THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED:

TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The Grateful Dead grew from the 1960's counterculture and have been one of the most influential bands of American culture. This thesis examines Deadheads and the ritual dimensions of live shows subculture from its inception in the 1960s to the present through ethnographic work, focusing on the period of 1995—2020, and the changes that have arisen with the new group of younger fans. Chapter II consists of a literature review and investigates the ritual dimensions of live show using Robin Sylvan's levels of ritual dimensions in popular music. Chapter III builds on Sylvan's theories and examines the improvisation and jam band aesthetic in one of the Dead's most representative songs "Dark Star." Chapter IV looks at the data collected through digital ethnography to investigate the differences between classic and new Deadheads, and notes variations in both groups. Chapter V concludes what has been revealed through this research, as well as summarizes future directions of this project.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

During one of the hottest days of 2019, thousands of fans (including myself) gathered at Folsom Field in Boulder, Colorado to celebrate a live show with the remaining members of The Grateful Dead, one of the most iconic bands in the world. A mid-afternoon thunderstorm was approaching alarmingly quickly, with heavy thunder clouds threatening to ruin everyone's good time. About twenty minutes into Bob Weir's first song, "Cold Rain and Snow," the band announced that the show was being postponed due to unsafe weather conditions, and the crowd was corralled inside the stadium. However, Dead & Company were back onstage an hour later, rain or shine, to finish their set. The drenched fans of all ages shared rain-soaked ponchos and passed joints around to warm up their fellow Deadheads as the band began their second set. In the middle of John Mayer's rendition of "Fire on the Mountain," an older man with a tie-dyed shirt nudged me and pointed to a patch of sunlight that was peeking through the clouds and exclaimed, "See that? It's Jerry's spirit! He's here with us."

The Grateful Dead has been touring for over forty years and have played over twenty-three thousand concerts. Deadheads from around the world still religiously follow The Grateful Dead, not just for the music itself, but for the collective, ritualized concert experience among fans. Fans of the Grateful Dead, or "Deadheads," are an enormously complex and multifaceted community, consisting of home-grown jam bands, artists, and Dead archivists spanning multiple generations.

Originating in 1965 during the rise of the countercultural movement in the United States, the psychedelic jam band concert experience of the Grateful Dead

is unlike any other live show. While the anti-establishment ideals of the countercultural movement often surround the history of the Grateful Dead, the term "counterculture" has a complex cultural history that will not be expanded upon in this thesis. Theodore Roszak's 1969 book, *Making of A Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, rehearses the details, complexities, and nuances of the 1960's movement that are acknowledged but not expanded upon in this project.

Deadheads are sometimes known for their use of recreational drugs such as marijuana, acid, and psychedelic mushrooms during the shows, and these trips often mirror the Dead's long song sets and experimental improvisational breaks. These fans use the Grateful Dead as a guide to a collective psychedelic journey among thousands of people.[1] This state of prolonged euphoria and intimacy is shared among the audience, creating a unique experience for fans of the band. Fans attend Grateful Dead shows for many reasons. For some, the drug use takes precedence, but others prioritize the sense of community that developed since the band began touring in the 1960s. This fanbase has taken the lyrics of friendship and community that are often in Grateful Dead songs to heart. The Deadheads have created a worldwide community of people who share similar interests to come together at shows. Deadheads of any age can connect and share the experience of the music together at live shows as one family.

It has been fifty-five years since Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann, Bob Weir, and Mickey Hart played their first show at Ken Kesey's acid tests under

[1] Robin Sylvan, *Traces of The Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 8.

the name The Grateful Dead in 1965. A large amount of scholarship exists on the historical elements of the Grateful Dead. However, the overwhelming weight of this literature deals with the band in its "classic" form during the life of Jerry Garcia, and few authors have examined in depth transformations and continuity within Deadhead culture following Jerry Garcia's death in 1995. To be sure, The Dead are not "dead": Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart continue their third decade of post-Garcia tours and shows. This original jam band continues to support a large, dedicated fan base unlike any other in the world. Though die-hard, aging fans of the "classic" Grateful Dead continue to form the enduring core of the Deadhead fan community, a new group of younger fans have joined the party. These newer Deadheads share the love of the original tunes, art, and drugs that characterize classic Deadhead subculture, but differ from earlier fans in the fact that they have never experienced the original Grateful Dead with lead singer Jerry Garcia.

This thesis examines Deadhead subculture from its inception in the 1960s to the present, focusing on the period of 1995—2020, and the changes that have arisen with the new group of younger fans. The best way to document the evolution within the community is to study the Deadheads themselves.

Throughout all the continuing chapters of this project, I will be referring to data that I have collected through digital ethnography. To better gauge the values of modern-day Deadheads, I designed a survey to gather information and experiences from participants across the U.S. This 2021 survey, which was conducted through google survey and posted on message boards such as reddit and dead.net, as well as in the Facebook group "Deadhead Life—Grateful Dead to

the Core!" and has a recorded 209 participants. Eleven questions were asked that included information on the participant's background, number of shows they've seen, and opinions on the Grateful Dead.[2] A Along with the survey, I have also conducted individual interviews with five willing participants where I posed questions about the Grateful Dead and opinions on newer Deadheads. [3]

Accordingly, I draw upon digital ethnographic research methods throughout this project, specifically data I collected including an online survey that had 209 participants (more on the background of this in chapter II), and individual interviews with five participants. By looking at a group of both young and older fans, I gauge the values of the Deadheads to help document the change that is noted within the community.

The second chapter of this project will include a literature review and will detail the ritualistic dimensions of a live show. Grateful Dead shows follow a ritual-like set of events, turning it into a ceremony that is similar from show to show. Although times, locations, and sets change for the Grateful Dead, the ritual of a concert remains consistent and has been practiced by fans since the band's inception in the 1960s. There are five distinct elements that are essential to any Dead show: "Shakedown Street," "tapers," "dancers," the "tour heads" and drugs. Prior to the actual concert, fans of all ages visit a dedicated area known as "Shakedown Street" consisting of tents of local people selling art, food, drugs, and bootlegged t-shirts.[4] During the show, the "tapers" and the "dancers" have

[2] For a full list of questions asked in the Deadhead Community Survey, refer to the appendix.
[3] For a full list of questions asked in the individual interviews, refer to the appendix.
[4] "Bootlegged T-shirts" refers to the homemade, often tie-dyed shirts with band paraphernalia. Instead of purchasing an expensive piece of merchandise from the vendor who

specific locations where they can be found during the concert. The tapers—those who would record the show to share and distribute after—always set up by the front speaker array, near the stage. The dancers often wear brightly colored clothes and bells around their ankles and occupy the center of the crowd, with enough room for everyone to dance. Many of the people in the crowd have traveled a long distance and have paused their lives to be there. These fans, known as the "tour heads" will follow the Dead from city to city, so they can attend *every* show in the country. During the concert experience, these fans are no longer individuals attending a show, but an organic, collective entity that dances, smokes and exists together as one.[5] Drawing upon Robin Sylvan's model of religious experience in popular music from *Traces of the Spirit* (2002) this second chapter will investigate the ritual dimensions of the Grateful Dead experience to compare to later facets of spin-off bands.

Chapter III will take a deeper look at improvisation and the jam band aesthetic. By looking at the structure of improvisation in one of the Dead's most representative songs, "Dark Star," I will analyze how the jam band aspect of the Grateful Dead amplifies the ritualistic dimensions of a live show. In this chapter I will also compare and contrast the differences noted in a 1969 performance with Garcia to a 2016 Dead & Company's version performed by Bob Weir.

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hosts the band, many fans prefer cheaper shirts made in a random fan's basement which are one-of-a-kind.

[5] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit,* 92.

Chapter IV focuses on the Deadhead community. A sense of collectivism among fans has persisted since the band's origins in the 1960s. Rachel Wilgoren comments on this collectivism:

> The idea and ideal of community has been embraced by the Dead and Deadheads alike… Rather than being part of a group because they are born into it or because they live in a certain area, Deadheads are part of the Grateful Dead community because they choose to be; they share a common interest and love and have discovered that this thread of popular culture is enough on which to build a community.[6]

Wilgoren describes this community of dedicated fans in the same association as a loyal church following. The type of affinity between Deadheads based on their common interests is a classic way to form bonds together as a collective congregation.

This chapter details the community after Garcia's death in 1995, The Dead & Company's controversial history, and the dichotomy of the young and older fans. Using data from the digital ethnography, I examine the differences that are noted of the younger fans, as well as the similarities that are shared among the two groups, and how that has contributed to the change of the overall ritualistic dimensions of the community, and the live shows. Although Garcia is gone, the Deadheads continue to "live" and spread the message of the music for generations to come.

[6] Rachel Wilgoren, "The Grateful Dead as Community," in *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead: Critical Writings*, ed. Robert G. Weiner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 220.

CHAPTER II
LONG STRANGE TRIP: THE GRATEFUL DEAD RITUAL

Examining the scholarship and literature already established on the band, I will investigate in this chapter that Grateful Dead shows often follow a ritual-like set of events, turning it into a ceremony that is similar from show to show. Investigating the ritual dimensions through the theories presented by scholar of religion Robin Sylvan, I will examine how Grateful Dead shows and facets of the later spin-off bands remain the same in a ritualistic sense over a period of fifty years.

Now represented by millions of devoted fans, the Grateful Dead originated as a small California folk band in 1965. After a disastrous discharge from the army in 1960, lead singer Jerry Garcia (1942—1995) developed a style of American folk with the acoustic guitar and banjo.[7] Along with his coworkers at the music store where he taught lessons, Garcia founded the folk band The Warlocks by 1965. Consisting of Garcia, Ron "Pigpen" McKernan (1945—1973), Bob Weir (b. 1947), Bill Kreutzmann, (b. 1946), and experimental composer Phil Lesh (b. 1940), the Warlocks made their official debut in May of 1965. After the realization that there was already another single published under the name The Warlocks, the band settled on The Grateful Dead after randomly picking it out of a dictionary.[8]

The Grateful Dead had their first successful show at the public Acid Test thrown by author Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters at the local venue known

[7] Dennis McNally and Blaire Jackson, *Grateful Dead: The Illustrated Trip*. (London: Dorling Kindersley Publishing, 2015), 45.

[8] Ibid.

as the "Big Nig" on December 4th 1965.[9] Garcia reflected on these parties saying "The Acid Test was the prototype for our whole basic trip… It was something more incredible than just rock and roll and a light show."[10] These LSD-fueled parties thrown by Kesey and his friends included the combination of drug use with musical performances, black lights and white paint to create a unique psychedelic experience. These successful shows and the band's association with (still legal) LSD helped the new group gain recognition in the eclectic Bay Area arts scene with fans that were interested in the relationship between the music and the drugs. Although the Grateful Dead settled in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, the trend of LSD-fueled psychedelic rock was beginning to spread all over the United States. By late 1966, The Dead had officially signed with Warner Brothers and released their first self-titled album, which consisted mostly of covers that included their own improvised extended jams.

In 1967, lyricist Robert Hunter, and old friend of Garcia's, travelled from New Mexico to California with the promise of joining the band after the group had already begun working on the tune "Alligator" using Hunter's lyrics. While the Dead had their own sound in the covers they were producing, Hunter helped develop the sound and style of the Dead further with his lyrics to the first two hits "China Cat Sunflower," and "St. Stephen." Shortly after the addition of Hunter, the Dead added drums and percussionist Mickey Hart (b. 1943) who helped further develop the band's psychedelic musical vision.[11]

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[9] Ibid, 47

[10] Jerry Garcia in "Article Title," *Rolling Stone*, 1970. *Illustrated Trip,* 47. ***Needs more information – Article title?

The release of the Dead's 1970 hit albums *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* featured Hunter's lyrics in combination with Garcia's original folk sound. The diverse range of psychedelic rock tunes in combination with the American country-style melodies led to success and popularity among listeners. Hitting the popular and radio charts, "Uncle John's Band" and "Casey Jones" attracted fans of all ages to the Dead's songs.

As the Grateful Dead split from Warner Brothers to focus on their newly self-titled record company, Grateful Dead Records, the band began to tour in larger venues, including the 1973 Watkins Glen Summer Jam (which featured the Allman Brothers and The Band) which included an estimated 600,000 fans in attendance. By the 1980s following a break from the road to produce *The Grateful Dead Movie* (1977*)* and *Blues for Allah (*1975) the band was back on the road touring. In the increasing conservatism of the 1980s, the Dead and their fans moved away from mainstream music—their shows were one of the last bastions of the quickly fading countercultural movement.[12]

Review of the literature

The history of the Grateful Dead is detailed in a number of sources. Trade, written record, and bibliographies by fans and associates of the band have documented the phenomenon of the Dead since their origins in the 1960s. Listed below are five key pieces of literature to provide background that is often used by fans and scholars studying the Grateful Dead.

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Dennis McNally is arguably one of the most important writers of the Grateful Dead. Working with the band as their publicist, he began documenting the Dead during their early tours in the 1970s. *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (2002) provides a behind-the-scenes look at the legendary band and is considered an essential work for scholars studying the Dead. This book examines the counterculture of the 1960s, as well as the Grateful Dead's rise as one of the most accomplished musical entities. This work also explores the creative synchronicity that is formed between original band members Garcia, Weir, Lesh, Kreutzmann, Hart and McKernan. This book provides not only an insider history from McNally, who was on the road with the Dead through the majority of their tours, but also examines the counterculture and the broader context of the Grateful Dead's impact on American music. This source is important to this project because it examines the history of the Grateful Dead and the intimate details provided from an inside source that toured with the group, which is imperative to gaining an understanding of the origins of the Dead and the Deadheads.

Dennis McNally and Blaire Jackson's *Grateful Dead: The Illustrated Trip* (2015) is another source coauthored by McNally and Jackson which provides useful biographical information. This illustrated biography is filled with visual records of the Grateful Dead and chronicles the band from the beginning of the 1960s counterculture all the way to Garcia's death in 1995 and beyond. This encyclopedia incorporates rare photography that captures pivotal moments in the band's history including posters, memorabilia, ephemera, personal essays from band members, and every tour date played from 1960-2015. This source is also

useful for bibliographical information on the Grateful Dead. Along with this, it also provides a detailed look at the beginning of the Deadhead tradition through pictures, ticket stubs, and fan accounts of the band.

Carol Brightman's *Sweet Chaos: The Grateful Dead's American Adventure* (1999) is a testament to how the Grateful Dead survived the fall of the counterculture of the 1960s. Looking at the beginning of the band to their (so-called) "departure" in 1995, Brightman investigates the California band's ascent to global popularity, providing insights about the Dead and the counterculture from which they arose. Brightman's work examines the history of the band and its influence in the 1960s. This book is important to this project because Brightman documents the rise of trends among the fanbase, which became ubiquitous throughout the U.S, and compares how those trends differ among modern day Deadheads.

