

Bill Cutler:



Spirit of the Music

Crossing the Line – Magnatude Records – John Lynskey

Every now and then word spreads about a long-forgotten “Holy Grail” recording finally seeing the light of day, and certainly this is the case with Bill Cutler’s *Crossing the Line*. Bill started work on this album more than three decades ago, and after it lay dormant for almost 20 years, Bill resurrected the project, restored the original tapes, cut new tracks and finally completed a masterful album. Of course, the news that Jerry Garcia played on six of the songs has resonated far and wide through the music world, but what should not be overlooked is the fact that *Crossing the Line* is, at its essence, a singer/songwriter’s album. “Because Jerry is on it, and he is such an icon, sometimes people can’t see beyond that, but *Crossing the Line* is all about songs and songwriting,” says Bill. “I started out in the mid-’60s in Greenwich Village, a singer/songwriter with an acoustic guitar,” Bill continues. “As a teenager, I was very influenced by Bob Dylan and John Sebastian – that whole scene in the Village impacted me. Later on, it was Jackson Browne and Neil Young – all those guys helped to shape my style.” It also should be noted that, Jerry Garcia aside, *Crossing the Line* features such luminaries as Jorma Kaukonen, Bob Weir, Mark Karan (Ratdog), and Jerry Miller (Moby Grape), who help create the deep and fulfilling sound of the album.

Bill initially came into contact with the Grateful Dead during a visit to San Francisco in 1968, at a time when “they were still on their way up and approachable,” as Bill says. By 1973, Bill had moved to the West Coast and become a member of David Rea & Sleewfoot, whose album was produced by Bob Weir – which, as Bill notes, “thrust me back into the Dead scene.” During a subse-

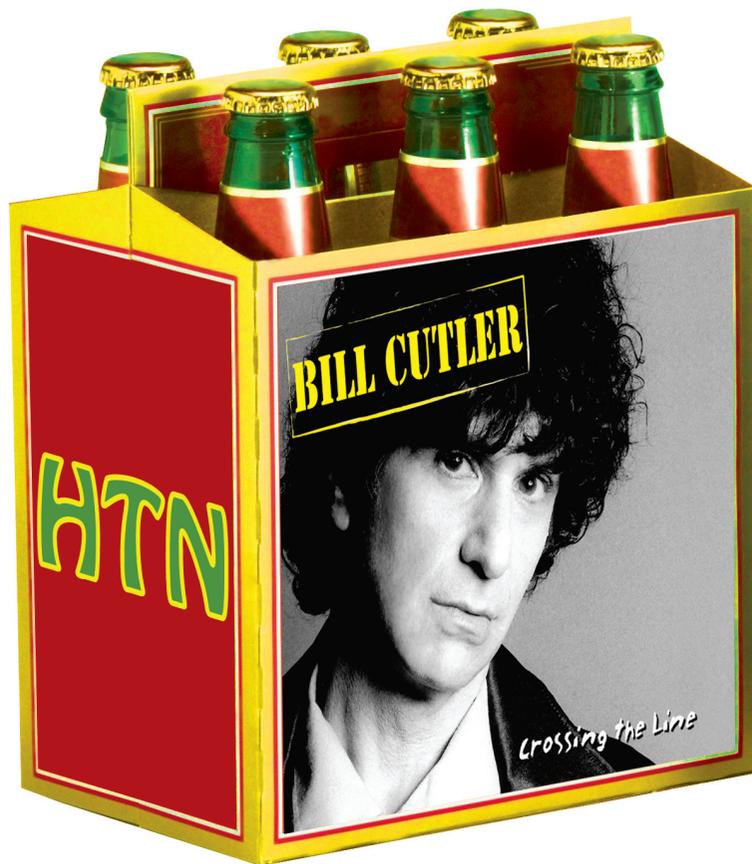
quent recording session, Bill and Jerry Garcia got together and hit it off. “We struck up a quick friendship, and Jerry told me, ‘Hey – if you ever make a record of your own, call me, because I’d love to play on it,’” Bill relates. “I never thought he’d do it, but a year later, when I decided to cut my own stuff, I ran into Jerry at a show, and he said, ‘I hear

we started cutting about 20 years ago?’ I told him it was still sitting around, and he said that he was going to have some time off, but that didn’t happen, and we never got together. It did spur me on to dig those tapes out, however, and when Jerry died, I went back in, cut some new songs and added some stuff to the existing tracks. It took some time to work out the legalities with Jerry’s estate, but it’s finally here.”

Crossing the Line opens with the high-energy rocker “Engine 99,” which is propelled by the solid guitar work of Jerry Miller and sets the tone for the entire record. “I’ve known Jerry for over 30 years, and I thought his guitar work in Moby Grape was totally underappreciated – he really can play,” Bill states. The moody and somber “Sailin’ Man” features Hot Tuna’s Jorma Kaukonen on lead guitar, and as Bill relates, “Jorma was perfect for ‘Sailin’ Man’; I wanted him to play electric guitar and give him something to sink his teeth into, and ‘Sailin’ Man’ fit the bill.”

Jerry Garcia takes center stage on the gospel-tinged “Ridin’ High,” which is as uplifting a song as one ever will hear, featuring some of Jerry’s most joyous playing. The lovely “Delta Nightingale” contains a lengthy fade-out, with Jerry hitting some poignant, moving licks that stay in your head all day. “We wanted to give Jerry a chance to stretch out, and those two tracks were perfect for that,” Bill says.

Crossing the Line has been well worth the wait, and proves that Bill Cutler is a singer/songwriter for the ages. With legendary stars, timeless playing and a delightful vibe, *Crossing the Line* has it all.



you’re doing a record – do I get to play on it?’ I said, ‘Sure,’ and Jerry replied, ‘Great – when’s rehearsal?’ Just like that, he was in.”

In a matter of days, Bill, his band and Jerry cut six tracks, but Jerry left to go back on the road with the Dead, and the album was left half-finished. “I went on to work with other bands, but I never got to complete that record, which was so frustrating to me,” Bill says. “I didn’t get back to it until after Jerry died, but in ‘93, I ran into him, and Jerry asked me, ‘What about that album