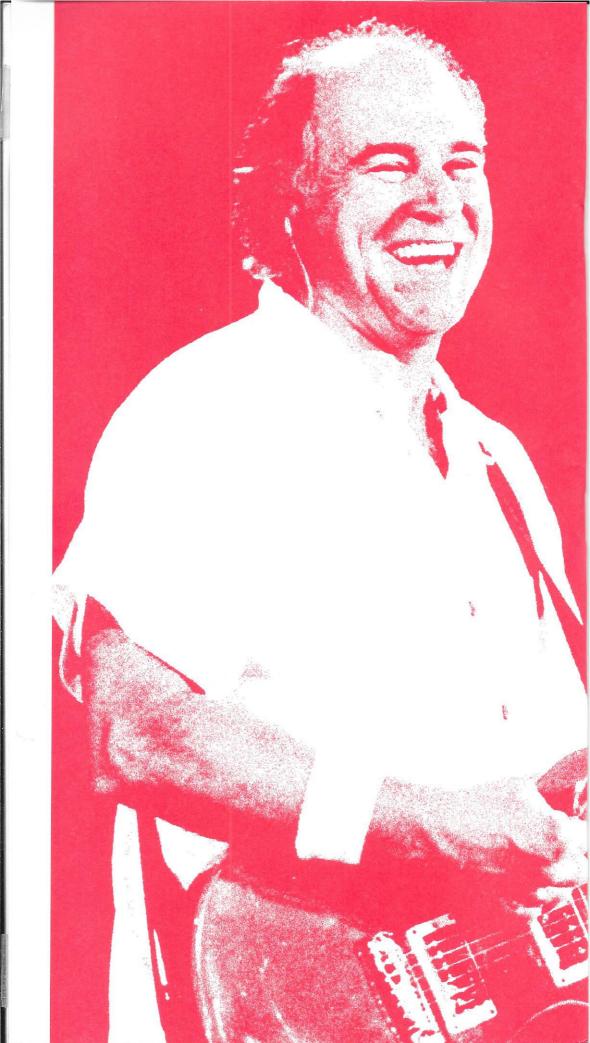
VOLUME 16 NO.5

www.margaritaville.com

Christmas 200

Photo: Noah L. Greenberg



Chris Dixon, the webdesigning-surfing-laptoppacking-journalist. flexes his fly-on-the-wall reporting skills presenting behind the scene stories to web wading 'Heads. For those who lead a contented, peaceful life, who refuse to bask in the glow of a computer monitor, who ignore the allure of the "super highway," we offer this, his latest effort

JB: The great thing about this whole gig is, you make it up as you go along. In making up the new show, I look at it like this: we've got this great, old, good-running car, and every now and then you've got to tinker with it. And I believe you've got to do the songs that people pay the money to see. It may be boring to some people, but it sure as hell doesn't look like it from where I'm standing. I don't have a problem with playing the standards. That's what people want to hear, so I'm gonna do them.

What having the standards does, though, is give you the opportunity to create the new show in the spaces and gaps between the standard hits you're playing. And that's the trick; use that space to bring the fresh coat of paint to the new show.

So we were thinking of this show last year — sitting there in a production meeting thinking of what the opening was going to be. I asked, what's the best opening we've ever had? Hands down, everybody said, "The Junkanoos." And it was true. The Bahamian Junkanoos. When they came out, they electrified that audience from the beginning like nothing I'd ever seen. And we said, maybe we should get the Junkanoos.

And then Tim Clancy said, "You know, I can get a Junkanoo sound with performers from Sports Magic out of Orlando." The real Junkanoo performers are great — but they're cab drivers, limo drivers and that sort of thing in the Bahamas. Once they did the opening, we couldn't use them afterward.

So the first thing I'm saying as I look at Tim is, 'You're gonna have 15 white guys that look like Tim come up dressed as Junkanoos?' And Tim said, "No, I've got these guys from Africa, the Caribbean, all over. I said 'I wanna see resumes and pictures.' Well, we got busy and I never looked at the resumes — I just trusted that these guys knew what they were doing.

So, we wrote the show for a Junkanoo opening. And we didn't have the dancers and drummers for the first part of rehearsal. They just showed up the day before dress rehearsal. We were just going to tell them where they went and what to do. Then I heard them play, and saw them dance, and I said, 'Man, that's great!' And I turned to Ralph [MacDonald] and I said, 'Those aren't Junkanoos, those are Africans!' They all were so good that we re-wrote the whole opening. We said, forget all that Junkanoo stuff — because that's what these guys were trying to do. I said, go back and do exactly what you were doing before.