David Shenk and Steve Silberman's *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads* (1994) is an encyclopedia on all matters of the Grateful Dead. This book expands upon the culture of the Dead and the Deadheads through fans' own stories and insider knowledge from those closest to the members of the band. This source details fundamental knowledge of unique culture of the Grateful Dead. Deadhead scribe Steve Silberman has made a huge contribution to Grateful Dead literature—having written countless essays and liner notes on Deadhead culture, Silberman even helped co-produce the famous boxed set *So Many Roads (1965-1995)*. *Skeleton Key* is a vital source for Deadhead literature and this project because it provides many details on the history of the Grateful Dead that can be found in this encyclopedia.

Peter Richardson's *No Simple Highway: A Cultural History of the Grateful Dead* (2015) is one of the first books to not only chronicle the history of the Grateful Dead, but examine an entire culture formed around one band and its societal impact in the U.S. This source uses interviews and research from Grateful Dead archives to probe at the Dead's long-lasting appeal and is an important source for Deadhead scholars who wish to explore the community aspect of the band. This source is used throughout this project to compare and contrast the Deadheads and community that continues to thrive today, post-Garcia.

The Deadheads

The phenomenon of the growing number of Deadheads began to attract attention from critics and mainstream media by the mid-1970s. Village Voice music critic Robert Christgau noted in 1971 "how many regulars seemed to be in attendance, and how, from the way they compared notes, they'd obviously made a determined effort to see as many shows as possible."[13] As the band began to perform more tours and shows, they hired administrator and staff member Eileen Law to manage the mailing list for fans and the *Dead Heads* newsletter to help connect fans all across the United States to the band's shows and events.[14] Grateful Dead shows were not merely an event put forth by the band members, but were cultivated by the community of fans who religiously followed them to each show. Deadhead scholar and rock critic for the *Hofsta Chronicle* Michael Benson comments on the unique gathering of the fans at each event:

[13] McNally and Jackson, *The Illustrated Trip*, 113.

[14] Ibid.

> Deadhead Nation is a phenomenon that has been imitated since by fans of other bands like Phish, but the nomadic Deadheads set a social precedent, neo-gypsies camping out in parking lots and public parks, selling paraphernalia and souvenirs to the locals to stay fed.[15]

Deadheads are often associated with hippy ideals because of their countercultural roots, however, these fans differ from the classic anti-establishment counterculture of the 1960s.[16] While many Deadheads certainly fall into this stereotype, this idea quickly became an idealized conception. With the end of the countercultural movement, the Deadheads had adopted these themes into a broader social context, mixing different aspects of the 1960s into the community experience of Grateful Dead shows. With the seemingly endless tours of the band, the Deadhead community developed into discrete groups which became a staple of every show. Although it was predicted that these strange traditions would fade away after the death of Garcia and the disbandment of the original group, these ritual traditions are in fact still present today at Dead and Company shows almost fifty years later. These traditions that developed within the group that were consecutively present at every show were the *tapers, tour heads* and the *dancers*.

First, as technology improved over the course of the 70's and cassettes became widespread and easily accessible, a surge of fan-recorded tapes of the Dead shows became increasingly popular. Since each show was unique due to the

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[15] Michael Benson, *Why the Grateful Dead Matter*. (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2016), 93.

[16] Robert Sardiello. "Secular Rituals in Popular Culture: A Case for Grateful Dead Concerts and Dead Head Identity" in *Adolescents and Their Music*: *If it's Too Loud, You're Too Old*. ed. Jonathan S. Epstein (London: Garland Publishing, 1994), 121.

extended jamming and improvisation, a network of fans known as tapers quickly emerged among Deadheads, trading recorded performances so everyone could faithfully recapture the experience of the show. The tape trades were person-to-person as well as through the mail, and fans began to feel a sense of familiarity through these tape trade networks.[17] Not only did the members of the Grateful Dead know about these tapers, but they actually encouraged it, including a section at their shows for tapers to get the best sound, which was officially instituted by 1984.[18] Silberman describes the tapers' section:

> [The tapers' section was] a block of 200 to 250 seats set aside by Grateful Dead Ticket Sales behind the soundboard, where tapers are permitted to set up their decks and microphones, and record audience tapes of the shows for listening and not-for-profit trading. The Dead's policy of allowing taping is revolutionary and has had the effect of creating a passionate and loyal constituency of tapers and traders.[19]

In short, tape collecting, and trading was one of the "most durable binding threads in the fabric of the Deadhead Community.[20] While tapers are no longer needed at modern shows, the network of psychical and digital tapes is still circulated among the community today. During an interview I conducted for this project, a 22-year-old participant spoke of the bootlegged tapes they had inherited from their father:

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[17] David Shenk and Steve Silberman. *Skeleton Key: A Dictionary for Deadheads*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1994), 434.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid, 436.
[20] Ibid, 438.

My Dad gave me some of his bootlegged tapes to listen to in my car since it only had a cassette player. I don't have anything to listen to them with anymore, but I still keep them around, just in case.

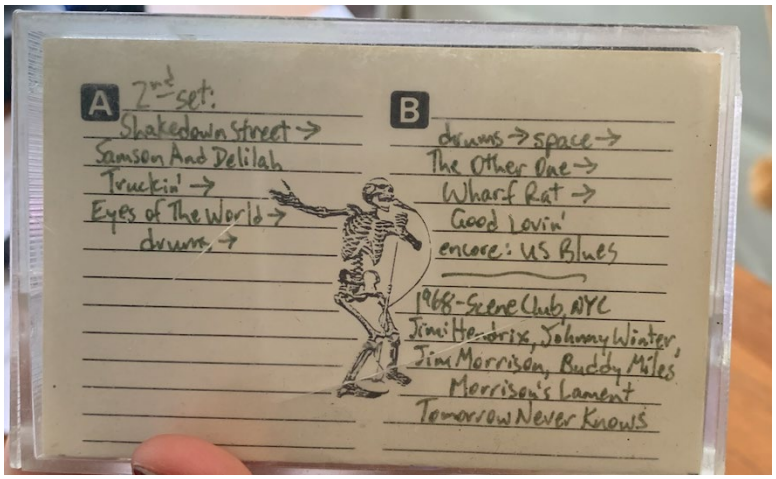

Figure 1.1. A thirty-year-old bootlegged tape inherited by a younger Grateful Dead fan.

These tapes are still cherished by both young and old fans. Although tapers no longer exist at shows, the novelty of the tape trade is still alive. Thanks to the modern convenience of the internet, the tapes from the tape trade network have migrated to a digital form. Through the University of California Santa Cruz Grateful Dead Archive, thousands of tapes and recordings of Grateful Dead can be easily accessed by anyone, preserving the tape trade network forever. [21]

Second, *tour heads* were fans of the Grateful Dead who did not sit idly by and wait for their favorite band to come to their city: they followed the Grateful Dead from city to city religiously to attend the shows. This especially "deadicated" class of fans followed the band for most or all of a tour.[22] They lived along the

[21] Grateful Dead Archive Online, University of California Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz, CA. https://www.gdao.org/

[22] Ibid.

way in tour buses, hotels, friends' homes, local student housing, or anywhere they could find a bed and a warm meal—this was part of the tour head experience. A 1988 *Relix* magazine survey states that 91% of Deadheads regularly travel away from their home base to attend shows. According to Steve Marcus of Grateful Dead Ticket Sales, there are approximately two thousand Heads who order tickets for every show and another five hundred who go to every venue but do not necessarily try to get in.[23] In other words, following the Dead across the country to attend their shows was a crucial aspect that amplified the ritualistic dimensions of the entire experience—going on "tour" to get to the shows was a potent initiation rite for new fans of the band.[24] These fans didn't fancy the regular nine-to-five lifestyle of the "American Dream" that was being established around them: they planned their entire year around following the Dead.

The digital age has made traveling to shows and purchasing tickets easier. While many fans will choose to see modern day Grateful Dead bands in a tour head style by following the band to multiple cities, the reality remains that the band just doesn't take marathon tours around the U.S that lasted the entire year anymore. Many older fans will even claim that since the tour head aspect of the band is no longer a part of live shows, younger fans cannot even call themselves Deadheads. A participant of the Deadhead survey says that technology changes the experience: "Digital age makes it easy. We had no cell phones, no GPS—we had to mail order for tickets, or drive to a coliseum to wait in line. We had to

[23] Ibid, 458.

[24] Robin Sylvan, *Traces of The Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 102.

make tapes to get good cassettes of shows—It was much more labor intensive back then."

While most older Deadheads still consider the younger generation Deadheads, there is a consensus that without the tour head aspect, shows are much easier to attend now than they were in the past. While interviewing Deadheads for the purpose of this project, A classic Deadhead who has been attending shows since the 1970s agrees that things have become a lot easier for the younger generation:

> The older deadheads didn't have any money like the new fans do. They would just live show to show eating whatever they could so they could travel and get into shows. We used to have to wait in line for hours to just have a chance to buy tickets but now you can go online order a deluxe private box and have your drinks brought to you.

The lack of tour heads at a modern-day show is just one of dividing factors among new and old fans that is explored more in depth in Chapter IV.

Another important part of any Grateful Dead show is the dancing that takes place. There is no right range of movement to listen to the Dead—some sit and bob their head rhythmically while others dance, spin, and sway to the music. The Deadhead dancers are usually seen toward the front of the stage in their designated area, or in the hallways of the venues where they can move freely. These dancers, sometimes called *spinners*, are defined by Silberman:

> Dancers who twirl energetically to the music, often forming groups in the hallways where their movement won't be obstructed. Rapid and prolonged whirling has long been recognized as a way of altering consciousness. Dr. Andrew Weil points out in *The Natural Mind* that turning around until

> dizzy is often the first means by which a person "gets high". Dead shows—with music continuing for long periods without interruption—offers dancers the chance to spin for hours and attain altered states of consciousness.[25]

Another branch of dancers present at concerts are affectionately known as *space dancers*. Space dancing is a Deadhead's "bodily conversion into the music."[26] Matching the music being played, this free form of dancing involves bending of the knees, swaying, and expressive movement of the hands. Space dancing is often considered a fan's way of participating in the jam. Upon first glance, it may appear to an outsider to be random and formless, but close observation and will reveal that that most people have a specific form that is being followed while dancing. These fans are responding to the subtle gestures in the music with equally subtle gestures.[27] The spinners are often clad in colorful tie-dyed dresses and skirts with bells around their ankles that twinkle when they spin. This group of Deadheads was particularly prominent in shows in the late 1980s and early 1990s and are still present at Dead and Company events today. A participant of the Deadhead survey states that today they still like to attend shows dance: "I love the Dancing [sic] because it feels like a real connection! When dancing it doesn't matter whether you know the other person [or] not."

Ritual Dimensions

[25] Shenk and Silberman, *Skeleton Key*, 421.
[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

Grateful Dead shows are distinct from other jam bands because of the ritualized set of events that are consistent at each show. The ritual of a Grateful Dead show has been observed by scholars and critics since the early concerts in the 1960s. Because of the shared experience of being on the road, fans developed traditions that were put in place at every show. Many of these traditions have lasted decades, and will likely remain consistent for years to come.

Religion scholar Robin Sylvan notes the ritualistic dimensions of the Grateful Dead in his book, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (2002). Sylvan presents a few fundamental theories on how popular music can be viewed religiously. He writes that "music functions in the same way as a religion, and the musical subculture functions the same way as a religious community, albeit in an unconscious or postmodern way."[28] Sylvan proposes five levels through which popular music can be viewed, and that popular music can "integrate all these levels synergistically into a coherent whole greater than the sum of its parts. A unified field that can be directly accessed and powerfully experienced."[29] Looking at popular music through the this lens can be a powerful tool to understanding the complex interweaving of music and religion, and examining Grateful Dead shows through Sylvan's framework reveals ritualistic dimensions that have endured since the 1960s. I will be comparing and contrasting elements of Sylvan's levels through the lens of the original and modern- day ritual and how these frameworks shape the classic and new Deadheads.

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[28] Sylvan, *Traces of The Spirit*, 4.

[29] Ibid, 21

(1) *The physiological level*. The first level Sylvan presents is the physiological level. This level is used to examine how the physiological element affects the physical body and its subsystems. It is also used to audit how sound is received by the entire body, not just the ears, therefore viewing the body as a locus of integration. Sylvan uses the example of the body being possessed in a religious ceremony as a real, physical process that takes place in the human body. In the context of Grateful Dead shows, both body and mind are often altered at the physiological level by more than just the drugs that are often present at Dead shows—many Deadheads describe how the music effects them physiologically. The dancers/spinners, as mentioned above, participate physically along with the Dead during the improvisation that happens during the shows by spinning and dancing. Space dancing, which is a fan's way of dancing in order to gain a deeper connection to the music, has physically altered the body, according to fans who have danced and spun for hours during the Dead's sets. Space dancing is often compared to the freeform movement that is practiced at Orthodox Jewish synagogues.[30] Much like Jewish Hasidim, a practice in which it is believed that the dancing and swaying "enabled a man to put the whole of himself into his worship and likened it to a kind of love making with the Divine." Deadheads also feel a closer connection to the music and jams through the physiological movement of dancing.[31]

The freeform Drums/Space portion of the shows is another source where the physiological level of the ritual that Sylvan describes is present. One

[30] Shenk and Silberman, *Skeleton* Key, 421.

[31] Ibid.

participant in the Deadhead survey stated that they felt physiologically altered during a show:

> I always feel changed or altered in some way…it's hard to explain, but it's kind of like how you feel when you hold a crystal or go to the beach and swim in the water. It's like a universal feeling of calm and fulfillment.

As this participant describes, the physiological experience of these shows temporarily reconstructs the psyche, leading to a new feeling of change or alteration.[32]

Many Deadheads feel the similar physiological effects when participating by dancing during the sets. Dancing "allows for active participation in the ritual performance."[33] Dancing, spinning, or twirling is an easy way to physically feel connected to the music. Epstein writes that "Dancing also induces a flow experience that is shared and collectively expressed as a form of communitas."[34]

Of the 209 participants of the Deadhead survey, over 20% indicated that dancing and "losing oneself" was the most enjoyable aspect of the shows. One participant mentioned the physical response they felt at the shows:

> The actual show while playing was the most fun to me. The reason is because it's when almost everyone is living in the moment, everything else falls away. When that happens, you can feel it, the band can feel it, we are all communicating via alternative methods such as movement and vibrational resonance. It's my happy place.

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[32] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit,* 25.

[33] Robert Sardiello. "Secular Rituals in Popular Culture," 129.

