

WHAT A LONG, STRANGE TRIP

Jerry Garcia raised the Dead to joyous heights, but bad habits finally silenced the truckin' troubadour

BEARDED AND GRAY, A MIDDLE-aged man whose weight sometimes ballooned to 300 pounds, Jerry Garcia seemed the antithesis of what a rock star is supposed to be. He giggled with childlike enthusiasm when he talked, dressed always in a little boy's playground uniform of T-shirt, sneakers and dungarees and sang in the cracked and reedy voice that made him sometimes sound on the verge of tears. His idea of stagecraft was to stand stock-still and utter not a word to the delirious multitudes who adored him. And yet he was a riveting figure onstage, a benevolent Buddha whose face beamed with merriment and sometimes sorrow as crystalline notes floated and soared and burst from the custom-made guitar that he seemed to play not with his hands, but his heart. "For me," Garcia once said about the music he performed for

over 30 years as leader of the Grateful Dead, "it's always emotional."

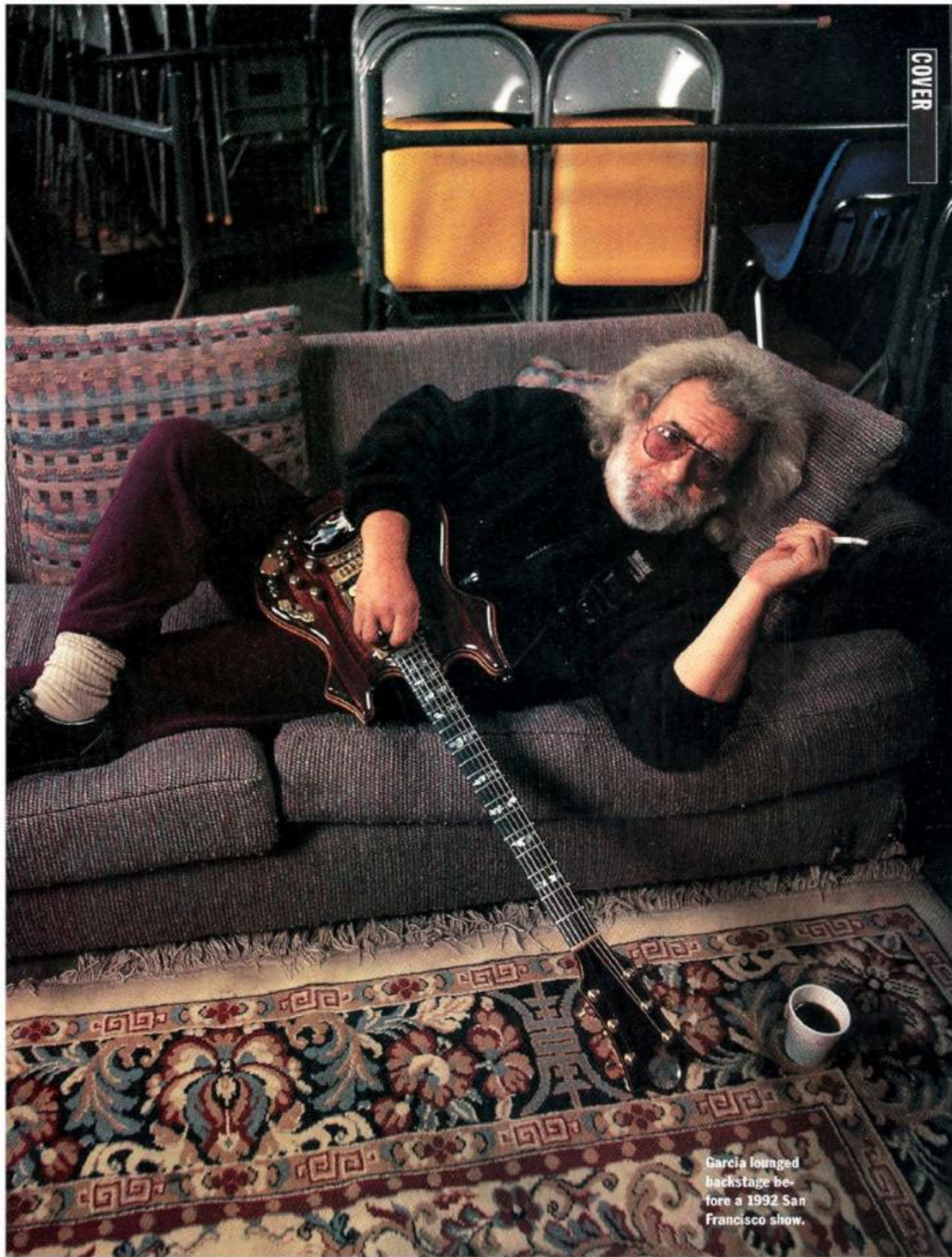
Last week, in the early morning hours of Wed., Aug. 9, Garcia's heart, 53 years old and ravaged by years of drug abuse and related health problems, gave out on him. The guitarist's comatose body was found before dawn during a routine bed check by a counselor at the Serenity Knolls drug treatment center in the San Francisco Bay Area town of Forest Knolls, where Garcia had checked in after an apparent relapse into a heroin addiction that had plagued him for years. Garcia was pronounced dead at 4:23 a.m. after a staff nurse and a Marin County paramedic each failed to revive him with CPR. "It was clearly a heart attack," says longtime Grateful Dead spokesman Dennis McNally, an opinion supported by the Marin County coroner's preliminary finding that the death "appears to be from natural causes."



