

## PERFORMANCE

# Marshall Tucker plays Dead

Marshall Tucker Band  
Madison Square Garden  
New York City  
November 9th, 1978

By John Swenson

**T**HE HOTTEST free agents to come to Madison Square Garden this fall weren't hockey or basketball players, but the Marshall Tucker Band, led by the Caldwell brothers, Toy and Tommy. After playing out its option with Capricorn Records, the group was being courted by a number of major labels, and this was a crucial showcase. (Warner Bros. eventually won the bidding war.)

The band was under additional pressure because New York traditionally is a bad town for Southern rock groups. These bands trade on regional pride, and Marshall

Yorkers usually don't appreciate. In addition, Tucker's blend of country-rock elements and easy, loping instrumental jams works best in a relaxed, open-air setting, not in a reserved-seat arena where the staging is often as important as the music.

To deal with this problem, the band used a backdrop projection of a runaway stagecoach careening across the prairie. The setting made the band seem more at home, but as it turned out, no such help was needed. The crowd was wildly enthusiastic from the start. Tanked to the gills on every type of booze imaginable and totally oblivious of the seating arrangement,

they roamed up and down the Garden stairways and aisles at will. The best response of the night came with "Can't You See." The entire audience seemed to join in on the sing-along chorus, and a reference to New York City fired the crowd up even more. People stood on their seats and waved bottles in the air. And even though the set was barely half over, they lit thousands of matches and cried for more when the song ended.

The band responded with a tight, professional set that covered all its FM hits ("Carolina Dreams," "Fire on the Mountain," "Take the Highway") and featured one long Toy Caldwell guitar solo per song, plus an occasional flute break from Jerry Eubanks. The crowd cheered each solo as if it had never heard one before. The rhythm section choogled along with just enough abandon to keep the fans dancing. And George McCorkle on rhythm guitar and Tommy Caldwell on bass engaged in a Bo Diddley shuffle marathon, while drummer Paul Riddle did his best to hold things together.

"It's just like the Grateful Dead," one delighted girl sitting in the loge hallway said to her friends. The T-shirt salesman outside concurred: "These Tucker shirts are our best item," one said, "outside of the Dead shirts."