



Quite often, people ask me, "What is your favorite band of all time?" expecting me to say Led Zeppelin or the Stones. The Mothers of Invention? Jimi Hendrix, perhaps? My one and only answer usually surprises them: The Flying Burrito Brothers. I have literally been waiting for this album to appear for decades.

One of my favorite claims to fame is that except for their consummate road manager, Jimmi Seiter, I have been to more Burrito Brothers shows than anyone else on the planet. I didn't miss a single gig in Los Angeles, and would hitchhike hundreds of miles to swoon over "Do Right Woman" or "Hot Burrito #1," afraid I might miss the most heart-wrenching versions yet. Even at eighteen, I knew something very special was going on and I didn't want to miss a single momentous note. Listening to this oh-so-alive music once more has been an extremely heady experience, taking me down to the dance floor over and over again.

The best thing about this remarkable trek back to San Francisco, 1969, is just how perfectly it captures the live Burritos experience, beginning with their usual rousing opening number, "Close Up The Honky Tonks." It's overwhelming to hear the medley "Undo The Right/Somebody's Back In Town" again—the ideal country combo. And "Sin City" sounds exactly like I heard it played so many times. In my opinion, this original incarnation of the band is the truest—Gram, Chris, Sneaky Pete, Chris Ethridge, and the ever-adorable Mike Clarke. You can really hear Hillman's pure, sweet harmonies, accenting Gram's plaintive melodies just right. And Sneaky Pete's psychedelic, oft-imitated, innovative pedal steel breaks all the rules, loud and clear. Close your eyes and you can almost see the rhinestones twinkle on their scandalous Nudie suits while the trippy-hippie light show swirls 'round and 'round.

I was fortunate enough to see the short-lived version of the Byrds at the Kaleidoscope on Sunset, featuring the newest member, Gram Parsons, and witnessed the birth of a brand-spankin'-new sound. Chris Hillman had put his mandolin and penchant for bluegrass on the back burner, fired up again after fortuitously meeting the like-minded country boy in line at the bank. The sold-out Hollywood audience that night was dumfounded. The result seemed to surprise even Roger McGuinn, and it would eventually shake up the rock world, but acceptance of what Gram called "Cosmic American Music" was slow in coming.

After Gram refused to tour with the Byrds in South Africa due to apartheid, the Southern upstart was promptly fired. Shortly afterward, Chris Hillman quit the band, Gram contacted him immediately, and the Flying Burrito Brothers started making history.

Some nights only a handful of country-loving diehards showed up at the Palomino Club or the Troubadour to revel in the long-haired, soulful strum and twang, but it only seemed to fire up the Burritos. Gram had a laser-beam focus, determined to bring together seemingly disparate types of music—country, blues, and rock—to create a sound that is now as accepted and familiar as he believed it would be.



The recently discovered treasure you hold in your hands has the Burritos opening for The Grateful Dead at the Avalon Ballroom, and features a plethora of daring cover tunes, from Hank Williams' "You Win Again" to George Jones' "She Once Lived Here." There's even a raucous take on Waylon Jennings' wicked "Sweet Mental Revenge," long before he joined forces with Willie and became an outlaw. It's hard to imagine these selections being controversial today, but trust me, in the late '60s it was a prescient, dramatic, cheeky move.

I had always thought of country music as lame and corny, played by backwoods guys with crew cuts, until Gram sat me down with a fat joint and played me albums by Merle Haggard, Waylon, and George Jones, the man he called "The King Of Broken Hearts." I instantly understood his passion for honky-tonk, and am eternally grateful to him for enlightening me so profoundly. More than once I saw Gram weep while singing "She Once Lived Here," tears sliding down his face, his voice cracking—"I see her face in the cool of the evening/I hear her voice in each breeze loud and clear."

I was crazy about Chris Hillman, and Gram soon became a true-blue pal. Along with Miss Mercy, (one of the girls in my group, the GTO's), I was invited to several The Gilded Palace Of Sin recording sessions. We both happily warbled off-key on the chorus of the stoner song, "Hippie Boy," feeling very honored indeed. I became an honorary "Burrito Sister," and was privy to the real tales behind the tunes. I knew, for instance, that Gram's love, Nancy, refused to call him "old man," because she felt he was too young at age 23 for such a term. She called him her "old boy," which wound up as a lyric in the stunning "Hot Burrito #1." I also knew Gram was concerned that calling out "Jesus Christ!" on "Hot Burrito #2" might keep the song from being played on the radio, which, sadly, turned out to be wishful thinking. I saw the Burritos off at the station when they left on their infamous train tour, and patiently waited for postcards and phone calls, playing their first album incessantly until they came back again.

I was there at the Avalon Ballroom that intoxicating night in April of '69. For awhile I had the dance floor to myself, twirling alone to the cheating R&B song "Dark End Of The Street" and the soul-shaking Delaney and Bonnie tune "Get Ourselves Together." Some of the tie-dyed, head-banded Grateful Dead fans seemed to appreciate the new blend of sounds, but I still felt like I was in on a thrilling secret. Even though this band has influenced more musicians than can ever be counted, the Flying Burrito Brothers are still somewhat of a secret—a secret I'm glad you're in on.

It's an intoxicating honor to have the Burritos sing me back home with songs I used to hear, making my old memories come so brilliantly alive.