[34] Ibid.

Another fan said that they felt physiologically altered in a similar way:

> The jams are the second-best part because it allows me to go into a meditative state and leave my body for a time. I usually come out of a show having learned something about myself or the universe at large.

Many fans speak of how they go into an altered state during shows. One participant speaks of a "joy high" that is experienced at shows: "The best part of the show for me is the sheer joy that comes over me when they play, especially one of my favorite songs. How it unifies every person as we dance and sing. I am on a joy high for weeks after a show."

Some fans will even argue that this altered physiological state that creates this "joy high" that fans describe will last beyond the shows, leading to a healthier mental state. Long time Grateful Dead fan and Psychiatrist Jacob L. Freedman writes that Grateful Dead shows can help to reduce stress levels in the brain, leading to a happier and healthier psyche.

This altered state that many fans describe is one of the many contributors to the physiological level that Sylvan describes. Grateful Dead shows are a vehicle to experiencing all of these authentic emotions in one single show.

(2) The Psychological Level. The next level of ritual organization that Sylvan discusses is the psychological level. In contrast to physiological reactions, the psychological level looks at the temporary reconstruction of the psyche when listening to music, altering the state of consciousness during shows. The use of hallucinogens may play a large role in mind alteration for some fans, but this can sometimes be experienced just through the community and music of the Dead.

Mary Goodenough interprets the Grateful Dead experience as a "Psychic epidemic, that is an autonomous movement from the realms of the collective unconscious."[35] The Dead's shows align with initiation rites of religious ritual because of the spiritual training and transformation that is experienced at shows.[36] Goodenough writes that the music that is played at shows "is a vehicle by which the spirit transcended the physical world, and this experience transformed the lives of countless deadheads."[37]

The music is used as a way to transform and help fans transcend into a new mindset—this is perhaps why drugs and the tunes are used together as psychedelic tools to unlock the subconscious or a new method of thinking at shows. In the Deadhead Survey, one fan recalls this transcendence: "The music… it's like a dear old friend and I lose myself…it's a feeling of being 'at home' with all that is wonderful… and it triggers a feeling of belonging and connection… and of course dancing as the music moves my soul." Sylvan states that this altered state of consciousness can lead to unlocking of the fan's subconscious, as he notes from a longtime Deadhead: "Often, this expansion of self went far beyond a feeling of unity with other Deadheads to a much more profound mystical union with the whole universe."[38]

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[35] Mary Goodenough, "Grateful Dead: Manifestations from the Collective Unconscious." In *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead: Critical Writings*, edited by Robert G. Weiner, 175–182. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 175.

[36] Ibid, 176.

[37]Ibid., 179.

[37]Ibid., 176.

[38] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit,* 95

Another vital component of the psychological impact of the shows is the heavy improvisation central to the Grateful Dead's music. Of the two sets that are the standard format at shows, the second set always includes improvisation. Popular music scholar Ulf Olsson notes that "improvisation was the Grateful Dead's special way of practicing dislocation. Through improvisation the band managed to move the music out of itself—out of the given, regulated form of the song and into a strange and sometimes uncanny territory."[39] Sylvan likewise notes the importance of improvisation to the ritual of a Dead show, saying the improvisation of these sets were often non-linear, making the entire experience feel ethereal. These long, warped sets that are unpredictable and everchanging not only give the fans a vehicle to altering their subconscious, but also are a surprise each time, making every set unique.

(3) The Sociocultural Level. The next important dimensional level that Sylvan introduces is the sociocultural level. This takes a broader perspective and looks at the effect music can have on culture. The sociocultural level is a reflection of a social order and the cultural paradigms it imposes.[40] The community of Deadheads have many sociocultural levels to their fandom. The ritual of the live show celebrates and encourages a strong social identity of the Deadhead. While the Deadhead identity can be strongly associated with their love for the music and the culture, many Deadheads do not fit into a certain mold of a

[39] Ulf Olsson, *Listening for the Secret: The Grateful Dead and the Politics of Improvisation*. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 94.

[40] John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 28.

political party or affiliation. Younger Deadhead Lindsey Tatum spoke on how anyone can be a Deadhead, even those from a traditionally conservative background such as herself:

> I come from a pretty conservative family where nobody really listens to the Dead. Some of my best friends that love the Dead come from liberal families–I think anyone can love the Dead from any background. It doesn't matter what your political or religious beliefs are. The Dead is about community.

The sociocultural level of loving the Dead comes from the music itself. Many Deadheads identify strongly with nature and the larger world around them. Sardellio writes of the sociocultural entailments of the Deadheads:

> They channel and focus emotionally charged sentiments relative to these beliefs and symbolically foster attachments to a social group that provides a source, or at least a partial source, of personal and collective identification. Deadheads express their identification through dress, behavior, and attitude, even against the resistance of others in a larger social context."[41]

Sardellio implies that it is easy to spot a Deadhead because of their sociocultural identification. In the Deadhead survey, for instance, an astounding 95% of respondents said they "strongly identified" as a Deadhead.

One of the main aspects to the Deadhead identity is a strong commitment to the community. In the Deadhead survey, almost half of the answers given for their favorite part of the shows referred to some aspect of community. One participant said, "Music of course, but more over the community. The knowledge

[41] Sardiello, "Secular Rituals," 130.

that you are entering an area of others who hold light love and acceptance over hate." Another participant describes the community they feel at the shows:

> The music, the whole big happy family vibe, seeing your friends' kids with their own kids, it's awesome having three and four generations of us dancing and having fun. All of us having one common joyful experience, it is beautiful.

Shenk similarly describes the Deadheads as a "tribe":

> One way in which Deadheads think of their community—an extended family of people from various classes, races, sexual orientations, backgrounds, and other musical interests. While "tribe" is normally used to describe a group of people descended from a common ancestor, the tribe of Deadheads is unusual in that membership is recognized in oneself rather than inherited…For many 'Heads, sincere appreciation for the music, and sharing it with others, comes before job title, national identity, and political or religious affiliation.[42]

Many Deadheads speak of the shows nostalgically as a family-wide tradition, feeling a tribal sense of belonging each time they are reunited with old friends at previous shows. As a participant in the survey describes it, "everyone is one big family—sometimes I'll see friends I haven't seen in years… it feels like we've never left."

Sylvan writes that through this sociological lens, "one may even develop a strong social identity based on musical affiliation. Thus, music is usually a highly social phenomenon."[43] It is almost impossible to listen to the Grateful Dead

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[42] Shenk, *Skeleton Key*, 598.

[43] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit*, 28.

without developing the identity of the Deadhead—members of this community constantly display Grateful Dead paraphernalia everywhere—from stickers, clothing, decoration and even cars, every Deadhead is guaranteed to have at least a few t-shirts in their weekly wardrobe rotation, the art and iconography is crucial to the community.

While many members of the Deadhead community cling to the nostalgia of the 1960s, most fans simply enjoy the band and the acceptance the community has created over the past fifty years—regardless of age, gender, or race. Sardiello notes, "the Deadhead community has been responsive to larger cultural changes … repetition of concert events promotes opportunities for continued interaction and allows new members to learn the appropriate forms of expression relative to the interpretative rules Deadheads use to understand reality."[44] The Deadhead community will continue to grow and foster new 'Heads through their compassion and the music of the band.

(4.) The Semiological Level. This lens studies the mechanics of symbolization—a song that can bring back memories, and a band can reference objects outside the music itself. Sylvan says that particular musical phrases are signs but also signifiers.[45] Sylvan writes that both of these terms serve under the basic sign, which is made up of the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier is the object, or in the case of music, a musical utterance (song, phrase, etc.)– something that creates a feeling, and the signified in the reaction that phrase or song creates, i.e., an emotion or memory that is brought back when listening to

[44] Sardiello, "Secular Rituals," 130.

[45] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit,* 29.

that song. Certain elements of music, shows, and culture can trigger a feeling of joy for some, while the same show or song can trigger a completely different feeling for others. The Grateful Dead signifies many meanings for fans. A tune may instantly trigger a memory: a place, a time or a venue where they first heard that song, bringing them back to this place when listening to the Dead. The Dead's vast repertoire and unique sets make these memories distinct. Sylvan notes, however, that it is often hard to find the difference in music between the signifier and the signified.[46] He writes that the "connection between the signifier and signified is very tenuous indeed, and the signified seems to be somewhat free-floating and chameleonic. This makes for a situation in which a multiplicity of meanings can be invoked by a single piece of music."[47] Since the fanbase has such a wide range of ages in fans, the Grateful Dead's music will contain different semiotic meanings for different listeners. Older Deadheads likely will have a different relationship with the older Deadheads who actually saw Jerry and the band play in the 1960s. By comparison, the Dead's music can serve as a symbol of the past that is deeply nostalgic to some younger fans who didn't actually see the Dead in their "prime" but grew up listening to it with their family and older fans. For many younger fans, the Dead reminds them of their childhood and their parents, who played the Dead's music for them growing up. In the Deadhead survey, of the 7.7% of participants who were nineteen to thirty years old, many of them contributed that the Dead held an element of nostalgia for them. Deadhead Ashley Mendes, 22, commented on Deadhead identity:

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit,* 30.

> My dad is a huge Deadhead and I've always loved them myself… We see Dead and Co. every year together with my uncles. He used to go to shows with them all the time when he was younger.

Mendes, like many younger fans of the Dead, enjoy the music for the deep childhood nostalgia and memories their music brings back. Another participant in the Deadhead survey, however, comments on the community that is only present in the older generation: "Probably more similar than different (old vs. new heads). Perhaps more 'family' for older Heads."

(5.) The Ritual & Spiritual Level. This lens demonstrates how music can be a powerful medium for the transformation of an experience that can be channeled towards a specific religious experience. The Deadheads have turned their favorite band into more than just a band—Grateful Dead concerts have become a ritualistic event for the Deadhead community. The practices that are seen at the shows that include the tapers, Shakedown Street, the dancers and the long-extended sets have become a standard practice at every Grateful Dead show. Perhaps the most important aspects of the ritual of a Dead show are the sense of community and collectivism that is felt among the fans. For the past fifty years, fans have felt the multigenerational connection of Deadheads from everywhere around the United States. Wilgoren writes about this sense of collectivism, indicating that unlike many religions and communities, there is no specific requirement to join:

> Rather than being part of a group because they are born into it or because they live in a certain area, Deadheads are part of the Grateful Dead community because they choose to be; they share a common interest and love and have discovered that this thread of popular culture is enough on

> which to build a community. Because their membership is chosen rather than forced or enforced, as may be the case with more traditional communities, their bond to this particular community may be even stronger than their bond to other communities of which they may be a part of.[48]

Wilgoren notes that anyone can be a Deadhead, even those who are not old enough to have seen the actual Grateful Dead. Fans both young and old can experience the ritual together.

This sense of collectivism that is documented by scholars does not end with Sylvan's theories—Grateful Dead shows can be viewed as a form of *collective effervescence* in the sense that the group functions together to create a feeling that is experienced among the entire group. Originally coined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim in 1912, the term collective effervescence refers to a group of people or community coming together and simultaneously communicating the same thought together as one large collective mind. This simultaneous communication through participation in the same action—such as a concert—can help create a new larger sense of togetherness. This sense of collectivism helps to unify the group by creating high energy levels and pleasure, making these tasks feel sacred. This high energy level that is experienced to create a sacred experience helps to add to the ritual dimensions of a Grateful Dead show. Crucial to this idea is the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is differentiated by these collective representations that

[48] Rachel Wilgoren, "The Grateful Dead as Community." In *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead, Critical Writings,* edited by Robert G. Weiner, 191–202. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 128.

happen during a ceremony, and the profane is marked by everyday tasks that are necessary to society such as hunting, paying bills, etc. Durkheim writes about the dichotomy of the two, saying that the profane environment and the sacred one are not merely distinct by also to one another--there is a gulf between them. In the nature of sacred beings, there must be some special cause that necessitates this condition of unusual isolation and mutual exclusion.[49] In other words, there needs to be a special cause to create the sacred environment, such as a musical event. This plays into the idea of the novelty of a Grateful Dead show. Durkheim, therefore, says that religion is the practice of balancing and differentiating the sacred from the profane. These activities done by people can be seen as a sacred method of social organization or interaction. These sets of social rituals or activities creates a sense of unity among the group, and loss of individuality that can serve as a totem, or a religious vessel or object.

In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Durkheim explains that collective effervescence contributes to unifying the group, which in turn transforms the event into something sacred. When a large group of people become one monolithic unit, the high energy levels associated with the group can come to be seen as sacred to practitioners, making these religious gatherings cherished and divine. The idea of collective effervescence—an event experienced together by a large group of people in a ceremony format offers a theory on how these strong social bonds unite the Deadhead community: by participating in a show, the group helps to create and maintain this sacred energy level. Grateful Dead shows

[49] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [originally published 1912]), 322.

are a ritual that is craved and adored by fans; demand for Dead & Company's 2022 Mexico destination event, Playing in the Sand, is so high that it sold out to "alumni" fans before the general ticket sale in under five minutes. It appears that the demand to see the Dead is increasing every year. While shows were popular in the 1970s and 1980s, the Grateful Dead usually were not playing sold out venues in their prime. One possible reason for the demand for live shows could be the lack of concerts the previous year. Because of the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the lack of live shows, it can be assumed that fans crave the sensation of collective effervescence, increasing demand for shows now that live music is returning.

Another aspect that creates this sense of collective effervescence is the liminality that is experienced through the ever-present Shakedown Street. As described in the classic account by anthropologist Victor Turner, liminality, which comes from the Latin word for "threshold," is a rite of passage in many rituals where the participant stands at the threshold between the previous way, they structure their identity, time, or community to the new way that is established by the rite. By entering this liminal state, the participant no longer holds a pre-ritual status, and begins the transition to the new status that is established after the ritual.[50] Physical liminal spaces are used as a frontier or place that are passed through to enter a new threshold of embodiment, experience, or rite. In the context of a ritual, a liminal space can be physically and mentally produced as an invitation of part of the ritual itself and can be thought

[50] Victor Turner. "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology." Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies, 60, no. 3 (1974) Rice University: https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159.

of mentally as a threshold of consciousness. In Christian worship, liminal spaces are often holy spaces that separate the sacred from the profane—once a participant enters through a liminal space, they are being transformed and changed in preparation for sacred knowledge or worship. In the practice of Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic churches there is often a "royal door" that is passed through to enter the sanctuary of the church. These doors delineate the space between the crowded secular world outside and the sacred world inside of that holy space.

