

# Dancin' Along to Those Old Roses and Skulls

by

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<sup>1</sup> Grateful Dead, “Franklin’s Tower”, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Grateful Dead, “Stella Blue”, 1973b.

<sup>3</sup> Grateful Dead, “The Other One”, 1971b.

<sup>4</sup> Grateful Dead, “Built To Last”, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Grateful Dead, “Dark Star”, 1969c.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Garcia, “The Wheel”, 1972.

## Chapter 1: In Another Time's Forgotten Space

The Grateful Dead scene is crazy. Most people cannot fathom it. The straight world saw Deadheads as the dregs of society—drug addicts, vagabonds, the remnants of a failed hippie movement from the 60s who refused to face modern times—while Jerry Garcia was alive and the Dead were consistently touring. Now that Jerry has been dead for over seventeen years, the band has not lost their “legion of haters” (Paumgarten 2012: 43). Yet no band in history has had such a devoted, active following as the Dead had and continue to have. The music lives on and while some people dismiss Deadheads as pathetic, criticisms don't deter Deadheads from living and breathing the music, and may in fact reinforce solidarity among fans. When Jerry died, his fans did not let the scene die and many continued following the “traveling circus” (a term often used among Deadheads to describe their scene) by seeing jam bands such as Phish, Widespread Panic, STS9, The String Cheese Incident, and Gov't Mule to name a few (Shapiro 2012). The Dead pretty much undisputedly formed the jam band scene and some of these bands that are arguably derivatives of the Dead are highly reputable and have devoted followings. But the music of the Dead lives on more than indirectly. Deadheads are not just jam band fans. The songs of Jerry and the Dead live on and are reinterpreted in countless ways through musicians who still play the songs of the Dead and through a persistent, perhaps obsessive community that listens to and shares the music and unique philosophies espoused by the Dead. Is this scene inherently good? I don't think there's an answer to that. Part of the charm to the Dead was that they did not supply any easy, straightforward answers. The band was about exploration, getting high, prodding people to think outside of restrictive

frameworks. They did not deliver perfection nor did they provide readymade answers. As the lyrics of “Terrapin Station” (GD<sup>7</sup> 1977b) go: “His job was to shed light, not to master”.

The impact that Jerry Garcia and the Dead have made in my life and hundreds of thousands of other people’s lives is immeasurable. As the great saxophonist Branford Marsalis said, “There is not a sentence in the world that could do justice to the life and music of Jerry Garcia” (Jackson et al. 2003: 443). But while Jerry has been gone, Deadheads have persisted in honoring him and carrying on the dream. The scene is certainly weird. It may be a little creepy how devoted and obsessive Deadheads are, but it is a scene that has to be experienced to be understood. Timothy Leary recounted in an interview on the 1993 Dead Summer tour, “I can’t think of another group in history, a religious group, that operated with the almost divine disorganization as this wonderful group called the Grateful Dead” (Shapiro 1993). Divine disorganization is a great way to describe the strangeness yet familiarity, the imperfection yet spirituality, associated with the band and the scene. Through the music, the community, the friends, the family, the art, the appreciation of nature, the unbridled desire to explore uncharted territory, to find solidarity, to be at one with the cosmos—I am still amazed and left with the feeling—this scene can be beautiful.

Perhaps because the Grateful Dead is such a unique phenomenon and has existed for so long, a lot of people have written on them. Most works have been biographical and have focused on inside histories of the band, the most famous being *A Long Strange Trip: An Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (McNally 2002),

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout essay the citation symbol GD refers to Grateful Dead

*Garcia: An American Life* (Jackson 1999), *Searching for the Sound: My Life With the Grateful Dead* (Lesh 2005), *Living With the Dead: Twenty Years On the Bus With Garcia and the Grateful Dead* (Skully, Dalton 1996), *Grateful Dead Anthology: The Illustrated Trip* (Jackson et al. 2003), and *Garcia: A Signpost To New Space* (Garcia et al. 1972). Scholars have also written on the theory, technical aspects, and philosophies behind the music as well on the unique culture of Deadheads that sprang up around the band. The book *Essays on Live Improvisation: The Grateful Dead in Concert* (Tuedio, Spector) contains several illuminating essays on such pertinent themes. *Deadhead Social Science: You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know* (Adams, Sardiello) and *Dead Studies: Volume 3* (Meriwether) also contain provocative essays. The aforementioned books (as well as several others) are fascinating, but by and large they just focus on what the band, the music, and scene were like before 1995 when Jerry Garcia was alive and the Grateful Dead were a touring act. I'm exploring why people are still so crazy about the Dead and why/how the scene thrives today. There is very little written on the post-Jerry Dead scene. Pretty much the only information available is online in the form of interviews. Therefore I draw on books written in the past and/or exploring the past to understand the present. Also I draw on band/fan interviews, articles and essays from the Deadhead magazine *Relix*, [Relix.com](http://Relix.com) and other various websites, and documentary films, in particular *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* (Meeske 1995) and *And Miles Before I Go Before I Sleep: On Tour With the Grateful Dead Summer 1993* (Shapiro 1993), which I feel provide authentic, unadorned views from the people about the Grateful Dead to balance with the more philosophical, esoteric essays

written by scholars. After my own experiences at shows and the thousands of hours I have spent listening to Jerry and the Dead, I found the most useful information about the music and the scene in the interviews I conducted with Bill Bonacci (the lead guitarist/vocalist of a Dead cover band from New York called Stella Blues Band), Bob Guerra (the guitarist/vocalist of a Jerry Garcia Band/Grateful Dead cover band from New Jersey called Reflections), and Peter Shapiro (the current owner of the Deadhead magazine Relix and of the famous New York jam band venues Brooklyn Bowl and the Capitol Theatre). So much about the Grateful Dead is based on subjectivity so personal accounts proved invaluable.

