

## GRAM PARSONS

Title: Live - Max's Kansas City

Label: NA

Release Date: NA

Medium: CD

Availability: Rare

Venue: Max's Kansas City, NYC, New York

Recording Date: March 9, 1973

Lineup: Gram Parsons - Vocals, guitar  
Emmylou Harris - Vocals  
ND Smart II - Drums

Jock Bartley - Guitar  
Neil Flanz - Pedal steel guitar  
Kyle Tullis - Bass

Set List: Buckaroo  
Still Feeling Blue  
That's All It Took  
California Cottonfields  
Cry One More Time

A Song For You  
If You Don't Love Him (Let Him Go)  
Hang On Sloopy  
Medley - Baby What You Want Me To Do/  
Bony Maronie/Forty Days/Almost Grown

Arguably, Gram Parsons was the most pivotal figure in the development of country rock, a genre that has generated millions of dollars since his death in September, 1973. While Parsons was a key member of the Byrds and one of the founders of the Flying Burrito Brothers, he never achieved the fame and fortune that his talent deserved. His two solo albums generated virtually no sales, although they are now regarded as classics. Only the second charted, and then barely. However, Parsons was admired by his peers and his songs have become mainstays in country music. His legacy continues to this day.

Parsons was born Ingram Cecil Connor III on November 5, 1946 in Winter Haven, Florida to Ingram Cecil and Avis Snively Connor. His mother was the daughter of citrus fruit magnate John A. Snively, who owned extensive properties in Florida and Georgia. His father was a WWII flying ace. While Gram's early childhood was happy, his parents became alcoholics and his father suffered from depression. When Gram was 12 years old, his father killed himself two days before Christmas. While his mother eventually remarried to Robert Parsons, both Gram and his younger sister Avis, were affected for the remainder of their lives.

The new marriage was stable until his mother died from cirrhosis on June 5, 1965. Gram inherited a large trust fund which sustained him for the remainder of his life. From an early age, Gram had used music as a relief from his family problems. He learned to play the piano at the age of nine and after seeing Elvis Presley perform at his school, decided to become a musician.

At the age of 14, Gram played in his first rock and roll band, the Pacers. That band evolved into the Legends, which also included future Lobo members Jim Stafford and Kent Lavoie. In 1963, Parsons changed directions and formed a folk group called the Shilos. They performed throughout Florida and cut several demos, but were not picked up by any label. However, they did land some bookings in NYC before disbanding in the spring of 1965. Gram then attended Harvard University for one semester. While there, he fell in love with country music, particularly inspired by Merle Haggard.

In 1966, he formed a new group called the International Submarine Band with guitarist John Nuese, bassist Ian Dunlop, and drummer Mickey Gauvin. They recorded a handful of singles and an album that was never released for Goldstar Records before relocating from NYC to Los Angeles. Once there, Dunlop and Gauvin left and were replaced by drummer Jon Corneal and a trio of session players. They released a new single in July, 1967, added Chris Ethridge on bass, and released their only album, *Safe At Home* (1968) in March, 1968. It featured four original Parsons' compositions.

While Parsons was recording the album, he met Hillman and the two became friends. While Gram was waiting for International Submarine Band's debut album to be released, Hillman asked him to audition for the Byrds. Parsons agreed and was hired as a rhythm guitarist and singer. He debuted on *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* (#77-1968), which was released on August 30, 1968. Initially conceived by McGuinn as a project to explore all forms of Americana music, the final product was recorded in Nashville and was decidedly country based. While touring in support in London in July, 1968, Parsons abruptly left the band, in part because he did not want to tour in South Africa because of apartheid and in part because he had become friends with Keith Richards and Mick Jagger and wanted to hang with them.

The two musicians recruited bassist Chris Ethridge (born John Christopher Ethridge on February 10, 1947 in Meridian, Mississippi) and steel guitarist "Sneaky" Pete Kleinow (born Peter E. Kleinow on August 20, 1934 in South Bend, Indiana) to round out the band. Oddly, the name, Flying Burrito Brothers, had been coined by ex International Submarine Band members Ian Dunlop and Mickey Gauvin, who teamed with Barry Tashian and Billy Briggs from the Remains to form a new band. Dunlop owned the name. They played honky tonks in the LA area under that moniker but never recorded anything. When Tashian and Dunlop decided to move to the east coast, Dunlop allowed Parsons to take the name for his own group.