Similarly, Shakedown Street presents a liminal zone. Named after the Dead song of the same name, this tradition began in the early 1980s in the parking lots before shows. Items sold at Shakedown Street include food, alcohol, tie-dyed clothing, jewelry and drug paraphernalia. While participating in the vending of Shakedown Street by buying or selling items, fans will often socialize and catch up with one another. Shakedown Street instills the strong sense of community that is essential to Deadheads. Shakedown Street is a liminal place for the ritual of a Grateful Dead show—fans will shed the worries of their everyday life and prepare (clad in tie-dye with grilled cheese in hand) for the upcoming show, chatting about what the Dead might play tonight or catching up with an old friend from on the road. This liminal zone is the creation of "time out of time: a special place." [51] Shakedown Street provides a space in between the

[51]Victor Turner. Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology." *Rice Institute Pamphlet, Rice University Studies*, 60, no. 3 (1974) Rice University: https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159.

profane world of everyday life, in preparation for the sacred ritual of a Grateful Dead concert.

***Figure* 1.2.** *Shakedown Street* vending area outside of a Dead & Company show.

While Deadheads can usually come to a consensus that modern-day shows present a slightly different ritual, the collective effervescence is still present at Dead and Company shows. One fan notes, "[The main difference is] feeling mostly. I love the shows I see nowadays, but a part of me died that day in '95, so it just feels different, not bad, not worse, just different." Conversely, another fan comments on how the shows remain the same: "There's a common thread that just keeps on going. Jerry being gone is a big change, but he remains alive within

all of us." Noting the change in atmosphere, many Deadheads who have experienced both post and pre-Jerry Garcia shows noted the change in pace, with the new shows taking on a much slower pace in song tempo, as well as audience feel. This can be a change in the ritual of the show perhaps because of the audience, but it also important to factor in that the lead singer of the Dead and Company Bob Weir is seventy-three years old now, and has been on the road playing thousands of tours since the 1960s.

One of the most important ritualistic aspects of the Grateful Dead is the drugs that are taken and associated with the Deadheads and the shows. LSD played a crucial role in the shaping the Grateful Dead's image and career. From the Acid Tests, Garcia became known as "Captain Trips." LSD, marijuana, psychoactive mushrooms and other psychedelics have a strong association with the band. Deadheads often go to shows not only for the music, but for the combined experience of being high on different drugs which is encouraged and promoted by members of the Grateful Dead. The different drugs that are taken by Deadheads are an important aspect to the overall ritual of live shows for a few reasons. First, the drug use is deeply spiritual to many users—some Deadheads don't like to call the substances they use at shows "drugs" because of the term's connotation with illness and law enforcement. They instead prefer "sacraments" which instead helps to enforce the seriousness these drugs hold to fans.[52] This controlled state of altering one's consciousness is an aspect to many religious rituals, including shamanism. Deadhead scholar and musicologist Nancy Reist

[52] Shenk, *Skeleton Key*, 494.

writes that similar to a "controlled trance" which is experienced in some shamanic cultures, Grateful Dead concerts provide the musical route to altered states of consciousness.[53]

During the ritual of a dead show, many fans use psychedelics and other mind-altering agents to experiment with unorthodox forms of sexuality and sensuality. A participant of the Deadhead Survey commented that the drugs helped them to reach a "cosmic orgasm" through a psychedelic journey they once took during a show. Many fans recall going on an incredible journey with the paired use of the Dead's songs and the psychedelics to further open their subconscious. A participant of the survey says that with the use of the drugs they felt "the music flowing up my arms, through my body and bringing peace to my soul." Silberman describes a similar revelation that he experienced on LSD:

> If you were tripping, the music would pour forth celestial architectures, quicksilver glistening with might-be's, cities of light at the edge of a sea of chaos… And some nights, the hair on the back of your neck would stand on end as a *presence* came into the room, given a body by the magnificent sound system.[54]

Fans speak of the trips they experience while at Dead shows as being deeply spiritual and magical, bringing them not only closer to themselves, but to a higher power. A participant of the survey writes that the best part of the shows was "Losing yourself and finding yourself, the experience." Many fans in the

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[53] Nancy Reist, "Clinging to the Edge of Magic: Shamanic Aspects of the Grateful Dead," in *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead: Critical Writings,* edited by Robert G. Weiner, 183–190. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 185.

[54] Steve Silberman, "The Only Song of God," *Dupree's Diamond News*, 1995. http://www.poetspath.com/Scholarship_Project/god.html. Accessed April 26, 2021.

community survey write of the "magic" they experience from the atmosphere, the community and the drugs that lead them on a psychedelic journey.

Psychedelic drugs were often used at Grateful Dead shows to create an expansion of consciousness when listening to the music. Jörg Falchner writes about how music and an altered state of consciousness go together, and the shared escapism that fans experience:

> Altered states of consciousness appear attractive when we feel burdened down by all the routines, the haggling and tedious details of everyday life. We want to "Get away from it all", lie on a beach, let the sun warm us after a swim. The music drifting over from the beach bar sounds alive and real.

Older Deadheads originally flocked to the Dead because of the counterculture, anti-war movement that was happening in the 1960s. An altered state of consciousness helped to provide respite during a dark time in history.

These experiences that are shared among Grateful Dead fans help to incorporate the ritual and the collective effervescence that is present at shows. Sylvan describes this occurrence:

> Such experiences are rare enough in our modern secular culture, but what made these peak psychedelic experiences unique was the fact that not only were they shared by a large group of people on a regular basis, but this was, in fact, the goal of the enterprise."[55]

The original Deadheads experienced this altered state of consciousness together and continue to share the ritual of live shows with younger fans almost fifty years later.

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[55] Sylvan, *Traces of the* Spirit, 91.

These shared experiences and the collective effervescence help contribute to the larger ritual as a whole.

The ritual that occurs at live shows has been noted by many scholars since the 1990s and continues to be practiced today at shows with all of the elements mentioned above. Grateful Dead scholar Rachel Wilgoren describes this community of dedicated fans in the same association as a loyal church following. One participant from the survey writes "[The best part of the shows is] the community of family. The whole defines the journey."

Conclusion

Examining traditions among Deadheads through the lens of Sylvan's scholarship on ritual and popular music highlights the parallels between religious ritual and Grateful Dead shows. Through the drugs, liminal zones, and other recurring aspects of every show, the ritual that fans in the 1970s created has stood the test of time. The ritual of a live show still remains strong at current Deadhead events, such as Dead & Company shows. Although lead singer Garcia died in 1995, the Dead has continued to live on in the hearts of the fans, who still practice the ritual through the liminality of Shakedown Street, the drugs, and the culture of the Grateful Dead. Younger Deadheads speak of the "magic" that they experience at shows in a similar way to older fans, blurring the distinctions between the two groups. The collective effervescence that was experinced at the original shows remains strongly present at Dead & Company events and will continue to be experienced and practiced by fans for years to come.

CHAPTER III: IMPROVISATIONS AND THE JAM BAND AESTHETIC IN "DARK STAR"

As discussed in the previous chapter, Grateful Dead concerts embody a special ritualized experience consisting of a set of events that are put in place mostly by the Deadhead community. One of the most important aspects of the Deadhead community is the music of the Dead, specifically the improvisation that is imperative to their jam band aesthetic. By examining the structure of improvisation in one of the Dead's most representative songs, "Dark Star," I analyze how the jam band aspect of the Grateful Dead contributes to the ritualistic dimensions of their shows by viewing these characteristics through the framework presented by scholars Robin Sylvan and Michael Hicks. Comparing a classic Grateful Dead performance of "Dark Star" from 1969 with a new performance by the Dead & Company in 2019, I investigate and incorporate the scholarship to determine what aspects have changed over time, with emphasis on how the rituals of a live show have developed in tandem with the differences in improvisation over the years.

Jam Band and Ritual

The Grateful Dead are considered pioneers of the jam band genre. The origins of the jam band scene are rooted in the countercultural movement of the 1960s and are often associated with the Dead.[56] Deadhead scholar Peter Conners notes in the first chapter of his book *JAMerica: The History of the Jam Band and*

[56] Peter Conners. *JAMerica: The History of the Jam Band and Festival Scene from the Grateful Dead to Phish, from H.O.R.D.E to Bonnaroo, and Beyond*. (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2013), 19.

Festival Scene (2013) that most of the established jam band artists of the 1990s (Blues Traveler, Phish, the Spin Doctors) were inspired by the Grateful Dead.[57] Conners notes that besides just adding lengthy "jams" to the sets during concerts, a few important characteristics of the jam band include:

> Dedication to creating a singular musical event shared by band and audience generally driven by improvisational moments, emphasis on live performance over recorded works. Bands that encourage taping of their performances reinforce this focus. A conscious effort by the band to connect with grassroots following of fans. This, naturally, implies reciprocity in the fans' effort to connect; however, that type of connection appears in every genre of music. The difference in the jam scene is that the fans become a vitally important part of experiencing the band; symbols, rituals, slang, and esoteric history become tickets to fully understanding the band itself.[58]

Along with audience engagement, the jam band musical style refers to the improvised material that includes extended musical improvisation over rhythmic grooves and chord patterns — these long sets of music which often cross genre boundaries, such as folk and blues. The improvisation that makes up a jam comes from a vast area with many stylistic instantiations such as free jazz which was contemporaneous to the development of the style the Grateful Dead incorporated into their music.

Scholar David Shenk writes describes the jam as a spontaneously composed memorable melody that appears during the sets:

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[57] Ibid, pg 16
[58] Conners, 10

> Grateful Dead music is a conversation between form and chaos. Certain songs—like "Cassidy," "The Music Never Stopped," "Playing in the Band," "Dark Star"—have jams built in, places where the band can, as jazz musicians say, "take it outside," pushing the limits of harmony and dissonance.[59]

Similar to a practice that is used in jazz improvisation, the melody of a jam is often stretched during a set until the song can no longer be recognized, making the riff only distinguishable by key and rhythmic feel. This complete freedom and a lack of preplanned changes or drive to move to the next song fosters a feeling of ambiguity which is an important aspect of the jam.[60]

Sylvan writes that a specific set of reoccurring events help to contribute to the larger ritual as a whole. The Grateful Dead have established a specific setlist they used for most shows. The first set of a show is generally consistent; it usually includes fan favorite songs that give the band a chance to warm up. Between the first and the second set is "Drums and Space." This highly improvisational jam session follows the solo drummer duet that happens between Micky Hart and Bill Kreutzmann. During this transition, the Dead make use of nontraditional timbres, electronic effects, altered attacks and decays, as well as use of uncommon scales (such as chromatic and whole tone scales) to create a unique level of harmonic dissonance for their listeners.[61] After the completion of "Drums and Space," the second, more improvisatory set begins and reincorporates

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[59] Shenk, 343.
[60] Ibid.

[61] Shaugn O'Donnell, "Space, Motion, and Other Musical Metaphors," in *Perspectives on the Grateful dead, Critical Writings*, ed. Robert G. Weiner, 131.

structural boundaries, but still includes the classic jam band improvisation. Along with this, the songs themselves incorporate certain dynamics — the long-drawn-out sets, the improvisation, and the repetition of the songs themselves are all key components to the ritual space of a Grateful Dead show that has created a timeless experience for its fanbase.

The Grateful Dead became famous for their stylistic fluidity, which lead to a wide range of material that is heard within their songs. The genre of "psychedelic rock" is often synonymous with the Grateful Dead because of the presence of LSD and other drugs that are often incorporated into and associated with the concert experience. The term psychedelic rock has a complex history that surrounds its origin. While many different ideas surround the term "psychedelic rock" for the sake of the paper I will be defining and using the term in reference to the drug use that is associated with it. The genre of psychedelic rock is a style of music that developed in the 1960's, surrounding the culture that centered on the use of altering consciousness through the use of hallucinogenic drugs. In his 1999 book, *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and other Satisfactions,* Michael Hicks concludes that the adjective "psychedelic" is used to describe this genre of music because of the similarities between the musical style and an LSD trip. In order to understand how music can be related to psychedelics, Hicks examines three common effects of LSD – *dechronicization, depersonalization, and dynamization* – and their musical parallels in psychedelic rock:

> To understand what makes musical stylistically "psychedelic", one should consider three fundamental effects of LSD: dechronicization,

> depersonalization, and dynamization. *Dechroniczation* permits the drug user to move outside of the conventional perceptions of time. *Depersonalization* allows the user to lose the self and gain an awareness of undifferentiated unity. Dynamization as Leary wrote, makes everything from floors to lamps seem to bend.[62]

Thus, the effects of psychedelic music parallel the effects of LSD consumption. The improvisation that happens during a jam often lengthens the songs and slows them down, altering the fabric of the musical reality. The jams that happen in the middle of songs often include instrumental introductions, codas, or a long solo with one musician. These jams, similar to an LSD trip, create open-ended forms and rhythmic freedom that is explored during the sets. Hicks uses his "three D's" to compare LSD consumption to psychedelic rock.

The first element, dechronicization, is attributed to the lengthening and slowing of song tempos that happens during a jam. Hicks writes: "One experiences the passage of time largely according to the disposition of musical events, quasi-hypnotic repetition and the absence of musical goals change the sense of time-passage dramatically."[63] This lengthening leaves room for on-the-spot improvisation, treating a rock song like a jazz chart, and gives the band a starting point for a series of improvisations that explores the key and basic material of the song further.[64] The Grateful Dead practice lengthening their songs with improvisation to not only explore the song further, but to also engage with

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[62] Michael Hicks, *Sixties Rock: Garage Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions,* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, 1999*),* 63.

[63] Ibid, 64

[64] Hicks, *Sixties Rock,* 64.

their fellow bandmates. The band members would practice both hierarchical and associate modes of improvisation.[65] They would take turns passing the melody around, and give certain members a chance to control the flow of the jam. Garcia and Weir would often practice this during their sets in the 1980s and 1990s. Dechronization can also be interwoven into Sylvan's levels of ritual dimension in popular music. The idea of lengthening and altering songs fits perfectly into Sylvan's first level, the physiological. This level alters the senses through music and time. This sense of an altered state that is achieved both musically and through the band's repetition, improvisation, and (in some cases) the listener's drug use helps to elevate and dechronize the listener into a new state.

Hicks's second element, depersonalization, comes into Grateful Dead jams through changing the idea of musical roles within the ensemble. Weir, Garcia, and Lesh all took turns functioning as lead guitar and singer during performances. This practice is still present at Dead & Company shows, where the role of vocalist is passed between Weir and Mayer. The Dead's songs are already so varied in genre that it is easy to blend folk, jazz, and country together in a jam, depersonalizing the band's image. Another element of depersonalization (and dynamization) that Hicks mentions is the use of artificial reverberation, an effect often used in psychedelic rock. The high intensity reverberation effectively depersonalizes the band's guitar sounds by warping it into an almost new sound. The sense of community that the band experiences together not only

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[65] Jim Tuedio. *"It All Rolls into One:" The Allure of Chaotic Synergy in Grateful Dead Improvisation and Musical Dialogue*. In Studying the Dead: The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus, An Informal History. (United States: Scarecrow Press, 2013)

depersonalizes the group, but also incorporates to Sylvan's ritual and spiritual lens that is discussed in chapter two. This sense of unspoken communication that the band has can be seen as a spiritual bond that holds the group together, and makes the jams powerful in the sense that the entire group is working together to create a new sound.

