
Egypt '78 in Sh Allah

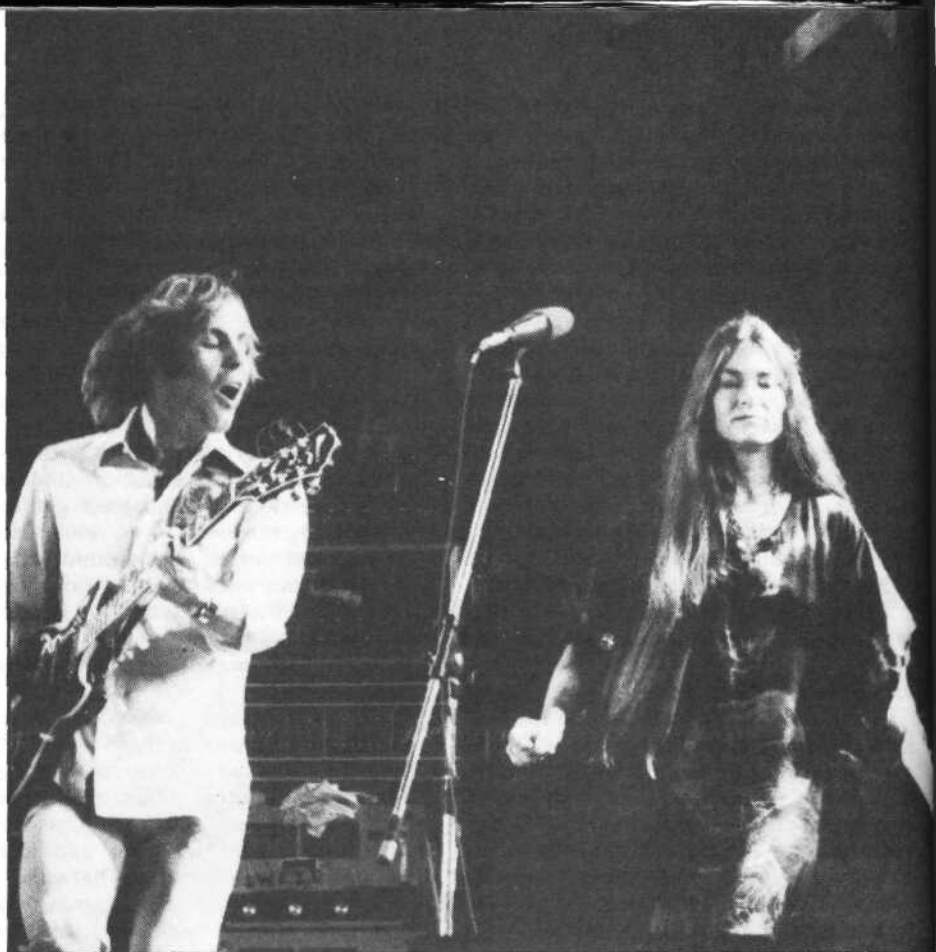
By Cookie Eisenberg

The Grateful Dead realized their long time dream when they played the Great Pyramid. They stood beside the Sphinx, surrounded by the Pyramids of Giza on three crystal clear Egyptian nights and played — and *did they play!*

Picture a theater, located almost directly below the Sphinx. The stage touches the Temple of the Priests in front of the pyramid of Kefran. Cheops, largest of the pyramids, could be seen to the right, and Mycerinus, the smallest, to the left. All around the stage stood the women, the children, all of the friends of the Grateful Dead who'd helped to make the trip a reality. Supportive through the long years, they now shared this remarkable experience with the band. Among them were Ken Kesey, David Freiberg, Paul Krassner, and a recent, but very enthusiastic supporter, Bill Walton, who used to earn his daily bread shooting baskets for the Portland Trailblazers.

The spirit of San Francisco and the *mystique* of the Dead merged with the ancient energy of the pyramids — consider the potential. To produce electric music, to create and to experience that creation in such an environment, certainly was unique. It raised a question concerning geothermal effects on the audience as well as on the crew and the band — did the Dead play the pyramids, or did the pyramids play the Dead?