Ethridge had also been a member of International Submarine Band with Parsons while Kleinow was a fixture in the Los Angeles country scene, playing with Smokey Rogers & the Western Caravan and the Detours among others. The four were immediately signed by A&M and began to record their debut album. Lacking a drummer, four session drummers were used to record the record. That album, *The Gilded Palace Of Sin* (#164-1969), was released in February, 1969. It made the lower reaches of the American pop albums chart and generated sales of approximately 50,000 copies.

The album was a revolutionary combination of country, folk, gospel, soul, and rock. It was characterized by the vocal harmonies of Parsons, Hillman, and Ethridge, as well as Kleinow's distinctive pedal steel work, which was played through a fuzzbox and amplified by a rotating Hammond Leslie amp, which was usually used by keyboard players. It played an important role in the development of The Eagles as well as the development of an entirely new style of country music recorded by Travis Tritt, Vince Gill, Alan Jackson, Clint Black, and Randy Travis in the eighties. It was ranked number 192 on Rolling Stones' 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.

Needing a full time drummer to tour, the band hired ex Byrd Michael Clarke (born Michael James Dick on June 3, 1946 in Spokane, Washington). Since being fired by the Byrds in late 1967, he had joined Dillard and Clark. The resulting tour was a disaster. First, the band turned down an opportunity to play at Woodstock. Second, due to Parsons' aversion to flying, they traveled via train through the United States. By the fall of 1969, Ethridge had left, prompting Hillman to return to bass. He was replaced by future Eagle, Bernie Leadon (born Bernard Mathew Leadon III on July 19, 1947 in Minneapolis, Minnesota). Leadon had first met Hillman when both were teenagers in California and had most recently been a member of Dillard & Clark.

After recording a second album, *Burrito Deluxe*, with the Flying Burrito Brothers, Parsons showed up at a show too drunk to remember the songs. He was fired by Hillman on the spot. Once again, it seemed that he wanted to leave the group anyway. He quickly signed a solo deal with A&M Records and was teamed with producer Terry Melcher, who had worked with the Byrds. The two recorded a handful of songs before both lost interest in the project. A&M dropped him.

Gram then accompanied the Rolling Stones on their ten day 1971 UK tour in March, 1971. He was hoping that they would sign him to their newly formed Rolling Stones Records, but that did not take place. A planned duo album by Richards and Parsons also did not get traction. After spending much of the spring in London, he then accompanied the Stones to France, where they were going to record their next album, *Exile On Main Street*. They arrived in June, 1971. While there, Parsons was constantly drunk and high. He also had brought along his then girlfriend, Gretchen Burrell, and they constantly fought. They were a constant distraction and convinced that Parsons' self destructive behavior would not change, Richards' long time partner, Anita Pallenberg, insisted that they leave, which they did in early July.

While accounts vary as to the real reasons why Parsons left France, it was later suggested that Jagger was behind the demand from the start. Richards was spending so much time partying and playing songs with Parsons that he could not focus on the Stones new album. It has also been suggested that Richards wanted to clean the house of any drug users since he was being pressured by the French police. At any rate, Gram never did reconcile with the band and dropped out of their circle of friends.

After returning to the States and marrying Burrell, the couple spend time in England. With the assistance of Family/Blind Faith bassist Ric Grech, he was able to kick heroin. After playing an one off show with the Burritos, Hillman suggested that he go see Emmylou Harris sing in a small club in Washington DC. They became fast friends and she encouraged him to record his still pending debut solo album. In mid 1972, he was signed by Mo Ostin to Reprise Records. Initially country legend Merle Haggard had agreed to produce the album but after the first recording session, he abruptly dropped out. Parsons idolized Haggard and was crushed.

However, the singer got his act together and brought over Grech to help him produce the album. He also secured the use of the core of Elvis Presley's backing band, TCB. They included guitar legend James Burton, keyboardist Glen D. Hardin, and Ronnie Tutt on drums. Grech played bass. Harris sang backup and guitarist/vocalist Barry Tashian played a significant role. Gram began recording the new album in September, 1972. It was finished by the end of October. The new album, *GP* (1972), was released in January, 1972. Unlike his previous work, the recording was pure country and did not find an audience. It did not chart.

To tour behind the album, Parsons pulled together a new band, the Fallen Angels, which included Harris, Jock Bartley, Neil Flanz, ND Smart II, and Kyle Tullis. The band toured in early 1973. After the tour ended, Parsons reconvened Burton, Hardin, and Tutt to record a new album. The sessions also included Harris, bassist Emory Gordy Jr., pedal steel guitarist Al Perkins, and guitarist Herb Pedersen. A number of guest musicians also contributed, including Bernie Leadon, Ronstadt, N.D. Smart, and Byron Berline.