The last element that Hicks describes, dynamization, is used by psychedelic groups such as the Grateful Dead through altering harmonic motion and movement within their songs. This is done harmonically through chromaticism, passing tones, or appoggiaturas, and manipulating the timbre of the sounds themselves (i.e., tone modulation effects such as reverb and distortion). Dynamization is another element that is demonstrated through reverberation. The high intensity reverberation effectively dynamizes the band's guitar sound by transforming its spatial implications. By dissolving the barrier between listener and musician, the ensemble effectively lets the audience *feel* the vibration of the band's instruments, not just hear them. This effect not only makes the music feel like it is present inside the listener's body, but can also cause it to sound far away, which mimics the effects of LSD.[66] This is heard throughout Dead jams but is especially noted during the "Drums and Space" middle portion of each of their sets, where vocals fade away and are replaced by synth, drums, and reverberation. The result of this immersion of self into the sound of jam is, as scholar Sheila Whiteley describes it, a "drowning of individual consciousness."[67] Hicks third D, dynamization can also be incorporated in to

[66] Hicks, *Sixties Rock,* 66.

[67] Ibid, 65.

Sylvan's fourth level, sociological. By changing the band's sound, the jam becomes the signifier, creating a new sense of perception for the signified, the listener. The Grateful Dead's use of chromaticism is utilized in many of their songs, but is especially present in "Dark Star."

All three of Hicks's "three D's" are used in Grateful Dead jams, and fit into Sylvan's levels of ritualistic dimension. The band's jams often include long sets that are repetitive in nature and blend into each other, seemingly altering the reality of the listener. The use of reverberation and other sonic distortions in "Drums and Space" make it perhaps the most open-ended musical trip. With the improvisations and long sets that blend together seamlessly, "Drums and Space" usually lasts from thirty minutes to an hour, but it can sometimes feel like time stops, and the warped tones of guitars and drums will last forever. Sylvan writes about how musical sets at Grateful Dead shows typically follow a specific structure that fits into a formal design. The first set is always very structured, it follows traditional song structures, a break, and the second, more improvisatory set (drums and space, climax). This structure closely follows what Sylvan describes as moving from structure to anti-structure.[68] The anti-structural aspect that Sylvan writes about in his third chapter is present during the Grateful Dead's sets. Often during a ritual, the practice will follow the form or structure, to anti-structural, and then back to structure with new elements incorporated. Similar to Sylvan's description, the Dead's sets follow this loose form. The structure of these sets remains the same at new Dead descendant shows such as the Dead &

[68] Sylvan, 103.

Company. This next section will explore one of the Dead's most anti-structural songs, "Dark Star", which incorporates jamming and improvisation. By analyzing elements of this tune, I will then compare a Grateful Dead performance of "Dark Star" with a Dead & Company performance to note the differences and similarities of the jam band aesthetic throughout the forty-year period.

"Dark Star" Analysis—*Live/Dead*, 1969

"Dark Star" is one of the Dead's most legendary and hypnotic tunes. Not only is this popular song a Deadhead favorite, but the song's tonal and expressive ambiguity is a rare and magical experience to be heard at shows. Grateful Dead scholar David Dodd describes "Dark Star" as a vehicle that approaches music in a new and mystical way: "Dark Star was to be their magic carpet, a vehicle that allowed them to approach music as an unfolding dance."[69] Lyricist Rob Hunter was inspired to write the lyrics for "Dark Star" (the first song he ever wrote for the Grateful Dead) from a journey that he took from New Mexico back to San Francisco after he had agreed to work with the band. Hunter speaks of the inspiration for the tune: "I don't have any idea what the 'transitive nightfall of diamonds' means. It sounded good at the time—it brings up something that you can see."[70] In other words, the lyrics are open-ended and can be interpreted through many different lenses and experiences. Jerry Garcia commented on

[69] Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of The Grateful Dead* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 221.

[70] David Dodd, *Greatest Stories Ever Told—Dark Star*. *https://www.dead.net/features/greatest-stories-ever-told/greatest-stories-ever-told-dark-star*

"Dark Star": "So I have a long continuum of 'Dark Star' which range in character from each other to real different extremes. 'Dark Star' has meant, while I'm playing it, almost as many things as I can sit here and imagine."[71]

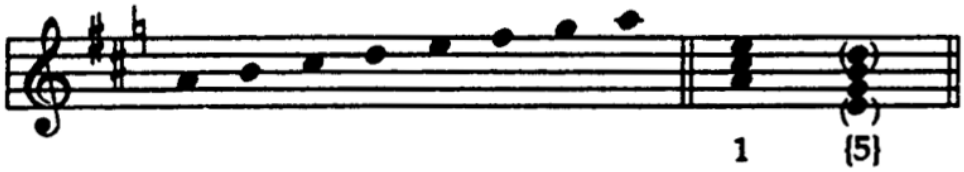
"Dark Star" is so expressively and tonally ambiguous that every version is slightly different, especially when listening to studio recorded albums versus physical performances. One older fan in the Deadhead Community Survey notes, "I enjoy the music. It's the same to me. A little slower paced jams sometimes, but hey I'm a lot slower than when I was younger too!" To compare improvisations in "Dark Star," I will first focus on the version from *Live/Dead* that was recorded live at the Filmore West in 1969. During live shows, there are usually no notable breaks between the songs in the set. The Dead's set repertoire all blend together melodically, making it hard to distinguish when the band has transitioned to a new tune until a few minutes in — this usually happens when they begin improvising on a song and slowly modulate into the key territory of the new piece. Both the 1969 and 2016 performances of "Dark Star" exhibit this technique.

Musicologist Graeme Boone adds a helpful perspective in his analysis of "Dark Star." The 1969 performance of "Dark Star" begins with the transition to the key of D minor with open ended improvisation — bassist Phil Lesh holds the key of D minor steady, guitarist Bob Weir maintains an F chord in the offbeats of the song, while Garcia lingers strongly on A until about measure 12.[72] The first five minutes of the jam are completely instrumental, at a steady tempo of about

[71] Ibid.

[72] Olsson, *Listening for the Secret*, 175.

89 beats per minute (BPM). During this introduction, we hear the main melody teased in the guitar, along with the accompaniment of synth. By measure 20 of this recording, the Dead have already transitioned into a new key area. After about five minutes of opening jams, Garcia sings the first chorus, slowing the tempo down to 83 BPM (5:47). From there, the tempo fluctuates between 70-80 BPM, sometimes abruptly slowing down. Boone writes in his analysis that the band have a formula that they loosely follow, using a mixolydian scale to modulate into a new key area that Boone notes in his analysis of the song. This chord, which Boone refers to as the "Dark Star Progression" is heard in almost every "Dark Star" jam, which consistently gives the jam a sense of fluidity, but also probes for further exploration that happens throughout the entire jam by helping the song transition into a new key..[73] Boone's analysis can be used as launching point to help show how the key transitions that the band uses exemplifies Hicks's concept of dynamization. By playing this progression on the guitar, the group dynamizes the sound of the song by transitioning seamlessly between key centers and modes in a way that feels smooth yet unexpected.



Example 7.2. (a) Mixolydian scale basis for "Dark Star"; and (b) Dark Star progression.

Figure 2.1. Dark Star chord progression from Graeme Boone's "Tonal and Expressive Ambiguity in "Dark Star".

[73] Graeme M. Boone, "Tonal and Expressive Ambiguity in 'Dark Star,'" in *Understanding Rock, Essays in Musical Analysis,* eds. J. Covach and G.M Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 175.

Furthermore, the Grateful Dead use Hicks's dynamization and depersonalization aspect in the "Dark Star" jam through heavy reverberation (7:46). The reverb continues to grow louder and more present as this performance of "Dark Star" moves into the experimental jam in the middle of song, with the guitar occasionally playing the main melody to anchor the listener in the tune (8:16). After one short glimpse of the melody, however, the band moves back into an unrecognizable key and melody that includes ambient sounds from the main guitar (11:17). During this middle section, the tempo has slowed significantly to 70 BPM. Finally, after 12 minutes of exploratory jams, Lesh on bass teases the main "Dark Star" melody, bringing the band and the jam back into the home key of D minor.

The multiple keys and the seamlessness that is used throughout the jam helps to exemplify the dynamization of the group. "Dark Star" features polytonality through the multiple keys that are explored within the structure of the jam. The *Live/Dead* version of "Dark Star" has a notable shift in key as the (11:22), the jam moves into atonal territory with no distinguishable key, but eventually moves back to D minor (18:25). An interesting side note to this performance is around the 11:22 mark when the band moves into the most atonal section of the jam, Garcia can be audibly heard tuning a broken guitar string during the jam, somehow blending it into the sound. At the 21-minute mark, Garcia enters again with the second and final verse. The entire song lasts for 23 minutes.

The jam that occurs within "Dark Star" mirrors the unpredictability and uncertainty of an LSD trip by incorporating an expanded, warped melody within

the jam. The aesthetics of the mid-1960s Acid Tests that explored an expansion of the participant's subconscious through LSD and other hallucinogens that influence the Dead's career so heavily is reflected similarly in "Dark Star." By mimicking an LSD trip musically, the band incorporates Hick's level of dynamization by giving the listener a new experience through this set. This also fits into Sylvan's physiological element of ritual dimension, because the listener feels physically altered through the band's practice of improvisation, with reverb mimicking the dynamization associated with LSD. Garcia reflects on this experience of the combined use of LSD and musical exploration, saying that this was the basis for a lot of their songs — this tune was meant to aid in taking the listener on a spiritual journey to discovering a new way of thinking through improvisation, similar to an LSD trip.

> We were improvising cosmically, too. Because being high, you know, is like a whole universe. And each silence. And the quality of the sound, and the degree of emotion…when you're playing and you're high on acid, these scenes are truly the most important thing in the world. It's truly cosmic.[74]

Garcia speaks of improvisation being the most important aspect of the song. Throughout the *Live/Dead* recording, the band is exploring tonality, going on a 'trip' of improvisation, mirroring their listeners and by the sensations they were experiencing while high on LSD. The unpredictable improvisation that is described in "Dark Star" helps guide the listener (sober and high) on a spiritual journey while participating in the ritual that takes place at shows. A participant of

[74] David Malvinni, *Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), 76.

the Deadhead Community Survey speaks of the journey they took within their subconscious while listening the jams of the Grateful Dead:

> The jams are the best part because it allows me to go into a meditative state and leave my body for a time. I usually come out of a show having learned something about myself or the universe at large.

This alteration of consciousness through the musical experience of the jam is an important feature of the Grateful Dead ritual that is documented through Sylvan's physiological level. Scholar David Malvinni discusses the religious experience that is often felt while listening to "Dark Star": "'Dark Star' can be thought in broad transcendental terms — as a religious experience, a cosmic, cathartic event, mourning, even mandala."[75] Grateful Dead chronicler Steve Silberman also weighs in on the ritual aspect of the tours.

> The Grateful Dead ended up recapitulating of reifying of reiterating so many of the traditional forms of worship and initiation. Simply improvising out of whole cloth, people came up with these forms as if they were inherent in the hardware of the human animal and I think that's one of the most powerful truths of the Grateful Dead.[76]

The power these jams hold is certainly a special aspect of the Grateful Dead. The *Live/Dead* version of "Dark Star" is still well known 40 years later and is arguably one of the best live performances that displays the power of the improvisatory jam.

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Sylvan, Traces of the Spirit, 102

"Dark Star" by Dead & Company, 2019

The Dead & Company's 2019 recording of "Dark Star" embodies Hicks's "Three D's" and the jam band aesthetic that help incorporate to the ritualistic dimensions of the overall experience in a similar way to the 1969 performance, but this version incorporates a few new aspects, such as tempo, that are noticeable among fans. One of the first obvious differences between the older Grateful Dead and the Dead & Company's shows is the increased frequency of live performances. The 1969 performance of "Dark Star" from *Live/Dead* has been one of the most popular recordings because of the expressive quality of the improvisatory jam aspect of song where its tonality, rhythm, timbre and song structure is explored. "Dark Star" has since been a crowd favorite at shows. Since fans were encouraged by the Grateful Dead to tape and distribute the live shows, many different versions of "Dark Star" exist, each one of them unique.

This variation between all the different versions of the tune makes "Dark Star" almost magical to hear. Along with the vast variation that is heard among the different versions, this song used to be rarely performed. Because of its popularity and rarity at shows, "Dark Star" was considered the "Holy Grail" for Deadheads. Performed in the early 1970s but dropped from their song sets in the 1980s and 1990s, the four bars of the opening segment were often even teased at the beginning of other jams by the band, but never performed.

The Dead & Company, however, have somewhat shattered this illusion of magic with the increase of "Dark Star" in their set repertoire. "Dark Star" has been performed over seventy times in the last four years during Dead & Company tours. This choice to shatter the illusive qualities of "Dark Star" brings

controversy to the Dead & Company, leading to the broader question of the motivation of money within the new group. This divergent opinion on the Dead & Company's move from prioritizing music to money is discussed more in depth in chapter four. Some fans believe that "Dark Star" is performed as a "cash grab" for the band, but an alternative opinion is that "Dark Star" might just be easy for Weir to remember after all these years of tours. For the remaining section of this chapter, I will be investigating Dead & Company's 2019 "Dark Star" and comparing it to the *Live/Dead* 1969 version. By noting some similarities and differences, I can examine how a Dead show is differently reflected through a modern-day performance of "Dark Star" by the Dead & Company, and whether or not the ritualistic dimensions have changed.

Performed during the Dead & Company's 2019 Summer Tour in Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA, this rendition begins with the modulation from the key of the previous jam, "He's Gone" of E Major to the new key of D minor (0:27). The final phrase of "He's Gone" is mixed together with the first opening notes of the "Dark Star" melody. The noticeable change from the previous key of E major to the new key of D minor stirs up excitement as fans immediately realize "Dark Star" is next on the setlist. This rendition of "Dark Star" is in the original key (D minor), but like many of the Dead & Company's renditions of the classic songs, is at a considerably slower pace than the *Live/Dead* performance. A few minutes into the instrumental opening jam, Weir plays the main "Dark Star" melody at steady tempo of 63 BPM (1:58), with Mayer joining in around the three-minute mark with improvisatory material on guitar.

