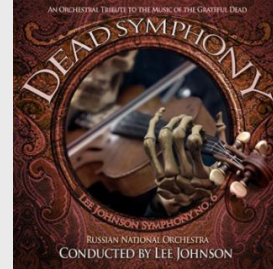




# Indie Retail Exclusives\*

Lee Johnson/Russian National Orchestra  
Dead Symphony no. 6  
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WASHINGTON (Reuters Life!) - The Grateful Dead made their name playing improvisational music born anew with every performance, and now an American composer has sought to capture their psychedelic spirit in a classical symphony. "Dead Symphony No. 6," by Lee Johnson, encompasses some of the band's most familiar melodies and its most otherworldly jams in a work in 12 movements. The symphony is a "musical embrace of American culture" and a natural outgrowth of the band's spirit, Johnson said. "The Grateful Dead lived in the musical moment. There was a world of perpetual exploration and endless possibility." A studio recording by the Grammy-winning Russian National Orchestra has been released online and a CD release is scheduled for late May. Discussions are also underway for a live U.S. orchestral premiere, possibly in the San Francisco area. Rock songs have long been arranged for orchestral "pops" concerts, but Johnson said the Dead symphony is more ambitious. Highlights include movements based on the Dead's psychedelic portion, in the lament "Stella Blue." Atlanta producer Mike Adams, a "Deadhead" fan of the band, got the idea of a symphony after frontman Jerry Garcia died in 1995. He wanted someone who could cast the music in a classical form. "He thought that what he was hearing was way beyond what a band should be able to do. It could have symphonic possibilities," said Johnson, who was recruited by Adams. Johnson, an Emmy-winner composer has written symphonies, operas and film recordings. "I grew up studying 'dead' composers, but the other kinds - the Stravinskys, the Beethovens and all those," he said.

## PRECIOUS GEMSTONES

Johnson chose songs based on their melodic potential and overall fit. A movement based on the song "Here Comes Sunshine," for example, stretches the original melody in time so it is almost unrecognizable amid the harmonies. One ambitious movement was based on "Blues for Allah," which was played live only three times by the Grateful Dead. In Johnson's version, a clarinet's jaunty refrain evokes American composer George Gershwin, while deep cellos envelop the movement in its powerful Middle Eastern theme. The symphony's overture and finale include strains of "Funiculi Funicula," the much-parodied Italian song the Dead used as a playful tune rip-off. The symphony should appeal to "Deadheads," whose attention to the band's improvisations has given them listening skills surpassing many classical aficionados, he said. Symphony audiences would probably include fans in tie-dye and tough-looking bikers. But the Russian players also took to the music. When asked to improvise for "Stella Blue," they were eager to jam. "The orchestra is just kind of deconstructing all around it (the song). It is spontaneously combusting," he said. The improvisation section remains in the score, with some guidance for future performances to avert utter cacophony. The symphony can take its place in the evolution of a still-young American musical heritage, Johnson said. "I know for a fact that I'm the luckiest composer in America to be asked to do this."

1. Dead Overture mvt I (Johnson) (1:53)
2. Saint Stephen mvt II (Hunter, Garcia, Lesh) (4:12)
3. Here Comes Sunshine mvt III (Hunter, Garcia) (6:38)
4. Mountains Of The Moon mvt IV (Hunter, Garcia) (3:34)
5. Blues For Allah mvt V (Hunter, Garcia) (4:21)
6. Sugar Magnolia mvt VI (Hunter, Weir) (2:57)
7. To Lay Me Down mvt VII (Hunter, Garcia) (6:12)
8. If I Had The World To Give mvt VIII (Hunter, Garcia) (3:59)
9. Stella Blue mvt IX (Hunter, Garcia) (4:54)
10. Bird Song mvt X (Hunter, Garcia) (2:42)
11. China Doll mvt XI (Hunter, Garcia) (5:12)
12. Dead Finale mvt XII (Johnson) (1:51)