

DARK STAR - APRIL 8TH 1972 – A MUSICAL ODD-ESSAY

GRATEFUL DEAD

(FIRST AND LAST SLEEVE NOTES)

Bill Giles

(The music to which this relates can be heard on "Steppin' Out with the Grateful Dead", Arista GDCD 4084, Disc 4, issued in 2002 and "Europe '72: The Complete Recordings, issued in 2011 as well as on unofficial sources (see later))

Improvised music is not normally a subject for writing: it advances by osmosis between musicians in a time continuum and it is rare that it arrives at points that are easily describable in words. The Grateful Dead's explorations are rarely analysed from a musicological standpoint, and quite rightly - they wouldn't generally tell you much. But the 8 April 1972 Dark Star has an unusual abundance of harmonically describable points. Plainly, it is futile to describe the music - it speaks for itself - but it may be possible to use its musical 'describability' to understand better (and so marvel yet more at) the individual and collective genius that creates it. We may be able to learn something about what is going on between the players on a musical plane and hopefully understand also how or why something 'works'.

The aim of this written exploration is to catalyse even greater enjoyment of the music. It involves a bit of musical analysis, but I've tried to explain the few technical points in lay terms and so hope that it's sufficiently 'non-musician friendly' to be readable by all who are open to trying another way to get inside the beast.

What's the score?

I'm an amateur pianist, played in the Paris-based GD cover band, Deadicace, (and now, since 2016, in The Grateful Dudes in the UK) and have long been intrigued about how good group improvisation works. 8 April 1972 at the Wembley Empire Pool, London, happened to be my first Grateful Dead concert. That it also happens to be one of my favourite Dark Stars is, I think, a mere coincidence or subliminal - my tape-unaided specific memories of the gig come from the first set; the second was just a wash of pleasure. But I guess a first gig boosts enthusiasm!

As does familiarity. We've been lucky enough to be able to hear this Dark Star in excellent quality since early 1973 - at least the 24 minute extract (5.28 – 29.43) that the Dead gave to the six-sided, UK-released Revelation 'Glastonbury Fayre' LP as a token of apology for not making the 1971 solstice Festival (they got holed up in the Château d'Hérouville). Alongside Live Dead (which had a few years' start), I guess it's the most listened-to piece of the Dead in my collection. Then, a few years ago, David Gans played the whole Dark Star > Sugar Magnolia > Caution sequence on Grateful Dead Hour. At last, the full suite! And I've been heartened to hear many people say that they too think it's up there amongst the very very finest Stars. John R. Dwork's piece in Taper's Compendium Vol 1 also sets out a pretty convincing case.

But why is it musically great? The simple and most important answer is that it has astonishing range and colour, exquisite melodies, great rhythms, frequent and often unexpected build-ups and releases of harmonic, rhythmic and dynamic tension; and that the music flows seamlessly from mood to mood with all the individual and collective genius that the Dead bring to their art. It also has a certain genuine uniqueness - there really is nothing else like it - but it's not that quality itself which makes it great.

Can we go further? You can always go further! I've poked around it, trying to understand a few things about how it works, and I think there's a story to tell here about why 8 April '72 is musically *exceptional* and about the genius of the band and Garcia. Indeed, the deeper you dig, the richer the vein. I've found for myself a number of surprises that I hadn't realised I was having!

So let's try, with apologies in advance to those for whom it's too convoluted, too superficial, or too irrelevant. And if you want to read an abridged version, skip to minute 20 of the disc and 'Movement 5' of this text and take it from there.

Astronomical Anatomy

Some background. If you choose to analyse the 27 Feb '69 Dark Star (the Live Dead version) and you've listened to some of the many other versions the band played either side of that gig, you hear that they - essentially Garcia - had developed a set of musical signposts, motifs that occur only once on any one night but which recur from performance to performance. Openly designed, they provide some glue for the improvisation - territories to take brief refuge in, and to use as launchpads for a next development. One reason why 27 Feb '69 and many other early '69 Stars flow so well is because these waypoints facilitate seamless transitions, keeping a musical continuity that would otherwise have probably been lacking.