*Grievous Angel* (#195-1974), was recorded during the summer of 1973. It had a more country rock feel than his debut. In retrospect, it is amazing that the album was even completed. By this point, Gram was using heroin once again and drinking heavily. However, he bounced back in the studio and recording sessions were relatively drama free. Plans were even made for a Fall supporting tour, that would include a shared backing band that included Clarence White, Pete Kleinow, and Chris Ethridge. However, while

Parsons was recording the album, White was tragically killed by a drunk driver while he was loading equipment into his van.

During that same summer, Parsons Topanga Canyon home was completely destroyed by a fire caused by a stray cigarette. Nearly all his possessions were destroyed. On top of all of this, his marriage was falling apart. Burrell was extremely jealous of Harris and Parsons had moved in with his road manager. Ironically, Parsons and Harris were not romantically involved. In fact, once he separated from Burrell, he rekindled a relationship with his high school sweetheart from Georgia, Margaret Fisher.

Needing to decompress before the fall tour, which was still planned despite White's death, Parsons went to Joshua Tree National Monument in southern California. Accompanying him were Fisher, his assistant Michael Martin, and Martin's girlfriend, Dale McElroy. The group arrived on September 17, 1973. It was common place for Parsons to visit Joshua Tree, which he had been doing on a regular basis since the late sixties. During these trips, Parsons would venture out into the desert along, while his friends remained behind drinking at local bars.

On the night of September 18, 1973, Parsons drank six double tequilas, then purchased morphine from an unknown woman after returning to the Joshua Tree Inn. He injected the morphine and immediately overdosed. Fisher temporarily revived him with an ice cube suppository and cold shower, then put him to bed. While Fisher went out to get coffee, McElroy stayed in the room to watch the singer. Parsons began to crash once again. After unsuccessful attempts from Fisher and McElroy to resuscitate him, they finally called an ambulance. It was too late. Parsons was declared dead on his arrive at High Desert Memorial Hospital at 12:15 a.m. on September 19, 1973. The official cause of death was an overdose of morphine and alcohol. .

Upon his death, Parsons step father, Bob Parsons, organized a private ceremony in New Orleans. The circumstances behind the ceremony were suspicious as none of Parsons' friends were invited and Bob Parsons could inherit Gram's still considerable trust fund if he could prove that Gram was a resident of Louisiana. However, Gram had told his road manager, Phil Kaufman, that in the event of his death, he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes dispersed over Cap Rock at Joshua Tree.

In a bizarre set of circumstances, Gram's body was taken to Los Angeles International Airport for transport to New Orleans. Somehow, Kaufman and a friend managed to steal it from the airport and drove it back to the Joshua Tree desert in a borrowed hearse. Once there, they attempted to cremate it by pouring five gallons of gasoline into the casket and setting it on fire. This created an enormous fireball which attracted the attention of the local police. They chased Kaufman and his friend but the two managed to escape. They were arrested several days later and only fined for stealing the coffin. As it turned out, it was not illegal to steal the body. What was left of Parsons' body was shipped back to Louisiana where he was buried at the Garden of Memories Cemetary in Metairie.

Since his death, Parsons had obtained almost legendary status, despite not being inducted into either the Country Music Hall Of Fame nor the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame. He was included on Rolling Stone Magazine's 100 Greatest Artists Of All Time, listed ast number 87. He has been memorialized through music festivals, a music theatre production, tribute bands, and his music is still covered by various artists.

Parsons has only released one official live recordings. Sierra's 1982 set, *Live 1973*, includes 12 tracks recorded on March 13, 1973 fpr a WLIR-FM radio concert. He is also featured on several compilations. Raven's 1992 set, *Warm Evenings, Pale Mornings, Bottled Blues*, contains 21 tracks, including one live cut.

Sundazed's 2000 release, *Another Side Of This Life: The Lost Recordings Of Gram Parsons 1965-1966*, includes 18 solo acoustic tracks Parsons recorded in a folk singer style. Rhino's 2001 set, *Sacred Hearts And Fallen Angels: The Gram Parsons Anthology*, contains 46 tracks from Parsons' entire career, including recordings with the Byrds and the Flying Burrito Brothers. Finally Reprise's 2006 release, *The Complete Reprise Sessions*, includes 48 tracks from his solo recordings.

My first live recording of Parsons is a a set he recorded in Max's Kansas City in New York City on March 9, 1973. At the time, Parsons was accompanied by the Fallen Angels, which included Emmylou Harris. Amazingly, this set includes six songs that do not appear on the Rhino radio concert, which was recorded just four days later. They include a Byrds instrumental, three songs from *G.P.*, and two new covers. Recording quality is pretty good, with clear separation between the vocals and instruments.

