

JORMA KAUKONEN
GREAT AMERICA MUSIC HALL
FEBRUARY 02, 2006



NOW THE TIME HAS COME TO PAUSE

Caught Jorma Kaukonen on his latest swing-by in the Golden State. He appeared at the Great America Music Hall with Barry Mitterhoff. There was some confusion in booking these tix from the 3rd party vendors who failed to clearly outline what was different about the seating arrangements. Long time attendees to the GAMH know that first come is first served at the irregularly spaced ground floor tables and the balcony lines. This time the venue had front "row" seats reserved for those who had bought dinner tickets at a special price. Now dinner at the GAMH has always been nachos, cheeseburgers and cheesesteaks of no special distinction, so this issue confused a large number of people.

That said, we managed to squeeze in at balcony level for a show that turned out to be characterized by nuance and delicacy of playing with attention to dynamics more than we have seen previously from Jorma shows. Or it may be that the intimate quality of the small hall, packed as it was, allowed for the sound to come forth where it had been lost before. Jorma's flourishes, rolls, harmonics, and deft changes rang out clear as, well, clear as silver, sound as gold.

He is more evidently than ever before at the top of his game in terms of musicality, even though he might not command stadiums of 40,000 seats or more as he once did under the Jefferson Starship. But Kaukonen, ex-student of Rev. Gary Davis, is a musician more invested in musicality than grandstanding.

Here is the setlist he played that night with Barry Mitterhoff.

1. Blue Railroad Train
2. How Long Blues
3. I'll Let You Know Before I Leave
4. Parchman Farm
5. Keep your Lamps Trimmed And Burning
6. Serpent Of Dreams
7. Heart Temporary
8. Prohibition Blues
9. Preaching On the Old Camp Grounds
10. Hesitation Blues
11. That'll Never Happen No More

Set Two

1. Big River Blues
2. Know You Rider
3. I'm Free From The Chain Gang Now
4. Death Don't Have No Mercy
5. I See The Light
6. More Than My Old Guitar
7. Bread Line Blues
8. Come Back Baby
9. Embryonic Journey
10. Good Shepherd

11. Genesis
12. I'll Be All Right Some Day
13. A Life Well Lived
14. Just Because
15. Encore: 9 Pound Hammer

Barry Mitterhoff, it should be mentioned, is an unassuming genius. We saw him play two forms of the mandolin, an achingly beautiful Gibson f-hole 4-string tenor guitar with gorgeous sunburst motif, banjo and any one of these instruments he could have played rings around any number of self-indulgent "ax-men" endowed with thousands of dollars of specially-made flying-V Fenders. What the man can do humbly on the traditional mandolin puts most guitarists to shame.

He and Jorma traded solos and licks back and forth with evident and mutual delight, which is really the high point of watching a solid collaboration in music.

Kaukonen's version of Reverend Davis' "How Long Blues" started out pretty much note for note just how the old master used to play it, but segued into his own interpretation with its trimmed-down lyrics. His culls from his Grammy-nominated "Blue Country Heart" were pretty much straight-forward replays, including his own interpretation of "Big River Blues" with its curious Cm inclusion on the windup. On this go-around, as we have felt in recent years, is a strong sense of taking a long goodbye to life, with particular attention to paying due respect to those who have gone before. We have a strong sense of Jorma standing at the edge of some chasm looking back at a long life that has been full

of more than its share of troubles, seen more than its share of horror, and now is turning to look at crossing that last river Jordan to the other shore.

Of course there is stronger sense of depth in a man approaching seventy who performs "Death Don't have No Mercy" than in a twenty-year old. Still, its interesting to note that his encore piece is the vibrant "9 Pound Hammer", with its defiant "That 9 pound hammer that killed John Henry aint gonna kill me! No, no."

We have seen him deal with hecklers a bit abruptly, but he humorously tolerated the yahoos who continuously yelled for "Genesis", which is a lovely song of course, but easily learned by any beginner in about an hour. Really, you can pick up a guitar and learn the song yourself and so stop asking the man to repeat himself. Which is something most musicians really really hate.

For a man who has written some of the songs that are the basic building blocks for American Music in the last century, we would hope that this survival sentiment holds forth for a long time to come. If Jorma Kaukonen happens to be in his "golden years" we hope that gold may continue to shine for many more. As a two-part standing unanimous ovation Thursday night at the Great American Music Hall indicated, so many others wish it so.