CD: They were telling me how different this was from any gig they'd done before.

JB: Well, yeah. It would have to be. Once again, we put our asses on the line and came up with something that the audience loves. I mean, after 16 shows, I get people who've seen the show, and they just go bananas over the opening. It's the stuff I've learned from musical theater in the last few years, too. We bookend the first part of the show — opening with the dancers and have them come out for One Particular Harbor before intermission. That makes it like going to two shows. The first set to me, is as powerful as we've ever been. We open with a lot of traditional stuff and mix in things that people haven't heard, and then do a 4-5 song acoustic set — which we haven't been able to do before. You'd think you won't be able to do that many acoustics with a crowd so big and raucous, but it seems to work.

CD: How about having Heather and Louisa out on tour?

JB: Well, that all started when we went in and interviewed dancing girls for Don't Stop the Carnival. That's an enjoyable process. Working in musical theater just fascinates me. I got the idea of having the girls from watching one of my favorite bands from Martinique called Kassav. They had two sets of adagio dancers — two couples. So while the band is playing all this wonderful zook music, you have people dancing with traditional and modern costumes. I love that part of their show. And I wanted to try it to see if Parrot Heads dug it.

Louisa's the one I went to when we were auditioning dancers. Not only can she dance, she's got great talent coordinating skills. And she recommended Heather because she knew her from the Rockettes. Heather's delightful. And she had such a cameraderie with the band.

CD: I was struck by how things changed from the start of rehearsal to now. It's still the same framework, but much is different.

JB: Well, if there's anything I've learned from musical theater, it's that the show is scripted. But ours still changes a lot. I write down what I'm thinking — ideas, directions, thoughts and processes and then I send it out to all the other guys. You'll get input from the lighting director, from the production crew, the dancers and the band. But then when you get there, you have to always be ready and able to adapt. I've always done it that way — I don't know how to do it any other way.

The horn section is an example. I have them do their own horn range because they know how to make me sound best. I never tell them what to play. And in hiring people like Louisa Kendrick, you hire them for a reason. Louisa's got talent and knows how we work. I love that.

I've always wanted to mix the work of musical theater and rock and roll. I think we do it pretty well. And it's all about whether the audience will accept it or not. If they didn't like the dancing girls, they wouldn't be there. But we sure like them, and with two of them it really seems to work. A little dancing, a little shaking around. People love 'em.

CD: The whole production staff and band were raving about the Alpine Valley (Wisconsin) show. Can you tell shifts in the energy level of the crowd?

JB: It's a living, breathing thing. You bet I can tell. I've really tried to stay connected as a performer that way. It's not just doing a set list. I work off that audience energy. Take Alpine Valley. We've been dogged by bad weather, but still 39,000 people showed up. And we caught such pretty weather that night. I walked out on that stage, and the energy literally, physically knocked me back. I really had to catch up to the audience. At Alpine Valley, not only are there 39,000 people, it's a low, close stage, so you can touch them. You can feel all that mass, you bet. I can even feel the people on the lawn.

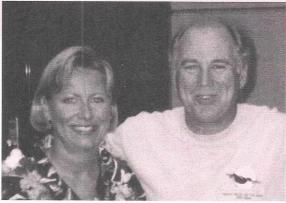
CD: Do you notice individual members of the audience?

JB: Sure. I'm trying to work with the energy of a crowd like a sailboat or an airplane. Trimming here, moving around, following the currents. And the people I can see in my individual line of sight — I try to use and transfer their energy so that the rest of the audience feels that way. Having a direct connection like that is not something I thought we could do. I thought, well, you can be intimate with about 500 people, then it seemed like, well, you can do 5,000 if you do it right. Then 10,000 on to 30,000. We're not just doing run-throughs of our songs. We're having fun and responding to the crowd. Maybe the umbilical link is the beachball. I don't know, whatever it is, it works. I've taken more direct beach ball hits to the head this year than and in the past. Normally, I can duck those things. But with these crowds... It sure has been fun.



In May, 1993, Cincinnati Public Schools held a contest for students interested in the marine environment. The rules: read and summarize three books from a list presented by singer/songwriter Jimmy Buffett. The award: 2 weeks in August attending Seacamp, a non-profit marine science camp in the Florida Keys. Jimmy's affinity to the environment and to Cincinnati - the seat of Parrot Headism - drove him to offer this unique opportunity. Selected students spent 2 weeks in Big Pine Key, 30 miles outside of Key West, participating in recreational and classroom activities.

