

Craig: "Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today."

Pete Sears: "Good to speak with you"

Craig: "Since we have a wealth of material to talk about, why not start at the beginning and work our way to the present."

Pete Sears: "I'll remember what I can."

(Pete laughs for a few seconds).

Craig: "One of the earliest bands you were involved with was called Sons of Fred and you played bass. What are your recollections of the group?"

Pete Sears: "The Sons of Fred started out as a semi-professional band in 1964, playing parties, weddings, anything. I was playing guitar in another band at the time, and I'd met the Sons of Fred guitarist Mick Hutchinson a few times on a train to London. Their bass player was about to get married or something, so they asked if I'd like to replace him on bass."

Craig: "Didn't the group have the terrific experience of recording in Abbey Road Studios (E.M.I. at the time)?"

Pete Sears: "Yes, we got a backer for the band. They bought all this Selmer equipment for us. Before you knew it, we were a full-time professional band, touring all around the U.K. We actually played between six and seven nights a week. The travel conditions were a bit rough, and we'd sometimes sleep on the amps loaded in the back of an old van on the way back to London. The van would break down on the way to shows all the time. We often got to the gig at the last possible moment and we had to set up in the dark in front of an unruly audience many times. Although we had a backer, and a good following, the funds were not exactly plentiful. It was a great experience for a young rock musician though. We toured, we learned in the trenches, and we had fun. We released five singles that were done at E.M.I. Studios, later named Abby Road Studios. There was also a marvelous U.K. TV program called, Ready Steady Goes Live, on which the band performed a live song. Another TV show that we appeared on was Thank Your Lucky Stars, but that was still a lip sync situation. We were mobbed by crazy fans leaving the studio on that one, clothing torn off our backs, police cordon, the works. I think the girls would have mobbed anybody looking even vaguely like a rock band leaving the TV studios that day, or maybe they thought we were somebody else. Still, we did have a pretty good following at the time. The band played a lot of rhythm and blues music live. The singles were mostly original tunes. One of the rhythm and blues tunes we played live was *Walking The Dog* (Written by Rufus Thomas. Two very well known versions were by the Rolling Stones and Aerosmith). As often happens in the music business, the band eventually just fizzled out, but not until we got way out on the edge, feedback, smashing things onstage...the works. The Sons of Fred experience was great. I was young and we got to record in the same studio the Beatles used...only we didn't sell as many records."

Craig: "Did you ever get introduced to George Martin (Engineer for the Beatles)?"

Pete Sears: "No, but we may have been recorded by one of the same in-house engineers. It was fascinating to possibly be using some of the same mics and recording equipment the Beatles had recorded *Please Please Me* with."

Craig: "Did you keep the music for your own personal archives?"

Pete Sears: "A few years ago my wife Jeannette's niece was visiting with her boyfriend. He was twenty-one at the time, and he was asking me about bands I played with in England during the 1960's. He'd actually heard of the Sons of Fred. I couldn't believe it. Not only that but he'd collected all five singles from various compilation albums. I hadn't heard the songs in forty three years, so he sent me a copy of the five singles on cassette tape. A friend mastered them onto a CD for my collection. I'm trying to track down other members of the band to give them copies. I was surprised out how good we sounded, and we actually played in tune most of the time."

Craig: "Normally if somebody is under the age of thirty, they wouldn't listen to anything older than yesterday. Maybe there is hope yet to preserve 1960's music."

Pete Sears: "It was very cool."

Craig: "The next stop on the Pete Sears train was the Fleur de Lys. What are your memories from that period?"

Pete Sears: "To be honest, I don't remember how I met those guys. They needed a keyboard-player, so I joined on piano, hanging mikes down into old uprights trying to hear myself, and be heard. I eventually traded my bass guitar in for a Hohner electric pianet, which would feedback if I tried to turn it up. I was constantly fixing it with a soldering iron during a performance, it was pathetic really. The last gig I did with them, the piano finally collapsed in a heap on the floor!"

Craig: "There were great moments. Didn't Jimi Hendrix play on a session with the band?"

Pete Sears: "Yes. Phil Sawyer was our singer at the time. The guy was a terrific talent. He later took over for Steve Winwood after Steve left the Spencer Davis Band. We were hanging out at Eric Burdon's (The Animals) house, when Chas Chandler (The Animals) walks in the kitchen with a guy we'd never seen before. He seemed like a nice easy going fellow, and we all sat around and talked for a while. It turned out to be Jimi Hendrix who'd just arrived in London from the States. He and Chas hadn't got the Experience together yet. We'd been at the studio recording the Impressions song, *Amen* with Hilton Valentine producing, and Chas later brought Hendrix down to put a guitar part on. I was fortunately able to play a nice grand piano on the studio recordings, a nice change from the horrible thing I had to use live. This must have been late 1965 or early 1966, I'm not sure about the dates."

Craig: "Was Gordon Haskell, later to be in King Crimson part of the group?"

Pete Sears: "Yes, he was. In fact Gordon was there before and after I left the band. We were pretty good friends. We still communicate occasionally, mostly by email. He still tours Europe playing mostly solo shows, and recently had a pretty successful CD release. Unfortunately the Fleur de Lys song Hendrix played on was never released. Some rock and roll book mentions I have a copy of the song for some reason. Wish I did. I remember seeing an acetate (A single of the recording was pressed at the time for the band members to listen to) of the song lying around on singer Sharon Tandy's coffee table back in 1966, but I haven't seen it since. If anybody out there knows where it is, please let me know."