Any kind of classification for such a crazy, enigmatic entity as the Grateful Dead can be problematic. As I noted earlier, Timothy Leary described the Dead as operating with “divine disorganization” (Shapiro 1993). The disorganization inherent in the scene does not lend to neat categories in writing. But while the Dead could be chaotic, they were not opposed to form. The versions of their songs varied and the band was spontaneous but usually within the framework of composed songs. Their shows were roughly organized by songs and so my essay is roughly organized into chapters. Grateful Dead lyrics are perhaps the best written works that can describe the Dead because of their amorphous, poignant nature. Therefore each chapter in my essay is named after various lines from Grateful Dead songs. The title of this introductory chapter is “Another Time’s Forgotten Space”<sup>8</sup> (from the opening line of “Franklin’s Tower”). The Dead suggested to their audience that there was space available to create. This mystical space is hidden and mainstream society confines

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<sup>8</sup> Grateful Dead, “Franklin’s Tower”, 1975.

itself through artificial boundaries and misconceptions of time. As a result people often feel discouraged from “seeking all that is still unsung”<sup>9</sup>. Yet the Dead gives hope to people that they can experience and work towards the extraordinary and find space that is hidden by misconceptions of time.

After this introductory chapter, in my second chapter “In the End There’s Just a Song”<sup>10</sup> I explore the current legacy of the Grateful Dead in terms of people playing music of the Dead and Jerry Garcia. I refer to these bands as cover or tribute bands often but these terms are imperfect in their traditional connotations. In an essay entitled “Even better than the real thing? Understanding the tribute band phenomenon”, Andy Bennett argues, “The art of the tribute band involves creating as perfect as possible a representation of the tributed act” (Bennett 2006: 20). Success is measured objectively as the ability of the tribute band to “pass itself off as ‘the real thing’ ” (Bennett 2006: 21). Anyone who has seen live Dead music since Jerry died knows that the music is not the same as it was with Jerry and that Dead cover bands do not merely imitate but innovate. They use the songs as frameworks but make new statements and inject their own energy and interpretations into these frameworks. This is the nature of improvised, transcendent music. As Bill Bonacci put it “the music lends toward originality...there’s a whole lot of space within that to go...You have to have the imagination and the creativity to bring it about so the scene can be carried forward” (Bonacci 2012). There are literally hundreds of Dead and Jerry Garcia tribute bands. They vary in size and reputation. Although they don’t usually play tunes that they themselves composed, this does not mean that the music they

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<sup>9</sup> Grateful Dead, “Attics of My Life”, 1970d.

<sup>10</sup> Grateful Dead, “Stella Blue”, 1973b.

play is unoriginal or inauthentic. The members of the Dead did not buy into self-aggrandizement. They understood music as a healing force, something bigger than any of them individually (Lesh 2005: 190). Therefore, generally they like it when people play and expand on the music that the Dead wrote. While songs are personal and connected to the composer, great songs go beyond the composer. They are transcendent and people can relate to and learn from them and add to them. Great songs don't disappear when the composer is dead but in fact can take on new meanings and in some ways become deeper.

In Chapter 3, “The Bus Came On and I Got On”<sup>11</sup>, I focus on the community of Deadheads both from the past and the present. This chapter is linked to the previous chapter as most Deadheads continue to see Grateful Dead music performed live but it also addresses Deadheads who carry on the scene in the way they speak, the way they treat other people, the way they view politics, humanitarianism, American identity and freedom, the way they relate to songs and lyrics, and the way they listen to and share music and memories. While people outside the scene often label Deadheads as degenerates and drug addicts, there are not accurate stereotypes that can describe the Dead community. Yet there is a sense of shared identity in the scene. Natalie J. Dollar argues, “This shared identity, however, was not taken to be an agreed upon or static way of being a Deadhead, but reflected instead a diverse yet coherent identity” (Dollar 2010: 284). The mantra of the Dead in forging identity is not to mimic but to adapt previous forms and stimuli and blend them and draw from them to grow as people and create/further develop new forms and ideas. This mantra

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<sup>11</sup> Grateful Dead, “The Other One”, 1971b.

applies to musicians who play Dead music and to fans who are inspired by the music.

