



## ***GarciaLive Vol. 10*** ***May 20th, 1990 Hilo Civic Auditorium***

### **Liner Note Essay by Dennis McNally**

Standing on the edge of the stage watching one of Jerry's first shows after his 1986 diabetic coma, what he called "my meltdown," Bill Graham couldn't believe his eyes. After Jerry's initial recovery and then musical rehabilitation at home with friends like Merl Saunders and Sandy Rothman, he'd gone to Hawai'i to recuperate. Now back and performing, he was tanned, fit looking, and radiating good vibes. Bill was ecstatic, but a little bit incredulous.

Graham was right. Hawai'i's pristine underwater world, to which Bill Kreutzmann had recently introduced Jerry, was Garcia's healing sanctuary. Twenty or thirty feet down, the only attention he attracted was from the fish, and that was pretty easy to take. Hawai'i soothed his soul.

It's no wonder that this show is so good. To start with, Hilo and the Big Island are a long way from the glitz of Waikiki Beach or the fancy hotels on Maui. Much of the island is small-town, rural and agricultural. Hilo is the biggest city on the island, and with a population then below 40,000, few would call it urban. The Civic Auditorium was unpretentious and relatively small, about high school gym size. In other words, it was Jerry's kind of place.

Though "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)" was a perfectly normal opener for them, you can hear their good mood and high energy from the start; there's a smile in Jerry's voice. John Kahn lays down a fat bottom, David Kemper's tempo is crisp and bouncy, Gloria (Jones) and Jackie (LaBranch)'s voices fill in nicely, Melvin (Seals) rules the keys, and the song's legendary authors, Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Edward Holland Jr., would have been proud.

How good a mood? Someone offered Jerry something that I'm guessing were some leis, and his jovial remark, "What do you want me to do with them?" generated laughter as he kicked into the third song, the first of his five Dylan songs that night.

Which calls for some remarks. The eighteen songs the band played in Hilo represent a fairly standard selection from the JGB repertoire. Even though he sang all the leads, his side bands represented a break from the responsibility of serving the giant dragon that was the Grateful Dead. In some ways, it was a vacation, a busman's holiday. That meant, for instance, that he focused on playing other people's songs, so that there are only three originals here ("They Love Each Other," "Run for the Roses," and "Deal").

That repertoire was grounded in a deep sampling of some of the best of the African-American tradition: two Motown R&B standards—"How Sweet It Is" and Smokey Robinson's "The Way You Do the Things You Do"—plus an older R&B classic, Hank Ballard's "Tore Up." There's also Los Lobos's wonderful tribute to the "queen of make believe," the all-American wandering sprite, "Evangeline."

The two reggae songs, Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come" and Peter Tosh's "Stop That Train," reflect Jerry's catholic taste and inquisitive ears. "The Harder They Come" was the title song of the classic 1972 movie of that name, which starred Jimmy as the outlaw Ivanhoe Martin, and Jerry was playing it by the next year. It's also a landmark in the 1970s development of midnight movies, in which cult hits like *El Topo* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* would play late on weekend nights and develop hip audiences. No one who saw *The Harder They Come* that way will ever forget the opening scene, in which a vague blur of green sharpens into focus until the viewer realizes that they're looking at fat green buds of *ganja* —remember, it was illegal then.

The repertoire is full of more black music: one straight-up gospel song, "My Sisters and Brothers," and several I'd call neo-Gospel—"Like a Road," by the Memphis Stax-Volt mainstay Don Nix and Dan Penn, Beasley Smith and Haven Gillespie's classic (versions by Ray Charles, Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, Willie Nelson, and Johnny Cash, among others) "That Lucky Old Sun" (with a truly superb Melvin solo, which helps make it a show highlight), and Bruce Cockburn's "Waiting for a Miracle." You could arguably include "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" in that group, but we'll keep it with the single largest bunch, the five songs by Bob Dylan. And that's a very interesting story.

Jerry first heard Bob Dylan live at the 1963 Monterey Folk Festival. As a serious bluegrass banjo player, Garcia was on the purist side of the folk spectrum, and the idea of writing one's own material was foreign to him; he did not approve. Then in February 1965, he caught Dylan on the Les Crane television show, and things changed.