Craig: "There have been stories that Jimmy Page not only produced some of the recordings from Fleur de Lys, but played guitar on at least one tune. From your recollections of the sessions is that true?"

Pete Sears: “Jimmy Page did produce some Fleur de Lys sessions. I don’t know if he played any guitar on the songs.

Craig: “The band had two songs that have been talked about for years. The cover of the Who’s song *Circles* and a track titled *Mud In Your Eye*. Why didn’t the record company release the songs the second Jimmy Page gained fame?”

Pete Sears: “You would have thought that would have happened. It is possible they are sitting in some studio to this day, or lost. Fleur de Lys was a good band. It was a fun time, but that chapter of my early musical career was about to come to an end. I remember one particularly memorable show we did at a theater in London. The band was opening for rhythm and blues artist Eddie Floyd (*Knock on Wood*) and we were sitting in the dressing room waiting to go on, when Brian Epstein (The manager of the Beatles) who was promoting the show walks in. He gave us a bottle of champagne and wished us luck on our performance. Seemed like a nice fellow. It was tragic his life ended so early.”

Craig: “There was another memorable moment when the band went to see Pink Floyd.”

Pete Sears: “It had to be some point in early 1967. We went down to the Marquee Club on Wardour Street in London to see a new band people were talking about. We’d been playing Motown and Stax style music, and we stood in the back with a bit of a cynical air at first. It was a feast of sound and colour, with the first oil light show I’d ever seen. They played music that was new and refreshing and they were willing to live dangerously and on the edge. Seeing them gradually had a profound effect on me. I can’t speak for the other band members however. Soon after that Mick Hutchinson, formerly of the Sons of Fred, called me up. He was playing with Tabla player, Sam Gopal, and he asked me if I’d like to come down to a new club called the UFO and play bass with them. Although we sounded nothing like Pink Floyd, our music had the same spirit of adventure and freshness. We were a trio, and Mick played Indian ragas on the guitar. The club was full of people living on the fringes, poets, mime troupes, and those looking for greater musical improvisation. Mick, Sam and I clicked. We didn’t have a vocalist, but got into some very out there instrumental music. We’d often play the Electric Garden Club in Covent Garden, later to become the Middle Earth Club, and we’d sometimes spend all night there, hanging out and jamming after the place had closed down. Graham Bond would sometimes join us. Mick and I often had nowhere else to stay. We called the band Sam Gopal’s Dream. The new record company Virgin was interested in signing us, but only if we added a vocalist to the line-up. We did a show filmed by the B.B.C. that had Traffic and Pink Floyd on the bill. It was 1967. I would love to find the footage. The show was in London and was called, Christmas on Earth Revisited”

Craig: “Didn’t a second Jimi Hendrix moment occur after that?”

Pete Sears: “We were playing at the Speakeasy in London. I was playing B3 with my head down, and when I looked up, there was Jimi Hendrix playing guitar with us. Mick had picked up my bass. Jimi played several songs with us.”

Craig: “Please tell me somebody recorded that and it is sitting in your living room.”

Pete Sears: “I remember standing at the bar before we played and there was a reel to reel machine ready to record our set. But once again a piece of history has been lost. Nobody knows what happened to the tape...we were very stoned”

Craig: "This is brutal. All the great people I get to speak with and they tell me about some of the most amazing moments that aren't preserved for all to experience."

Pete Sears: "You are right. But they are moments in time, and that is fine. Perhaps it is sometimes better to not have recorded them. It is a shame about that show though, but that was that! It was fun having played with Jimi, he was amazing. Around 1969, Mitch Mitchell asked me to play bass with a band he was getting together. He took me down to see him play with Hendrix at the Royal Albert Hall, I remember Jimi telling the audience he was tired of playing his hits. He just wanted to just play the blues. And he did"

Craig: "When you turned down the opportunity to hire a vocalist and record Sam Gopal's Dream, did the United Kingdom have independent labels?"

Pete Sears: "I don't recall independent labels being around at that time."

Craig: "Did you consider a compromise, hire a singer that would add some flavor to the extended *jams*?"

Pete Sears: "We did think about it, but we loved playing instrumentally. We probably should have tried it. Mick later asked me to give the vocals a go. I wasn't a singer. I would love to hear that music now, we had some amazing moments. Things became pretty crazy at times. We played the Speakeasy gig in London after not sleeping for almost a week, (Or at least it felt that way) we'd been up on speed. Mick started yelling about politicians and even weirder things into the microphone. It was an early version of punk rock I suppose. We finished the gig and it hadn't been the serious playing we normally did. About five in the morning the manager informs us there had been a buzz going around about the band, and several major labels had come down to watch us that night. He hadn't told us so as not to make us nervous or something. We were thinking of all the nights for them to show up. It couldn't have been that bad I suppose, or Jimi wouldn't have come up to play with us."

Craig: "If only every moment in time could be captured. In 1969 you moved to the United States. One of the earliest progressive rock radio disc-jockeys Tom Donohue and yourself were involved in a band called Silver Meter. Can you talk about that please?"