In Chapter 4, “Show Me Something Built to Last or Something Built to Try”<sup>12</sup>, I delve deeper into the idea of Deadheads creating and innovating by focusing on how Deadheads adapt to a modern world while staying authentic and true to the ideals of the band. The two main focuses in this chapter are on economics of the scene and the way the Dead and Deadheads have developed and utilized technology to create something extraordinary and to spread the music and philosophies of the Dead. The technology and economics of the scene are both fueled by the Dead’s (and subsequently Deadheads’) ideal of working hard and delivering high quality. Jerry and the Dead redefined the notion of hard work. Jerry told Charles Reich in their interview in 1972, “I don’t think sacrifice is contribution. I think that contributing is contributing your own positive energy, and not forcing yourself or any of that stuff” (Garcia et al. 1972: 49). Jerry and the Dead loved to play music, which was their work. Although in reality at certain times through the history of the Grateful Dead (particularly in the Mega-Dead era of the early 1990s) the band seemed like an enterprise that was a financial stranglehold, for the most part the members of the band delighted in their work. They played because they wanted to and because they needed to, not for fortune or fame, but for the sheer joy of playing music and getting high. Jerry’s attitude towards work continues to be embraced by the Deadhead community. Although people have financial obligations (more so for some than others), the Dead influenced and still influence their fans to pursue work that they like, not to work in a cutthroat way, but in a way that is communal and spreads good

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<sup>12</sup> Grateful Dead, “Built To Last”, 1989.

vibes. Some fans built their livelihoods around following the Dead and some still support themselves following modern jambands and Dead tribute bands. Most Deadheads, however, do not build their livelihoods around the Dead but for the most part have the same jobs as people who aren't Deadheads. But whether or not people choose conventional or less conventional, nomadic lifestyles, Jerry's message of working hard and contributing positive energy resonated and still resonates with hundreds of thousands of people. This philosophy was revolutionary and is essential to understanding the ethos of the Dead.

The idea of working hard and passionately is connected to Deadheads embracing technology. Much of the Dead's success can be attributed to the thousands of recordings available on the internet of Dead concerts that can be streamed and oftentimes downloaded legally, made possible by passionate fans who taped shows they were at. The Dead were revolutionary in letting fans tape their shows. No other band has close to as many live recordings available. An article published in the New Yorker last November by Nick Paumgarten was quite enlightening to the taper culture phenomenon in the Dead scene. Besides taping, fans also have used technology to create websites, to post on blogs, to communicate with other Deadheads, and to share and listen to music, which has helped build identity and solidarity. In this chapter I also discuss technology embraced by the Dead in terms of sound systems and gear and its influence on modern bands playing Grateful Dead music who strive to create a live concert atmosphere unlike anything else. The Dead's music helps people to understand that there is space and potential available in

which people can hold onto a cherished past and meanwhile adapt to and even thrive in a modern day economy and technological age.

In Chapter 5, “Transitive Nightfall of Diamonds”<sup>13</sup> I move somewhat away from the mainly cultural focus of the previous two chapters and analyze particular Grateful Dead songs and moments in light of music theory, technique, idioms, and most importantly the spiritual, transformative nature of group improvisation. The Dead were never really about perfection. Individually no member was a virtuoso, at least not in the traditional sense, but each member contributed his own unique style to the music and the effect was that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 14). The Dead were great because together the band members all yearned to play music, to explore new territory, to feed and be fed by the audience. The Dead didn’t recoil in the face of uncertainty or chaos. They played in the moment and let the music speak through them. The music was a group effort, a give and take if you will. Jerry described this give and take of musical ideas through a metaphor of revealing faces. He reasoned, “I think that what happens is that the more faces you show, the more faces get shown to you” (Garcia et al. 1972: 137). By being courageous and weird and exploring new ideas, Jerry inspired others to get weird and share ideas and this sharing of ideas keeps building and inspires the audience who in turn further inspire the band and this is the heart of the Grateful Dead.

Because of the hope the Dead gave and still give to people, the scene will continue. In my last chapter “The Wheel is Turning”<sup>14</sup> I look to the future of the Grateful Dead scene. The music hasn’t been quite the same without Jerry and it will

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<sup>13</sup> Grateful Dead, “Dark Star”, 1969c.

<sup>14</sup> Jerry Garcia, “The Wheel”, 1972.

never be. As Phil Lesh puts it, “There will never be another band like the Grateful Dead” (Lesh 2005: 333). But this does not mean that the spirit will not live on. To conclude his book Phil writes:

Like family members who still celebrate with one another after the patriarch of the family has passed on, my brothers and I play on, and I always feel Jerry’s presence at our shows. No one can be replaced in the hearts of those who love them, but I still feel the necessity to play—for those who come to dance and those who hope to find magic, communing together with friends and family (Lesh 2005: 333).

This beautifully written passage conveys the magic of the Dead. There is something unexplainable, something outside the normal realms of logic that compels Deadheads to push the scene forward. In a very emotional interview after Jerry’s death, organist Merl Saunders (one of Jerry’s favorite co-collaborators), describes playing on the night Jerry died:

It was a very hard night for me...I went into Blue Hill Ocean Dance (Merl Saunders 1990) and then it came to Jerry’s part, which I started playing. I start bawling, I start crying. I couldn’t and then I was kinda ducking behind the organ and I feel a hand on my shoulder. I thought it was Mike [Mike Howell, Merl’s rhythm guitarist] because he was on my left but he was not near me. He was 4 feet away. I still felt the hand. Then I looked up and when I looked back it was gone, but then when the hand left I had this urge to play...We just took the people through a beautiful healing ritual” (Meeske 1995).