Time moves on, the band discards signposts - if you're playing them every night they are repetitive and a constraint on free development. And so Dark Star becomes an even freer form vehicle, with associated increase in collective musical 'risk', as we enter 1970 and '71. But there's a fair amount of caution. To take a well known example, the 13 Feb '70 Dark Star (Dick's Picks 4), like 27 Feb '69, never really strays from the root key of A major (which is that of the introductory riff and of the verse). While the Dead's courageous inventiveness has always prevented Dark Star from ever being merely a 'jam in A major', it has generally revolved around the key of A major in the mixolydian mode, and the related chords of G major and E minor (the chords of the verse) and D major and B minor in their corresponding modes. This means, in very broad terms, that the musicians can generally play the notes of the A mixolydian mode (*a,b,c#,d,e,f#,g*) across each chord. Or to put it another way, any other note (with various exceptions in context) would normally sound as a bum note.

Of course, this is a gross oversimplification, but I hope it conveys the point that Dark Star was conceived and developed in and around A mixolydian (hey, nice word, but I'll try not to use it too often), and that this provides a comfort zone for musician and attuned listener alike. But your friends who find Dark Star "monotonous" may, amongst other things, be reacting to the fact that it rarely changes key or harmonic.

In harmonic terms, the 8 April improvisation steps off this path, with large sections played in the key of D minor in the dorian mode. D dorian is made up of all the natural notes (ie white notes on a keyboard) - so the 'c#' and 'f#' above all become 'illegal' while 'c' and 'f' become legitimate. But forget the details of the notes: the point is that there is a distinct harmonic shift in the piece which creates a tension and removes any sense of 'monotony'.

Harmonically, it moves broadly through the following main phases:

1.	00.00 – 03.45	A major / E minor	Introduction
2.	03.45 – 10.05	D minor	First exploration
3.	10.05 – 16.05	A major	Verse and space
4.	16.05 – 22.08	D minor	Second exploration, concluding in D major
5.	22.08 – 27.05	Dmaj > Amaj	Resolution
6.	27.05 – end	A / G / D	Coda

There are two main facets worth highlighting now about the harmonic structure:

- First, the shifts between A major and D minor, as described above, which generate that overarching harmonic structural tension. (Because we are dealing with an improvisation, it would be pretentious to say that the A major / D minor tensions serve to heighten the satisfaction that arises from the final resolution into A major in Phases 5 & 6; but a classical music critic would be tempted to venture the point if the piece had been composed.)
 - It may be worth adding here that the band had recently (late '71) started big time experimentation with D minor in the Playing in the Band jams. I haven't particularly researched the point, but I don't think D min features in earlier (or indeed later) Dark Stars.
- The second general harmonic highlight lies within the D minor phases 2 and 4 themselves, and relates to Garcia's readiness to solo in a major mode over a minor chord backing.

Rats, I hear you say, this is all getting too technical: majors, minors, modes, molars, back teeth.... Hold in there! Simply put, the difference between major and minor depends on the 3rd note of the scale. Thus the 3rd note in D min is 'f' whereas in D maj it is 'f#'. But the effect of moving from one to the other is dramatic: prime examples of major / minor modulations in the key of D in GD songs are:

- Playing in the Band: Garcia's motif (or riff) at the end of the sung choruses is in D major; as the jam opens, the music transforms into D minor. Then, at the end of the jam, that same motif which returns them towards the song moves the piece back from D min to D maj. You *feel* those changes.
- China Doll: the root chord of the song is D minor. After the fourth verse, the chord that immediately precedes and initiates the chorus "Take up your china" is D major, as is the chord on the word "fall". The piece has moved from minor to major - and you feel the uplift.

All those changes are composed - planned and expected. Moving between the major and minor of a common root is one of the oldest compositional tricks in the book. But you are generally in one or the other. Even blues and jazz where the minor third is typically bent up to the major on the guitar, or slid up on the piano (a 'blue' note), do not easily tolerate equivocation here. And changing from one to the other in an improvisation is risky territory when you know that, generally, collective or individual failure to spot and adopt a major / minor modulation made by one player sounds bad, though skilfully and sparingly used momentary ambiguity can generate great beauty or poignancy. As we'll see, the band negotiates a number of minor / major changes in the keys of both A and D; and Garcia's soloing over D minor employs harmonic ambiguity to exceptional effect.

