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Spector, Stanley J.

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STANLEY J. SPECTOR

Furthur played two nights in June 2011 at Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, California. The band was rested, having finished their spring tour six weeks earlier, and, since they were going to rest for another six weeks after these shows before embarking on a summer tour, this two-night run was a stand-alone event, not part of a tour context. Moreover, these were also the first Bay Area, or hometown, shows since New Year's. As a fan, I was excited about attending these concerts—but as a philosopher, I looked forward to reflecting critically on the multifaceted aspects of a show, including my own experience as a participant. This review reflects these perspectives, filtered through my experiences at the shows and refined by subsequent evaluations of the recordings, both the official soundboards and representative audience recordings.

Mountain View is a dot.com city between San Francisco and San Jose, centrally situated in Grateful Dead Land. The atmosphere was already festive when we arrived in town on Friday, greeted by so many familiar faces and looks. There were more of us than the locals had accommodated in quite a long time, and we felt secure in our numbers as we were once again taking over a small town for a weekend celebration of music and community. The excitement was palpable. By the early afternoon of June 3, the motel parking lots lining El Camino Real were

already filled with cars, buses, and trucks, many of them adorned with telltale stickers and decals. Motel lobbies were filling with Deadheads, all ready for a show, waiting to check in and hoping to meet their friends. The staff at my motel seemed a bit overwhelmed. My brother, dressed in his professional, "I've-been-at-work-all-day" outfit, elicited an apologetic, "It's not always like this" from the general manager, whispered across the counter. "It's OK," he reassured her. "I'm in the gang." It was hard to tell if that put her at ease or made her even more uncomfortable.

Although Shoreline is not the most intimate venue, it is a place for which many Deadheads have a deep affection. The Grateful Dead played there frequently in the first eight years of its operation (39 times), and two of those shows featured special guests: Clarence Clemons on June 29, 1989, and the Gyuto Monks on June 2, 1995. And Shoreline seemed to be designed with Deadheads in mind, to maximize the Grateful Dead concert experience. The venue is spacious both outside and inside the entrance gates, so no one feels hurried or corralled while milling about and meeting friends.

Although it is a large venue, actually larger than basketball arenas though smaller than stadiums, it feels remarkably cozy. Of the roughly 22,000 people it can accommodate, there are 6,500 seats divided into two sections, one closer to the stage, the other separated by a concourse that curves horizontally from one end of the theater to the other, with room for another 15,500 people on the lawn. The sound system is first-rate, and numerous video screens are sprinkled throughout the venue, both inside the arena proper and on the concourses. When it first opened, many compared it to Disneyland, as it was so roomy and large that groups of people could move effortlessly and efficiently through it. Shoreline may not have the rides that Disneyland does, but it facilitates the individual journeys some fans still travel, their own version of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. And just as Disneyland is full of attractions and diversions, so, too, is Shoreline. Private vendors lined the ramps, dotted among multiple food and beverage stands, and here again there was plenty of room to hang out comfortably and safely. Most importantly, there are plenty of restrooms. There are women who still say a silent thank-you to Bill Graham every time they use a restroom at Shoreline.

But this weekend was not about the Grateful Dead, it was about Furthur. As we prepared to go to the shows, we got the bad news to prepare for rain. The forecast called for lots of rain, more rain than the Bay area had received in over 120 years, but the dire warnings did not dampen the excitement. The rains did come, but thankfully not during the shows, just a drizzle after Friday night, with clear skies by show time after the downpours during the day on Saturday. (Deadheads always did say, with a smile, that the band controlled the weather.)

There are enough parking lots at Shoreline to provide spots for a sold-out show, and many folks were surprised that the price of parking was already included in the ticket price. The parking lot scene was casual, with fewer vendors on Shakedown Street than in its heyday in the late eighties and early nineties; nonetheless, it still pulsed with commercial pre- and post-show energy. Once inside, we were able to stroll leisurely up and down the concourse, look at the photographs of many of the performers who have played there during the last twenty-five years, and check out the stage from various vantage points from the back of the lawn to the 200 or 100 sections.