This invisible, mystic presence is inexplicable but it is nonetheless there and can’t be denied. Musicians and fans alike feel it and they are driven to continue the scene. Because of the spirituality of the music and the commitment of the musicians and fans who appreciate it, the Grateful Dead will not go away. It’s ironic, but true—the music of the Dead cannot die.

## Chapter 2: “In the End There’s Just a Song”

When Jerry Garcia passed away in 1995, Deadheads were heartbroken. Many thought it marked the end of an era. In some ways it did. Although Jerry hated to be called the leader, in many ways he was the centripetal force that held the Grateful Dead together both as a band and as a scene at large. As Phil Lesh candidly expressed in his book, “As much as we all loved playing with one another, everyone’s primary musical bond was with Jerry” (Lesh 2005: 135). The Grateful Dead ended on July 9, 1995, the last night of their fateful summer tour. Band members have reunited and played tours but after Jerry died one month after his last show, no band would ever take on the name Grateful Dead again. But the fans and musicians, for whom the Dead were so important, were resilient and determined to carry on the scene and the music. In an essay entitled “Many Small Circles” written shortly after Jerry died, Mountain Girl (a former wife of Jerry’s and a lifelong friend of the band) speculated on the legacy of the band, which has proven to be quite accurate over the last seventeen years. She wrote about the Grateful Dead experience:

We have learned much about magic, about the dance between audience and performers. It’s a circle of hearts falling into rhythm, in confluences of color and sound. All those shows, so many instants of perfect communication between musicians, energy fielded by the crowd, swirling around, filling hearts; this is our shared memory and shared ceremony...If we were a big circle, we can be many small circles and pass that good feeling around again and again. It is real (Mountain Girl in [Dead.net](#) 2012).

After the Grateful Dead ended people continued to play the music. The tribute bands that formed and the projects created by former members of the Dead became loci to these small circles. Perhaps the scene is more localized now. The bands are smaller. But I don’t think the scene is necessarily less organized or at least it’s not more divisive than it was while the Dead were around. People congregate at many of the

same shows but instead of seeing one band they often see several bands playing Grateful Dead music. The Grateful Dead still captivates listeners, many like me who never got to see Jerry, and this is largely due to the fact that people still play the music live and are determined to bring it to new dimensions. The fans are receptive to exploration and rocking out and they carry out the good vibes that emanate from the music. There are still moments when “Everybody’s playing in the heart of gold band.”<sup>15</sup>

In light of the Grateful Dead live music scene that exists today, it is interesting to examine tribute bands as a general phenomenon. In the book *Access All Eras: Tribute Bands and Global Pop Culture* (Homan 2006) I find it significant that neither the Grateful Dead nor any bands that play their songs are ever mentioned, whereas acts that in no way could compare to the Dead in terms of their longevity, the devotedness of their following, or in their originality are discussed in length such as Abba, Neil Diamond, and Robbie Williams. There are bands that this book discusses at length that I love as well as bands that I don’t, but I don’t think any band is like the Grateful Dead and I feel many authors who have written about the tribute band phenomenon are either not familiar with the legacy of the Dead or they skip over the Dead in their analysis because Dead tribute bands would complicate their arguments.

That being said, in some ways Dead tribute bands fulfill desires of their audience in a similar way as other tribute bands do. Andy Bennett argues:

Tribute bands respond to a range of mundane, everyday desires exhibited by audiences: to relive a particular moment in their youth; to experience again their personal icons in a live setting (and perhaps take their children along too); to engage in the rapport between performer and audience deemed integral to the communicative quality of the music (Bennett 2006: 19-20).

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<sup>15</sup> Grateful Dead, “Scarlet Begonias”, 1974a.

Many Deadheads who saw Jerry feel like they are reliving moments of their youth when they see Dead tribute bands. This is particularly true with the most popular Dead tribute band (not counting projects that remaining members of the Grateful Dead are in), Dark Star Orchestra (DSO) who mainly perform setlists from shows that the Grateful Dead played. According to DSO's website, over the last fifteen years the band has played nearly 2,200 shows out of the total 2,318 shows the Dead played in their career ([darkstarorchestra.net](http://darkstarorchestra.net) 2013). The actual DSO concerts are not the same as the Dead shows that they tribute (despite being the same on paper). DSO's drummer Rob Koritz explains the allure of the band:

For the old school heads who got to see the Dead a lot, it takes them back to a place that they never thought they could get back to...and there's the other side of it where you look out there and you see these fresh faces that never got to see the Dead and part of the objective is to give it to them (Koritz et al. 2007).

In a way DSO does, as Andy Bennet postulates about tribute bands in general, feed “the audience's desire to experience again the spectacle of their favorite artists in a live setting and in some cases, to have particular unfulfilled dreams regarding these artists brought to life” (Bennett 2006: 25). DSO probably captures the sound of the Grateful Dead more accurately than any other act today and so in terms of fulfilling people's desires “to relive a particular moment in their youth...and perhaps take their children along too” no band is more successful than DSO (Bennett 2006: 19). In terms of fulfilling people's desires “to experience again their personal icons in a live setting” the best bands are the ones that actually have former members of the Grateful Dead in them (and are debatably not tribute bands) such as Furthur, Phil Lesh and Friends, 7 Walkers, Mickey Hart Band, BK3, and The Rhythm Devils. In terms of fulfilling people's desires “to engage in the rapport between performer and audience

deemed integral to the communicative quality of the music” the best bands are local, smaller cover bands like Reflections, Stella Blues Band, the Garcia Project, and Shakedown Street (some notable Dead cover bands from the tri-state area) and hundreds of others elsewhere. Thus different groups that play Dead music today fulfill different desires in people, all of which are important, and so often Deadheads are inclined to see many different configurations of musicians perform music of Jerry and the Dead.

