



Adrian Boot

Hamza El-Din & friends

## An Adventure in Egypt

By Nicki Scully

The Great Pyramid is truly amazing. It has withstood thousands of years and the removal of its mantle and now bears the hordes of tourists who crawl around and inside it, curious but mostly ignorant and lacking respect. I waited a day to enter it so I could go for the first time with Ken Kesey, who had been there before. Our guide was the Mayor of Ciza, a most gracious man who was also the keeper of the keys to the Pyramid. There were about ten of us, some lugging videotape equipment.

As we explored the Queen's chamber, the grand gallery, and finally the King's chamber, I was most surprised to discover the musical attributes of this structure.

My friend Courtney showed us that by striking the side of the sarcophagus and OMing at that pitch below the lip of it, you could make the entire room ring.

The following morning, after a magnificent sunrise at the Sphinx, Courtney and I found ourselves back at the Pyramid, trying to figure out how to beat the tourists for some quiet time before the rush. It turned out the group waiting to get in were Rosicrucians who had permission to have the King's chamber to themselves for an hour.

As we talked with a guide whom we'd met the previous day, we achieved a rapport which found us on our way to the subterranean chamber, which is also known as the Chamber of Ordeal

or Initiation. The entrance is behind a locked iron gate at the base of the ascending passage. We were given a stub of a candle for light and the gate was locked behind us. We made our way down a narrow tunnel to the descending passage, which went far down below the level of the earth, several hundred feet beneath the King's chamber. There we were astonished to discover that we could clearly hear the chants of the Rosicrucians through the solid rock above us. We could also hear them leaving and the tourists in their less harmonic explorations. We found great peace in the darkness, and after using the candle to survey our surroundings, had no further need of it.

There is a pit in this chamber, about 8 feet across and very deep, its bottom filled with sand. It's my opinion that if anyone were ever buried in this pyramid, this was the actual burial site. There are similar, though smaller, deep shafts scattered among the mastabas (tombs) which catacomb the area surrounding the pyramids.

One morning I climbed the Great Pyramid, hoping to see the sunrise from the summit. I awoke at 5 and ran alone the quarter mile up the road. There I met Farad, a guide who had become a friend. We ascended the pyramid from the eastern corner, picking our way carefully up the rocks which were worn from the passage of countless climbers before us. I was thankful for Farad who knew the easiest way and helped me up the hard parts. I felt frightened at times, clinging to the great stone blocks. At

these times Farad was quite firm, insisting I let the fear go, or it would be dangerous. I finally reached the top where Bob Weir, David Freidberg, Courtney and several others were already enjoying the first rays of the morning sun.

The descent was much simpler. You could dance down it, and there was no fear.

Farad took us on a tour of tombs and then to the modern cemetery across the dry bed where the Nile had flowed during another era. This cemetery had the most peaceful feeling to it. For a few days I had been looking at it, thinking it was much further away and that it was a village. The optical illusion was because the tombs were almost like small buildings, but each had a descending ramp to where the sarcophagus was placed.

We walked on, through another patch of desert and into a village. The feeling here, although still very close to Giza and the Pyramids, was much more peaceful than Mena Village (where we were staying). This was a residential area, its streets filled with women and children. When we came to Farad's house we were met by his wife, an exquisite woman in her twenties, and were escorted into a sitting room, the most completely furnished room in the house.

The seven of us were served a delicious and elaborate breakfast. It's a miracle to me how these women cook so well, so much and so fast, with as few modern conveniences.



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### "Fill 'er up" says Garcia

While Farad's wife was preparing *shai*, Egyptian tea, on a burner on the floor, I sat with her and her children. She spoke no English and we could converse only through her husband.

Before we left, she gave me a black dress, which she wore in public, and the black headdress that can be worn as a veil. Women in Egypt now go unveiled in the streets, but most of the older and