People talk about band members' mutual knowledge enabling them to finish off one another's phrases, and there's a lot in that. But when you're actually in a group improvisation, there's a continual dynamic process in which individuals make moves and then others come in and confirm their choices (or not, as the case may be). This is most obvious when someone teases a song coming out of a jam - sometimes everyone gets on board quickly, sometimes slowly or progressively, sometimes not at all. But it is also true about every substantive change of chord or mode or rhythm within an improvisation - mutual confirmation of a change is essential, and the quicker it comes and is agreed, the more the music will flow (and sound good), and the more the musician(s) will have confidence in the path being developed or followed. If a change is not heard, confirmed, adopted, explored, flow may break down (eg collapse into space, noodling, cacophony - all of which have their merits!). Listening, hearing, responding to changes, outrageous or subtle, is the plasma of group improvisation

And let's just remember too that making Dark Star a real adventure - preventing it from lapsing into a 'jam in A major' - requires not only incessant exploration but also individual self-abandonment and willingness to take collective and personal musical risks. The further you stray from familiar harmonic territory, the less instinctive the confirmatory responses - but perhaps all the more mutually stimulating if and when they arrive. And, of course, all changes have quality: not all are necessarily inspired and 'successful'.

Putting to one side individual brilliance and the inspired quality of the changes, I guess that part of the magic of the 8 April '72 Dark Star is not only that there are a lot of rhythmic and harmonic changes proposed and accepted, but that the main changes (osmoses) are finally unambiguous because they go outside the normal harmonic root and hence are more aurally striking. And the often difficult modulations between keys and between major and minor modes, created by one player, are rapidly adopted by the group, so that the musical flow never really falters. A lot happens with little waiting time between events - indeed, the speed at which musical transactions occur appears to increase as the exploration advances.

So let's get on with the show.

(Note: the timings given in the text are originally those from the CDR copy re-mastered by myself and treed initially in Europe in Oct 2000 via eurotraders and in the US in Dec 2000 via CDead. For identification purposes, Disc 3 is 60.34 minutes long, Shnid no.2534. Streamable at < <https://archive.org/details/gd72-04-08.sbd.giles-jeffm.2534.sbeok.shnf> > Also downloadable on Lossless Legs. To take a single reference point for comparison with other versions, the first word of the verse starts at 10.53 on the disc; on the stream it falls at 11.00 (ie. +7 seconds) .

Post-Script 1: The music was officially released on "Steppin' Out with the Grateful Dead" in 2002. I am pleased to say the timings are identical with those of the above disc.

Post-Script 2: Dead air precedes the version in the "Europe '72: The Complete Recordings" box set, so the timings all run 38 seconds later, and the first word of the verse falls at 11.31.)

Post-Script 3: On the Charlie Miller shnid 83714 (also on archive.org) the timings are +4 seconds.

(Note also that I've used the convention that chords are typed in upper case (A, Bb, B ...) and are major unless otherwise written. Individual notes are in lower case (a, bb, b ...).)

Movement I Introduction: American Ambiguity (0.00 - 5.24)

Following a faster than usual 'It Hurts Me Too', Dark Star's standard format opening is also slightly up-tempo, and well-executed by the guitars and drums quartet. Weir is quick to start developing the A mixolydian envelope, playing a series of insistent E minor chords between 0.30 - 0.46, returning to A major with Garcia at 0.47, when the piano makes its first entry. From 1.20 the band makes a similar visit into E min, underpinned more by the bass this time; and they all sense their way into the resolution back to A again at 1.47. By 2.00, we're revisiting E min again, driven by a succession of high riffs from the bass. The undergrowth then thickens, but Garcia starts to find a way out around 2.40, peaking 25 seconds later.

All this is classic, elegant Dark Star. But as the music returns to sea level, listen carefully to the repeating lead guitar phrase 3.27 - 3.38, supported by the piano in its last iteration. We'll hear the piano recall precisely the same phrase to delightful effect in 18 minutes' time.