While bands playing Dead music today in some ways fulfill similar desires as tribute bands in general, in other ways Grateful Dead tribute bands are inherently different from other tribute bands and they seem to nullify part of Bennett’s argument. The success of a Grateful Dead tribute band is not measured “to the extent that [it]... can pass itself off as ‘the real thing’ ” (Bennett 2006: 21). People who play and/or love the music of the Grateful Dead are keenly aware that Jerry can’t be replicated. As Papa Mali, the guitarist/vocalist of 7 Walkers (a band featuring the Grateful Dead drummer Billy Kreutzmann that I feel offers one of the most unique takes on Grateful Dead music as well as delivering funky, Cajun, hard hitting originals) puts it, “But there is only one Jerry Garcia, and his style and shining spirit can be emulated—but never imitated or copied” (Relix 2012b). The degree to which bands that play Grateful Dead music innovate varies, but no band plays Jerry note for note and no band tries to pass itself off as the Grateful Dead. Shane Homan probably goes further than Bennett in his argument, which is antithetical to the Grateful Dead, in writing: “The tribute performance, at its centre, is not derived from subjectivity, but objectivity (in search of the perfect copy)...The tribute cannot state ‘this is what’s

like to be me' ” (Homan 2006: 45). Homan’s contention is inapplicable to Dead tribute bands. In the case of other tribute bands, perhaps Homan’s statement makes more sense. Most bands that have been tributed played their own songs live as they appeared on their albums note for note, so it makes sense that the tribute bands would also play the songs note for note (Paumgarten 2012: 53). But the Dead were not like any other band. No two shows were the same, nor were two versions of the same song (Bonacci 2012). As the famous rock music promoter Bill Graham often said when introducing the Dead before they took the stage, “They’re not the best at what they do. They’re the only ones who do what they do” (Lesh 2005: 299). The Dead’s music is deep and calls for reinterpretation. It is not static but as Jerry expressed, “What we do is an ongoing procedure. The procedure sometimes coughs up a magical relationship with the music and other people can dig it too. We’re definitely a process band” (Boone 2010: 89). People who play Dead music well—while paying homage to Jerry and incorporating some of the signature licks that the Dead were famous for—innovate and add their own unique takes to the music.

The idea of paying homage to musicians through performing cover songs was not unfamiliar to the Dead, and the members of the Dead are for the most part supportive of people covering their songs. Even back in 1972 Jerry expressed that he would like people to cover Dead songs. In describing the recording of “High Time” (GD 1970c) off of *Workingman’s Dead*, Jerry admitted, “I was just not able to sing it worth shit...I wish someone who could really sing would do one of those songs sometime” (Garcia et al. 1972: 70). Dead tribute bands may have proliferated after Jerry died, but there have actually been Dead tribute bands around since the 1970s.

Bob Guerra told me about seeing the New York based Dead cover bands Border of Legion (which featured DSO's rhythm guitarist/vocalist Rob Eaton), Timberwolf (which featured DSO's keyboardist/vocalist Rob Baracco, and Volunteers (which featured DSO's new lead guitarist/vocalist Jeff Mattson) in the 70s (Guerra 2013). The idea then was the same idea now: great music is transcendent and should be played by other people.

Part of the beauty of the Dead's music is that it is so accessible and so many people know the tunes. Of course the more one listens to them, the more intricacies and complex nuances are revealed in the music, but as Neal Casal, a guitarist from Ryan Adams' band the Cardinals who recently collaborated with Bob Weir, put it "all of the songs are humable (*sic*) and singable and we can all remember them" (Relix 2012c). On a similar note, Weir explains, "the songs are living testimony to Jerry's musical legacy; they live and breathe when you play them. It's no big mystery, they're fun to play; they get people involved" (Kayce 2012a). Both musicians and fans in the Dead scene are active and creative and as a result the music and scene evolves. Unlike many other bands who are primarily famous for their studio albums, as Jerry said about the Dead, "The records are not total indicators, they're just products" (Garcia et al. 1972: 71). Phil Lesh expressed a similar sentiment to Jerry and Bobby in describing the transcendence of music:

Like fairy tales or folk songs, all versions are true... The more versions there are, the truer it is...I would want to see the music just sort of osmose into the great cloud of music that's been created, that people just sing back and forth to one another...If in a hundred years people are still singing these songs back and forth to one another on the back porch, in a night club, a bar or the living room, that would be great (Paumgarten 2012: 52).

From Phil's prophetic statement, I can't help but think of a line from the Dead song "Stella Blue" (GD 1973b) — "In the end there's just a song". Music that is

transcendent goes beyond the original performers. In an issue of *Relix* published ten years after Jerry died, Phil wrote:

We never really talked about this, because it was so obvious to all of us, but he knew he wasn't making that music; it was like he was just up there quoting or transcribing what it was that was being given to him or coming through him, as we all were in the best moments. That's the goal that we strive for, that we still strive for. That feeling didn't have to die with Jerry. It's in my band, it's in all the bands (Spies 2005).

