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Rocker Dad Jorma Kaukonen talks Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin and his adopted daughter

Posted 10:00am Fri Feb 10th, 2012 by [pandaroo](#)
 by [Kyle Mullin](#)
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Jorma Kaukonen and his wife adopted a girl from China

He's played guitar for Jefferson Airplane, David Crosby, and Janis Joplin. But Jorma Kaukonen says none of those collaborations can compare to bonding with a Chinese orphan.

A February 11 Yugong Yishan gig will be the prolific guitarist's first ever far east visit, but he's been acquainted with China ever since his wife Vanessa traveled to Nanning to adopt their now 5-year-old daughter, Israel love.

"From the first time I saw her picture at the orphanage I felt that she was our daughter," Kaukonen says of his greatest muse. "On my last album, *River of Time*, there's a lot of songs dedicated to her. She inspires me to write music that's very different from what I normally did in that it's not blues oriented, just poetry set to music."

In a recent phone interview with the *Beijinger* , Kaukonen detailed that journey from the blues to psychedelic rock, and how it now helps him write musical family mementos.

What made you want to adopt a Chinese child?

I'm 71 years old, a little old by western guardian standards. My wife is 20 years younger than me but she's not a kid either, so when we looked at adopting, one of the only regions that wasn't critical about age was China.

How does your little girl feel about you returning to her homeland?

I thought she'd say 'I wish I can go too.' But it's funny, she's in kindergarten now, she

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got an award for perfect attendance so far this year. And, unlike her dad, she doesn't want to miss any school.

That's adorable. What about your own education, musically? Enotes.com quotes you as saying you were "sucked in by the technology" when you first auditioned for '60s psychedelic rock troupe Jefferson Airplane. That's quite a contrast from your stripped down bluegrass recordings, like 2009's River of Time.

If you listen to our (Jefferson Airplane's) stuff from the '70s, you have to wade your way through the overdubs. But left to my own devices, I'm a pretty minimalist guy. Even the technology I was drawn to back then, by today's standards it's so rudimentary it's almost laughable... like (using) the kinds of amps that kids always use today for looping, at the time I thought "Holy mackerel, what planet is this coming from?"

You've had just as much success outside of Jefferson Airplane, collaborating with David Crosby and Janis Joplin on their early solo albums. How did you wind up working with Janis on 1964's The Typewriter Tapes?

It was my first week in California, trying to make it as a guitarist, and I saw a flyer on a telephone pole for a free range audition. I went and Janis was one of the ones that needed an accompanist. I offered my services, and we got along so well that she invited me to play at a bunch of other gigs.

Was she struggling with drugs at the time?

Not that I was aware of, I think that was later. It was 1962 and I was only 21 or 22 years old, she was only in her late teens and I don't think it had become an issue yet. At that time we both just loved the music and put it first.

Do you ever have survivor's guilt about getting through the '60s and '70s when many of your musician friends didn't? How did you avoid their pitfalls?

Well, I had as many pitfalls as anybody. But luckily I was able to grow up while I was still alive.

Jorma will showcase those years of evolution at [Yugong Yishan](#) on Feb. 11 at 9pm. Tickets are RMB 100 (RMB 70 pre-sale). For more information visit [www.yugongyishan.com](#)

Photo courtesy of Jorma Kaukonen.

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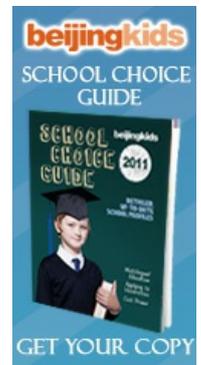


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