Comfort territory now starts to erode at 3.45 as Weir, instantly followed by Godchaux, moves from the underlying E minor to D minor, taking the first step out of A mixolydian mode. The 'd' bass notes from 3.56 cautiously confirm this, yet while the backing remains in the minor, Garcia's solo run includes 'f#' at 4.17 and 4.20 - so he's not yet in D minor territory. But at 4.25 we hear both Bob and Keith persist and now Garcia follows suit, underpinned by Weir's increasingly insistent D min chords from 4.32. Garcia sets up a nice development which finally runs out of steam around 5.10, leaving the band hovering in minor mode while Garcia's delicate little run (5.16 - 5.23) again glances past in D major, renewing the major / minor ambiguity. Godchaux and Weir then exploit this as if of one mind, the piano sliding down from g/e > f/d (minor) at 5.25, and the rhythm guitar following with (major) f#/d > e/c in identical phrasing four seconds later - the stuff of composition! We'll hear this collectively ambivalent interplay between D major and D minor return downstream: its early genesis here generates a kind of structural harmonic ambiguity - almost like a game the band decides to play that night - which, against the odds, is exploited to remarkable effect.

Movement II Nailing and Flailing (5.25 - 10.05)

Glastonbury LP addicts long wondered just where the beast unleashed from 5.25 by Garcia's fast tapping that 'd' note came from. If the choice of note owes much to the preceding section, the unremitting, insistent, irregular pulse as the tapping becomes hammering is nothing less than a gargantuan cosmic flash. The subtleties of harmonic ambiguity instantly vanish from view. Billy's at the bench by 5.40, doubtless surprised by this abrupt and now unrelenting change of mood, but you can't argue with Jerry's sudden bat-outta-hell determination: were these the moments Dick Latvala had in mind when he said this Dark Star "nails you to the wall"?! By 5.45 Godchaux and Weir are settled on pumping D minor. The beat thickens, Lesh starts thumping 'd' at 5.57 and, when Garcia then puts down his mallet to solo, you've been plucked from your push-chair walk in the rose garden and dropped on the roof of a monster locomotive hurtling and swaying through some ravaged landscape, Keith colouring the hills, Garcia following a spellbinding trail, throwing your sense of direction with those lightning somersault twirls at 6.17 and 6.47-52. The D minor backing is solid but not complacent: 6.33 sees Weir strike some A major chords but nobody responds to them.

There are at least three interlocking stories - metric, bass-ic and harmonic - to tell about the following minutes. In the metric department, the music has been pummelling forward with a strong beat but absolutely no meter. From about 7.23, Garcia's solo slips into 6/8 time (count 1-2-3 4-5-6). It feels like it will be shortlived as Garcia plays against the time (7.35-7.40), only to resurge with greater rhythmic definition from 7.43, now clearly supported by Kreutzmann. Bill's drumming in this 6/8 section is spectacular (those rolls from 7.56 - 8.00!), and from 8.15 he's playing more through the beat than on it, entrusting the meter for safekeeping to the instrumentalists if they want it. Garcia's two-note repeating phrase from 8.28 - 8.49, for example, and Phil's riff (see below) at this time maintain the 6/8; at risk of floundering early in minute 9, it remains the meter for Garcia's solo from 9.22 until it naturally disaggregates between 9.45 and 9.54, leaving the space for Garcia to announce the verse theme at 9.59 and for the required 4/4 meter to settle into place from 10.01.

As for the bass, Phil finds a new motif from 8.07 which, from 8.21, becomes a quite distinctive riff which my partner in pianism, Jean-Michel, notes is virtually identical to the riff in 6/8 time underpinning Wayne Shorter's 'Footprints' (1967). Phil develops it until around 9.15. A conscious nod to the modern jazz fraternity? (He visits the same riff in *The Other One* at the following concert on 11 April in Newcastle.)

Meanwhile, on the harmonic front, Garcia again plays his lines at 7.07 in the major key, quickly supported from the piano over the band in the minor. At 7.46 by dint of luck the band all momentarily chime E minor, but within the D dorian mode in which the music remains anchored. At 9.27-9.31 Garcia once again performs the major solo over minor backing track until the rhythm and key for the song verse are set up with the near-classical precision of a chamber quintet from 9.54, Keith adorning that change with elegance from the upper register. And so at 10.05 we're re-established in A, resolutely major at 10.16, a 4/4 signature in place, all sweetly teed up for the verse.