The band members of the Grateful Dead saw themselves as vessels channeling forces of music that were beyond them to create a collective consciousness and as conveyed in Phil's quote, they still see themselves this way. Great songs are not about ownership or exclusion. They are spiritual, loved by many, and will be performed after the composers die because "in the end there's just a song".

Part of the reason band members of the Dead saw themselves as transcribers and believed people should play old songs and imbue them with new energy was that the Grateful Dead themselves covered so many songs. According to Bill Bonacci, the Dead "had such an uncanny knack for covering tunes that just fit with them in so many ways" (Bonacci 2012). They played songs that highlighted their outlaw, wild west persona such as Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried" (GD, 1971b), Noah Lewis' "New Minglewood Blues" (GD 1967), Marty Robins' "El Paso" (GD 1976), and the song the Dead played more than anything else in their repertoire (performed nearly 600 times)—"Me and My Uncle" (GD 1971b) written by John Phillips (Jackson et al. 2003: 63). The Dead started their career by delivering their own psychedelic brand of electric blues and R&B music. The Dead's early covers of songs like Sonny Boy Williamson's "Good Mornin', Little School Girl" (GD 1967), Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour" (GD 1968a), Howlin' Wolf's "Smokestack Lightnin'" (GD 1973a), the Rascals' "Good Lovin'" (GD 1972), Martha and the Vandellas' "Dancin'

in the Street” (GD 1970b), and their more psychedelic, jammier takes on Noah Lewis’ “Viola Lee Blues” (GD 1967), and Bobby Bland’s “Turn on Your Lovelight” (GD 1969c) captivated audiences and are responsible for putting the Dead on the map. The Dead made these early songs their own by opening them up into extensive jams where every member improvised, delivering their own energy so that the whole became greater than the sum of its parts.

While “the blues never lost any appeal for the band” and later in their career the Dead composed several blues songs such as “West LA Fadeaway” (GD 1987) and “Alabama Getaway” (GD 1980), and offered new interpretations of old blues songs such as Robert Johnson’s “Walkin’ Blues” (GD 1990a) and Willie Wixon’s “Wang Dang Doodle” (GD 2000), the Dead did not confine themselves to just playing blues and R&B songs (Malvinni 2010: 81). Some of my favorite Dead songs are traditional folk songs that the Dead made their own such as “Cold Rain and Snow” (GD 1967), “Peggy-O” (GD 1999a), “Jack-A-Roe” (GD 1981), “Goin’ Down the Road Feelin’ Bad” (GD 1971b), and “I Know You Rider” (GD 1966). Some of the most epic parts of Dead shows were the rock covers they played throughout the years such as Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away” (GD 1971b), Traffic’s “Dear Mr. Fantasy” segued into the Beatle’s “Hey Jude” (GD 1985) , and Bobbie Dobson’s “Morning Dew” (GD 1967). There are so many great songs the Dead covered and made their own (not to mention all the songs that Jerry Garcia Band covered and Jerry covered in Old and In the Way, Legion of Mary, Reconstruction, and with Merl Saunders, David Grisman, David Nelson, and John Kahn to name a few of his co-collaborators). Jerry shed light on why he covered other people’s music using Chuck Berry (whom the Dead covered

throughout their entire career) as an example: “We have a lot of respect for Chuck Berry, what the fuck, it’s traditional to do a guy’s tune if you like his music” (Garcia et al. 1972: 72). Covering music in the idealist sense is about respect and innovating, not imitating or stealing. There have been issues over royalties, especially in the 1950s when many white musicians became stars by playing tunes written by black musicians who didn’t experience nearly the same degree of fame or fortune. But this phenomenon didn’t really apply to the Dead as they did not have any cover songs that were hits on their records (nor did they have a hit record of originals until 1987). It was through the Dead and Jerry’s side projects that I discovered artists such as Merle Haggard, Allen Toussaint, the Rowan Brothers, and Jimmy Cliff. The Dead helped spread great music and in a way helped smaller artists that they covered get some of the attention they deserved.

The spirit of covering songs has not gone away in the Dead scene. Bob Weir and Phil Lesh’s band Furthur led me to discover Ryan Adams through their performances of his songs “Nobody Girl” (Furthur 2010c) and “Magnolia Mountain” (Furthur 2010a). Some of my favorite songs that Jerry and the Dead performed were by Bob Dylan. After Jerry died, Dylan said, “Jerry Garcia could hear the song in all my bad recordings, the song that was buried there” (Paumgarten 2012: 43). I love Dylan and honestly don’t think the Dead necessarily made any of his songs better, but they made them fresh and unique and I definitely got into some of Dylan’s songs such as “Tangled Up in Blue” (Jerry Garcia Band 2005), “Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues Again” (GD 2002) and “Visions of Johanna” (Jerry Garcia Band 2005) after I heard the Jerry Garcia Band and/or the Dead play them. I think Bob

Weir cannot be sold short in covering Dylan tunes either. One of the best concert experiences I ever had was hearing Bobby sing “It’s a Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall” (Furthur 2010c) (which the Grateful Dead never covered) at a Furthur show in Worcester, MA on 11/19/10. Covers were always an integral part of the Grateful Dead experience and as the Dead offered so many unique takes on songs written and performed by other artists, other bands can offer their own unique takes on Dead songs.