Pete Sears: "After the original Sam Gopal's Dream broke up, I did some work with a band called Vamp, and Steamhammer (a Blues band who would back up Freddy King on his UK tours). I did some session work, including working with Marion Segal and Jade on a folk rock album. I met Leigh Stevens from Blue Cheer in London, and he said to look him up if I ever made it over to the states. I saved some money up, and bought a ticket. I came over to the states with five bucks in my pocket, and somehow ended up on Santa Monica Pier in LA in the summer of 69. Fortunately Leigh still lived there above the old merry go round. We formed a band with drummer Micky Waller (Jeff Beck, Rod Stewart) called Sliver Metre. We'd rehearse and hang out day and night at the next pier down from Santa Monica. After about three months, we moved to San Francisco and met Tom Donohue who ended up managing us. We did one album. I was recently sent a live recording of a show we played with Quicksilver at the Fillmore in San Francisco. There are some cool power trio style jams in there. Leigh's a great guitar player; I played mostly bass live, but used the B3 a bit also"

Craig: "Do you recall which two tunes from Elton you performed?"

Pete Sears: “We did *Country Comforts*. I later played piano on the same tune with Rod Stewart on *Gasoline Alley*. The other one was *Sixty Years On*. Silver Meter was supposed to do another record, but something happened with Tom Donohue. I am not clear on the details. The money just wasn’t there. I went back to England and joined Stoneground, a band formed from the Medicine Ball caravan, also managed by Tom Donahue. We recorded at Trident Studios in London with Bob Mathews and Betty Cantor engineering...it was a good record and very indicative of our live sound. Unfortunately it was never released, and we returned to the States to play a New Years Eve show with the Dead. We recorded the first official Stoneground album in LA. It didn’t seem right, and was very slick and overproduced. I wasn’t at all happy with it. I left the band and went back to England to play piano on Rod Stewart, *Every Picture Tells A Story*.”

Craig: “You first appeared on Rod’s 1970 *Gasoline Alley* album.”

Pete Sears: “That is correct; it was recorded around my time with Silver Metre. Micky Waller introduced me to Rod, and I played bass on “Cut Across Shorty”, and piano on “Country Comforts”. After Stoneground, jamming on KSAN radio with Jerry Garcia, John Cipollina and Bob Weir, and recording “Every Picture Tells a Story” back in England, I returned to the States on bass with the Long John Baldry Blues Band. I then formed Copperhead with John Cipollina. I had a great time working and living with John, but I left the band just before their first album to go back to England and record on Rod Stewart’s album *Never A Dull Moment*.”

Nicky Hopkins had also asked me to play bass and some keyboards with a band he was getting together, so I returned before finishing Rod’s album to take possession of a house he was renting me while he was on the road with the Stones. He didn’t do well on the road, because of health problems. So he decided not to form the band after all. Nicky was a wonderful person and a talented musician. It was a sad day when he passed away.”

Craig: “In that time period was there talk of a power-trio including yourself, Neil Schon (Journey), and Greg Errico (Sly And The Family Stone and Santana)?”

Pete Sears: “Sometime around 1972 I was doing session work with guitarist Neil Schon. Neil and I got together with Greg and formed a group we called Sears, Schon, Errico. We were looking for a vocalist, but were unable to find one that worked for us. The music was a very cool power trio sort of thing, a bit like Cream. We did well on the live shows, but never formally recorded. I later introduced Aynsley Dunbar to Neil Schon at a session I was producing in Los Angeles.”

Craig: “For helping to team up members of Journey, you should be compensated with some of their royalty checks.”

Pete Sears: (Pete chuckles). “I should look into that. After I stopped working with Neal and Greg in 73, I co-produced a Kathy McDonald album at Wally Heider Studios in San Francisco. Grace Slick and Paul Kantner were in an upstairs studio recording Graces album *Manhole*, and they invited me to play piano on it. This was the first time I met Grace and Paul. David Freiburg introduced us. I improvised a blues track and Grace wrote some lyrics on the spot. She called the song *Better Lying Down*. The piano part was fun to do. Up to that point, my only connection with Grunt Records was when I played bass on “The Janitor rives a Cadillac”, from the first Papa John Creach album.”

Craig: “When you look back on the Rod Stewart 1974 record *Smiler* and the session work over the years for him, was he open to suggestions from other musicians?”

Pete Sears: “Rod had a production style I liked. He let things happen naturally in the studio. Much of the music was recorded live in the studio, with few overdubs. I would play the piano and Ron Wood (Rolling Stones) would play electric guitar and the bass. Ian McClagan played the B3. Ron was a guitar-player, but had played some great bass with Jeff Beck for a while. He played lead guitar in a band called the Birds during the sixties.”

Craig: “The group he played with was from England, and spelled it Birds and not Byrds.”

Pete Sears: “That’s right. Martin Quitington played most of the acoustic guitar on Rod’s stuff. We also brought in some very talented folk musicians from groups like Pentangle. Rod would gather a few of us in the piano room at his house, and we’d run over the songs we were going to record that night. Each house got progressively bigger with every album.”

Craig: “I usually have the opposite situation.”