Movement III Verse and Converse (10.05 - 16.01)

The verse and following interlude are nicely executed, and the space from 12.45 stays mainly in A or A7. It works very satisfyingly. But we enter major > minor modulation mood at 13.50 when Keith drops into and then builds an A minor arpeggio, strongly confirmed by Phil's 'c' notes at 14.00, 14.04 and 14.06, all while Jerry saws and Bob feeds back. Then at 14.11 Phil starts hitting 'd'. It's perfectly compatible with the band hovering around A minor, but a tense fourth - foreboding!; his 'g' at 14.32 and following 'f#' at 14.35 provide the band with the base for a B minor 9th construction which, with the band just rolling down a grassy slope together, cascades miraculously into E minor at 14.55. Did they rehearse that or what? From 14.59 they're resolved back in A major, home ground.

The next mode change is at 15.37 - Godchaux goes chromatic, working the 'off-key' semitones of 'f' and 'bb' to take the band into A7 (-9) and some interesting bass-ment excavations.

Movement IV Godchaux Combo (16.02 - 20.37)

And then from 16.02 Keith breathes the germ of the next idea, the previous 'off-key' 'f's' providing a natural route for a perfectly fluid, classically styled, second transition into D minor. Billy resumes playing after 2 1/2 minutes' silence; at 16.18 Jerry lands on a pretty conclusive 'd', Keith all the while ornamenting in D minor, while Phil wisely waits out to see where this is going. At 16.26 he returns to work and from 16.30 - 38 the collective mind is pregnant, listening, waiting for the change of direction to reveal itself..... and it opens into a light, quiet, fast rhythm, Billy working the high hat and cymbals and occasional bass drum; 16.36 - 16.42 Jerry, Phil, Keith, and Billy hear one another's minds to perfection, Phil delivering from 16.40 the clearest pointer to the route ahead, while the rhythm guitar just hums. Hey, we're going *dancing* in D minor. Keith certainly knows where he's headed at 16.58 as the piano starts to lead the band with that supple jazz rhythm, modulating with the lead guitar and bass into G major at 17.15 - 20, and again around 17.37 - 17.42. The lead guitar / piano / drums / bass interplay throughout this section is just so deft - magical. 18.02 and 18.05 Keith touches the tiller with a motif to which the rhythm guitar, largely absent from the jazz quartet, chimes a response at 18.08, turning the outstanding into the sublime. By 18.32 Garcia and Kreutzmann are getting angry, and by 18.42 the piano has dropped into C minor, way off D dorian, yet with such modal magnetism that the band seems to coalesce around it. Bob's earlier silence has risen to screaming pitch at 19.04, but by 19.15 we've shifted back into D minor. Garcia leads the swooping descent from 19.18, nicely repeating at 19.34 the D min / G maj modulation played a minute earlier, which Weir recalls yet again at 19.56 - light and occasional touches like these give the improvisation integrity, points of reference for the ear. At 20.02 Garcia revisits 'f#' to keep the major / minor ambiguity flame alight, while at 20.20 the band shifts more substantially into G major before settling back into D minor built on 'd' in the bass at 20.39. Just about exactly perfect.

Movement V Moses came ridin' up on a guitar (20.38 - 27.28)

Around 19.25 the organ had entered the music for the first time - truly admirable, well-judged restraint from Pigpen - and from about 20.08 it briefly comes to the fore as the band regroup, a nice new texture that follows the 20.20 - 20.38 modulation into G and then immediately helps shape the next rhythmic development, before retiring again at 21.14. Just why Pigpen swirls in D major from 21.00 onwards is anyone's guess - but let's suppose that he was taking a leaf from Jerry's book and perpetuating the major / minor ambiguity.

I guess there's a technical term for the arpeggiated trilling that Garcia starts at 20.44 - but I'll call it strimulating. Whatever it is, it sounds nice and provides a space for things to develop. Weir steps smartly in with a new riff at 20.51; *spurs a-jingling*, Jerry strimulates and builds. We're still very solidly in D minor at 21.08, a common 4/4 meter apparently in place, Keith laying down some rhythmic tension, Garcia hunting, trying to find space. By 21.21 the thing is simmering nicely. Your classic jam band would probably