The Seacamp Scholarship Program is now an annual event.



Contest Coordinator, Linda Basler and JB

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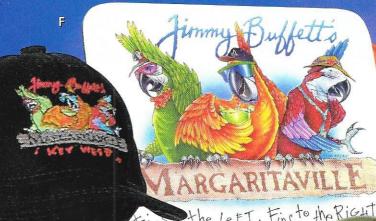


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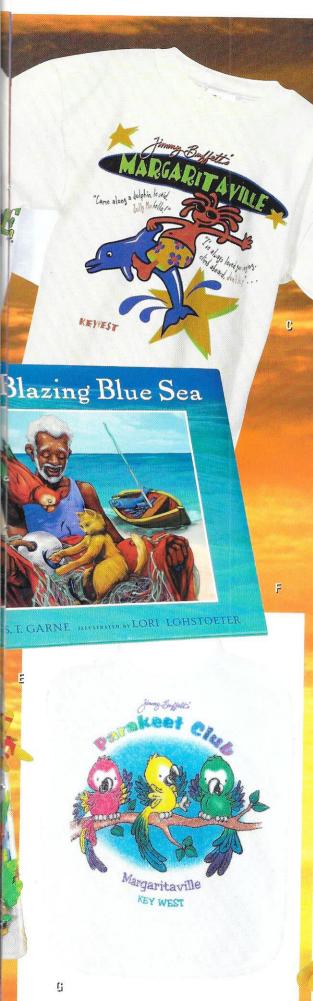