Dan Healy, chief engineer, needed full understanding, so he and John Cutler attempted to use the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid as an echo chamber for vocal reverberation. The objective — merging Dead music and pyramid power by sending the vocals into the chamber and through the speakers, then back again via microphone to tape. Healy had not encountered this degree of challenge since the time he recorded **Happy Trails**, the Quicksilver Messenger Service album, in Hawaii. He learned then that much planning as well as the proper hardware and recording



Egypt Jam

equipment is needed to bring electricity to a nonelectric environment. Every possible mote of equipment, down to the least plug and tool had to be brought into the country. "Organizing in advance, leaving nothing to chance" was his slogan.

The King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid is a large, rather box-like, rectangular room, measuring 60 feet in length, 30 feet wide and 40 feet high. It is constructed entirely of polished stone, and is located in the heart of the pyramid, which gives it a rigidity and resilience impossible to find elsewhere. Sound resonates beyond the known laws of physics.

Healy, Freiberg, Cutler, John Kahn, Garcia and Mountain Girl got permission from the pyramid's watchman to go inside at night, after the tours had ended at about 5 o'clock. These watchmen take their jobs quite seriously, as their positions are inherited, spanning the generations from the ancient days. They recognized the sincerity of the Dead and their purpose, and allowed them to spend the night in the King's Chamber. The entire night was spent in singing, and the sound produced was unbelievable. The King's Chamber houses a sarcophagus which has a resonance so intense that if you lie within it and hum softly, the sound will massage your body; if you talk or hum too loudly, it will actually hurt your ears.

It is one quarter mile from the stage to the pyramid. Healy had FM transmitters and tuners to span the distance, and an antenna set up to send out the signal. Because of the solid stone structure, Ramrod had to run wires from a receiver placed outside into the pyramid, down the Grand Gallery, through the Queen's Chamber and into the King's Chamber where the wires were hooked up to a speaker. A microphone was placed in the chamber with more wires hooked up to a transmitter on the side of the pyramid, which sent the signal to a receiver onstage. Thus, the sound of the stage plus the pyramid was to be mixed and plugged into a recording console.

Unfortunately, this never happened. The cable required was unavailable in Egypt, and one of inferior quality was brought in from Italy. This proved inadequate. Besides, many tourists on escorted visits through the pyramid stepped on the cable daily. The cable was not strong enough to withstand this kind of abuse, and so the hook-up was unsuccessful.

With it all, none of the Dead or the Egyptians felt that anything was done to violate any sacred rites or cause conflict of interest or friction of any sort. The pyramid is thought of by the locals as a temple of energy, a kind of Cosmic University, not just as a tomb. A presence where a cultural exchange can be brought about in a very real sense.



Adrian Boot

The people who live in the village surrounding the pyramids look upon them, the Sphinx, and everything else in the vicinity as their property. They claim the special position of watching over these monuments. All through the concerts, they posted their children on every roof, people on every sand dune and all around the village to watch and to report any disturbance, but not to interfere unless absolutely necessary. In this manner they facilitated the incredible happening brought about by the Grateful Dead.

The Sound and Light Theatre normally features information. Three times weekly shows are presented in English, French, German and Arabic detailing the history of the Sphinx, the pyramids and Egyptian culture in general. Not one bit of rock 'n' roll -- not until September 14.

When the Dead first thought of playing at the pyramids, they approached the governments concerned. From Washington they heard that, while no one was opposed, no one was particularly inclined to help out, either. They made it clear that the group was on its own . . . sounds like **Mission: Impossible!**

In March of last year, Richard Lorenz, Alan Trist and Phil Lesh tramped off to Cairo, accompanied by Joe and Lois Malone of Middle East Research Associates. After conferring with officials, it was agreed that the Dead

would pay all of their own expenses, and that proceeds from ticket sales for the three shows would benefit charities. These were the Waf Wal Amal Society, the Department of Antiquities and a group which would set up a soccer field for the children of Giza. Waf Wal Amal is an organization which benefits deaf and blind children, and is Mme. Sadat's favorite charity. The Department of Antiquities is forced by lack of funds to store many of the ancient treasures in crates in the basement of the Cairo Museum.