just get louder here, keep on building. Not the Dead – they seem to feel they've reached the plateau - *the door is ajar* - so much so that at 21.22, hearing Garcia's preparatory 'g a', Kreutzmann and Godchaux smartly step back, the dynamic suddenly quietens - like "clear the way, the guitar's got something to say!" And it does. *His manner was bold*. The waves part and Garcia steps forth. 21.24 'd'; 21.25 'e'; and then at 21.26 Jerry plays that note - 'f#' - the major third - a blazing beacon of a note. Musicologically it's just not right - a bum note! Or as Jean-Michel succinctly observed, "C'est très acide". *His reason was spent*. Lesser mortals would have played something in keeping with the D minor backing; and lesser mortals, if they had played 'f#', might have tried to work it again into the succeeding phrases. Not Mr Garcia. That 'f#' radiates alone, unrepeatable and unrepentant, an outrageous but beautiful peak of tension that puts us momentarily back in major lead over minor backing territory, which Garcia with singular mastery then resolves, stepping through 'e', 'd' and 'c#' en route to the safety of root 'd' (21.31). A fabulous vision.

But that's just the story of the melody: when the beat falls on Jerry's 'd' at 21.31, the band is of one perfect rhythmic mind. Garcia's following repeated 'e's do the double trick ('double E's'?!) of maintaining the melodic tension while building a rhythmic catharsis that the band makes the most of: when they create the beat at 21.40, the cosmos is of one perfect mind. The waves come crashing back down. Weep for joy. Melodic curve ball and rhythmic double whammy in less than 20 seconds! *You can't close the door when the wall's caved in*. Remember that 1960s Garcia interview with Ralph J Gleason about playing so that the beat was when it happened, rather than something that was laid down? The Dead have done it many times and this one surely counts among the very best. I had been thinking that it was easier than some of the others because they are effectively playing in 4/4 time, but counting it out shows it's not so straightforward. If you start counting four to the bar from Weir's riff at 20.51, you will find yourself 30 'bars' later at 21.55; and, as you'd expect, the cathartic beats at 21.31 and 21.40 land on the first beat of a 'bar'. But Jerry's phrasing is not what you'd expect: the first 'd' and the 'f#' when he steps out at 21.24 feel like first beats of a bar - but they're actually 3rd beats of a notional regular 'bar' pattern. And Bob's perfectly positioned chords cut right across natural phrasing. We're not in a regular pattern at all. Look at it any way you will, this whole section is a giant tribute to Garcia's sense of melody, phrase and timing, and to the band's astonishing sense of 'ensemble'. If I ever had to reduce my GD music collection to 90 seconds (tough game!), 20.30 - 22.00 would be a strong candidate for the loop!

And the story doesn't end there. Keith subtly endorses Garcia's beacon note with his piano run in D major from 21.47 – another right-on touch from a master accompanist; so responsive, so quick to pick up a nuance in chord, mode, or rhythm - and, more amazing still, a precise repeat of the Garcia's phrase in the Introduction at 3.28! Send for the composer! In the 21.50's Lesh and Weir are still in the minor, but at 22.08 Keith, followed by Phil, settle the band into the quiet section in D major, for a gentle recovery and 'happy' resolution to the D minor excursions. *Cool clear water*. Bill's quiet but fast insistent rhythm from 22.15 sets a nice contrast to the bass melody and new-found instrumental calmness.

From 22.45, Bob starts playing neutral A chords, that get taken into the minor by the others. Then - extraordinary flash! - from 23.12 Garcia plays the essence of the tune of the verse in A major via his volume control, which Weir sets in D major at its conclusion at 23.29 and then follows up with an inspired F# minor chord at 23.34, before returning to the mainstream D major from 23.40. Always exploring, Bob fields E minor at 24.15, but it's too fragile to resist the approaching forces of the haunting atonal landscapes that arrive at 24.24, a stark contrast to what precedes and follows.

Movement VI Grooving down the road (27.30 - 31.34)