Pete Sears: (Laughs). “He would play a song for us on acoustic guitar. We would fiddle around with it for a bit, then we’d go straight to the studio and record it...after a couple of beers of course. I enjoyed the sessions.”

Craig: “Next for you the Jefferson Starship flight begins. When you first met Grace was Grace in the studio the same persona as live?”

Pete Sears: “She could get pretty out there some of the time, but she had amazing focus on the tunes and wrote cool lyrics. Her personality was amazing. Like Janice, she helped define much of the 1960’s rock generation. She was also part of the rebellion against problems with civil rights, Vietnam, etc.”

Craig: “When the recording was over for the Jefferson Starship album *Dragon Fly*, did you get the feeling the band was on the verge of something special?”

Pete Sears: “The album felt great. I was in England and Paul, Grace, and David Freiberg had called me several times about being part of the band. The Rod Stewart album went longer than anticipated. There was a fuel crisis in 1973, with long lines at the petrol stations. Many recording studios were shut down and we had long gaps between sessions. We finally finished the album. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to be in the Jefferson Starship at that point, I had a few possible things in the works in London. But Jeannette and I eventually came over to San Francisco from England; I wanted to meet Paul and Grace and check things out. They had a limo waiting for us at the airport, and put us up at the Seal Rock Inn. They lived in a beautiful house overlooking the San Francisco Bay, we had a meeting there and hit it off really well, and that was that. Grace and I plunged in and wrote the song *Hyperdrive*, that same day.”

Craig: “Paul continues to play *Hyperdrive* in the past couple of years.”

Pete Sears: “Yes, I have heard them play it...Diane sings it really well. By the way. Around the time I played on Manhole, I met Jorma Kaukonen while he was working on the *Quah* album. We went out for a drink. I didn’t see him again for many years, until I joined Hot Tuna.”

Craig: “We’ll get into that a bit later. It seems if you had doubts of contributing to the Jefferson Starship, they had to dissipate after the album was completed.”

Pete Sears: “It was clear the Jefferson Starship was never intended to be an extension of the Jefferson Airplane. That is why they changed the name. I was never asked to learn any of Jack’s bass parts. We only did two or three Airplane songs in our sets. They wanted it to be known as a different band. Most of our early live material was from Paul and Grace’s solo projects”



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Craig: “When *Red Octopus* was completed, could you and the band members sense that something rather special and intense would be happening soon?”

Pete Sears: “I can’t speak for the others, but I knew it was a good album. I felt good about the material...the songs worked together. The album just felt right. It was very well produced, but I was certainly surprised it sold as well as it did.

Craig: “What was it like working with Papa John Creach?”

Pete Sears: “What a great guy. A wonderful man. Always a gentleman. John was a very inspiring person to play with. I loved playing on the song from his first solo record *The Janitor Drives A Cadillac*.”

Craig: “That was great that you and Joey Covington were part of the only hit single he had.”

Pete Sears: “I didn’t realize that. That’s cool. His rendition of *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* was absolutely unbelievable. I loved his fiddle parts on *Hyperdrive*, a song Grace and I wrote; especially when we played the song live. John enjoyed driving his Cadillac around. A real character and a total pleasure to work with. We were still a good live band back then, with lots of improvisational playing!”

Craig: “With the success of *Red Octopus*, what were Grace and Paul’s reaction to the original Airplane fan base?”

Pete Sears: “I can’t speak for Paul and Grace regarding their feelings on the Airplane. But we all considered Jefferson Starship a new band, with new material. In the 1970’s we consistently had very large audiences, way more than the later 80’s more poppy incarnation of the band. We were willing to take chances with the music during live shows. I used to do a ten minute bass solo during the 1970’s, then along came the 80’s when the band only wanted to play hits.

Craig: “When you recorded *Spitfire*, did the success of the previous record put an albatross around the neck of the musicians?”

Pete Sears: “A bit; when you come up with a record that sold the way *Red Octopus* did, as well as receiving good reviews, you definitely feel some pressure to come up with a decent follow up. But it didn’t really bother us that much; we just had fun writing songs and touring. We felt the pressure more from the record company; it’s a business for those guys. Maybe one could argue there were too many writers in the band, but this didn’t seem to hurt us...it actually helped the band create its own identity. With that many writers, not everyone will like all the songs of course. But we approached everything as an experiment. The band was diverse and not looking for a formula. For better or worse, it was an honest band. We were riding high back in those days, I remember we sold out County Stadium in Milwaukee (Former home of the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team), and playing a show in Central Park NYC, to a hundred thousand people. We had a gas in the 70’s”

Craig: “Then the 1980’s come and ruined the musical universe.”

Pete Sears: “We needed a new singer after Grace left the band in 1978. I had wanted to bring in singer Jess Roden in 1979. (He played with ex-Doors members John Densmore and Robbie Kreiger in the Butts Band, and has done numerous session work). He had a lower bluesy voice, which is what I liked. We flew him out from New York City to audition. The record company

wanted a high voice that better blended in with the harmonies. Jess is a fine singer. So is Mickey Thomas, but with a very different sound. Things changed quite a bit. We hired a different producer who had worked on several current hit records by other bands. We developed a harder rock sound, but it was still a good band live. The more poppy sound came a few years later.”

Craig: “Why does a band allow a record company to be so out of touch with what the group is about? Especially with the strong personalities within the group?”