Just after 7:30 p.m. on Friday evening, the band came on stage, acknowledged the crowd with a wave, picked up their instruments, stepped to their microphones and opened the show with a Beatles' tune that they had only played twice before, both times during their spring East Coast tour. The vocal harmonies were obviously practiced, and the first opening notes of "Here Comes the Sun" electrified the crowd. Although their arrangement of the song closely followed the Beatles', Furthur transformed the song, the musicians playing it in the same style that they played their own tunes and creating a musical space where they could open up the song into a jam. By contrast, on Saturday, when they played another tune from *Abbey Road*, "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window," they did not create a space for jamming. Again, following the Beatles' arrangement closely, they played it as the Beatles had on the record, almost note for note, with Lesh even doing his best Paul McCartney impersonation, keeping the song to its brief, sub-two-minute length.

And here is one place where a philosopher's reflection of a show comes into play. Can we say that they played these Beatles tunes well?

Indeed, can we even say whether they played the sets well? And even if we can answer these questions, does that help us answer the more general question about the show? Are we really able to say whether or not the shows were good, or terrible, or outstanding, or ordinary, etc.? How much does—or should—the musical performance itself factor into a judgment about the show? Of course, all of us who have attended shows have answered these questions after every concert, but with what kind of authority? What enables us to make such a determination, and why should any one of our answers be valued over someone else's?

This problem highlights the reviewer's dilemma. Reviewers try to be objective, but at some point in a review, a reviewer's comments must be affected by the way he or she engages with the experience; that is, at a fundamental level, we cannot separate the subjective states of the reviewer from an objective assessment. Philosophers (and anthropologists) are familiar with this conundrum, but music reviewers like to think that they are being objective and dissociated from the experience—an impossible stance to maintain. At some point, reviewers need to acknowledge their participation in the experience. If reviewers are well versed in music theory, or are in fact musical experts, then their reviews of the music alone might tell us much, both technically and objectively, about the way the music was played: how the notes fit together, how the band performed the songs, what the modes and scales of the songs are, and why the music triggered various emotional responses.

Conversely, after the concert, whether in the parking lot, a hotel room, or on the way home, when someone offers an informal description of the show, the audience for those remarks is in effect the choir. We speak the same language, understand the references, and presuppose with the critic an understanding of many of the particulars of the setting, because we have shared the same show experience. When such a critic says, for example, that the "Morning Dew" in the middle of the second half of the second set on Friday night, or the "Weather Report Suite" > "Eyes of the World" second set opener on Saturday night were highlights, we hear a friend who is part of our community, participating in the venue and in the show in much the way that we do, while also experiencing the music—again, in much the way we do—and we are confident that the review is

fairly accurate, mostly because it roughly matches our own.

But a formal review addresses a different audience and requires greater explanation. In the case of these Furthur shows in June (and, I would argue, in the case of any show or live performance), as important as the music is, an analysis of the music alone does not account for the total experience. The venue itself is important, not only in terms of its sound quality and physical space but also for the atmosphere it generates. Shows also involve the community that has developed not only among those in the audience but also between the performers and the audience. Another characteristic of a show is how the audience participates in the making of the show. Lesh acknowledged all three of these factors as he began the "Donor Rap" Friday night, thanking us for being there at the venue, for being participants in a community, and for being participants in the making of the music that night. When he returned to the stage, his first words were:

> Hey y'all, welcome back. It's good to see our community together again wherever we are. Thank you for coming out tonight and helping us make this music. It could never get as weird as it is without your help. So thank you.

It is not unusual to read informal critiques of shows by fans touching on any or all of these aspects—namely, the venue (or physical space of the show), the community, and the music itself. Some might offer detailed analysis of the songs and their sets, while emphasizing whether the staff at the show were fan-friendly or not; others might comment on whether there was room to dance, while perhaps mentioning their candidate for a musical highlight, perhaps a breakout tune or a tune played unusually well or differently from what we were accustomed to hearing. But we need to remember that breakout tunes are not necessarily highlights; for example, although the band broke out "It's All Over Now" during the first set on Saturday, it was overshadowed by the much stronger and more tightly played tunes, "New Speedway Boogie" and "Reuben and Cherise," which sandwiched it. The jam that opened the show, colored and accented with jazz rhythms and structures, was something new and different, and therefore might be considered a highlight.

