

NOW WE'RE TALKIN'



By Helen Marketti

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, HOT TUNA, NEW PROJECTS

A Conversation with Jorma Kaukonen

The name is synonymous with the 60s whenever you hear a song by Jefferson Airplane who were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996. He still tours with Hot Tuna and his good friend, Jack Casady. Today we are still hearing great music created by Jorma Kaukonen. His new album, *Ain't In No Hurry (Red House Records)* was released in February. It is a combination of familiar and original tunes. Music fans will hear a combination of blues, traditional and folk styles.

In My Dreams is a track from the new album, which speaks to what we all go through in life. All we have is this present moment in time and it is important to make the most of that time with those in your life. "I first started thinking about putting the album together in 2013. Normally, I am deadline driven," said Jorma. "*In My Dreams* came to me while I was in Pennsylvania. I was just waking up and the line "we never seem to age in my dreams" was in my thoughts. I hurried to write it down before anything could be a distraction. I did not turn on the TV or the computer which would have been spirit killers and the moment would have been lost. I like to use pencil and paper when I'm writing. I usually put the first drafts on paper and play my guitar. I wrote most of the song in one day. I started playing it at a few of my shows when it occurred to me that it had been a number of years since I did my last solo album. We approached Red House Records who gave us the go-ahead and then I had a deadline. I had some other songs too that I was thinking about including. I am happy with the album."

"The song, *Sweet Fern* is a song by the June Carter family. It is a lesser-known song from their catalog. I used to play it when I was in New York in 1961. The song is from a female perspective but I changed the wording so it would be coming from a male perspective," explains Jorma. "Many of my friends are younger than I am and I had thought about the ones who have daughters who are in the service and had to leave their family behind which is why I included that song on the album."

"I am trying to do better at jotting down ideas when inspiration hits. It's good to carry a little pocket notebook because you never know what you might see or overhear. It could be something a waitress said in a diner or two people having a conversation in a parking lot. Any time you hear anyone say anything vaguely interesting; write it down because you never you know when you can turn what you heard into a song."

Jorma started out playing the piano before he switched to guitar. "I wish I would have stuck with piano a little longer because everything I know and converse about music in a traditional way stems from my taking piano lessons. I switched to the guitar when I was a teenager because first of all, it's cool! I think guitars are cool looking and *make* you look cool. When I started playing guitar, the instruments of choice at that time were drums, piano or saxophone. The guitar came into its own with rock and roll. You can play any kind of music on the guitar. It's versatile; it's portable and the perfect instrument."

Jorma discusses meeting deadlines and finishing albums. "Well back in olden days when I was with the Airplane and we were popular for about twenty minutes (*laughs*), we finished *Surrealistic Pillow* in less than two weeks. When we started to gain more power and money then we were able to take longer periods of time to create and finish albums. I like to work painlessly and quickly. I know the musicians from San Francisco and we were not trained musicians per say unlike the ones that came out of LA, New York or Chicago. I didn't have a lot of confidence because the recording process can be a little intimidating. I have long since realized that live music and recording music are different," said Jorma. "When you are working on a recorded project in the studio, you don't need to be as conscientious as you had to be in the early days and what I mean by that is there are more tools of technology to use for editing and so forth. We simply did not have that kind of luxury back in the day."

Jefferson Airplane will celebrate their 50th anniversary on August 13 to be exact as being part of the 60s music influence. "It was a really exciting time from a creative point of view. What was happening in San Francisco for the pop scene was so different than what was happening anywhere else in the U.S.," remembers Jorma. "The approach to music was unique and out of the mainstream. In my opinion, it was an era that created history. We did it our own way."

A very close friend to Jorma is Jack Casady who shared the stage with him in Jefferson Airplane and later with Hot Tuna. Hot Tuna still tours and has several dates scheduled over the summer. "Jack and I have played together since 1958 and we've been friends even longer. We each have different personalities and may not always agree but we don't argue. We respect each other as friends and musicians."

Jorma and his wife, Vanessa own Fur Peace Ranch in Pomeroy, Ohio. Fur Peace Ranch is a place where musicians from beginners to seasoned pros can attend guitar camps and clinics with popular teachers such as Jorma, Jack Casady and many others. Everyone is invited regardless of skill level and the clinics usually sell out quickly. Fur Peace Ranch also offers concerts and other special events. "We bought the property in the early 90s," said Jorma. "I have always enjoyed teaching and helping others so we started the ranch. It's hard to describe but it's a great place."

Jorma is always looking ahead to what life has in store and enjoying the journey. "My mind's eye is always open to watching life go on without me. I have never gotten bored. In a normal world, I would probably be a grandfather by now and a great grandfather. I have a teenage son and an eight-year-old daughter and I'm not saying that keeps you young although it does keep you tired. (*laughs*) I try to stay tuned in to the world at all times. I would like to think I would be this way regardless. I love learning. I love music and playing the guitar. My favorite music is around 90-years-old but that's OK. Life excites me."

For more information: www.jormakaukonen.com • www.hottuna.com



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