After about 6 minutes of instrumental introduction, Weir begins the first chorus of “Dark Star” at a drudging 60 BPM, which is considerably slower than the classic 1969 performance, which begins the chorus at (89 BPM). Unlike the somewhat dissonant opening instrumental jam that begins the *Live/Dead* performance, Dead & Company opens with about six minutes of jamming in D minor with the main melody and “Dark Star” chord progression being easily heard by John Mayer on guitar. Bob Weir finally breaks the instrumental introduction with the first verse of “Dark Star,” singing at a drudging 60 BPM, which is considerably slower than the classic 1969 performance, which begins the chorus at (89 BPM). After the first verse, the band breaks back into a drum-heavy jam that immediately breaks the formal structure of the song, moving into a faster tempo that is rhythmically insecure. Here the group practices dynamization in the ways they improvise, passing the melody to each member of the group. Mayer begins jamming on lead guitar in a new and unfamiliar key that can be easily picked up by the audience, pushing the song into new territory, making it almost musically unrecognizable (9:47). The jam portion of this song much faster at a BPM of 135 with Mayer leading. This jam includes more classic guitar solos and drums and less synth and reverb than the *Live/Dead* “Dark Star”. The jam ends with Weir belting the second verse (14:03), returning the band to the original key of D minor, but with much more dissonant background instrumentation. This rendition of “Dark Star” concludes with more jamming in no particular key and at a faster tempo of 130 BPM which eventually leads to the unknown territory of “Drums and Space”. Overall, this version is only 18 minutes, which is considerably shorter than the 23 minute “Dark Star” from *Live/Dead*.

Along with length, The Dead & Company rendition is also noticeably more tonal throughout, with most of the solos staying in the home key of D minor. The solos stay mostly between Weir and Mayer, whereas in the *Live/Dead* version, they are passed between every member of the band.

Another modern change to the jam that makes the entire ritual and experience different is the technology that has been added to shows. A Dead & Company show features huge flat screens in the corners of an arena that show psychedelic, warped colorful patterns and morph and breathe with the music, creating an even more cosmic effect, as well as showcase who is soloing onstage, making it easy for the entire audience to see. Overall, it is noted by fans that the changes to the jam are very minimal. An older Deadhead participant of the survey speaks of how the consistency of Dead & Company shows seem to change the overall feeling:

> John Mayer is fantastic and consistent, thus no magic. But I am thrilled he is doing what he is doing, and I am glad Dead & Company has made so much possible for the next generation. Personally, I find them almost unlistenable (due to the) slow tempos.

Another participant, on the other hand, says that the Dead & Company keep the spirit of the jam alive. "Now that I'm older and listen to the Dead in a far more sober state than I did in my misspent youth, the variety of music played by the Dead & Company over the years is really astounding."

Conclusion

The Jam band aesthetic and experience is an important element to the ritual of a Grateful Dead event. Viewed through the lens of Michael Hick's "Three D's"—

dechronization, depersonalization, and dynamization—the Grateful Dead's jams can be understood in comparison to the experience of LSD. The long, warped sets, the instability of tonal and rhythmic areas, and the sharing of roles help the band lead their listeners on a unique psychedelic experience to unlock their consciousness within the ritualistic context of the show. Both shows from Dead & Company and the original Grateful Dead incorporate Hick's 'three D's' into their performance, which in turn fits into Sylvan's levels of viewing music in a religious context. By practicing dechronization, the band plays their jams through Sylvan's physiological level of physically altering the audience through long warped tones and extended jams. Dynamization and depersonalization can be viewed through the sociological level, and finally, by incorporating all the elements of the jam into their music, the Dead's performances fit into Sylvan's virtual and spiritual level by experiencing the jam in a new religious dimension. Together, Hick's and Sylvan's theories help to elucidate the ritual dynamics of a Grateful Dead jam. Looking at two performances of the Dead's "Dark Star," the minimal changes that are noted do not alter the ritual, but arguably enhance it. The tempo difference of the Dead & Company's performance of "Dark Star" stands in contrast to the *Live/Dead* version, but the ambiguity of the jam still remains, making each performance open-ended and unique. "Dark Star" has many meanings, but above all it is mysterious and mythical – a cornerstone of the Grateful Dead's music.

CHAPTER IV: CLASSIC AND NEW DEADHEADS

Grateful Dead lead singer Jerry Garcia had been struggling with substance abuse and addiction his entire life, and on August 8th, 1995, he checked himself into a rehab facility in Serenity Knolls for the last time.[77] On August 9th, at 4:23 am, he was pronounced dead from a heart attack at age 53. Deadheads around the world were devastated — Garcia's death meant more than the passing of a brilliant musician; it marked the passing of an American icon, and perhaps the end of the Grateful Dead. It was unclear whether or not the band would go on without Garcia. Following his death, the band announced the cancellation of their fall tour, leaving fans to wonder about future plans.[78]

Twenty-five years later, however, the Grateful Dead lives on in an entirely new generation of Deadheads. A particular dichotomy has developed between the two groups of Deadheads: the older fans who saw the classic Grateful Dead in the 1970s-1990s, and a new group of younger fans who still enjoy the Dead but are too young to have seen Garcia before his death. These younger fans enjoy listening to old recordings of the band and seeing spin-off bands, even if Garcia has been gone for 25 years. Some of the older Deadheads, however, believe that you cannot be a part of the Deadhead community unless you saw the original Grateful Dead with Garcia. These diverging opinions reflect a schism between fans. For the purposes of this chapter, the older fans who saw Jerry and followed the band from the 1960s-1990s are classified as "classic Deadheads." In contrast,

[77] Illustrated trip, 441

[78] Iluustrated trip, 446.

younger fans who were born in 1995 or after who still enjoy the Grateful Dead but have never seen Jerry live will be referred to as "new Deadheads." Finally, "Dead descendants" is an umbrella term to describe the bands that arose from the remaining members of the original band, including Dead & Company and Bob Weir and the Wolf Bros.

While most Deadhead scholarship examines classic Deadheads when the original lineup of the band was active (i.e., pre-1995), very little has been written about the various Dead descendants that have emerged from the original Grateful Dead, leaving the past twenty-five years of activity within the community relatively unexplored. Using the Deadhead Community Survey as well as ethnographic interviews I conducted with fans, I will investigate the change in both the community as well as the ritual that occurs at live shows that is still present over the last twenty-five years. Looking at data collected from various interviews, surveys, and online Deadhead forums, I aim to investigate the differences between the classic and new Deadhead, and what contributes to those differences besides age and the overall Deadhead subculture.

The Dead & Company

On Friday December 8th, 1995, the remaining members of the band released a statement to fans officially retiring the Grateful Dead:

> After four months of heartfelt consideration, the remaining members of the band met yesterday and came to the conclusion that the 'long strange trip' of the uniquely wonderful beast known as the "Grateful Dead" is over. Although individually and in various combinations they will undoubtably continue to

> make music, whatever the future holds will be something different in name and structure.[79]

Following this announcement, band members encouraged their loyal fanbase to remember the music and shared journey they had taken together. Since many fans had witnessed the slow decline of Garcia's health during shows, the announcement of the disbanding of the Dead was not a surprise and was accepted by many with a somber heart.

The *phenomenon* of the Dead, however, was far from over. Remaining core members of the band Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann, and Mickey Hart broke off into solo ventures in the following years. Weir continued to tour with his own solo band, Ratdog, at the time of Garcia's death while Hart produced an album with a new group called Mystery Box.[80] In the summer of 1996, Phil Lesh emerged from retirement to create his own group called Phil Lesh and Friends. Around 2000, the remaining core members of the band started touring together again under the name The Other Ones. In 2002 they released an album titled *The Strange Remain*, and then changed the band name to The Dead in 2003. After The Dead played a number of successful tours, Weir and Lesh played together for the next five years under the name Further, while the other members participated in side projects and gigs. Two decades since Jerry's death, the four remaining members of the band announced a final series of concerts in 2015 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Dead's foundations in Palo Alto in 1965.[81] These shows were held from July 3rd-5th and played at Soldier field, Chicago — the same venue

[79] Illustrated trip, 447
[80] Illustrated trip, 449

[81] Illustrated trip, 469.

where the Grateful Dead played their last show with Garcia two weeks before his death. For many scholars of the Grateful Dead, the 50th anniversary shows were considered the final conclusion of the band.

The solo ventures of band members allowed Deadhead subculture to continue to flourish post Garcia, with fans still celebrating his legacy and keeping the Dead "alive." A 2020 *Vanity Fair* article credits the Dead descendants for the post Garcia boom.[82] Chief among them is probably the most well-known descendant band, Dead & Company.

This band, which was formed in 2015, features three of the original core members: Bob Weir (guitars/vocals), Bill Kreutzmann (drums) and Mickey Hart (drums), as well as former Allman Brothers' Band bassist Oteil Burbridge and Rat Dog's Jeff Chimenti (keyboard). The strangest addition to the group, however, was 43-year-old guitarist/singer-songwriter John Mayer, who fills the role of lead guitar and vocals alongside Weir. While the other members made intuitive sense because of their previous involvement with the Dead, the announcement of adding Mayer as one of the leading figures of the Dead & Company confused many fans. Mayer was already established as a pop icon and celebrity, having launched his first successful album *Room for Squares* in 2002. The hit single of the album "Your Body Is a Wonderland" gave the radio charting album instant success in the pop music category. His 2006 tune "Waiting on the World to

[82] Shirley Halperin, "John Mayer Talks Grateful Dead Legacy, Fare Thee Well and Learning to Play 'A Universe of Great Songs'", *Rolling Stone,* September 5th, 2015. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grateful-dead/6655956/john-mayer-grateful-dead-and-company-interview.

Change" was the third most downloaded song on the iTunes store after its release in July 2011.[83] Mayer's persona and musical style, however, were in stark contrast to the values of the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads. The only single that ever gained any popularity among a mainstream crowd was the Dead's 1987 "Touch of Grey", which got into the top 10 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart, peaking at number 9 and reaching number 1 on the Mainstream Rock Tracks chart—the only song by the band ever to do so on both charts.[84] While Garcia was shy and humble, Mayer seemingly had a completely different personality, confusing and angering Deadheads.

Although Mayer didn't grow up a Deadhead, he became fascinated with the band and Garcia's guitar playing after he heard "Althea" from the Dead's 1980 album *Go to Heaven*.[85] Mayer admired the Dead, and in 2015 he and Weir developed a friendship when Mayer invited him to play guitar together on the *Late Late Show*. In October of that same year, Dead & Company played what was supposed to be their only show at Madison Square Garden in New York, but after the success and enthusiasm they received, the band launched a full summer tour in 2016. Mayer was self-aware that his choice to join the band would confuse and puzzle many fans. In a Billboard interview, Mayer admitted that he knew the

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[83] ibid

[84] Shirley Halperin, "John Mayer Talks Grateful Dead Legacy, Fare Thee Well and Learning to Play 'A Universe of Great Songs'", *Rolling Stone,* September 5th, 2015. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grateful-dead/6655956/john-mayer-grateful-dead-and-company-interview.

91 David Frickle, "John Mayer on Playing With Dead & Company: 'It's Like Catching Air'". Rolling Stone, June 21st, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/john-mayer-on-playing-with-dead-company-its-like-catching-air-153950/

choice was a "head scratcher." When discussing the legacy of Garcia and the Dead with the Deadheads, Mayer explained that "They guard the gate closely. I understood that from the beginning. I wanted to honorably introduce myself. And I got the sense that as hard as they guard the gate on the way in, they defend you that hard once you're through."[86]

Dead & Company have gone on to have four successful years of tours since 2016, bringing the new community of Deadheads together again. This band is often credited for the boom in new Deadheads:

> "(Dead & Company) brought awareness of the Dead to a younger generation while providing their parents — or grandparents in some instances — with a return to the music of their own youth."[87]

The classic Deadheads have split opinions on Dead & Company. While some fans love attending shows and keeping the message of the Dead alive, many are opposed to these descendant bands, and believe the Grateful Dead should have ended with Garcia. Dead & Company represent change within the band and the overall legacy of the group. One of the most polarizing aspects of Dead & Company has always been Mayer's role within the band. One survey participant expresses their frustration with Mayer as lead guitarist:

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[86] David Frickle, "John Mayer on Playing With Dead & Company: 'It's Like Catching Air'". Rolling Stone, June 21st, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/john-mayer-on-playing-with-dead-company-its-like-catching-air-153950/

[87] Halperin, Shirley. "John Mayer Talks Grateful Dead Legacy, Fare Thee Well and Learning to Play 'A Universe of Great Songs'." *Rolling Stone,* September 5th, 2015. https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/grateful-dead/6655956/john-mayer-grateful-dead-and-company-interview.

> I think Mayer started out well with a lot of respect and reverence for the music. He listened and played according to the totality of the band. Now though, he's become just another "lead guitar player" who thinks the rest of the band is just background to his genius. It's time for him to go.

This classic Deadhead believes that Mayer has changed and altered the band from its original form to a new band that doesn't represent the Grateful Dead. They believe that Mayer is trying to stand in and play the role of Garcia, albeit poorly.

The reasons for some classic Deadhead's trepidation about Dead & Company are rooted in the countercultural movement of the 1960s. The position that the band was never profit-based was clear during their time in the 1970s through the 1990s with the encouragement of bootleg tapes and the leniency of merchandise sold by fans at Shakedown Street. Some fans of the Grateful Dead believe that the group cannot play without Garcia, and "replacing" Garcia with Mayer just adds insult to injury. A classic Deadhead who has been seeing shows since the '80s agrees that under the lead of Mayer and Weir, Dead & Company is much more of a profit-based enterprise:

> Dead & Co are more of a money-making machine than it used to be when they played for the enjoyment during the old days. Money used to be where a lot of the band's friction came from, because Bobby always wanted more shows and Jerry and Phil liked to take time off (and record songs).

There is no denying that Dead & Company has been a huge financial success. In 2017 the band grossed 50 million dollars on their summer tour, which is more

than the Grateful Dead probably ever made during their time touring.[88] This financial change is certainly one of biggest differences between Dead & Company and the Grateful Dead. Some classic Deadheads agree that the profit increase that is noticed among fans makes listening to Dead & Company impossible, but most just enjoy being able to attend shows at all.

A new Deadhead participant of the Deadhead Community Survey, however, believes that Mayer is creating a new role as one of the lead vocalists, and isn't trying to stand in the shadow of the Dead's beloved lead singer:

> John (Mayer) is awesome. He gets it and plays in the spirit of Jerry, not trying to be a copycat –he doesn't try to play note for note what Jerry did. I get pretty close to the original Grateful Dead with Dead & Company. It has been fun watching how happy he gets when he is "on" or "hits it" and knows it—it's been nice watching him evolve from playing tight and sort of scripted to comfortable and taking more chances with the Dead's music.