Pete Sears: “It’s a good question. I honestly don’t know. The band was originally set-up as an equal entity. Through the 1970’s it was very much that way, which worked well, especially with Larry Cox producing us. He was very adept at bringing out the best in everyone, but still maintaining control. In the 1980’s the record company pressure for hits and meeting radio airplay formats began. You did what they wanted or they wouldn’t promote your records. I think they wanted to make us sound more like Journey. Paul was always forward thinking. He didn’t see anything wrong with moving ahead and changing the sound. It’s also a gradual process. Our sound didn’t turn around the entire hundred and eighty degrees to pure pop overnight. When you are part of an organization you find that you gradually dig yourselves a little deeper into a hole with every bad decision you make. In the very early 1980’s we were still a good band. I liked the song *Jane*. I was also quite happy with the way the song I wrote with Jeannette, like *Stranger*, and *Winds of Change* turned out musically, but we had little control in making the videos for MTV. The videos ended up having little to do with the lyrics. Slick LA production companies basically got paid large sums of money to throw our videos together, without once consulting the writers of the song. We shot most videos of that period on one soundstage, with cheesy fake props everywhere. There was some internal conflict over our musical direction going on, so I can’t blame everything on the record companies. It was all becoming an L.A. (Los Angeles) thing, but not in a good way. We slowly sunk deeper and deeper into our hole, and couldn’t see the forest for the trees. We also didn’t sell as well as people may have thought we did during the eighties period. We had lots of record company promotion and airplay, but that didn’t necessarily translate onto more sales. Huey Lewis could get the same amount of airplay, but sell three times as many records. My wife Jeannette and I were deeply involved in Central American politics at the time. We were helping refugees from the civil wars in Guatemala and El Salvador hiding out in the Bay Area, mostly doing radio drives and putting fundraisers together. We had visited Guatemala, and knew firsthand what was really going on, and the US involvement. Paul had already left by now, and the band decided they didn’t want any political songs that might alienate any segment of our audience, only potential hits. The record company and producer would show up with a stack of cassettes they wanted us to check out for hit song material. I had this tune called *One More Innocent* that I wrote with Jeannette, and the producer and certain band members liked the music, but felt it was too much of a downer lyrically. I later released it on my solo album, *Watchfire*, with Jerry Garcia, Micky Hart and Baba Olatunji on the track. In the seventies, Jefferson Starship, like the Airplane, had always had an anything goes approach to songwriting, and for better or worse, anyone could write about anything they wanted to. I feel that this had been part of the attraction of the band. Then in the eighties we started playing nothing but potential radio hits. Even though a lot of people liked that stuff, I feel we alienated many of our older fans with this calculated approach to our music.

Craig: “I went to school with a great doctor that will give them help. It’ll be expensive and long. Does Mickey Thomas have any idea how many of the fans to this day are still appalled by that period of the band?”

Pete Sears: “I still do occasionally get people come up to me today, telling me how much they enjoyed the pop hits of the eighties. Many people enjoyed that period. Especially if they came of

age during that decade...they had good associations with the songs. I didn't enjoy that period myself. The songs were well crafted and Mickey is an excellent singer, but it wasn't for me. We were playing the song *Sara* live one night, and I was standing up playing bass on one of those keyboard things you hang around your neck. Suddenly I noticed Mickey lying on a park bench at the front of the stage, singing underneath a fake lamp post as a prop. I thought, what the hell am I doing here? It was like I woke up out of a surreal dream. I'm supposed to be a rock musician, how did I get here? When I left the Starship it wasn't on the best of terms. I was pretty much at odds with the band. There was pressure to have everyone dress in eighties style suits! I just couldn't do it. Every note during a live show had to be played exactly like the record. We had come a long way from the days of ten minute bass-solos. Jerry and the Dead had the last laugh, attracting massive audiences through the eighties without compromising their sound or needing a hit record. When I left the band my income level plunged, but I felt strangely free. I had to get out in the clubs and play the blues again; with Nick Gravenitas mostly. I played a bit with Frank Marino the guitarist from Mahogany Rush (Mahogany Rush had a cult following in the U.S.A. during the 1970's) and Aynsley Dunbar. It was a good band, but the record company who were interested in us said we needed a vocalist with a high voice...I'd already been through that, so I didn't do it. Aynsley, Frank and I had some fantastic power trio jams though. We probably should have kept it going, Frank was a good singer, and we should have just had him do it."

Craig: "In 1988 you did a terrific record *Watchfire*. You have often referred to the album as ecological awareness. Tell us about the album."

