



▲ David Gans plays his guitar.

BEYOND

THE DEAD

◆ by Dan Hopmann

Musicians often prefer to use their creative juices to write songs and lyrics early on in life. If they don't make it big, then they choose another road to travel, keeping their dreams in the back of their minds.

David Gans opted to stray from such a beaten path. After focusing his energy elsewhere for many years, the last eight years has shown the blossoming

of his own talents – and he has plenty of fuel left in his tank.

Gans has been in the music industry since the early 1970's, excavating nearly every nook and cranny. While the name may not be easily recognizable, Gans carries a résumé longer than a six-year-old's Christmas list. In 1969 he picked up his older brother's acoustic guitar and learned a few chords from him. Listening to bands like The Beatles and Crosby, Stills and

Nash, Gans found inspiration to write his own material.

"From that time on I was hooked," he says. "I started writing songs before I played guitar, but once I was playing, they both evolved together."

In the early 1970's, Gans followed his passion and became a musical journalist, writing for publications like BAM, Record and Mix, he networked with bands, producers, contractors and other contribu-

Grateful Dead biographer talks about finding his own music

tors to form an intricate web of relationships.

"I wasn't intending to drop music," says Gans. "I got into journalism because it was an opportunity to enrich my musical adventures. It became my day job, but I never stopped playing music."

Writing for BAM in 1976, Gans got the chance to interview one of his favorite bands.

"I met (The Grateful Dead) when they weren't huge American heroes like they were later in their career," Gans says. "So, over time, I formed friendships with the band."

Being a devoted fan of the Dead for years before he met them, Gans appreciated such a connection and learned to benefit from the friendship. In 1984, Gans met Peter Simon, an author writing a book about the Dead. Recognizing Gans's work, Simon asked him to collaborate on the project. The two published "Playing in the Band: An Oral and Visual Portrait of the Grateful Dead" one year after meeting, much to the Dead's liking.

"The book was very well-reviewed and well-received," says Gans. "From a musician's point of view, the band found it very pleasing."

The train didn't stop there, however. In 1985 Gans volunteered to help start a Grateful Dead radio talk show in the San

Francisco area. Soon he was asked to host the show. "The Grateful Dead Hour" became so popular in the Bay Area that stations around the country began requesting permission to broadcast Gans' show. In 1987, Gans received permission from the band to syndicate the show. Today more than 80 stations nationwide play "The Grateful Dead Hour" every week.

Despite his persistence and interest in the subject of The Grateful Dead, Gans remains modest about his opportunities to work with the band and promote its reputation and music.

"It was not an intention," he says. "It was a series of fortunate encounters."

Yet another "fortunate encounter" presented itself to Gans in the mid-1990's. In 1996, a year after Jerry Garcia's death, the remaining members sought after Gans's services again, this time as a producer. As a kind of dedication project in honor of the late Garcia, Gans co-produced the five-disc boxed set *So Many Roads (1965-1995)*, which was released in 1999 and chronicled the Dead's 30 years together.

"They hired me to do it after I wrote books and talked about their music on the radio," says Gans. "The guys in the band gave me their vote of confidence after doing the show."

Amidst an extensive background largely centering on The Grateful Dead, Gans stresses that his own musical career is his primary focus now more than ever. Feeling that Garcia's death put things into perspective,

Gans pursued his solo career to the fullest in 1997 when he released his first album, titled *Home By Morning*. For him it seemed to be the spark necessary to branch out to his own interests.

"It was more adventurous to make a record," says Gans. "Once I had it in my hand, it made it easier to get out in the world and play."

Working with his band, the Broken Angels, Gans released a single in 1998 titled "Monica Lewinsky," a song responding to the Clinton sex scandal that covered front pages that same year. In 2001, he put out *Solo Acoustic*, and two years later, Gans became one of the first independent artists to release a DVD, called "Live at the Powerhouse." Currently he is working on material that will appear on his upcoming album, which he expects will be released within the next couple months.

Gans has also toured every year since his debut. He enjoys interacting with the audience at his shows and will occasionally take requests. Using a unique device called a loop machine, Gans can play a chord progression, record it, and play it back in order to create multiple layers for a song while soloing over the recorded track. Thursday at 9:30 he rolls into town to play at Second Story.

"I tour for about a quarter to a third of the year, usually in the summer," Gans says.

"I have regions where I do well, and this is the first time I will be back in Indiana since I played in Indianapolis a couple years ago."

When it comes to writing, Gans doesn't necessarily have a default subject. At times they can be personal and elsewhere they can be reflective on current social issues.

"I've written about a lot of different subjects," he says. "I've tried to cover a lot of ground and give myself exercises. I have also given myself the assignment to write out of pure fiction."

"This year I've been writing more songs that are socially conscious," Gans continues. "My most recent song, which is called 'It's Gonna Get Worse Before it Gets Better,' is about the domination of right-wing culture."

As for any Grateful Dead influence permeating his songs, Gans indicates that the presence isn't as strong as it once was.

"They're becoming less of an influence," he says. "The Grateful Dead occupied a unique universe that you can't create on your own. I just have a different mission in life."

Gans still hosts "The Grateful Dead Hour" today, which is approaching its twentieth year, and he also hosts his own local Bay Area program called "Dead to the World," a two-hour show that gives Gans more freedom to talk about other genres of music that wet his appetite, such as bluegrass, country and Americana.

When asked if he will return to any of his previous jobs within the music industry, Gans seems dedicated to his present line of duty.

"Right now I'm too busy working on my own music," Gans says. "I will not say no to a creative challenge unless it's too time-restricting. I'm just trying to open people's minds and tell my own story. And every musician who pays any attention to themselves has a story to tell."



WHAT: David Gans
WHEN: 9:30 Thursday
WHERE: Second Story

IDS Weekend (Bloomington IN) 7/21/05