

Trist, Alan

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Alan Trist

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ALAN TRIST

I had to think about it—as usual in life’s rich pageant, we search for a crumb of meaning, and now I wondered why the Mars Hotel hospitality suite was tucked away, deep in the bowels of the stadium. The large sky boxes occupying the high tiers of Levi Stadium would have been well suited to MG’s graceful intention in organizing hospitality: a couple of them linked together would have made a decent “credentialed lounge” for the Cast Party, her term for a gathering of old “family” stalwarts of the Grateful Dead project. I suppose 1% protocol required the stadium/promoters to sell premium tickets for those boxes, and perhaps some of them were “owned” seasonally, but you’d have thought the spirit of generosity might have raised itself an inch above ground level in recognition of the energies it had taken over the decades to keep afloat the Ship of Fools being celebrated tonight.

Not complaining; just musing. Any place to get together is a good place. Even caves have their romance. We’d stayed in our seats mostly, spotting a few of the old crew here and there in the stands or on the concourse, but afterwards a kindly friend of Jon McIntire’s seated close by

showed us the tortuous way to the Mars Hotel. We found it: many friends, many hugs. And it was indeed a cast party of a sort, all the more poignant because of those absent and those more or less on crutches. Even in the screening crush at the entrance gates this had been presaged by a friend who told me, “Barlow may attend tomorrow along with the entire medical crew and equipment from the cardiac ward at UCSF Medical Center.” I believed it. That sounded like a classic Barlow gesture, unrepentant and unreconstructed.

Strangely, or naturally, the occupant of the seat in front of me sported a T-shirt with a print on the back of an arresting Herbie Greene photo of Garcia, reminding me throughout the concert of his implicit presence/absence. I kept asking him in my head, “Well, man, whaddayathink?” To which I expect he answered, as Nicki Scully did when I asked her the same question on the concourse, “I’m trying not to think, just to feel.” The best part: drum break with full on “Beast and Beam” followed by the return of “Dark Star” and a great “Morning Dew.” If the lengthy jams proceeding Billy and Mickey lacked dynamics and the dominant clarity of a lead guitar allowed to be out front, the band soon seemed artistically challenged by the creative force of the drums and percussion which reached cosmic levels of shamanic didgeridoo, suggesting ecstatic trance. Yet so challenged, “Grateful Dead” was musically redeemed by the final songs. Neat trick!

So was the light show, at both cosmic and stage levels: a rainbow in the East at the end of the first set accompanied a brief sprinkle of cooling rain followed by a half-moon nested in translucent clouds, with unmatched psychedelic light graphics on screens the size of buildings. And high Deadhead energy and excitement in response, undiminished by time, enhanced by a new generation and validated by the old: Bill Walton looming front and center in The Pit.

When we finally made it down to the Mars Hotel, against the flow of 80,000 folks trying to exit, it was warm and welcoming. Bettar, Jane, Sue Stephens, Swanson, Acacia, Sunshine, Freddie, Lisa, Didrik, Rhoney, Jerilyn, MG, and all the Garcia girls. The stadium was too new for this low-ceilinged, windowless room to have acquired the mold of a dungeon but it felt as if embraced by the disconcerting mycelium of plumbing and

wiring, the drone of deep and mysterious machinery seeping through the walls. The presence of old friends and long trusted colleagues overcame these shortcomings, enveloping us rather with the rooted, 'shroomy strength of ancient purpose, renewed and revitalized. We all felt it; we all knew. The music, the culture, the community lived on. Let those sky boxes float away to Mars. The show was supported from the field, the stands, and the bowels of the stadium.

ALAN TRIST served the Grateful Dead in a variety of capacities from 1970–2014, notably as manager of Ice Nine Publishing Company for twenty years. Educated at Cambridge University, he cofounded Hulogosi Books, which published several band-related titles, including Robert Hunter's translations of *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus* and his own *The Water of Life: A Tale of the Grateful Dead*. He edited *Alleys of the Heart*, Robert M. Petersen's collected poems, and coedited *The Complete Annotated Grateful Dead Lyrics*. His poems, essays, and other writings have appeared in a variety of periodicals.