When the reviewer is a music expert (and focuses on the music per-

formed) and makes the claim that a particular song is a musical highlight, we understand that his or her claim is supported by the technical structures and concepts of music theory. And yet, even within the world of musical theory, differences of opinion about what makes for musical innovation and excellence are commonplace. For example, some jazz bassists might argue that Lesh does not do his job as a bass player in an ensemble, or is too busy playing too many notes; others might argue that it is precisely his style of playing that makes him so effective and unique. Competing theories within the discipline each rest on axioms which are themselves neither self-evident nor objectively true. In this, music theory is not unique, for it is a mark of all axiomatic disciplines, even (or perhaps especially) mathematics, as Kurt Gödel (1992) has pointed out. In addition, given that different individuals and scholars within a single discipline may concur or sympathize with one theory or another, this illuminates a fundamental characteristic, not of the discipline but of human experience: namely, that in every situation we find ourselves in, we are already in a particular state of mind or mood that colors our interpretation and understanding of that situation and our experience.

So the reviewer who is a musical expert cannot escape his or her fundamental subjectivity when writing a review. The problem is compounded for the musically-inclined non-expert. Clearly, there is a correlation with how we think the band played and our assessment of whether the show was good or not, and we move back and forth between how we characterize the music and how we feel, as we step outside of the experience and reflect on it. Curiously, with so many specific, different particular nuances within a fairly common set of experiences, it is astounding that we are often in so much agreement. Here the music theorists can help us conceptualize our familiar experience and show how different sets of musical predispositions stem from common roots. Describing the band as "tight," or saying that the song was "crisp," or that "they punched out that tune," or any number of other colloquial descriptors, can all be framed and articulated in musical terms. To say, for example, that "Phil was on," already presupposes that we share a notion of how Lesh plays, and that within that context we judge his playing to be more or less inspired, or inspiring.

If all that were available for a record of a show were recordings, we could reflect on the music and perhaps delineate the different characteristics of the soundboard recordings and the variety of audience tapes. In the case of these shows, the soundboard recordings are superb. Every instrument and voice comes through clearly without distortion or ambiguity and in harmony and balance with the others. What is missing, though, is both the sense of the venue—in this case, outside in the early summer with cool air and occasional wind gusts that pushed the sound around—and the audience, which was on its feet dancing throughout both shows, cheering and applauding—and this, not so much because they were listening reflectively to a particular solo or jam, but more because they were participating in the making of the music, expressing through dance their connection to the same music as that of the musicians.

Sometimes an audience recording can capture these elements. In the case of the audience recordings reviewed here, the sound quality is not as sharp and pure as the soundboard releases, but they do sound more like the way we heard the show when we were there. The microphones cannot help but capture the quality of the sound coming through the air from the PA speakers, something soundboard recordings cannot.

We need to remember and understand the taper's lament: "Tapes lie." Soundboard recordings clearly lie in a fundamental way, for although the music is perfectly recorded, the other elements of the experience are not. Audience recordings also lie, but in a different way. Even though technology has improved to the point where now the sound quality of an audience recording can almost sound like a soundboard recording, audience recordings are still limited: they cannot fully capture the sounds of the audience and the feel of the venue. In addition, the tapes may not sound as we remember the show. They might confirm what we remember about how the band played, but sometimes what we discover is that what we hear on a recording does not comport with our experience of the shows. Sometimes the recordings do not sound as good as we remember the shows; but sometimes they sound much better.

What recordings cannot capture is the actual experience of the concerts. A recording can never express the experience of participating in the creative moment where the future is truly open to any possibility.[1] But the

particular state of mind each of us brings to this process is important in determining how both the musicians and we feel about the process at that moment. We need only recall Garcia's interview in *The Grateful Dead Movie* when he recalls a show that was so "not happening" that he threw Lesh down a small flight of stairs, only to listen to the tapes later and discover that they were so "crackling with energy" that they used them on their record.

