment

Eastman Opera Theatre performs condensed "La Boheme" in Reed



Mark Owens/The Collegian

Tragedy in Reed: Two members of the Eastman Opera Theatre perform a scene from "La Boheme" in the Wintergarden Monday.

by Mark Owens
The Collegian

Opera -- not Oprah, the larger-than-life talk show host -- has a lot of stereotypical baggage: long-winded performances, large, helmet-wearing women named Brunhilda singing in unknown languages and snooty old women with broken binoculars.

So leave it to The Eastman Opera Theatre to pack all of that baggage and ship it off on the nearest Federal Express Valkarie -- which they did with this past Monday's riveting, English version of "La Boheme" in the Winter Garden.

The troupe, hailing from the world-renowned Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, performed the opera as part of the new Logan Wintergarden Series, designed to introduce college students to classical forms of art.

According to David Stuntz, Director Of Music at Behrend,

Monday's performance strayed from the classical stage.

"The performance we saw was an opera, and wasn't. Normally, operas last anywhere from two to three hours and are non-stopped singing. In this version, the director (Richard Pearlman) took the most crucial scenes and put them together to give us a condensed version of "La Boheme," he said.

The opera, according to Stuntz, was completely re-written by Pearlman with this type of performance in mind. "What we got was vastly superior to the "selections from" approach, which loses all of the drama. Pearlman's version leaves both the drama and the storyline intact."

Stuntz added a performance like this is important because opera in America faces several problems.

"Opera not only has all of the Bugs Bunnyish stereotypes, but

is also viewed as a European import -- something different and foreign. If opera is going to survive and grow in America, it needs to establish an identity of its own," he said.

English translations of classic opera productions won't be enough though. American topics and ideas will also have to be explored.

"There's an opera coming out soon called 'Nixon in China' which deals with an important time in American history," said Stuntz. "I'm not sure what it's about, but that's the kind of thing opera needs to do to survive in this country -- broaden its base."

Increasing the number of people who listen and watch classical performances is the purpose of the Logan Wintergarden Series. "What we've done is take classical performances off of the stage and bring them out onto the sidewalk," said Stuntz.

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