The bands that play Grateful Dead music today are extensive. I suppose the groups can be categorized in terms of their size. The biggest bands around are Furthur, Phil Lesh and Friends, and Dark Star Orchestra. Furthur, the most recent big-name reincarnation of the Dead (featuring Weir and Lesh), was formed with the intention “to play a more faithful rendition of the music they’d played together when Jerry Garcia was still alive” compared to other bands in which original Grateful Dead members collaborated such as The Other Ones (who toured on and off again from 1998 to 2002) and The Dead (who toured in 2003 and in 2009) (Paumgarten 2012: 54). Nick Paumgarten speculates that Furthur has been more successful than Phil Lesh and Friends and Ratdog (a band led by Bob Weir which formed in 1995) because Furthur sticks truer to how the music sounded while Jerry was alive whereas Phil and Friends and Ratdog opened the Dead’s cannon to more reinterpretation, “which may have pleased them more than it did their fans” (Paumgarten 2012: 54).

I feel the group that sounds closest to how the Grateful Dead sounded is Dark Star Orchestra. That is not to say that they are not original. I have had amazing experiences seeing them live and the group energy and spirit of exploration is real. I

find it interesting that Andy Bennett writes that we are living in a postmodern age and “a centrally defining characteristic of the postmodern era is the dominance of simulacra...to the extent that representation has become, in itself, a reality for citizens of postmodern society” (Bennett 2006: 20). If tribute bands are simulated representations, then in a way DSO and Furthur “not only stand in for the ‘real thing’” but have become “primary referents” or “reality” for me (Bennett 2006: 23). They aren’t imposters or copiers of the Dead. I don’t find them artificial. In the case of DSO, Rob Koritz explains:

Even though it’s recreating something else, it’s all improvisational. You know 90% of what we’re doing out there isn’t anything the Dead ever did, so we’re still being able to have that creativity every night and play from our hearts and go for that place where the music plays the band (Koritz et al. 2007).

90% may be a bit of an exaggeration, but nonetheless DSO is original sounding and creative. DSO mainly plays shows the Dead performed but as DSO’s keyboardist Rob Baracco put it, “It’s just a setlist...their performance might have been so-so but that doesn’t preclude that we’re gonna have a so-so performance. We’re gonna blow the doors down” (Koritz et al. 2007). Seeing tribute bands is not all about nostalgia (as Shane Homan posits), but is about yearning for more music (Homan 2006: 46). The degree of originality/uniqueness is contested since these are subjective terms. Some bands playing Dead music sound more like the Dead with Jerry than others and while I don’t think sounding like Jerry makes a group inauthentic, the issue of imitation versus emulation is pertinent in the Dead scene today.

Homan argues that among tribute bands there are varying notions of authenticity and that hierarchies of taste are constructed (Homan 2006: 45). This is

definitely the case among Dead tribute bands. Dark Star is more accessible than other big name bands playing Dead music and Rob Koritz is pretty spot-on when he relays:

We've heard countless stories about people who go 'once Jerry died, I didn't think there was going to be anything. This isn't to denigrate any of those people but I tried Phil and Friends and I tried Ratdog and just nothin' did it for me...somebody dragged me out to see you guys and I came in so hesitant and ready to not have a good time and when are you guys comin' back to town? I can't wait to see you again' (Koritz et al. 2007).

When Rob Boracco compares his experiences playing with Phil Lesh and The Dead versus DSO, he doesn't say one is necessarily better than the other but he does say that in The Dead "There was so much going on all the time...and sometimes for me it became achingly apparent that Jerry wasn't there" (Koritz et al. 2007). In general, critics have been harsher about reincarnations of the Grateful Dead like the Other Ones and the Dead and Furthur, but Deadheads are also critical about DSO. Bill Bonacci told me he loves DSO but gave me an example of a time he saw them perform a show from 1978 where the "Estimated Prophet" (GD 1978) was a little too perfect, or as Bill said, "I felt like I was left high and dry...I felt that was kind of comping them to a fall" (Bonacci 2012). Part of the Dead's appeal was their rawness, their unpredictability—which included their mistakes as well as their high moments. Perhaps mistakes made the high moments more pronounced. Living members of the Dead have sat in at DSO gigs but in some ways the relationships between these members and DSO have been contentious. Although later Billy Kreutzmann apologized and somewhat qualified his statement, in an interview on [jambase.com](http://jambase.com), Billy said of DSO, "I think if you're going to spend that much time on music you should work on your own music" (Bruss 2009). Billy prefers mixing originals with new interpretations of Dead tunes. He told an interviewer when asked if he'd feel like he was progressing if he were just playing Dead tunes, "I know I wouldn't be

progressing. I like to be creative and make as much new stuff as possible” (Bruss 2009). While some musicians are critical of DSO, in general these criticisms pale in comparison to statements that have been made about Furthur.

