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The Last Dead Show

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Watching the Last Dead Show

ROBERT COOPERMAN

Who could afford tickets and a hotel room?
Not us. So Beth and I settle for live TV
and not a joint or pipe: Beth frowning
on my imbibing, and nowadays, my lungs
rasp like stripped-down gears, after a toke.

The concert's a treat, though if we're honest,
we admit something's missing: Garcia,
gone twenty years, but still indispensable,
though his vocals were nothing Tony Bennett
need feel threatened by. Still, they fit the music
like a Dancing Bears T-shirt and broken-in jeans.

As for his guitar solos, a bounce we don't hear
in this technically perfect performance,
but let's not quibble: this is as close as we'll get
ever again to seeing the real-live Grateful Dead.

After the camera scans the crowd—balloons
bouncing, smoke blown like giant gnat swarms,
Bill Walton’s big goofy grin and peace signs—
it focuses on the stage, and despite knowing
he’s gone, a small part of me expects to see Garcia,
not the heroin-wreck, but the young guy who epiphanied,

“Hey, I can make a living doing what I love.”

And then the show’s over, the crowd shuffles out,
the stage empties, all our fare-thee-wells sung and said.

ROBERT COOPERMAN is the author of fourteen collections of poetry and several chapbooks, including *A Tale of the Grateful Dead* (Main Street Rag) and *Not Too Old to Rock and Roll* (Snark Books), which take the band and the medieval legend, respectively, as their subject matter. Cooperman’s most recent books are *Little Timothy in Heaven* (March Street Press) and *Just Drive* (Brick Road Press). *In the Colorado Gold Fever Mountains* (Western Reflections Books) won the Colorado Book Award for Poetry in 2000.