A Mourners gathered in San Francisco to share their grief for Garcia. "It's truly the passing of an era," said one Dead fan. "There's nowhere to find the magic now."



COVER



Garcia lounged backstage before a 1992 San Francisco show.

➤ "He was the crown jewel of the Grateful Dead," Wavy Gravy says of Garcia (far right, performing in Indianapolis, July 6).

"I will more than miss him," says old San Francisco pal Joe McDonald, whose band, Country Joe & the Fish, was a Dead contemporary. "It's just terrible. There's a lesson here. It's a failure to get him to change his lifestyle. He could easily be alive today. He killed himself, make no mistake."

Garcia's fellow musicians feel the magnitude of the loss. "He created an entire subculture," says Chris Hillman, one of the founders of the Byrds. "He had his roots in bluegrass and blues and folk, and he was able to take that and make this eclectic mixture of sounds, always delving into more experimental things. He was a true musical explorer."

They scored only one Top 10 single—1987's "Touch of Grey"—in a 30-year history that produced more than 25 albums. Fans felt the recordings never quite captured the group's true spirit. But thanks to the communal magic of their live shows, the Dead have enjoyed a level of success seldom equaled in pop history. Indifferent to ever-changing and sometimes bewildering styles that have left most of their contemporaries on the music sidelines, contenting themselves with an occasional reunion tour, the Dead soldiered on, performing their own richly improvised, low-key and lilting amalgam of country, blues and psychedelic rock. Music-industry demographic experts could only gape in wonder at Dead concerts, which attract both middle-aged fans and thousands of tie-dyed teens and twentysomethings who



J. HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES/REUTERS



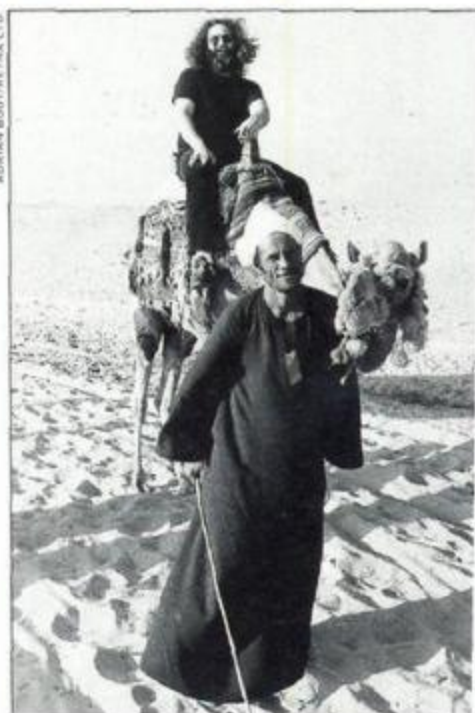
BROOKS BRANTFORD/REUTERS

▲ Deadheads (in Oakland in '91) form "a nomadic tribe," says filmmaker Andrew Behar.

▼ Garcia (second from right) and mates faced the press after a 1967 pot bust.



DAVID VETTER/AP



ADRIAN BOOTH/RETNA, LTD.



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A The 1966 Dead—Garcia (left), McKernan, Lesh, Weir, Kreutzmann—helped make Haight-Ashbury America's answer to Liverpool.

dervish dance and sing along with songs their parents might have been playing on their turntables while these Deadheads were being conceived. "It's not just music, it's a religion," says San Francisco poet Hugh Romney, better known as the cosmic clown Wavy Gravy. "The beauty of the Grateful Dead was their relationship with their fans. They just take this great big ball of love and bounce it out to the fans, and the fans bounce it back and each time it just gets bigger."

