

A Brief History of Jorma Kaukonen

In a career that has already spanned a half-century, Jorma Kaukonen has been one of the most highly respected interpreters of American roots music, blues, and Americana, and at the forefront of popular rock-and-roll. A member of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and a Grammy nominee, he is a founding member of two legendary bands, Jefferson Airplane and the still-touring Hot Tuna. Jorma Kaukonen's repertoire goes far beyond his involvement creating psychedelic rock; he is a music legend and one of the finest singer-songwriters in music. In 2016, Jorma, Jack Casady and the other members of Jefferson Airplane were awarded The GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award for their contributions to American music.

The son of a State Department official, Jorma Kaukonen, Jr. was born and raised in the Washington D.C. area, with occasional extended trips outside the United States. He was a devotee of rock-and-roll in the Buddy Holly era but soon developed a love for the blues and bluegrass that were profuse in the clubs and concerts in the nation's capitol. He wanted to take up guitar and make that kind of music himself. Soon he met Jack Casady, the younger brother of a friend and a guitar player in his own right. Though they could not have known it, they were beginning a musical partnership that has continued for over 50 years. Jorma graduated from high school and headed off for Antioch College in Ohio, where he met Ian Buchanan, who introduced him to the elaborate fingerstyle fretwork of the Rev. Gary Davis. A work-study program in New York introduced the increasingly skilled guitarist to that city's burgeoning folk-blues-bluegrass scene and many of its players. After a break from college and travel overseas, Jorma moved to California, where he returned to classes at Santa Clara University and earned money by teaching guitar. It was at this time, that he met Paul Kantner and was asked to join a new band. Although Jorma's true passion was roots music, he decided to join. That band was the Jefferson Airplane. Jorma invited his old musical partner Jack Casady to come out to San Francisco and play electric bass for Jefferson Airplane, and together they created much of Jefferson Airplane's signature sound.

A pioneer of counterculture-era psychedelic rock, the group was the first band from the San Francisco scene to achieve international mainstream success. They performed at the three most famous American rock festivals of the 1960s—Monterey (1967), Woodstock(1969) and Altamont (1969)—as well as headlining the first Isle of Wight Festival (1968). Their 1967 record *Surrealistic Pillow* is regarded as one of the key recordings of the "Summer of Love". Two hits from that album, "Somebody to Love" and "White Rabbit", are listed in Rolling Stone's "500 Greatest Songs of All Time".

Jorma and Jack would jam whenever they could and would sometimes perform sets within sets at Airplane concerts. The two would often play clubs following Airplane performances. Making a name for themselves as a duo, they struck a record deal, and Hot Tuna was born. Jorma left Jefferson Airplane after the band's most productive five years, pursuing his full-time job with Hot Tuna. Over the next three and a half decades Hot Tuna would perform thousands of concerts and release more than two-dozen records. The musicians who performed with them were many and widely varied, as were their styles—from acoustic to long and loud electric jams but never straying far from their musical roots. What is remarkable is that they have never coasted. Hot Tuna today sounds better than ever.

In addition to his work with Hot Tuna, Jorma has recorded more than a dozen solo albums on major labels beginning with 1974's *Quah* and continuing with his recent acoustic releases on Red House Records — *Stars in My Crown* (2007) produced by Byron House, *River of Time* (2009) produced by Larry Campbell and featuring Levon Helm and Jorma's latest solo album, *Ain't in No Hurry* (2015) also produced by Larry Campbell and featuring Jack Casady. Jorma currently, as he has for many years, tours the world bringing his unique styling to old blues tunes while presenting new songs of weight and dimension.

But performance and recording are only part of the story. As the leading practitioner and teacher of fingerstyle guitar, Jorma and his wife Vanessa Lillian operate one of the world's most unique centers for the study of guitar and other instruments. Jorma Kaukonen's *Fur Peace Ranch Guitar Camp* is located on 125 acres of fields, woods, hills, and streams in the Appalachian foothills of Southeastern Ohio. Since it opened in 1998, thousands of musicians whose skills range from basic to highly accomplished gather for weekends of master instruction offered by Jorma and other instructors who are leaders in their musical fields.

A multitude of renowned performers make the trek to Ohio to teach at *Fur Peace Ranch* and play at the performance hall, *Fur Peace Station*. It has become an important stop on the touring circuit for artists who do not normally play intimate 200-seat venues, bringing such artists as David Bromberg, Roger McGuinn, Arlo Guthrie, Dave Alvin, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Warren Haynes, Lee Roy Parnell, Chris Hillman and more. Students, instructors, and visiting artists alike welcome the peace and tranquility -- as well as the great music and great instruction -- that *Fur Peace Ranch* offers. There they have opened the *Psydelic Gallery*, a museum in a silo, which celebrates the music, art, culture, and literature of the 1960's, tracing important events and movements of the psychedelic era.

Jorma Kaukonen is constantly looking to take his musical horizons further still, always moving forward and he is quick to say that teaching is among the most rewarding aspects of his career. "You just can't go backward. The arrow of time only goes in one direction."