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David Gans, De La Luz at Temple Ball, Carrboro, NC- 4/4

Paul Kerr
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David Gans is a man of many talents. A musician since 1970, he quickly branched out into journalism and editing (man I hope I remember to spell-check this), and by the mid-'80s was writing books on the Grateful Dead and Talking Heads. In 1988 he turned DJ and created the Grateful Dead Radio Hour, which he still hosts each week on 80 radio stations across the country. Gans' extensive knowledge of the Dead's body of work made him the perfect choice to co-produce their career-spanning *So Many Roads* box set, and he's currently working on a box set of Jerry Garcia's solo work. He's even credited with coaxing Phil Lesh out of retirement after Garcia's death with an invitation to jam with his band, leading Phil eventually to form Phil Lesh & Friends.

With a mind constantly reeling and reveling in music, it was only natural that by the mid-'90s he was ready to start creating his own original music again, releasing his first album in 1997. He came through the De La Luz performance space inside the Temple Ball art gallery in Carrboro, NC for a night of solo acoustic originals and classic covers. The bearded troubadour sporting a Donna the Buffalo sweater and a John Kerry button launched into "Our Lady of the Well" to open the show. His warm acoustic guitar held a friendly tone as the plaintive melody was peppered with harmonics. All of the sudden he started playing something completely insane, almost impossible to play on guitar. I had no idea he was this... oh, wait a minute. It's a loop machine. While not the turbo-model carnival-in-a-can variety that Keller Williams boasts, Gans' loop machine enabled him to lay down a track or three of his own riffs while picking out beautiful melodies over the top.

Since this is an election year rife with controversy and high emotions, Gans is speaking out politically more than usual. "On behalf of California, I want to apologize for Arnold Schwarzenegger," he said, gaining laughs and cheers from many in the audience. After an emotional rendering of the Dead's poignant "Brokedown Palace," he introduced "An American Family" by reminding the crowd how the system is designed to discourage people from voting. As Bob Weir told Gans in a recent interview, "If all the Deadheads in Florida had voted in 2000..."

After taking a moment to tune up between songs, someone yelled out, "It's good enough for jazz!" Gans replied, "It might be good enough for jazz, but I don't play jazz. I play nasty folk songs like this one." He then burst into the anti-corporate anthem "High Guy," whose folksy rhythm and everyman delivery betray the bohemian nature of the lyrics. The Dylan-esque moral challenges of "Who Killed Uncle John" came next, probing the depths of Garcia's downfall, the scene around him, and those in a position to witness it from various viewpoints. "Who killed Uncle John/And kept the show from going on?/'Not I,' said the mainstream press/'I found his image ludicrous/His followers were so uncool/I made him out to be a fool'."

He followed with his personal favorite Dead tune, "Lazy River Road," delivering a soulful vocal over the elegant melody and timeless changes. "Like a Dog," written with Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, led into a rearrangement of Hunter and the Dead's own "Ship of Fools." "This song's dedicated to democracy, which is currently in critical condition in a Republican hospital in Texas," he said, eliciting a huge cheer from the hometown crowd in this progressive enclave. The set rolled on with a rendition of "In Another World," originally written by roots-rock zydeco festival stalwarts Donna the Buffalo.

At this point, Gans invited opening act Matt & Miner back on stage to join him for the rest of his set. Mutual friends had introduced them beforehand and they had the rare opportunity to work out several songs in advance. Matt's banjo and Miner's mandolin and fiddle perfectly complemented Gans' guitar as they picked through the opening notes to the Dead's "Friend of the Devil." They continued with "Caroline" and "Trumpets of the Ocean" before pausing to tune up once again. "It was in tune when I bought it," Gans said, before easing into "Echolalia." Miner's sweet harmony vocals lent a delicate touch to the lonesome blues of "Waltzing Across Texas," which they followed



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"River and Drown" was up next, encouraging the listener to drown their sorrows in a metaphorical river of joy. "Let's go down to the river and drown/Ain't nothin' shakin' in this old town/Get out on the highway and follow that sound." The intense lyricism of Bob Dylan's "Senor (Tales of Yankee Power)" led to the rousing Deadhead paean "Down to Eugene" to close the set. One of Gans' catchiest, most crowd-pleasing numbers, the words spin the tale of a man on a mission. "Goin' through the parkin' lot I might get lost/Best place in the world to get your wires crossed/Reality shatters when you leap and shout/Some people go in and they never come out/I ain't been the same since my sanity fled/I'm goin' down to Eugene to see the Grateful Dead."

They had meant to close the show on this note, but the crowd response was so overwhelming they had no choice but to return for an encore. Introducing the next tune, Gans confessed they were literally improvising at this point. "I think I know it, I know they know it, whether *we* know it is another story." They glided into "Long Black Veil" before surprising the audience with an exquisite version of the Dead's eternal "Ripple." A perfect choice to end the show, the audience soared out of the venue with a smile on their face and a song in their ear.

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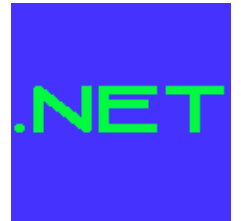
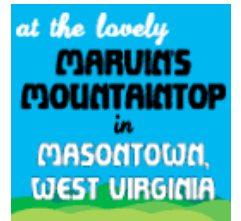


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