Pete Sears: "I don't remember ever actually referring to it in that way. As I mentioned previously, throughout the 1980's my wife and I were involved with trying to help spread awareness of the civil-war in Guatemala. There was terrible genocide in the country. Entire villages wiped off the face of the earth. My wife's mother was living there, so we got much of this information first hand. We had connections in Guatemala from the past with helping the earthquake relief efforts in the area. My mother-in-law had to be air-lifted out of the country when things became very dangerous up in the mountains. She was very vocal about what was going on after she came back to the states. There were safe-houses for war refugees in the San Francisco Bay Area. I organized a radio drive for aid; these people needed food and clothing. Since the Starship policy concerning potentially controversial material had changed when I was nearing the end of my tenure with the band, I wanted to help get the word out about what was really going on. Producers thought the story was too much of a downer, which I suppose it was. After I left the band, I went into the studio with Mickey Hart (Grateful Dead) and some African drummers (Baba Olatunji, Sikaru). We recorded the song *One More Innocent* with Jerry Garcia donating his guitar work. We also created a non-profit video production company to send out free videos of the song "Guatemala" to human rights organizations working to help the Mayan Indians. We also managed to spread the word by getting it aired extensively on the Canadian Much Music TV Channel. We used actual footage of Guatemala, and human rights violations up in the mountains, as well as footage of me, Enrique "Quique" Cruz, and David Grisman in the studio. Having been sick of the direction the Starship method of recording had taken, I recorded *Watchfire* mostly live in the studio. There were a few vocal over-dubs. As I mentioned, Jerry Garcia helped out with the project and Mickey Hart was a great help in finding Baba Olatunji and his African drummers. As I mentioned, it was really all a reaction to the way things were recorded in the 1980's, which I felt was very sterile. I am not saying that what I did was better. It was just different; more like the older ways. It was a breath of fresh air for me."

Craig: "Was it a sense of pleasure and relief to be able to record an album without the pressure of a three minute song or a hit single?"

Pete Sears: "It was a sense of relief actually. I didn't record it with thoughts of catering to a major record label format, although I probably wouldn't have said no if one had been interested. Holly Near's activist (Folk music) label Redwood Records put it out, they were very cool people. It was very rewarding to work with them, because they believed in the Jeannette's lyrical content. Jerry Garcia put the album out on Grateful Dead Records in 1996, and Relix later released it on their label while I was playing with Hot Tuna. I am now starting to manufacture it again, but with a bonus take of the song "Guatemala", with a never before heard ride out solo by John Cipollina. It's classic John. A nice by product to come out of *Watchfire* was bringing Jerry Garcia and David Grisman (Old And In The Way) together for the first time in fifteen years. I had some intense things going on in my life during the "Watchfire" period, but Jeannette and I fortunately had some very good friends. Way back, several years before I joined Jefferson Starship, John, Jerry, Bob Weir, Mario Cipollina and I had done the first live KSAN FM radio broadcast from the record library...it was all very impromptu. Jerry later called me in LA and asked me to play piano on his first solo record. I was with Long John Baldry (British singer that performed British blues and folk) at the time and couldn't make it unfortunately. I always regret the timing not working out. Jerry was a cool guy. He was always ready to help people raise some cash for various benefits he believed in."

Craig: "In 1992 you became part of Hot Tuna with Michael Falzarano (Memphis Pilgrims) and Harvey Sorgen (Memphis Pilgrims). How did that incarnation of the band come about?"

Pete Sears: "I hadn't seen much of Jorma since 1972. In 1992 I was helping Wavy with one of his SEVA Benefits in Berkeley. Hot Tuna, John Lee Hooker, Doctor John, and various other people were on the same show. I had volunteered to play solo piano at the after party. I was off in a corner, playing some blues with my head down when I feel a tap on my shoulder, and Jorma is standing there with Jack. It was good to see them again. They said they were recording a live album at the Sweetwater in Mill Valley, (*Live At Sweetwater* and *Live At Sweetwater 2*) and invited me down to sit in on piano the next night. The stage was quite small, but they didn't have drums that night. I set my piano up behind the band where the drums usually sit; Jorma, Jack, and Michael were lined up in their usual placed along the front of the stage. I ended up playing on every track, even though there were songs I had never heard before. It was a lot of fun. I stayed with Hot Tuna for ten years, and had some of the happiest times of my musical career playing with them, and the offshoot, the Jorma Kaukonen Trio. Jorma was always generous with the solos, and we enjoyed bouncing off each other. The supportive role can be equally as satisfying as the solo role. There were no ego trips with that band. It was just good music, and good people."

Craig: "Was the experience enhanced that they were not interested in making studio albums? You didn't have to worry about the record company holding you to three minute songs, or telling you what to write about? If you wanted to play *Walking Blues* for ten minutes you could."

Pete Sears: "It was great. It was like some of the bands I played with in the sixties, and like the Jefferson Starship of the 1970's. I also felt a sense of freedom when I played the blues with Nick Gravenitas, (Famous blues guitarist and blues song-writer). You just went out and played, with the freedom to improvise. That was all there was to it. It was wonderful playing country blues with Hot Tuna, and sometimes we'd go electric, which was always a crowd pleaser with hard core Tuna fans. Jorma always created a strong sense of togetherness in the band."

Craig: "Did you like the fanaticism of the Hot Tuna fans in New York, New Jersey and California?"

Pete Sears: "New York was great. I loved the crowds. They were hardcore Hot Tuna fans. I loved them all over the country. The Tuna fans were very supportive of the new line-up. I was walking into an existing situation, and they were very open to accepting keyboards in the band."

Craig: "You were respected because to the fan, you were part of the scene. It wasn't as if some outsider was getting a job that didn't know the roots of the music."

Pete Sears: "I had always had a strong admiration for Jorma and Jack. I made a point of trying to play in a way that was supportive of Jorma's guitar playing; I'd get to cut loose when it was my turn to solo...which was fortunately quite often."

