

HOT TUNA AND BOX SET

THE FILLMORE

January 28, 2004



A miracle of circumstances put us down in Babylon's venerable Fillmore midweek for Hot Tuna and Box Set.

We will skip the complications, but let it suffice that the evening was well spent.

We had heard of Box Set for some time, although some obnoxious reason had always intervened when a show came up, and we had enjoyed one particular recording about the troubles of living for music for about 12 years, so it was a particular pleasure that we took in listening to this homegrown band of Jeff Pehrson and Jim Brunberg.



Box Set put in a fabulously energetic show even before Jack Casady appeared, his head surrounded by a corolla of white hair. The duo is remarkable for their ability to harmonize vocals in a way that has not been seen on stage since CSNY. And Jeff manages to sing quite well while punching in some remarkably complex fingerstyle fretwork. This is a band to watch for the future and Island-Life recommends full devotion and attention.

Casady, hair gone snow white and figure still the rail-thin physique of thirty years ago, has finally put out a "solo" album, but this bassist is no ordinary bassist. Over 15 friends contributed to making this opus, including Warren Haynes and Jorma Kaukonen and Paul Barrere. Casady is unusual among bassists in that he can easily comp the melody as well as solo on a four-string better than many jazz artists can manage on a 5-string instrument. He can also

do this fluidly, without the usual staccato delivery of many "funkmeisters" out there.

His addition to Box Set, with an f-hole semi-hollow bodied Gibson, added a nice funky feel to the mix, as well as an informal sound.

When Jorma came on stage, around nine-thirty, the atmosphere changed to something a bit more raucous, albeit more Gospel. Its no secret that Jorma and Jack have both gone "born again". Some of this "Xian" flavor may have chased off a few would-be fans. Its unfortunate that the 12-step programs that the two have been through have led to this "religiousity," but listeners have to recall that Jorma's origins began at the feet of Reverend Gary Davis and the roots of the Blues reside in Gospel music.

One of the best songs from the set was, surprisingly, "Weight of Sin", which turned religious sentiment into the familiar ache of your good old-fashioned road song containing a very tasty acoustic jam. Also memorable was the lovely ballad "By Your Side", which Jack composed for his wife who sat just out of the range of the footlights on stage.

Jorma performed a mind-bending version of "Good Shepard" that spanned a good 13 minutes by the stage clock, and Barry Mitterhoff on mandolin scorched the fretboard with solos, pulling amazing performances from Jack and Jorma, who appeared to be really enjoying themselves after 40 years of performing together. They went through several numbers from Jorma's recent *Blue Country Heart* CD, including "Big River Blues" and "Prohibition Blues". After a number of floor shouts, Jorm obligated with his "Genesis" and "Embryonic

Journey", complimented with interesting additions by Barry Mitterhof. He also put in quite a tasty version of "Nine Pound Hammer," and a sinuous "Dream Snake". All of it was informed by a nice sense of musicianship absent from the efforts of several more immanent bands.

As Jorma mentioned at the beginning, "I was thinking backstage, you know, its been 37 years since we first performed at the Fillmore. That's a scary thought."

At exactly 11:59 pm, the duo of Jack and Jorma walked offstage after their encore, leaving a heaving and energetic crowd. As one visitor mentioned to me, "That was not Hot Tuna, that was Very Hot Tuna!"

Not bad for middle of the week music in Babylon.