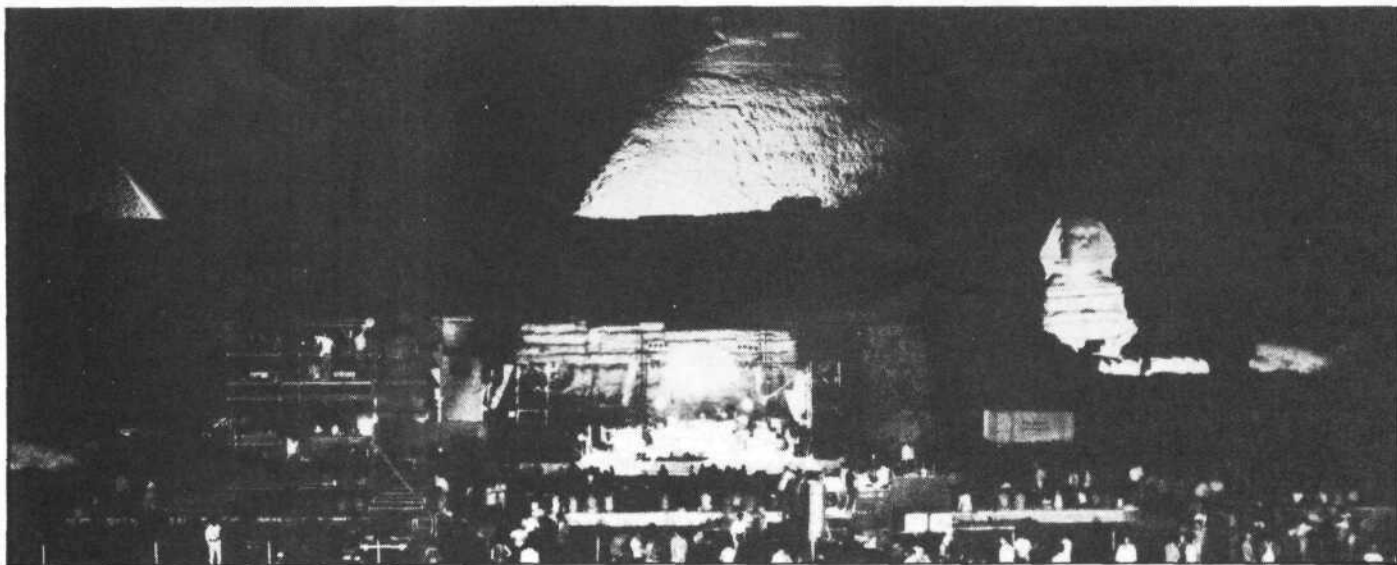
married women wear the traditional black costumes of their villages. These vary from village to village. This one was made of a crinkly woven cotton blend with sleeves a full two feet longer than my arms, so I had to gather them up and hold them in my hands. She taught me how to wear the sheer black scarf so as to let it either flow or cover my face.

When we left the house, Farad told me to walk alone, apart from the others. As I walked along the street dressed as a native women, the eyes of the people I passed lit up and the smiles on their faces gave me a feeling of complete acceptance. Although no words were exchanged except occasional greetings, the feeling I had during that walk back to the hotel was one of exhilaration and understanding that through nonverbal communication I had achieved a union with these people.

All our adventures seemed to be in some way preparatory for the music which was about to happen. The excitement had been building ever since the semi's filled with equipment rolled in. The anticipation was pervasive. The villagers were caught up in it as our own excitement mounted, and as the equipment was piled onto the stage of the theater, it became more apparent that something new and dynamic was about to happen.

This was to be the first rock concert of consequence in Egypt. Some ticket prices were more than the average monthly wage, so the paying audience tended to be the educated elite. All proceeds from ticket sales were shared by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities and a children's home which is the favorite charity of Anwar Sadat's wife.

It is interesting to note that the high-paying ticket holders wore their most stylish western attire while all of us dressed to the hilt in the glitter and flash from the bazaars and villages we'd explored. A further contrast was the



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local villagers in their flowing galabas, watching and dancing in the desert sand alongside the theater or sprinkled among the audience and around the stage. One thing everyone had in common was a great time. Many returned every night.

The shows were opened by Hamza el Din, the Nubian oud player. The oud is a Moorish stringed instrument which was introduced to Nubia by Hamza. I first heard this music in the sixties when his early records were released on Vanguard. Hamza's home village is in the Sudan, but he spent many years in Cairo before coming to this country more than eight years ago.

Alone with his oud, Hamza weaves a tapestry of jewels. He is a master of his instrument and created a magical link between us and Egypt. He was joined by a group of Nubian men in traditional dress who sang chants and did a hand clapping song while Hamza and Mickey Hart played the *tar*, a Nubian drum. Soon strains of Jerry Garcia's guitar could be heard within the Nubian framework, followed by the rest of the Grateful Dead. East and West blended in exquisite harmonies, while the combined cultures created a totally new musical experience. The Nubians departed with subtle grace and we and the Sphinx and the Egyptians were blessed with the good old Grateful Dead. It was a very smooth segue.