Craig: "There must have been a lot of special memories from the Japanese shows of 1997. You were able to make an album, *Live In Japan*. The stage didn't allow enough room for drums, but at least you were on the record."

Pete Sears: "Even though it was a small stage, Harvey played percussion, and we were able to set up the piano. It was a well mixed live to two track recording, so it was an accurate representation of what we played that evening. We didn't rerecord any part of it. The audience had a great time, and the performance was pretty strong. After about sixty seconds of listening to it back later, we realized we could release this as a CD."

Craig: "Were you surprised at the crowd response to the shows?"

Pete Sears: "There is a great appreciation for the blues in Japan. They have these basement bars in Tokyo that have an incredible selection of old blues albums on vinyl, with high quality stereo systems. Hot Tuna played a sort of country blues rock at the time. The club in Yokohama was so packed that the band had to climb through a window to get to the stage."

Craig: "1998 saw another live recording being released *And Furthurmore*. What was it like playing on the Further Festival shows?"

Pete Sears: "The Further Festival was built around Bob Weir's Ratdog. Bob had the great Johnnie Johnson on piano at the time, what a wonderful person and talent he was. I met the band Los Lobos on one of those tours, we become pretty good friends and I'd often sit in with them on piano. I have always admired their work. Hot Tuna had a great time playing the Further Festival shows. We'd sometimes start with a semi-acoustic folk blues feel, then go all out electric rock for the second half of our set. The band would go for broke and play the old style of Hot Tuna rock blues. The Tuna fans seemed to have a blast with that part of the show."

Craig: "That goes back to the 1975-1977 shows when the walls would shake. At the end of the three to four hours, the fans were as tired as the band. When Jorma had talked about recording a new sound with Blue Country Heart (Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck, and Byron House), how were you told about the change in direction?"

Pete Sears: "We had a good long run. It was actually the longest running version of the band Hot Tuna ever had; a wonderful ten years. Jorma was talking to a record company about doing some solo projects. Michael Falzarano and I suspected that era of Hot Tuna would soon come to a close. It is traditional for Hot Tuna to change. It is part of the order of things for Jack and Jorma, and they decided to simplify the line-up. To me it wasn't a surprise. I still sit in with them"

sometimes, and teach at Jorma's camp. I concentrated more on my band the Dawn Patrol, which I had some real good times with."

Craig: "You had done some work with a band Zero in 1994. They received a break when Robert Hunter (Lyricist for the Grateful Dead) got involved and the style became more improvisational. You were on the CD they called *Chance In A Million*. How did you get to be part of the project?"

Pete Sears: "I was with Hot Tuna at the time. When we weren't playing, I did some work with Zero. One of the highlights was trading solos back and forth with Nicky Hopkins on the song *Mercury Blues*. (Written by K.C. Douglas. Three popular versions came from Canned Heat, Steve Miller and Meatloaf) on the *Chance In A Million* CD. I am glad I got a live recording with Nicky and me playing keys together. I had often played bass with him."

Craig: "In 2006 there were some reunion shows with Zero. One of the concerts you were a part of in Colorado had former Grateful Dead member Donna Godchaux perform with Zero. How were these shows put together?"

Pete Sears: "Donna was an old friend of the band. I have known her for years. My first allegiance is to Moonalice, and I have to keep an open schedule for any events that may transpire with them. In this case I had the free time. It's always great to play with Steve Kimock and Zero. Donna was ill with a cold when she sang with us, but you couldn't tell, she came along and sang fantastic. Melvin was on organ, and I played piano. They plan to have more shows, but most likely it will be with the revolving keyboard-player thing. Depending on who's available"

Craig: "I have to mention to the readers something that you did, that was award winning, *The Fight In The Fields*. An original score about Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers Union. The program aired in April of 1997."

Pete Sears: "That one really sticks out. I heard a couple of days ago that the documentary is getting a new lease of life. I got a call from the producer that they needed a music cue-sheet, because it had been picked up by a Spanish Television station. It still airs on PBS on a regular basis."

Craig: "In 1999 you were on one of my favorite live albums *And Love Will See You Through* (Phil Lesh- Grateful Dead). Jorma, Phil Lesh, and yourself combine for some hot rock and roll. The idea that you guys could play songs ranging from *Good Shepherd* to *Dancing In The Street*, must have been fun as well as musically satisfying."

Pete Sears: "There are some wonderful spontaneous *jams*, and there was a nice selection of songs. There is some really good stuff on the CD."

Craig: "In 2001 there was a great album you released called the *Long Haul*. I had two songs jump at me the first time I listened to it, *Brother John* and *Meadway Rag*. What do you recall about the *Long Haul*?"

Pete Sears: "It was a labor of love. When I make a solo record it is never with the intention of making something that will sell well commercially, or fit in to a current genre of music. Not that I expect it would sell anyway of course. My co-producer and engineer, Paul Stublebine and I try to make the best possible album that feels right to us. I wanted a folk and blues thread to everything, and it has styles of music I love and have grown close to over the years. We also worked hard on the order of songs to make sure it flows well. *Brother John* was about an old

friend and colleague, John Cipollina (Quicksilver Messenger Service) who passed away. *Meadway Rag* is named after the street I grew up on in south London right after WW2. There were rows of prefabricated, modular emergency war housing made of corrugated asbestos, with air raid shelters in the back. There weren't enough houses to go around for returning servicemen due to heavy bombing during the Battle of Britain. So they put up these little bungalows for them and their families. I love ragtime music; I even have some New Orleans style horns on the track. One of my favorite moments on the album was writing and recording the song "Elizabeth" with John Lee Hooker, live in the studio. John later played it during a live show I played with him shortly before his death"

Craig: "In the early part of 2006 you released an instructional video on playing the piano. How did that opportunity present itself?"