Bob sang "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and within a couple of months Jerry was singing that song with his new band, The Warlocks. He'd play it the rest of his life. But it was the surreal interplay between this intense young folkie and Crane that startled him. When Crane asked Bob what he'd do with all the money that he'd be making with Peter Paul and Mary's covers of his songs, he replied, "I'm buying boots, bananas, fruits, pears..."—and then it got weirder. What's your message? "Eat." "Be. Period." Is love part of it? "It's been used a lot. Love, well, yeah, everybody says that." "Be. Is. Was, were, double, double up..."

A guest suggested that he was the new James Dean, and having been a huge Dean fan back in his hometown movie theater (which, conveniently, his family owned), Bob couldn't have minded that too much. Then he announced he was planning on making a movie that summer, to be written by Allen Ginsberg. "It's going to be a horror cowboy movie. Takes place on the New York Thruway. I'm the hero. I play my mother...you've got to see the movie."

Jerry was hooked, and stayed that way.

And so we get "Tough Mama," one of two songs from the often-overlooked Dylan album *Planet Waves*, out in 1974 to advance Dylan's first tour in eight years. Beautifully supported by Melvin's power chords, Jerry rips it up, spraying a sparkling net of notes to support the lyrical legend of the baddest goddess Bob had ever encountered. Jerry makes her his own as well.

His "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," with JGB or the Dead, has to rank among the greatest covers ever, period, great enough to be spoken in the same breath as Jimi Hendrix's version of "Watchtower." If you've not seen *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, do yourself a favor, if only for two elements: Bob Dylan as the knife-throwing "Alias," and the scene for which he wrote "Heaven's Door." Slim Pickens was not a great actor, but he filled some truly great roles (don't forget *Dr. Strangelove*), and the scene with Katy Jurado that's backed by this song is epic. Jerry, with

superb keyboard work from Melvin, captures the sorrow and the tenderness and the grandeur. It's a high point in the set, and could only be followed by a fast, rockin' first set-closer like "Deal," which he nails.

Dylan said he wanted to write a song for his newborn son that wasn't too sentimental, and "Forever Young" (the second from *Planet Waves*) fills the bill. Jerry introduces it with some elegant arpeggios that coalesce into the song—a lullaby, actually—and it conveys everything a parent can wish for a child, all the hopes and dreams.

"Tears of Rage," co-written by Dylan and Richard Manuel, was one of the darkest and most powerful jewels to come out of Dylan's 1967 sojourn with what had become The Band and would result in *The Basement Tapes*. Jerry didn't play it all that often; it was so powerful that it must have cost him something every time. Without being specific, it is a tale that combines *King Lear* and America's war in Vietnam, promises broken and oaths betrayed. "Oh, what kind of love is this / that goes from bad to worse? / Tears of rage, tears of grief...Come to me now, you know / We're so alone / And life is brief."

As it frequently did, "Tangled Up in Blue" closed the show. A wistful look back at lost love is the default setting for everyone's heart.

It wasn't just that Garcia admired Dylan's music; it was reciprocal. In 1980, Dylan started his second long run at Bill Graham's Warfield Theater in San Francisco. The first one had taken place the year before, and those shows were his first since he'd embraced Christianity. He only played new songs, and he was more than a little stiff. They were not a resounding success.

By the second time around he'd loosened up, and was receptive when Bill came to him with a perfect Bill-Graham-Scam-for-the-Good. "Bob, Jerry Garcia really wants to sit in with you, but he just can't ask." "Sure, Bill, tell him to come by." "Hey Jerry, Bob really wants you to sit in with him but he just can't ask." "Sure, Bill, happy to sit in."

And so Jerry came on and played the rare and beautiful "To Ramona," and it was lovely. What was hilarious is that after "Ramona," Bob simply wouldn't let Jerry leave the stage. Years later, Fred Tackett, Bob's lead guitarist, would admit that at the time he was confused, since Jerry was playing song after song he didn't know; from behind Dylan, Fred couldn't see him telling Jerry, "No, please stay." So Jerry learned and played on the fly. It was classic.

So is this show.

- Dennis McNally