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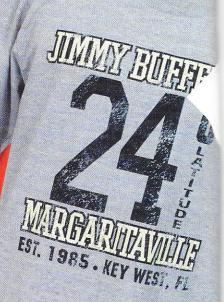
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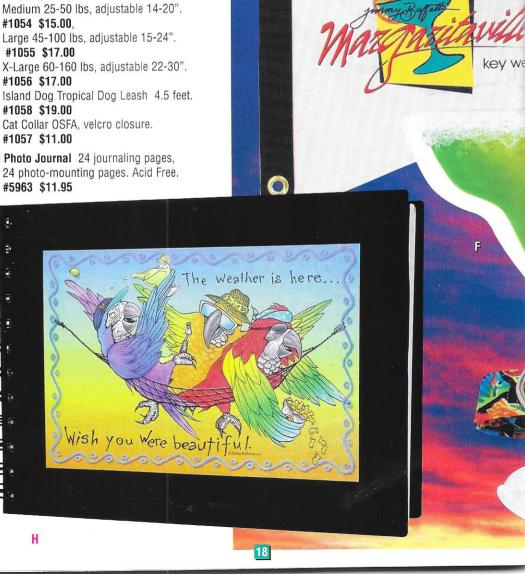
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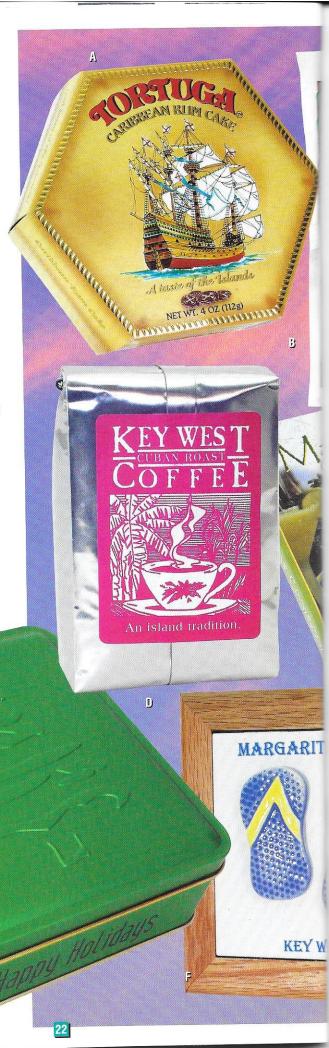
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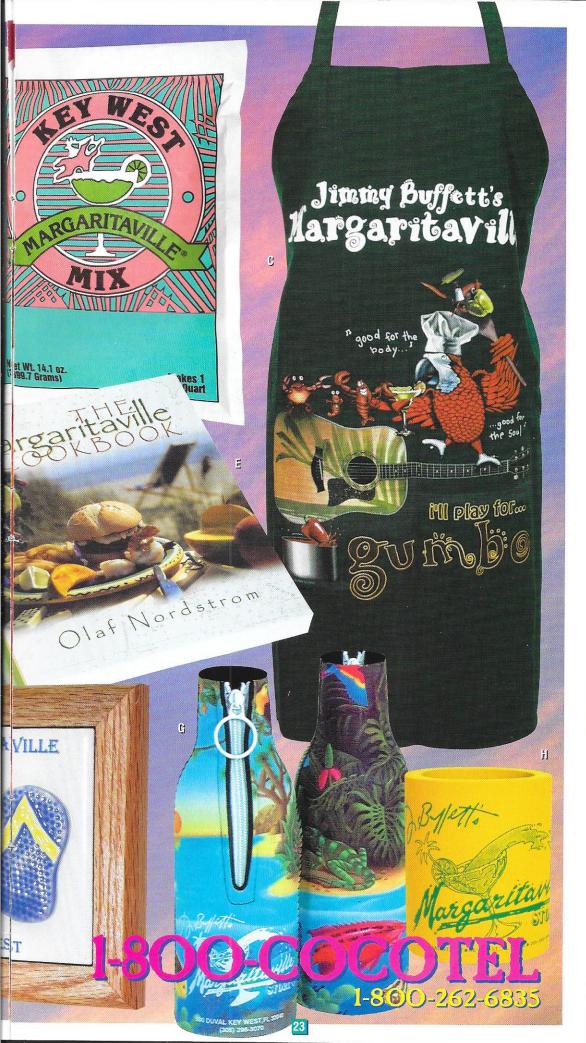
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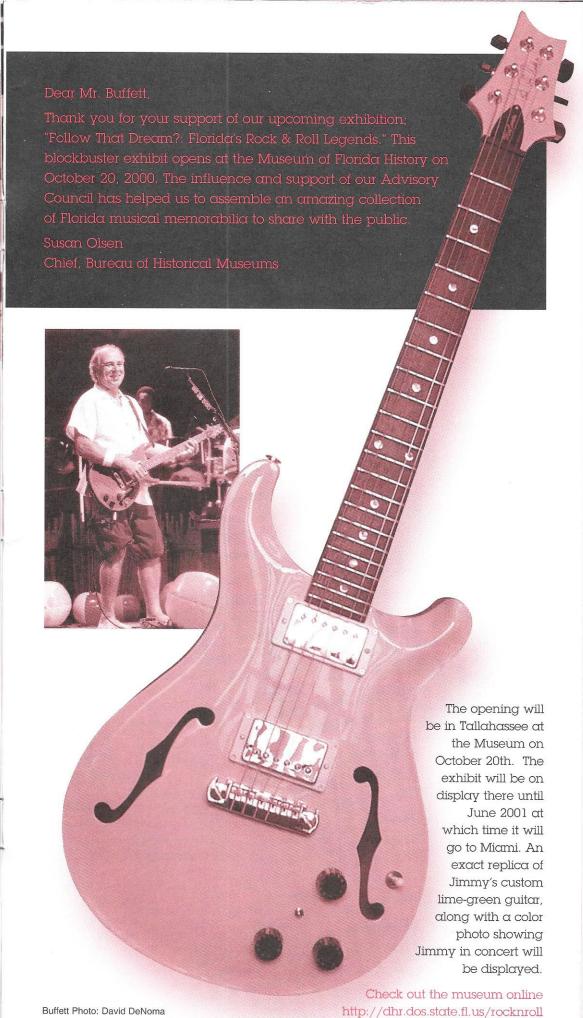
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Dear Mr. Buffett,

My name is Mike Ferrell and I am in the Air Force stationed at the Pentagon. I am one of your many faithful fans. My current position allows me to travel each November to the South Pole. Last year I organized a Jimmy Buffett party in your honor and we had a blast. There is nothing like sitting on a makeshift lawn chair in the snow with the temperature hovering at 40 below zero listening to your music. This year I an traveling to Key West and would like to get something from your place to take to the South Pole in November. We would take lots of pictures and return the items and pictures to Margaritaville so they can be displayed for all to see. I will be waiting your response. Thank you so much for your way of bringing sunshine even to the South Pole.

Sincerely, Mike Ferrell

We gave Mike a Margaritaville Boat Flag and will have the photos in a future issue of the Coconut Telegraph. JB





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