As this set shows, Parsons had fully converted to country music by the time he released his two solo albums. However, he also was a rocker, as evidenced by his cover of the McCoys' classic, "Hang On Sloopy" and a driving rock and roll medley that ends the set. The country influenced material features the tandem vocals of Emmylou Harris, who also sings solo lead on the cover "If You Don't Love Him (Let Him Go)". Her dual vocals with Parsons on "Still Feeling Blue", "That's All It Took", and "A Song For You" are terrific.

These songs also feature the pedal steel guitar work of Flanz and the guitar work of Bartley. These songs are performed both fast and slow, which showcases both Smart and Tullis, who keep things moving along at whatever pace is required. The country based material also includes the Merle Haggard composition, "California Cottonfields", which also features Harris. It is a true country rocker, with terrific harmonies, a driving beat, and a solid pedal steel guitar solo.

The band also can play the blues, as evidenced by "Cry One More Time", which features Parsons at his gritty best. He handles lead vocals, with Harris singing harmony, and both Bartley and Flanz throw off great guitar solos. The song is loosely played, which works perfectly in a live setting. The group also does a terrific cover of "Hang On Sloopy" which is slower than you will remember but just as effective. They are even better on a rock and roll medley that includes "Baby, What You Want Me To Do","Bony Maronie", "Forty Days", and "Almost Grown." It features guitar solos from Flanz, Bartley, and Parsons, who shows that he stills knows how to handle an electric six string. It is a great ending to a fine block of music that captures Parsons at his best. The fact that it also includes six songs not included on the Rhino set makes it an even better fine.

Since bootlegs are hard to track down, you should pick up the Rhino set if you want to include Gram Parsons in your collection. It is available at any large music retailer. However, if you want to search for this set, try ebay or a file sharing service.

Title: Live 1973

Label: Rhino

Release Date: 1997

Medium: CD

Availability: Very Good

Venue: Hempstead, New York

Recording Date; March 13, 1973

Lineup: Gram Parsons - Vocals, guitar

Jock Bartley - Guitar

Emmylou Harris - Vocals  
ND Smart II - Drums

Neil Flanz - Pedal steel guitar  
Kyle Tullis - Bass

Set List: We'll Sweep Out The Ashes In The Morning  
Country Baptizing  
Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man  
Big Mouth Blues  
The New Soft Shoe  
Cry One More Time

Streets Of Baltimore  
That's All It Took  
Love Hurts  
California Cottonfields  
Six Days On The Road  
Rock 'n' Roll Medley

The most noted live set from Parsons is this CD of a WLIR radio concert recorded in Hempstead, New York on March 13, 1973. The set includes 12 impeccably recorded tracks, including six from Parson's debut solo album, *G.P.* Like the Max's Kansas City set, recorded four days earlier, Parsons is accompanied by the Falling Angels.

Obviously, the Max's Kansas City set and this recording share much in common. However, what is fascinating is that only three songs are repeated between the two sets. And, between them, the sets include eight of the eleven songs that appeared on *G.P.* Since the WLIR set is extremely well recorded and the boot is problematic, this is the set that you will want to own.

Like the bootleg, *Live 1973* is well performed. Parsons' vocals stand out even more in the mix and the recording is so clear that they sound like they are in the room with you. The set shows how versatile this band could be. There is a blues song, "Cry One More Time", and several choice covers in addition to pure country pieces and rock and roll. The covers include an outstanding version of "Love Hurts" that shows how well Parsons and Harris could harmonize, as well as rock based covers like "Six Days On The Road" and a rock and roll medley that includes snippets of "Bony Maronie", "Forty Days", and "Almost Grown".

There is also an outstanding gospel like cover of "Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man" that showcases how good a singer Parsons was. Fast paced country pieces include Merle Haggard's "California Cottonfields" and "Country Baptizing", where Tullis actually has a brief bass solo. Slower country based pieces like "We'll Sweep Out The Ashes In the Morning", "The New Soft Shoe", "Streets Of Baltimore", and "That's All It Took" are traditional country in structure and played with passion. Musically, the dual guitars of Neil Flanz and Jock Bartley are prominently featured in nearly song. They are equally comfortable playing country, rock, or the blues.

It is clear from this set and the Max's show that Gram Parsons and the Falling Angels were a terrific live band. Parsons is particularly engaged with his audience, telling several interesting stories between songs as the set goes on. Since the WLIR set has been officially released, is better recorded, and contains three more songs, it should be your first choice. It is available at any large music retailer.