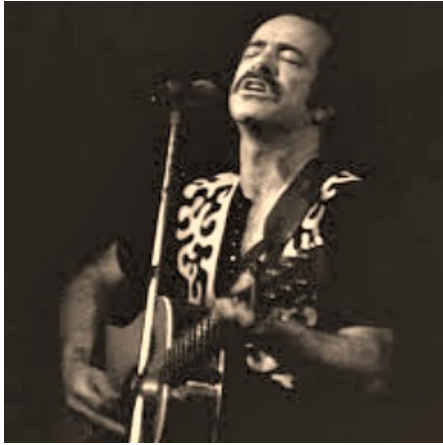


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YOU'RE MISSING: Robert Hunter

Article by: Justin Guinn

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“Inspiration move me brightly, light the song with sound and color.” -- Robert Hunter, “Terrapin Station”

In 1961, Palo Alto, Calif. aligned with the center of the cosmos. You may not hear many astrologists confirm this, but it is most certainly the truth, for from the tremendous depths of this interstellar configuration sprouted a lifelong friendship between Jerry Garcia and writer Robert Hunter, which subsequently led to an utmost decadent musical catalogue.

Hunter and Jerry played together in multiple bluegrass bands in the early '60s. Then, as Jerry went on to -- well, you know what he did -- Hunter focused on a Joycean quest as a novelist. Books beset him not, however, and as fate so often has it, another path beckoned Hunter.

Robert Hunter - "Friend of the Devil (Live)"

He maintained a causal relationship with Jerry and ended up sending some lyrics to the Grateful Dead. These lyrics would become the songs “China Cat Sunflower” and “The Eleven.” It’s alleged he came up with the lyrics while on LSD and mailed them to the band from Arizona. Hunter, like Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*), was a volunteer for Stanford University’s testing in psychedelic chemicals in the early '60s. This certainly comes through in his writing, as well as the Grateful Dead’s psychedelic feel. That feel was never more true for Hunter’s writing then in 1967, during a slew of early shows at Rio Nido, Calif., when he wrote the first verse to what would become the psychedelic ensemble Grateful Dead fans revere, “Dark Star.” Many DeadHeads refer to these shows in Rio Nido as the Dead’s ascension to the fulfillment of their psychedelic improvisational ability.

Hunter never performed with the band, but his place in the ranks of the Grateful Dead is unquestionable. His name graces the bylines of numerous Grateful Dead classics and deep tracks:

Sugaree, Tennessee Jed, Loose Lucy, Loser, Brown-Eyed Women, [Stella Blue](#), Black Peter, Bertha, Saint Stephen, Touch of Grey, Uncle John’s Band, Casey Jones, Attics of My Life, Box of Rain, Candyman, Easy Wind, Sugar Magnolia, Scarlet Begonias, Truckin’, U.S. Blues, Ripple

And that’s just to name a few. His writing elevated the band’s identity from psychedelically jam-normous to a wholesome, well-rounded storytelling troupe (whilst maintaining the former feel). So much so, in fact, that when the Grateful Dead were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994, Hunter was included as a band member, making him the only non-performing member in the Hall of Fame to receive such an honor. But, Hunter’s story did not end with the Grateful Dead. He has written songs with Bob Dylan, Bruce Hornsby & The Noisemakers, New Riders Of The Purple Sage, and Los Lobos. He also has released some solo efforts, and he has etched himself as a notable novelist and poet.

Still, his legacy will always last in lyrics like: “Dark Star crashes / Pouring its light into ashes” (“Dark Star”); “Every silver lining’s got a touch of grey” (Touch of Grey); “Once in a while, you get shown the light / In the strangest of places, if you look at it right” (“Scarlet Begonias”); and, probably his most famous line, “What a long, strange trip it’s been” (“Truckin”). As further testament to Hunter’s vibrant writing, Grateful Dead band mate Mickey Hart said of working with Hunter on an album earlier this year:

“When you’re in a situation in the future and you can’t explain it, very often a Hunter line or two or three will explain something that’s unexplainable.”



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