The goal — communication through music for all people.

Then came the bureaucratic activity, handled admirably and bravely by Frances Shurtliff. Finally, after months of vaccinations, visas, unusual amounts of paperwork and unbelievable amounts of red tape, the trip became a reality.

I left San Rafael on September 5 at 6 in the morning, sharing a limousine with some of the Dead family kids. The limo spurred us to play "Rock Stars," a game which consisted of wearing shades and waving to folks in other cars all the way to the airport. Once there, we met with a large crowd of Dead Heads, along with Ken Kesey and his friends from Oregon. We boarded an American Airlines flight to New York, where we would meet other friends and family for a charter flight to Cairo.

The next day, September 6, we breakfasted in Paris and had dinner in Cairo. We landed in a hot, beautiful country. Scanning the streets, we caught glimpses of the way things may have been in Biblical days, seeing veiled women, men in long robes and dark eyed children. Armed soldiers also made their presence felt. Eight million people populate Cairo, blending the ancient and the modern in dress and transportation. Our hotel, the Mena House, once a hunting lodge and palace, appeared as 44 acres of Paradise; on site were a pool, a disco, four restaurants, shops and bars, all giving a full view of the pyramids. Grateful Dead posters were hung on the hotel walls alongside others telling of Arabic events. Even in this cosmopolitan crowd Dead Heads stood out, and everyone was friendly and welcomed us to beautiful Egypt.

On the next day, September 7, daily meetings for crew technicians began. The biggest problem — to merge space age electronics with the almost non-existent electrical system of Giza. Ramrod had been given the monumental task of listing each piece of equipment (Carnet) for use outside of the U.S. Naturally, none of it arrived together. Road manager Robby Taylor went to the airport each day, chasing down missing equipment or luggage; a frustrating task, but he was determined to do it.

A generator was brought to the stage; huge sound trucks driven into place; interfacing for a 24 track Ampex was set up, along with the Dead's sound system. The recording crew for The Who came along on the trip to assist. I talked to them at dinner one evening, and found them excited but apprehensive about this unique undertaking in the desert. They'd gotten a great deal of misinformation; communications were delayed as well; none among the Egyptians seemed to understand the amount of equipment or the quality of sound expected by Dan Healy. His exacting demands and particular attention are responsible for the high quality of the Grateful Dead's sound system — long respected and highly acclaimed by sound engineers and musicians as among the most advanced and sophisticated to be found anywhere. In addition to the technical problems, Bill Kreutzmann was nursing a broken wrist, and tried to invent methods of drumming with a cast.

Meanwhile, all of us waited for our auras to catch up with us and to recover from 'jet lag.' We found time for sightseeing, shopping and exploring Egypt. Each of us sought to share experiences with the natives. The Egyptians were anxious to explain their culture and share their customs, and so extended their hospitality and friendship. We all established one to one relationships with as many as we talked



Tour Program for Egypt Shows



Adrian Boot

to. I learned, for instance, that Allah is known as 'The Generous' and the Egyptians pride themselves on this attribute. The trip by the Dead, spending their own time and money, donating funds to the needy, appealed to the Egyptians on many levels. Their coming to Egypt to share their music and electronic knowledge changed the prevailing opinion of Western man; this will not be forgotten.

Hamza El-Din, Nubian master of the *oud* (12 string predecessor to the lute) and the *tar* (a large, single headed drum; like a tambourine without jingles), arrived two weeks before the band. Hamza is an old friend of the group and is well known and admired in Egypt and America. In personal and