And so it is with us. If it took a long time to get into the show Saturday night because security was patting people down more thoroughly than on Friday night, and you were already irritated as you missed the opening jam and "Truckin'," and you were just settling in to your seat as they played "New Speedway Boogie," the subsequent "It's All Over Now," "Reuben and Cherise," "Tennessee Jed," and "Loose Lucy" may not have sounded very energetic, but actually kind of dull and boring. At the time, I thought that the band did indeed play these tunes in their distinctive style, but they did not do much with them in terms of opening up spaces for jamming, an experience that would have fed my hunger for that anticipation of open and endless possibilities in the songs. My thought was that they were working to get back to the level of intensity that they had played with the night before. A friend, however, thought that this set was already better than most of what they had played the night before. At the show, we can only acknowledge our difference of opinion, but after the show, we can mediate this disagreement by listening to the recordings.

But the recordings are not the show itself. They are only an artifact of the show, removed from the experience of the show, and establishing a new experience of listening to the music in a different setting with a different state of mind. When I listen to the recordings, these songs sound better than I remember experiencing them live; nonetheless, I still believe that they were not as strong as what I heard on Friday night.[2] It seemed—and seems, as I listen—as though the band was still trying to find its groove for the evening. However, with the "China Cat Sunflower" > "I Know You Rider" that followed "Loose Lucy" to end the first set on Saturday, the band found its groove, and those songs were as energetic and free-flowing as the tunes they had played on Friday night.

I was so excited about the show on Friday one might think that it

would not have mattered to me what and how they played. They could have started slowly and not jammed at all. Of course, this would not be true, for I still have a discerning ear for what I listen for at shows, namely, how much and how well the band jams. How many chances are they taking, making new music that may at times make me forget that I am there listening to music (the metaphor of being transported)? Or, more fundamentally, how am I being included in the musical conversation, not in the sense of just listening either passively or actively to what they are playing, but in the sense of playing the unheard song with them?

Here again, it is helpful to confirm my initial excited assessment with a recording. After opening with "Here Comes the Sun," the subsequent "Jack Straw," "Bertha," and "Pride of Cucamonga" all developed into full-fledged jams. "Cumberland Blues" was a bit cumbersome at the beginning but eventually also turned into a full jam. The set ended with a strong "Deal" > "The Other One" > "Hell in a Bucket." I thought the band played well together, each musician complementing the others and pushing everyone to explore new musical places. And there were moments in each of these songs where the band moved me, sometimes to other places, sometimes to dance, and sometimes to right where I already was, though beneath the grid of subjectivity and dualism.

Yet others argue that Friday was fairly ordinary compared to Saturday. If all we take into account is the music, we can focus on what we hear and apply the principles of music theory to the performance. But sometimes what we hear is not only what they played. Recordings can answer the question of how they played, but not the question of the dynamic of the individual with the music and with each other.

On both nights, the second sets were jam-filled and coherent. Each song had moments that made me forget I was listening to a band playing music, moments that made me entirely viscerally present with the creative process. They played ten tunes each night (nine on Saturday, if "Weather Report Suite" is counted as one), and, of course, they exceeded the Mountain View curfew. Most bands need to be off the stage by 11:00 p.m., but the Grateful Dead, and now Furthur, received a thirty-minute extension. Perhaps someone had to pay for it, but it is still nice to get that extra time. They played a little longer on Saturday, and Lesh rushed out to

the stage after "Not Fade Away" and had no time for even a few sentences of banter before he made his plea for organ donor participation, a fixture of his performances; he made sure there was enough time for a full encore, "One More Saturday Night."

Both second sets had an internal structure that made the entire set cohere, and both sets were structured with component pieces, all of which, except for "She Came in through the Bathroom Window" on Saturday, are songs designed to allow for maximum jamming. On Friday, the first half of the set began with "Help On the Way" > "Slipknot" > "Franklin's Tower" followed immediately by "Saint Stephen" > "The Eleven" and "The Mountain Song." For the second half the band played "Playing in the Band" > "Uncle John's Band" > "Morning Dew" > "Uncle John's Band" > "Playing in the Band." Saturday's second set was a bit different because of the placement of the Beatles' tune after the 38-minute "Weather Report Suite" > "Eyes of the World" opener. But then the band opened up again, first with a "The Wheel" > "Shakedown Street" pairing followed by a sweet "Standing on the Moon," giving couples the space to have an affectionate slow dance together. The set ended with "Scarlet Begonias" > "Fire on the Mountain" > "Not Fade Away."