For Garcia, the Dead, whose con-

◀ "Playing Egypt," Garcia said of a 1978 concert trek, "was a fantasy."

cert earnings exceeded \$162 million since 1992—making them one of the richest acts in rock—fulfilled the yearning felt by the youth of overlapping generations to become part of a larger cultural community. When the Dead toured, many of their fans would follow them from city to city, hitching rides and camping out in stadium parking lots. "It is this time frame's version of the archetypal American adventure," he said in a 1993 *Rolling Stone* interview. "It used to be that you could run away and join the circus . . . or ride the freight trains."

"When we get onstage," he once said, "we really want to be trans-

formed from ordinary players to extraordinary ones, like forces of a larger consciousness. So maybe it's that seat-of-the-pants shamanism that keeps the audience coming back and what keeps it fascinating for us too."

Friends, family and fans had hoped that the reports of Garcia's death were false, that he had suffered another close call, as he had in 1986 when he slipped into a diabetic coma brought on by years of admitted hard-drug use. Scared into kicking his eight-year heroin habit, Garcia tried to quit his three-pack-a-day cigarette routine five years later after collapsing from exhaustion. "He was torturing his body

➤ Looking fit and happy in a sober business suit, Garcia wed Deborah Koons on Valentine's Day 1994, in a Sausalito, Calif., church. "It was very Episcopal," noted a guest. "It wasn't New Age at all."

Y Garcia communed at a 1970 Calgary pop festival with Delaney Bramlett (center) and second wife Mountain Girl, a former member of Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters.



ELIOT WOLFF/MAJORITY COURTESY DEBORAH KOONS



AP/WIDEWORLD

with a real bad hot-dog-and-milk-shake diet, cigarettes and no exercise for 30 years," McNally says. "He had improved, but he wasn't the kind of guy to be really rigid. The point is, he made a real commitment to it and that's the saddest irony of today. Maybe a lot of old stuff caught up with him."

Indeed, Sandy Troy, author of *Captain Trips*, a biography of Garcia, says that the musician checked himself into the Betty Ford Center in Rancho Mirage, Calif., in early July after the band's tour ended. And Garcia's William Morris agent, John Ferriter, who visited the singer and guitarist at his home shortly before his death,

confirms Garcia was exhausted after this summer's disastrous Dead tour, which was marred by fan riots in several cities and by two deaths. In response band members posted a warning on the Internet following a July 2 concert addressed to their Deadhead followers. "A few more scenes like Sunday night, and we'll quite simply be unable to play," the message read. "The spirit of the Grateful Dead is at stake, and we'll do what we have to do to protect it."

While McNally said in July that the tour disruptions were not likely to cause the breakup of the Grateful Dead, who were scheduled to go back on the road for an annual autumn tour,

work pressures may have taken their toll on Garcia. "He's been on this treadmill," says Country Joe McDonald. "He was supporting a lot of people. He was the patriarch of an enormous extended family of vendors, roadies, fans." Garcia's death could well mean the end of the band. "It seems impossible," says McDonald, "to have the Grateful Dead without Jerry Garcia."

As word of the death spread, shocked and saddened fans flooded the Dead's Internet sites, causing one in Sacramento to shut down from user overload. "Just received word or rumor that Jerry died today . . . please E-mail me and let me know," one worried fan pleaded. "He's gone, man," came the quick reply. A fan in Columbia, Mo., likened the blow to "losing your grandfather. . . . He was the most loved member of the Grateful Dead."

In San Francisco crowds gathered last Wednesday at the corner of Haight and Ashbury Streets, the neighborhood that gave birth to the Dead and the '60s counterculture they helped to spawn. To fans, Garcia has always been regarded as something of a mythic hero. And details of his life story are shared and pondered by Deadheads as a kind of liturgical rite. Garcia was 5 when he witnessed the drowning death of his father, Jose, a Dixieland bandleader who had named his son after Jerome Kern. Around the same time, the tip of Garcia's right middle finger was cut off in a wood-chopping accident. "I had all my bad luck back then," he later said, "when I was young and I could deal with it."

Raised by his mother, Ruth, who ran a saloon next to the merchant marine union hall near the San Francisco waterfront, Garcia began playing a guitar she bought him when he was 15. An avid reader but an atrocious student, he quit high school after one year, joined the Army, which gave him an early discharge, and briefly studied painting at what is now the San Francisco Art Institute, a stint that would pay off years later when Garcia's abstract art works were marketed in a line of neckties that have earned him more than \$30 million. By 1963, Garcia had formed a jug band that included founding Dead members Bob Weir and Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, who would die of a liver ailment in 1973. Inspired by the 1964 Beatles film *A*