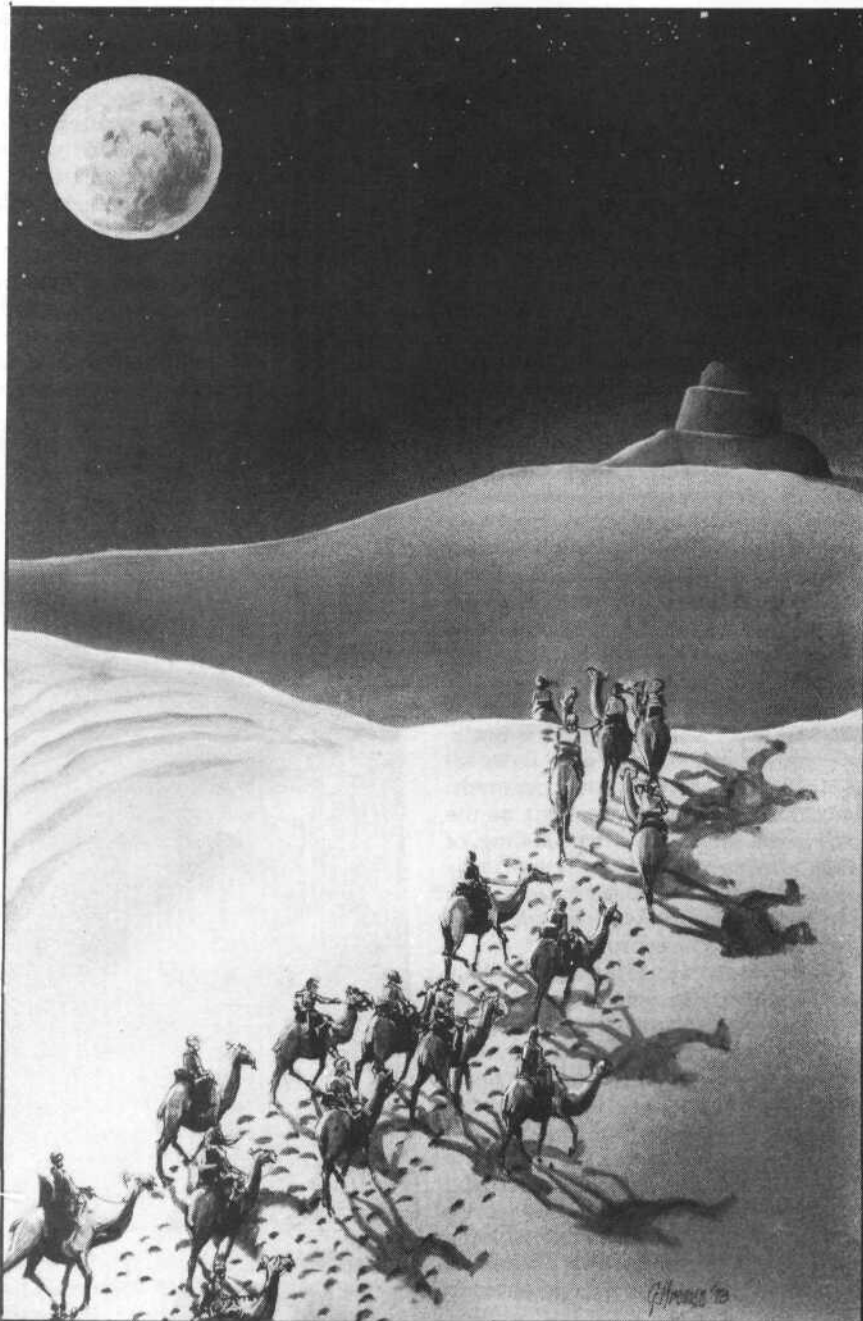
television appearances, he explained the reasons for the Dead's journey to Egypt to play at the pyramids. He related that the band, in their own special way — through their music — hoped to communicate their genuine desire for peace, unification and joyfulness. He also provided invaluable assistance by acting as interpreter. After the shows, each of which he and his troupe opened, Hamza became known as *The Grateful Dead Man* and accrued much thanks and praise from his native countrymen. He told me that the Dead lit up humanity for the people of the Nile by appearing in person, despite all the struggling to learn the many facets of electric music and its support functions and equipment.

The weekend passed and brought us around to September 11, Mickey Hart's birthday. He celebrated in Cairo with the highest of energy, checking the stage set and riding about the pyramids clad in a white *gallabeya* (long robe) on an Arabian stallion. His dark features, coupled with his attire, created the impression that he was Egyptian himself. The outrageous energy of the pyramids and his fine horsemanship boosted his own natural high, and brought his own being into sharper focus.

Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Bill Walton, David Freiberg and the rest of the crew arrived that day. Excitement mounted as the concerts drew nearer. Posters removed from the hotel walls were replaced regularly. It became difficult to find hotel rooms for new arrivals, so most Dead Heads doubled up to provide more space. This was indicative of the mood of total cooperation and positive energy which prevailed. I felt it coming closer — faster — higher; vibes, ESP, auras, energy — all coming together.

On the next day, the 12th, Garcia Donna and Z.R. Godchaux and Dan and Patti Healy surfaced after their long flight, looking as delighted as the rest of us to be in Egypt. All of our hotel rooms faced the pyramids, which directed endless beams of energy at us. The crew busied themselves unraveling miles of red tape, finding more rooms for people like Bill Graham and his staff. More equipment arrived — with the first sound check to take place on the following day, little time was left for rest. Missing luggage appeared, posters continued to disappear. People started waiting in line for concert tickets in Cairo. Folks all over talked about the American musicians with all that equipment who were to play at the pyramids, a definite first for all concerned. We heard that day that Mme. Sadat would attend two of the shows.

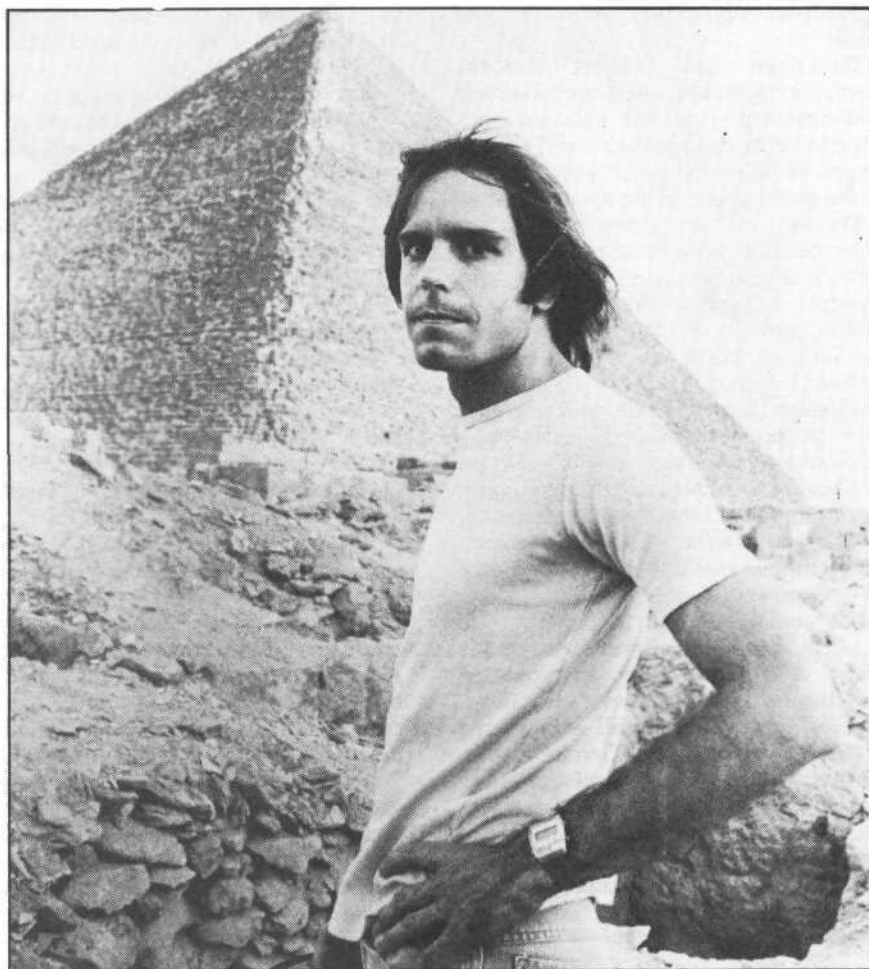
September 14 finally arrived — the day of the first concert. Hamza El-Din