Here we were in Paradise. It was like



Gary Kroman

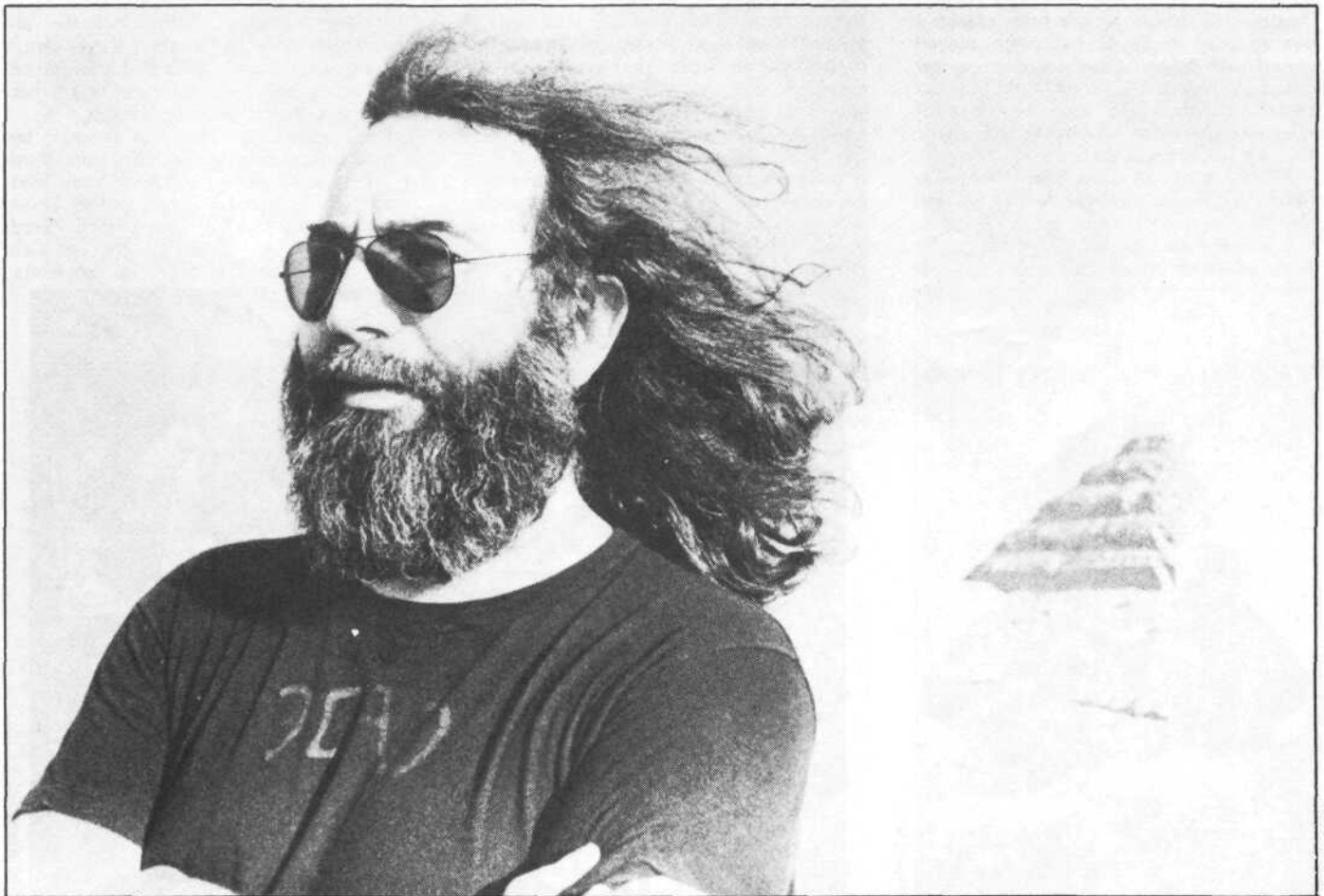
having the G.D. all to ourselves in one of the highest places on the planet, with plenty of room to dance, balmy weather, a full moon and . . . to top the drama . . . a total eclipse.

It was wonderful. But the full impact of the experience has only just become apparent to us, back at home. It's as though we went there, experienced the energy, filled ourselves more or less consciously with the magic of the country, the people and the Pyramids,

and then brought it home to Winterland to share with our friends.

For five nights last week, the Grateful Dead played with new life, and reached new heights. The phenomenon of Egypt, so deeply impressed into all of us who were there, was extended to the entire audience. There are new pictures in our inner landscapes.

The Pyramids are still an enigma, mysterious and enticing, and the Grateful Dead is still a miracle.



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