Song selection is another variable affecting our subjective judgment. For example, if what you look for in a show is "Viola Lee Blues" and/or "Dark Star" because you think that these are the tunes that allow for maximum exploration, you might have been disappointed. If you do not respond well to Lesh's or Weir's or Kadlicek's vocals, you might have become unsettled, and if you still think that some Garcia tunes are sacrosanct, you might have even become angry. In any case, the band plays almost its entire repertoire as a jamming band. Even when they are playing without a jam, during the verses or behind a particular solo, they have a distinctive sound, and although not every song is "Dark Star," each one has a space that allows for musical exploration. To the uninitiated ear, the nuance of the jam in "The Other One" is largely undifferentiated from the jams in "Fire on the Mountain." In fact, audience members who had never been to a show commented that the concerts sounded like one long song. They could only tell when a new song was beginning because of the cheering of the crowd, even though the set lists were composed

of identifiable rock and roll tunes, ballads, psychedelic jams, and jazz improvisations.

Listening to Furthur and watching the dynamics of their interaction on stage, it was obvious that this band is having fun playing and taking musical chances together. This clearly comes across on the recordings reviewed here as well. What does not come across in the recordings, for example, is the gesture Weir made when he forgot the words to his verse in the "Touch of Grey" encore on Friday night. Here the aspect of community came to the forefront, for as Weir blanked on the lyrics, he looked at us, shrugged his shoulders, rolled his eyes, and made a face that said, "Can you believe that I've done this again"?

Lesh and Weir have been playing together in that distinctively "weird" way for so long, there were times that it seemed that they formed this band just so that they could continue playing together—as if the other instruments were establishing a context within which this duo could experiment and flourish. Joe Russo is an excellent drummer who clearly understands the kind of music this band is trying to make. His drumming complements Lesh's and Weir's playing well and he pushes them to new and different rhythmic configurations. Jeff Chimenti's keyboards add a rich texture and a jazz dimension to the jams. Neither of these musicians plays in a standard, formulaic way, and together with the lead guitar explorations of John Kadlecik, they are sensitive to the notion that the music is really in the spaces between the notes. Sunshine Becker and Jeff Pehrson help round out the sound with their harmonies and range, adding more power and depth to the overall vocal texture. As an ensemble, Furthur produces a large sound: very tight, very innovative, and utterly non-pedestrian. They are not just a cover band playing the same old songs the same old way. They have been introducing new material, and they use the songs in their vast repertoire as portals for further musical exploration. Furthur, indeed.

Garcia once remarked that he had no problem with tapers because once the show was over, the band was done with it. The show itself could never be duplicated—not by the musicians, not by the audience, and certainly not by those who were not there. By definition, experiencing a

participatory show is fresh with every concert, and Furthur, as well as a handful of other jam bands, opens the possibility for that fresh and unique occurrence. To revisit shows, we can only listen to soundboard or audience recordings, and while each has its own virtue, there is a trade-off. Soundboard recordings are true to the music but often miss the elements of the audience and the venue; audience recordings often capture a sense of these elements but at the price of distorting the sound. We need both to remind us of the power of the live exerience of a concert, knowing full well that they will always remain an imprecise and faint impression of the magic of the moment.

Note

1. I understand that if you have not heard a show before, it seems as though the next notes are undetermined when you listen for the first time because you have not heard them before. But they have already been played, and you are listening to an artifact of something that has already spontaneously emerged in the past.

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Stanley J. Spector is Professor of Philosophy at Modesto Junior College. He has written on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others, and his work on the Grateful Dead has been published in two volumes of *Dead Letters, All Graceful Instruments* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007), and *The Grateful Dead in Concert: Essays on Live Improvisation* (McFarland, 2010), which he coedited.