Gary Korman

and his troupe of singers, dancers and handclappers opened the exciting, long-awaited evening. He sang songs the local audience knew and loved. They all got into the spirit of the night, clapping and dancing. Then, to the enjoyment of everyone, Mickey joined in, playing the tar and dancing across the stage. Then Garcia entered, followed by Weir; Lesh's bass was heard from somewhere. The Codchauxs and Kreutzmann appeared on stage in a most unique setting — the moon was almost full, night breezes cool the desert — the unknown was made apparent. Even the sound bugs were tranquil. There was a feeling of closeness among us all, family and friends alike. Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away" was the opening tune, appropriate for the magic of the moment. The energy flow has inspired the band, despite equipment problems and the lack of an experienced piano tuner for Keith.

The audience was a mixture of Dead Heads, European freaks, Egyptians, princesses, and jet setters; young and old danced in the aisles. During the first



Adrian Boot



Adrian Boot

"You make a right at the McDonald's, go three blocks till you hit a pyramid. . ."

set, curious Bedouins on camels rode up, shyly, apparently enjoying the music.

Backstage, Bill Graham danced; Hamza's musicians were overwhelmed and beaming. The little children were wide-eyed at the spectacle and totally forgot to be naughty. All were captive in the electric web of the music.

During a fine rendition of "Fire On The Mountain," the Rhythm Devils (the Dead's answer to the Gamalon Orchestra), a group drawn from the family, joined the band to share rhythms and to break down the barriers between people. Kesey chanted baksheesh (spare change) and played a tape recorder backwards through a microphone. Audiodrama? Overtones of Charles Ives? All took up percussion instruments of their own choosing. Garcia and Weir joined as Donna Jean sang without words, her voice a mirror of the power of the pyramid as she modulated over her vocal range.

Most of the ladies (and some of the men) wore beautifully embroidered gallabeyas with scarves and head-dresses, further uniting all who shared in the musical high. Garcia, nevertheless, wore his black T-shirt and slacks, sporting pig-tails to indicate the fact that there is indeed a special difference.

The Sphinx and the pyramids were all illuminated. Long colored banners of

silk hung above the stage, placed there by light person Candice Brightman. Brass lanterns showered subtle flecks of light on the band.

A collective dream come true.

On the first of the mornings after, much time was spent removing the previously tranquil sound bugs from the site. This procedure was made somewhat more difficult by the daytime temperature of 110°. Everyone was tired, and many in the band suffered the drastic effects of *King Tut's Trots*. A doctor was called in to treat everybody, and the show suffered slightly as a result.

The moon, fuller by degrees; the night, balmy and breezy.

The third night brought a climactic burst of energy as the full, Piscean moon went into total eclipse for about two hours. A piano tuner was flown in from London; everyone found new inspiration. Jerry soared into exhilarating leads; Keith's lighthearted arpeggios punctuated the cool night air. A return of the Rhythm Devils added to the excitement. Phil's bass roared commandingly; Bob's powerful rhythm and voice joined the ensemble; Donna's voice waxed ethereal as she sang the harmonies. Hamza El-Din and company played between sets. Rockets were set off by Ken Kesey and friends. The audience felt the effects — they couldn't sit down, and wanted more

and more. On this final night, the Dead obliged, encoring with "One More Saturday Night."

