

A Showcase for Garcia's Styles

The band may be only half Dead, but the music is all live. The Jerry Garcia Band is packing them in at the Keystone Berkeley club this week, through tonight, and while only half of the members are from the Grateful Dead, their lower key music is still an experience.

Garcia never seems to rest in one musical style. Since his main band, the Grateful Dead, has inactive periods, Garcia has spent a lot of time in other groups, usually of his own making.

He played pedal steel in the New Riders of the Purple Sage during their formative year, joined with organist Merl Saunders for a jazzier sound, played obscure acoustic instruments in the blue-

grass Old and in the Way, and lately has been fronting a band with his own name.

(Over the weekend the Key-

By
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stone Berkeley featured Tooloos, a band led by Dead bassist Phil Lesh and Sons of Champlin guitarist Terry Haggerty.)

In addition to Garcia, Dead keyboard man Keith Godchaux and wife Donna on vocals are in the group. Longtime Garcia associate John Kahn handles bass, and Elvis

Presley drummer Ron Tutt keeps rhythm. Newest member John Rich fills in the sound with tasty rhythm and pedal steel guitars.

More than any other Garcia band this one allows him room to run through all his guitar styles, often within a single song.

In addition to original material, the band plays staples like Dylan's "Simple Twist of Fate" and "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," featuring Garcia on Dylanesque vocals. The latter tune started almost as an a cappella ballad, but by the chorus was loping through a reggae beat, with country and blues overtones.

The biggest difference between this music and others

Garcia has played is that it is slowed down rock, accelerating only at the end of the set. It is sway music, best enjoyed in a standing position with

entertainment

hands in back pockets, rocking slowly to the chord changes, or slow dancing in couples (the packed dance floor made the latter movement difficult).

With Donna singing lead vocal, "Stir It Up" brought back memories of the Wallers' first U.S. appearance, at the now-defunct Matrix in San Francisco, where the slow-cooking music pushed the crowd into a quiet frenzy. The biggest difference is that the Garcia band features three lead instruments where Bob Marley's group had none.

Like his guitar lines, Garcia's vocals seem to develop as he sings, with each line sounding like it grows out of the previous one. The loose structure of the material allows him to speed up, slow down, and run through long solos.

Most important is that this

is not a show. The band members don't wear costumes or provide dazzling lighting effects. The emphasis is solely on the music, and while the basic structure is the same each night, the instrumental work is always new, live music for the moment. When it works it is grand, and when it doesn't it is still very good.

Another Bay Area musician, Steve Seskinen opened the evening with a bright set of acoustic folk and blues songs. He was aided by singer Lindy Pareira and bassist-harmonica player Steve Gurr, who have been with Seskinen for a couple of months now.

Just returned from a six-week cross-country tour, Seskinen and friends received quiet attention from an audience that had come to see Garcia. His official "homecoming" show will be Jan. 6 at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall.

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