At 27.03 the wah-wah return from purgatory sits on A in the bass, planted in A major by Keith from 27.05, building a nice tension around the sustained 4th. And if you thought this was again looking like a pretty happy place to be, you're right; and then it just gets happier. At 27.28 the resolution is complete, the piano arpeggios and cymbals now creating fresh space for the guitar to announce something new. Garcia kicks the wah-wah off and, once again with perfect flow, sets up at 27.31 the harmonics (A mixolydian) and tempo for a joyous tune. Bob is with him immediately, developing a riff to match after 2 bars from 27.36, and Kreutzmann and Lesh put it into solid 4/4 time another two bars later. At 28.02, 24 bars in, Garcia lifts his tune, and does so again 48 bars in - delightful melody. At 28.57, after 64 bars in A, Garcia holds the 'a' at the end of his phrase, leaving space for Bob to develop something new. Fine musicianship. Weir lays down a simple diminished descent in A for 8 bars, but Garcia and Lesh have something more melodic and gambolling in mind, as they jointly make known in the 8 bars from 29.08. Weir waits out for a few moments to get the hang - great musicianship again (silence is golden). By 29.18 it's gelled sufficiently for Billy to put

it into double time and for the whole band to have picked up on Garcia's and Lesh's underlying chord structure, which Garcia then develops like this:

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|A . . . |G . D/f# . |A/e . . . |A . . .  
|A . . . |G . D/f# . |A/e . . . | . . .  
|A . . . |G . D/f# . |A/e . . . |A . . .  
|A . . . |D . . . | . . . |A . . . (*)  
|A . . . |D . . . | . . . |A . . . | (*)
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(* Third time round, Weir plays the fourth and fifth lines as |A . . . |D . . . |Dmin . . . |A . . . | (30.31 - 30.42). And on the shortened fifth time round he plays it as the fourth line.)

This 20 bar phrase (interesting variant on the normally safer 16) repeats 3 times with Garcia's playing keeping a firm hold on the structure, Weir making the variant above.

Fourth time round (from 30.42), Garcia lets go to play a solo and Weir completely revises the backing structure to play the same line as his variant. Not only does it shorten to 16 bars, it now reads:

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|A . . . |Dmaj . . . |Dmin . . . |A . . .  
|A . . . |Dmaj . . . |Dmin . . . |A . . .  
|A . . . |Dmaj . . . |Dmin . . . |A . . .  
|A . . . |Dmaj . . . |Dmin . . . |A . . . |
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Garcia's solo negotiates the changes perfectly. "Why create an improvised structure if you can't then bend it?" says Bob. Or "Hell, can't I trust these guys to hold a 20 bar structure together?!", wonders Jerry as he drives hard back (31.05) into the first line of his structure so everyone knows he's starting the fifth round, and with his original chord sequence (slightly adapted as the G and D elements become more akin to A sus4/7 and A sus4 respectively). *(Note: the Weir-driven structure is a part-precursor - a sort of bastard uncle - to the later 'Mind Left Body jam' which was generally played as a 24 bar sequence, the A > Dmaj > Dmin > A line repeating four times as above but then followed by 8 bars in E.)*

And on this fifth time round, you can hear Garcia just slightly slow down, leaning on his chords, from 31.17, no doubt signalling "time to move on" with eye-contact too. If Kreutzmann had also slackened the rhythm here, it's a fair bet they'd have segued to a slow Garcia song; but the rhythm doesn't let up and Garcia neutralises the fifth line of the original chord sequence (31.29), creating space for Weir who, right on the ball, announces Sugar Magnolia at 31.31 with the distinctive roll into the E major cadence. Keith's repeating chord and then Garcia's extended 'a' help provide the necessary space for Bill to adjust his sticks to the rhythm required for the song..... and The Grateful Dead have just completed one of their finest ever song-to-song transitions.

On one level, there's nothing devastatingly musically clever about this Movement which sits first in A and then in a semi-conventional country structure. But the enchanting melody that Garcia creates over A is exceptionally fluent and supremely beautiful; the transition to the 'country structure' occurs with a remarkable aplomb; and the structure itself maintains perfect coherence, paradoxically all the more so for its irregularity and Garcia's instantly adapted solo. Simply a monumentally fine coda to the struggles, risks, adventures and tensions of the previous half hour, and a truly remarkable piece of solo and ensemble improvisation in itself. In the same way that classical musicians will tell you it can be harder to do justice to early Mozart than to more flamboyant composers, the same is in many ways true of conjuring a melodic structured improvisation - if only because it's obvious if someone flubs their unwritten script.

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What more can be said? Listen to it again!! Admire the genius, the creativity. Listen to the band listen to themselves. Hear the band hear itself. I hope these explorations may further deepen your appreciation of this music and the talents that combined to create it.

BG

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Comments are always welcome. You can contact me via The Grateful Dudes' website:
www.gratefuldudes.co.uk

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