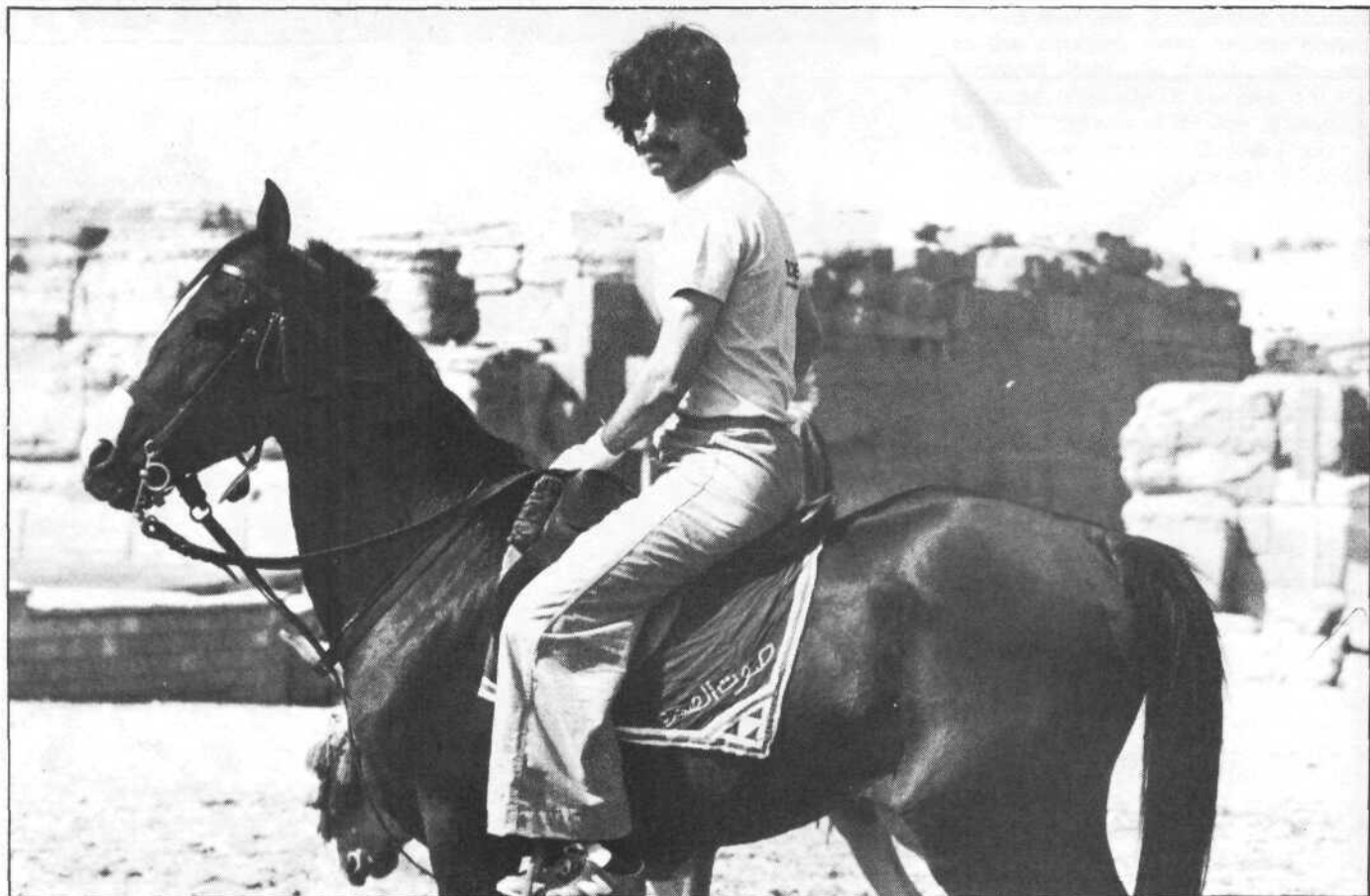
After the concert, Bill Graham and his staff gave a party. Twenty camels and twenty horses and buggies carried some of us fifteen miles into the moonlit desert. We arrived at a large tent to find dancing girls, exotic foods and drink and music. The band celebrated by playing games and feasting in time-honored Arabian style. The party ended as the sun rose from behind the pyramids, signalling the beginning of a new day and of the long road home. To top it off, Mickey and Bill Graham raced horses; to the victor, all of the beer.

We all await the pictures, the tapes, and the many anecdotes of the trip. It was so exciting, so different . . . and certainly unforgettable. The mystery and energy of the pyramids affected us all, the band especially, with the lunar eclipse responsible for unmatched flights of hitherto unknown power. For me, the payoff was watching the Egyptians react to and enjoy the music. One told me that the sounds made him feel like Superman.

Music — it's the same as love.

We all are one when it touches our souls.

The trip will be treasured and long remembered . . . the first of more to come.



Adrian Boot

Mickey Hart sightseeing