This fan says that although the Dead will never be the same without the presence of Garcia, it has changed into a new experience for both classic and new Deadheads.

Another participant of the individual interviews conducted for the purpose of this thesis speaks from the younger perspective of the new Deadhead in a similar way:

> I know a lot of people are opposed to Dead & Company because they're not the original band, but the sad reality is that Jerry is gone, and he has been for a while. Of course, it's not going to be spot on to what they originally sounded like, but they're there for a younger generation to experience the Dead and to appreciate them the way original dead heads [sic] did in their

[88] Rock Scully, *Living with the Dead: Twenty Years on the Bus with Garcia and the Grateful Dead* (Township, NJ: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 283.

> twenties—they're also a way to connect the younger fans to older ones. Nostalgia pandering is everywhere and it's everywhere because it works; everyone gets a boost of serotonin from something that used to make them happy, and even the old fans who gatekeep the dead can't deny that Dead & Company keeps the message alive. This new band also never claimed to be the original Grateful Dead. John Mayer isn't trying to be Jerry, but he can still improvise for hours on guitar in the same style that is essential to the Grateful Dead.

This particular participant who was born in 1999 and has only seen Dead & Company shows points out that the Dead & Company are in no way trying to be a "copycat" to the original Grateful Dead. One of the most important aspects of the Dead's music is the band's ability to effectively perform in multiple genres. This is evident not just after Garcia's death but for the entirety of the band's existence (compare, for example, the folk style in their 1970 album *American Beauty* to the more psychedelic approach in the 1980s).

This interviewee points out the obvious reality: Garcia is gone and has been for a while—the only way for the band to remain in existence is to adapt to and accommodate change. For most of the band's history, members have been rotated in and out to fit the needs of the band and their changing environment. After the unfortunate passing of founding member of the Grateful Dead Ron "Pigpen" McKernan at age 27 on March 8th, 1973, members of the Dead paused touring to grieve their colleague. Garcia spoke at McKernan's funeral saying, "After Pigpen's death we all knew this was the end of the original Grateful Dead."[89] While nearly two decades of successful tours would contradict Garcia's

[89] Scully, *Living with the Dead*, 230.

statement, the band shifted in duties to accommodate the death of Pigpen and continue on the legacy of the Grateful Dead. Change and adaptation will almost always be necessary for the band to have relevancy in modern culture, and many fans agree that Mayer incorporates that change into the band.

Along with the experience of change exemplified in John Mayer's new role with Dead & Company, fans note that a physical shift has happened with the atmosphere of concerts. While certain rituals of the live shows are still present at a modern-day concert, many fans observe some of the differences that are present at Dead & Company shows. A participant of the Deadhead Community Survey states that "Shakedown is much less of a thing—there is nobody walking around holding up bags of mushrooms for sale, and I haven't been offered 'doses' once at Dead & Company shows." While drugs are still heavily associated with Dead, the younger generation of new Deadheads do not rely so heavily on the consumption of psychedelics at shows. When asked if she took drugs at shows, A new Deadhead who was interviewed for this project says:

> No, I've only done psychedelics once and it was a pretty bad experience. I go to shows completely sober for the most part. I go for the music—to hang out with my family who also share a love for the Dead. I also love participating in shakedown street and getting a new t-shirt—I go for the vibes of a live show.

This participant speaks of the "vibes" of a show that can be experienced without the use of drugs. While the Dead has changed in many ways, it is clear to fans that the main message of the group is still clear: the music and community. The question of art versus commerce has always surrounded the Grateful Dead. On

the one hand, the band has never made music for the commercial profit—cheap tickets, bootlegged tapes and free use of their licensed products gave fans the notion that the band never had money in mind. On the other hand, the group still needed to make money. The tension between art and commerce is complicated and will probably always surround the group. Through financial alterations and rotation of new members into the Dead, the love for the music remains the center of the experience of every show. A classic Deadhead who's been attending shows since the '80s agreed that drugs were no longer a factor at Dead & Company shows: "I don't go to shows to do drugs anymore, I'm a responsible adult! Most times I go to shows to be with friends and family and share the experience of listening to the music." Dead & Company relay the message the original band stood behind: the music is the most important aspect of the experience. Another participant states that "It was never about the drugs; it was always about the music."

One particular aspect of the live shows that is shared among both groups of Deadheads is the nostalgia that remains at Dead & Company shows. For both classic and new Deadheads two different strains of nostalgia for the band has arisen. For classic Deadheads, shows from Dead descendant bands such as Dead & Company are deeply nostalgic in the way they remind old fans of the old shows from the 1970s to 1990s. For newer fans who never experienced Garcia live, however, the nostalgia often comes from being raised by Deadhead parents, or having a Deadhead in their life expose them to the music. For some new Deadheads, the music brings back feelings and experiences from childhood, or times they were around an older Deadhead. For both new and classic Deadheads,

however, the nostalgia of community is still present. For example, new Deadhead Lindsey Dale Tatum speaks of the nostalgia she feels while listening to the band:

> When I think of the band I think of a couple of things. The first I remember is my boyfriend. Second is a guy I went to school growing up with. He always wore the coolest dead shirts. I always think of him when I listen to "Eyes of the World."

Lindsey says that although her family are not Deadheads, her friends closest to her turned her onto the band—the music of the Grateful Dead has felt nostalgic ever since. Another new Deadhead who has attended every Dead & Company show but wasn't alive when Garcia died goes even deeper into this idea, saying that they've been a Deadhead since they were born:

> I distinctly remember the very first time I listened to the Dead it already felt like I heard it before. My first car was really old, and it had a cassette player in it, so I found a few of my Dad's old cassettes he bootlegged from Dead shows and played them in my car and when I heard the music, I felt this overwhelming feeling of calmness come over me; almost like I heard it before–which is why I say I'm pretty sure my mom listened to it when she was pregnant with me. I enjoy it for this and many reasons. It reminds me of my home that I grew up in, feel like I also listen to the Grateful Dead as white noise, just to fill the space around me.

Both the fostered and deep-rooted sense of nostalgia is present in new and old fans of the band. A classic Deadhead participant of the survey says that every show they've been to since the death of Garcia is deeply nostalgic in a similar way to what the new fans describe:

> Any Dead show after Jerry's death feels in some way like a celebration of him and the rest of the band. Even when any number of the original members are playing at the show, it feels very nostalgic, almost like a tribute to the band before his death. The music naturally takes on a different sound, curated by whoever is playing lead guitar at the time, but anchored by the unique playing style of whichever original member is also at the show. So, it's always very familiar, but different at the same time.

This older fan from the Deadhead Community Survey says that Dead & Company help to enhance the feeling of nostalgia: "Honestly not much of a difference. Obviously, back in the day it was a bit more nostalgic, but the community has grown back to a similar nature thanks to Dead & Company." Dead & Company have brought back the similar sound of the past shows with similar sets and run time, making it feel timeless for fans of all ages.

There is no denying that a few obvious differences make Dead & Company shows a slightly altered experience from the original shows. With the change of new members to the band comes a new sound to the group that is slower, but still has many of the key factors of the jam band (discussed in chapter three). Many elements of the original ritual that was practiced at shows still remain at Dead & Company shows. From Shakedown Street to "Drums and Space," almost every ritualistic aspect discussed in Chapter two is still present in some form at modern day shows. Tapes are still in circulation, being traded and handed down among generations. Dancers and spinners can still be seen wearing colorful skirts and twirling, even in large amphitheaters. The most important aspect that makes the Grateful Dead a unique band is still present: the music that fosters a community among the Deadheads. The community of Deadheads remains the strongest

element of the old shows that is also present in the modern day. This next section will explore the differences of classic versus new Deadheads, and the contrast the younger subgroup holds from the original values of what it means to be a Deadhead.

New Versus Classic Deadheads: Money and Materialism

When asked the differences between classic and new Deadheads, twelve people from the Deadhead Community Survey said that the only difference between the two groups of people is age. A select few classic Deadheads (7 out of the 209 survey participants) however, have developed the notion that younger people who never saw Garcia live cannot be considered Deadheads, viewing the new Deadheads are much more materialistic and embracing different values from the older generation. Two common themes that appear in the survey of the differences between the old and new fans are the influence of technology, and materialism. A classic Deadhead participant describes the younger fans:

> Newer or younger fans (some of them, anyway) appear to see the "Dead" experience as "performative"— an opportunity to dress up in "hippy" festival gear so they can document (i.e., video) themselves "getting down." I can't really see what's going on in their mind, but it seems like it's done for the purpose of ticking a box showing other people they've been there. There also seems to some kind of competition (who's got the most Dead gear, who has the most refined tastes in weed, who can take the most drugs) and, perhaps related to the first two, there seems to be unnecessary insecurity about not having seen Jerry. I'm sure some of this performance, competition, and insecurity (for not having seen the band in earlier days) has always been part of the scene, but I wasn't really aware of it. And I'm sure it's largely exacerbated by social media. But I also think the lack of

> social media allowed us to live in the moment more. We could close our eyes and boogie without feeling we had to be capturing it all on our phones to show everyone we were there… anyway, I might generalize that older heads are more into the music and the community, whereas newer folks are more interested in collecting the "experience" (and the merchandise). I do know this doesn't apply to everybody, though.

This fan makes a few observations about what makes the younger generation different. First, the performative aspect: the younger 'Heads attend shows for the novelty of the Grateful Dead, and not for the music. This fan says that because they never saw Garcia, younger fans make up for it with merchandise, drugs, and material goods. This performative aspect appears in a few other responses in the survey — many old fans agree that the new fans go to the shows for materialistic elements rather than the experience of the music. Another participant says something along similar lines:

> The (younger Deadheads) never saw a live show with Jerry, and the way that felt was special. Also, after 1995, the culture of the whole scene changed. People just don't tour with the band the same way and the whole "lot" scene has become "Shakedown" and is nothing like it used to be.

This fan agrees that without Garcia, there is much more of a material aspect to the shows and the younger generation. One of the main values of the Grateful Dead during their touring years is their liberal stance on money, and since the original band was never greedy, many classic fans have noticed the shift in the financial aspect of both the new fans and Dead & Company. This fan notes that "the whole 'lot' scene has become "Shakedown"—this statement implies that the

tailgating and community aspect of the shows has been taken over by the vendors and merchandise of “Shakedown Street.”

Some older fans believe that under the presence of social media, younger fans feel the need to show off the novelty of the Grateful Dead instead of just enjoying the music. Reflecting back on the older band, this opinion considerably stemmed from the idea that the Grateful Dead were never mainstream, and this is what made the original experience special among the community.

The influence of technology among the younger generation and the overall experience of the Grateful Dead is undeniable. One participant says that social media actually makes it *easier* to feel the sense of connection with the band: “The younger generation is able to communicate with each other better and explore all the music because of technological advances.” With the use of online streaming platforms, it has never been easier to experience the Grateful Dead. Instead of just accessing the music through records, a modern Deadhead has access to all of the band’s studio albums, complete live albums, compilations, and recorded live tours in one search on Spotify or other streaming platforms. The entire library and discography of the Grateful Dead is widely accessible thanks to streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music. Another aspect that has changed due to technology is the tickets sales. Instead of waiting physically in line to get tickets to a show, ticket sales to Dead & Company shows are done completely online. Most live Dead & Company shows are streamed online and accessed through livedead.co. Most shows are available to be streamed via MP3 for the price of around thirty to forty dollars, meaning fans can attend *any* show virtually. Tickets to the physical shows even be scanned via smartphone

and that show can be re-watched through their app, nugg.tv, for free. Technology has made attending and viewing physical shows different as well. Huge flatscreen TVs (mentioned in chapter three) make it easy for anyone to see the band playing from around the venue.

Many fans have polarizing opinions on the influence of technology on the Grateful Dead's music and Dead & Company. While some say that it has enhanced the overall experience of a live show and made access to the band's music easier, some older fans believe that technology has brought forth a new material aspect that has changed the younger generation and derailed the original values the Grateful Dead held. A classic Deadhead from the survey, however, disagrees that there is any difference between the two groups of fans:

> The new kids are cool, some of them are there for the music, they get the family "tribe" vibe, and then there are some of the lost kids there just for the dope. As long as there is music to enjoy, dance to, and learn from, old folks like me need to share our stories and tapes and love with the new kids.

This Deadhead states that instead of shutting the door on the newer generation because of their differences, the older generation should accept the "new kids" with open arms, as they help to keep the legacy of the band alive. Although there are many differences that can be noted between the different group, the overarching message remains: being a Deadhead is about having a passion for the music. A classic Deadhead interviewed for this survey says that it's always been about the community and the music:

> I think some of the same values are still there in bringing together a large group of people to enjoy the scene of being outside, in the good company of people and listening to the sweet sounds of the music.

Community

"Strangers stopping strangers, just to shake their hand, everyone's playing in the heart of gold band." These lyrics from the Dead's "Scarlet Begonias" perfectly encapsulate the strongest, unchanged aspect of the Deadhead fanbase: the community. Although Garcia has been gone for many years, his message of love and community remains the strongest factor among Deadheads of all ages. A new Deadhead born in 1999 speaks of community she feels among strangers:

> I think that being a Deadhead is about the music and community that Deadheads have together. Whenever someone my Dad's age compliments a Dead shirt I'm wearing in public I instantly feel like I have a sense of community and belonging with a total stranger (especially if there is a large age gap between us). It's just a way to connect everyone of all age groups that no other band can.

This Deadhead identifies the unifying aspect of community that still remains, whether it be a compliment from a stranger or just a friendly nod, there is an established unspoken connection between Deadheads that is still present today. Wilgoren writes that certain classic Deadheads gravitate towards the community in the absence of human connection within mainstream American society.[90] For many Deadheads, the community they have created provides a neighborhood and a familial atmosphere among band and fans. In the modern age of technology this

[90] Wilgoren, 195.

neighborly feel can be absent, so this community is especially important to the younger Deadheads. The overarching message of "being kind" remains among both groups of the Deadhead community. A classic Deadhead who participated in the Deadhead Community Survey writes that the message remains clear:

> There's a common thread that just keeps on going. Jerry being gone is a big change, but he remains alive within all of us. The community will never die as long as we have each other, and we keep the music alive.

Throughout the past fifty years the Deadhead community has fostered a unique experience within American culture. Although lead singer Garcia died in 1995, the community has continued to grow and change to accommodate the newer Deadheads. Through music and the neighborly bond that is established, both the young and the new Deadheads continue to spread the message of the Grateful Dead.