Pete Sears: "I taught a bit here and there, including at Jorma's Fur Peace Ranch in Ohio. I thought why not. A couple of young guys that started a company called Icons of Rock came to me. It's really for beginners; they can go as far as they want to with it."

Craig: "The readers can go to <http://www.petesears.com/> and check out the instructional video and your activities on the website."

Pete Sears: "Yes, thanks!"

Craig: "You are involved in a short and long term project with artist Andreas Nottebohm called *Black Hole Studio, Musical And Visual Art*. Tell us about this."

Pete Sears: "I've known Andreas many years. He has a three dimensional technique of painting that jumps out at you, the images are astounding. We came up with the idea that he will make up a series of prints of his work in an album. Each print will come with a CD with a twenty minute piece of music to go with it. I am incorporating unusual things like radio signals from outer space into the music. There are no confining musical boundaries. We will release this all as one body of work; art and music. The project should take at least another year and it will be presented in the art world, and not the music world. There is definitely little that is commercial about this project. The music and art gets very out on the edge."

Craig: "On a completely unrelated note, did you do a studio session for Mick Jagger's brother Chris? What is often forgotten Mick has a brother, and Chris has put out several albums. Mick often contributes background vocals."

Pete Sears: "I did some session work in England around 1973, including the Chris Jagger album. I haven't talked to him since though. When I came to the states, I lost touch with a lot of good friends in England."

Craig: "You were able turn the clock back on 10/29/05 for the opening ceremony of the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater, McClaren Park, San Francisco, California. How did it feel appearing with the Jefferson Starship?"

Pete Sears: "They asked me to sit in; I played bass on a couple of songs and just went for it. The spirit of the 1970's Jefferson Starship was still there. It took me back to my days with the original band. It was fun."

Craig: "How long was it since you played *Hyperdrive*?"

Pete Sears: "Not since the 1970's. I wrote the music on piano, but didn't know if I would remember it after all that time. Grace had written the lyrics. The band Paul currently has is full of wonderful players."

Craig: "I couldn't let you go without talking about the exciting work with the Flying Other Brothers. How did you get involved with them?"

Pete Sears: "I had known Roger McNamee since I taught at a band camp in 2001, when I was finishing up my ten year run with Hot Tuna. I joined the Flying Other Brothers band around 2002, and I later got a couple of friends of mine, Barry Sless and Jim Sanchez involved. I played on their *52 Week High* (I did that as a session player) CD, and *San Francisco Sounds*.

Craig: "Was there a natural growth from the first record to the second?"

Pete Sears: "Yes. We evolved more into jamming and playing off each other. But we recently folded the Flying Other Brothers, and have started a new band called Moonalice, with Roger, Ann McNamee, Barry Sless, Jimmy Sanchez, and new members, GE Smith and sometimes Jack Casady. I'm still playing keys, and we all cover on bass when Jack is out with Tuna. I have started playing more bass again on sessions, and Barry and I often go out with the "David Nelson Band". We get into some pretty intense jamming. We all have main bands we play with and get together a couple of times a year for fun. We have several different drummers that play with us, depending who are available. Usually John Molo and most recently, Bill Kruetzman from the Grateful Dead. We just finished a great run in Hawaii with Bill. I sometimes sing a version of the Grateful Dead song *Stella Blue* on some of the live shows. I'm new to this singing lark though. When Brent Mydland from the Grateful Dead passed away (7/26/90), Jerry Garcia gave me a box of songs he wanted me to learn to try out for the job. I had never been a singer, so it didn't work out, although Jerry did tell me I was the second choice. I have taken some vocal lessons since then. Don't know if it helped. I do *Stella Blue* as a tribute to Jerry really."

Craig: "Do you have tour dates set for the entire country?"

Pete Sears: "Moonalice has finished recording some new tracks with T-Bone Burnett producing. We often play Alaska, and we plan to play more festivals and tour the US extensively

Craig: "Why don't we get a plug for the terrific site from Moonalice. The readers can go to <http://www.moonaliceband.com> and check out the latest happenings of the band. They can also enjoy some samples of the music."

Pete Sears: "Thanks."

Craig: "It is well deserved. Before we end the conversation, you are always so proud of the work of a band you once started called Dawn Patrol. Fans can go to the <http://www.petesears.com/> site and click on a link to find information about the group. Lastly congratulations to your mother-in-law on the book, "Blood In The Cornfields", about the civil war in Guatemala being published. Her name is Bonnie Dilger and I hope it is very successful. Pete, there isn't enough time in a month to cover your career. It was a pleasure to speak with you. Thank you for enlightening all of us on your fabulous musical journey."

Pete Sears: "Thanks Craig. It was nice talking with you."