Conclusion

After the 2015 "Fare Thee Well" tour brought looming uncertainty of the next steps of the Grateful Dead, descendant bands such as Dead & Company have revived the Deadheads, bringing the community back together with the music they share. Through this transformation, along with the widespread availability of recordings, newer fans are experiencing the music of the Grateful Dead for the first time. Older fans are critical of the materialism and the influence of technology in the newer fans, though this view is far from universally shared. Although opinions are varied among the two groups on the influence of the Dead & Company and the overall message of this descendant band, the

Deadheads remain a strong community that has weathered the storm of the Garcia's death, and both groups have the similar interest that connects them together to celebrate the Grateful Dead, regardless of age or culture.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Born from the counterculture of the 1960s, the psychedelic jam band the Grateful Dead pioneered a unique concert experience for their fanbase of Deadheads over the last fifty years. Having played twenty-three thousand concerts, the Dead have become an enterprise that caters to their community of loyal fans that followed them around the country to see shows. Deadheads are an enormous and complex community that have persisted from the band's early years to the present day. Sharing a common love for the band, the Deadheads have created home-grown jam bands, artists, and Dead archivists that have developed through music, fan art and merchandise. The Deadheads are not just a "deadicated" group of fans—this community of people value the band so deeply that is becomes a part of their identity, with traditions that have continued with near religious fervor. In spite of the tragic death of lead singer Jerry Garcia in 1995, the core members of the Grateful Dead continue to tour through Dead descendant bands such as Dead & Company. Deadheads from around the world still religiously follow The Grateful Dead, not just for the music itself, but for the collective, ritualized concert experience among fans.

While the musicological literature on the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads has focused primarily on the seminal countercultural years of the band and the Deadheads up until 1995, little research has examined continuity and change in Deadhead culture following Jerry Garcia's death. This project has been pursued in response to the relative dearth of research on the Deadheads after 1995. While little has been written about the Deadheads, the ritual of the live show continues to be showcased at modern day Dead events. Through online

ethnography, this thesis has examined transformation and tradition in the Deadhead community and the overall ritual of the Grateful Dead's live shows in the years since Garcia's death. I began by examining the ritualistic elements that are present at Grateful Dead shows through the lens of Robin Sylvan's scholarship to examine the and compare those elements to a modern-day live show. By investigating shows in this way, it can be concluded that most of the elements that made up the ritual such a dancers, tapers, and Shakedown Street are still actively present at current shows such as Dead & Company. Elements of ritual such as Emile Durkheim's collective effervescence, the sense of liminality, and influence of drugs at shows help to strengthen the ritualistic dimensions of live shows that continue to be regularly practiced.

Further examining the ritual of a live show, I then focused on how the style of the jam and its aesthetics add another dimensional element to the ritual. Comparing and contrasting two versions of a classic song of the Grateful Dead, "Dark Star", I concluded that although minor changes are made (such as tempo), the two shows remain similar in how they are structured, continuing the ritual of the live show. The last chapter of this thesis focused on the community of Deadheads, and the change that is present among the dichotomy of older fans and newer fans. By interviewing fans and looking at data collected from the Deadhead Community Survey, it can be noted that although there are a few noticeable differences to the newer fans of the Dead, the overall message of the fans remains the same: community and music will always influence the Deadheads. Although the rotation of the members of the Grateful Dead will undoubtably shift, the ritual of a live show continues to be practiced and

amplified by the large community of Deadheads who will continue to spread the message of the music for the next generation.

The limited nature of this thesis leaves several aspects of the Deadhead unexplored. The constraints of time and the COVID-19 pandemic limited the number of interviews that were held for this thesis. The data used from the 214 survey and interview participants represents a miniscule amount of the overall fanbase.

In the future, I hope to explore more details about the Grateful Dead, as this project only scratched the surface of the vast literature of the band. This thesis was based mainly on the Dead descendant band; The Dead & Company, so other groups such as Further, Phil Lesh and Friends, and Rat Dog remain largely uninvestigated. I hope to also investigate the elements of fan-based Dead descendant bands, such as the Jerry Garcia Birthday Band (based in Portland, OR) and Crick Wooder (based in Longmont, CO). Research on fan-based bands (as opposed to the bands that include core members of the original group) could provide fruitful evidence of how ritualistic elements differ in these types of groups, and if the audience and fans of these groups are a new branch of Deadheads.

To conclude this project, I look back on the Deadheads who I have had the pleasure of interviewing and their varied opinions on all things Grateful Dead. The Deadheads are a huge group that ranges in age, gender, and political spectrum that share a common interest that brings them together regardless of their differences to celebrate music and the message of kindness and community.

I close this thesis with the lyrics of Robert Hunter that perfectly encapsulate the large and ever-changing community into one timeless message:

> Wake up to find out that you are the eyes of the world
> The heart has its beaches, it's homeland and thoughts of its own
> Wake now, discover that you are the song that morning brings.

APPENDIX

Questions from the Deadhead Community Survey.

1.What is your current age?

2.What city do you currently live in?

3. How old were you when you saw your first Grateful Dead show?

4. How many Grateful Dead shows did you attend before Garcia's death in 1995

5. Which of these bands have you seen live?

- Dead & Company
- Phil Lesh and Friends
- Bob Weir and The Wolf Bros
- Billy and the Kids
- Phil and Bobby
- Other

6. Do you consider yourself a Deadhead?

7.Please describe which part of a Grateful Dead show was the most fun and why?

8. What are the biggest differences between "original" Deadheads and newer Deadheads born after 1995?

9. How many Grateful Dead shows (or any Dead shows of the sort) have you seen since Jerry's death in 1995?

10. What are some differences you've noted with Dead shows since Jerry has died (if any)?

11. What do you think of John Mayer playing with the Dead & Company?

Questions asked to individual participants interviewed.

1. Have you ever felt physically or mentally altered in any form (excluding drug use) during a Grateful Dead show? Please explain.

2. Dead shows have often been described as a modern-day spiritual ritual. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

3. What is your favorite aspect of Grateful Dead shows in general? Why? Please describe.

4. What in your opinion, does it mean to be a "Deadhead?"

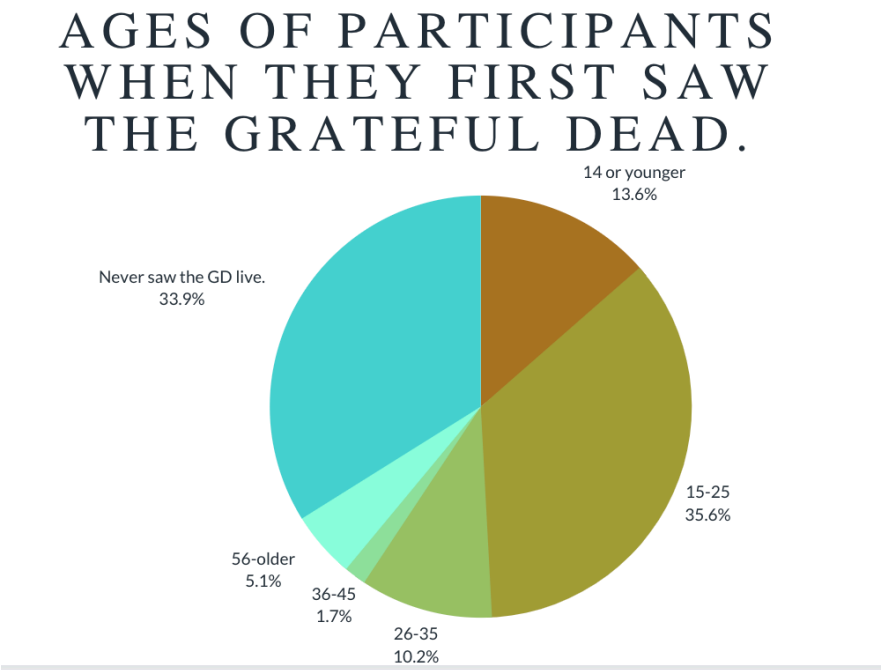
5. OLDER HEADS: What are some differences you've noticed between Classic Grateful Dead shows and newer shows such as the Dead and Company? Please explain.

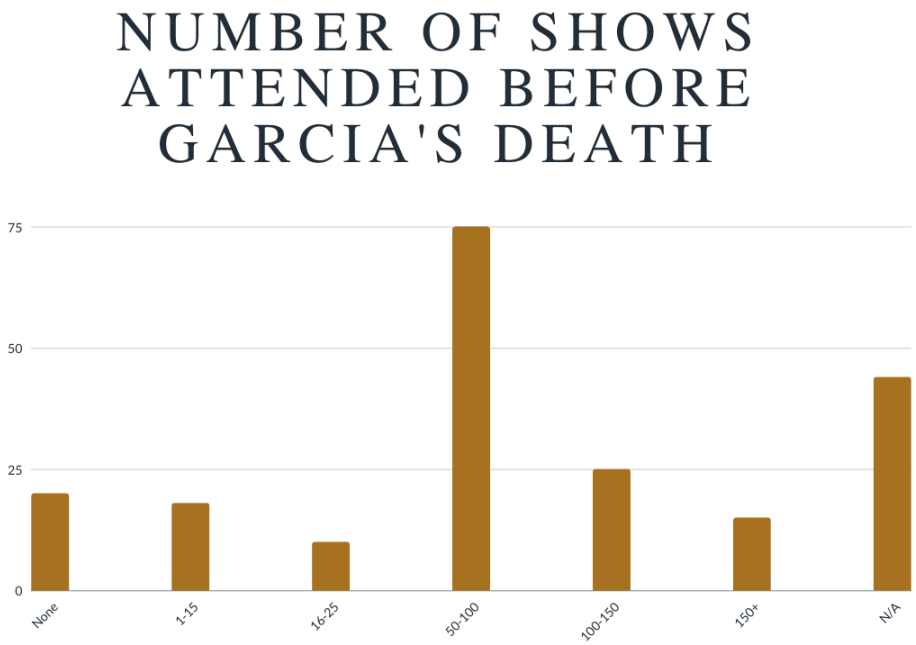
6. YOUNGER HEADS: Do you believe your taste in music and love for the Grateful Dead is affected by political of economical influences?
7. YOUNGER HEADS:
    a. How would you describe the way you dress?
    b. What is your political affiliation?
    c. Do you go to the shows to do psychedelics or any kind of drugs? Why do you attend shows?
8. OLDER HEADS: In your opinion do you think the Dead has changed since Jerry?

9. Do you go to the shows to do psychedelics or any kind of drugs? Why do you attend shows?

10. When you think of Grateful Dead iconography or art style, what comes to mind?

Quantitative Data collected from the Deadhead Survey





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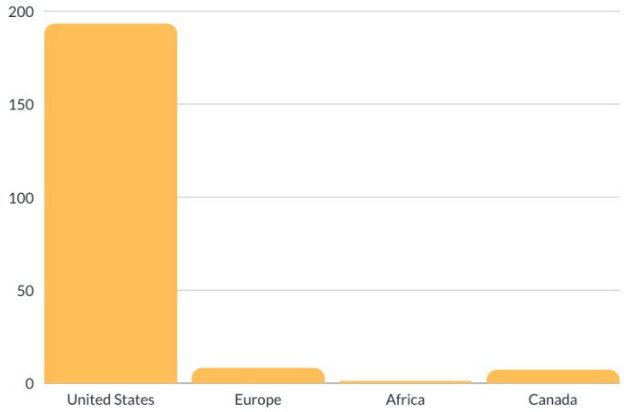
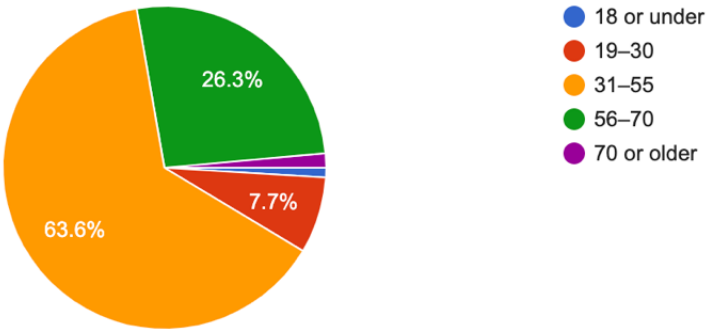


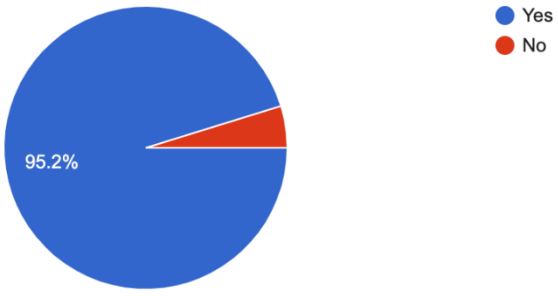
What is your current age?

209 responses

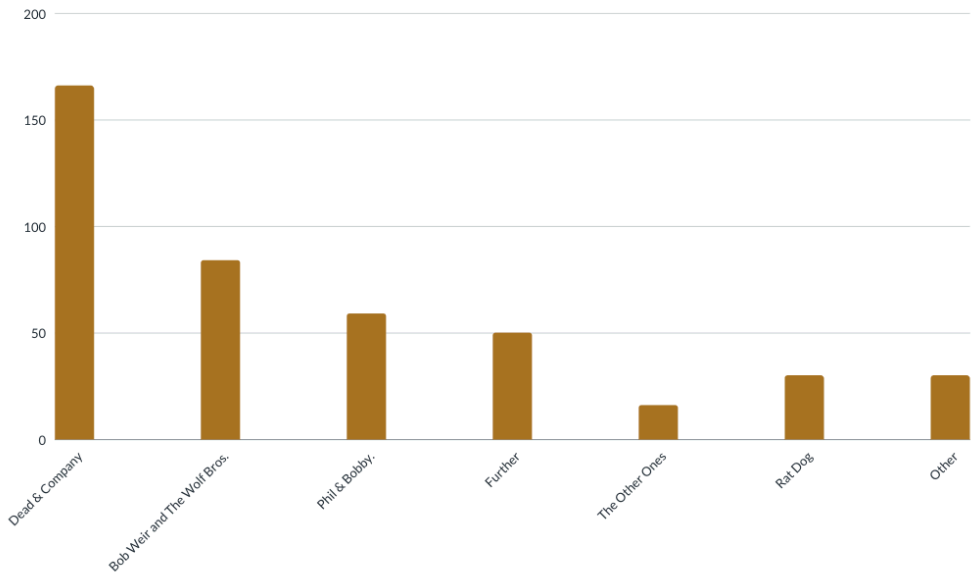


Do you consider yourself a "Deadhead"?

209 responses



BANDS SEEN LIVE(OTHER THAN THE GRATEFUL DEAD)



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