The musicians who play Dead music, like the fans of the music, are very opinionated. Billy has made it clear that he does not like Furthur. In an interview from 2010 Billy said, “I haven’t really got much interest in them...I don’t feel they’re doing anything really new with their music...They should have hired a great solo guitar player” (Woodward 2010). The former guitarist of DSO, John Kadlecik, plays lead guitar in Furthur and while many love his smooth, polished tone and some think he is the best guitarist to play Dead music since Jerry died, others feel he tries to sound too much like Jerry on one hand and on the other hand he plays it too safe and lacks the chaos and adventure that were endemic to Jerry’s playing (a syndrome Assembly of Dust guitarist/vocalist Reid Genauer denotes as sounding like “Jerry lite”) (Relix 2012a). Kreutzmann, like his bandmates in the Dead, wants people to continue to play Dead music, but he is arguably more focused on innovation and delivering the music in a unique style that sounds different than the Dead did with Jerry than he is with pleasing fans. 7 Walkers has not achieved the commercial success of Furthur or DSO and Billy may be a little bitter about this, but 7 Walkers is a great band (as long as you’re not expecting to hear classic Grateful Dead) and I genuinely believe that Billy is sincere in his criticism and not just jealous. He felt the more commercially successful groups he played in after Jerry’s death “were okay bands—the musicians were always really great—but I always missed one guy. I couldn’t help that in my heart. The Grateful Dead without Jerry Garcia was like the

Miles Davis Band without Miles Davis” (Eisen 2012). While this may seem harsh, The Dead and the Other Ones weren’t that good. It’s disappointing that the surviving members of the Grateful Dead haven’t really created great music together without Jerry, but for the most part I love their recent individual projects and the variations keep the music fresh. Billy believes in 7 Walkers and is more passionate about the music he plays in this group than he has been about any group he’s been in since the Grateful Dead (Eisen 2012). To the chagrin of many Deadheads, Billy surmises that if Jerry were still alive he “would have had enough of the Grateful Dead” (Bruss 2009). But while Billy thinks Jerry wouldn’t be playing with the Dead if he was alive, he insists, “I know he’d be playing music though. I guarantee you that much is a fact” (Bruss 2009).

While Billy seems genuinely uninterested in Furthur and playing with Bobby and Phil for musical reasons and as he said in an interview, “After you’ve been together for 40 years it feels real good to get out there and play with different musicians”, Rob Eaton seems personally bitter about Furthur (Bruss 2009). In Nick Paumgarten’s article in the New Yorker, Eaton is quoted: “I haven’t gone to see Furthur...It’s like going to see your ex-girlfriend fucking your best friend” (Paumgarten 2012: 54). Eaton seems angry both at John Kadlecik for leaving DSO and at Phil and Bobby for taking John away from DSO. As he puts it, “I think one of the reasons Phil and Bob took John is that they wanted to get rid of us—their nemesis, this little gnat they can’t catch” (Paumgarten 2012: 54). DSO hasn’t really lost popularity since John Kadlecik left the band. Many fans prefer his replacement Jeff Mattson (the former guitarist of one of the oldest and longest lasting Dead tribute

bands—the Zen Tricksters) who I feel has an edgier, more adventurous sound and opened the band up to playing more 60s Dead (at the time of the DSO interview in 2007 when John Kadlecik was in the band they hadn't performed any Dead sets before late 1971) (Koritz et al. 2007). DSO prices are still pretty expensive (they're almost always at least \$30 whereas most Dead cover bands are usually at the most \$10, though Furthur tickets are about double the price of DSO tickets). Expensive ticket prices are a major source of frustration among Deadheads, though the prices haven't really dissuaded fans from going to shows. It seems that Eaton should be grateful to Bobby and Phil for the music they created, which has allowed Eaton and DSO to thrive. He shouldn't view them as adversaries. The spirit of the Dead is not about competition or scarcity in music. The more people going to shows and enjoying and learning from the music, the better. There "aint no time to hate"<sup>16</sup>.

The tension that exists between the big name bands in the Dead scene is off-putting. Jerry is missing in unifying the scene. Some feel the music and scene will not continue without Jerry. As Reed Mathis, the bassist from Tea Leaf Green commented, "One of the marks of a true original is the amount of imitators that follow in the wake. One of the other marks is that none of the imitators ever come close" (Jambands 2012). I agree that nobody comes close to Jerry, but I don't consider musicians playing Dead music to be imitators of Jerry necessarily. These musicians can be great in ways that are different than Jerry was. They should not be thought of as inferior. I agree with the guitarist Warren Haynes (from Gov't Mule, the Allman Brothers, Phil Lesh and Friends, and The Dead) that "Sometimes the sign

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<sup>16</sup> Grateful Dead, "Uncle John's Band", 1970c.

of a great song is how many different ways it can be successfully re-interpreted or re-arranged” (Relix 2012d). I feel several groups have successfully re-interpreted Dead songs, whether they play songs closer to the styles the Grateful Dead played them in (i.e. DSO, the Zen Tricksters) or they conceive the songs in new ways that sound very different from how the Dead played them (i.e. 7 Walkers, Mickey Hart Band, Jazz is Dead). I think both kinds of bands (though both is not the right word because there is not a binary) are important and they are not mutually exclusive. The important thing is that people are playing music of the Grateful Dead and engaging in the culture that emerged around the band. Instead of giving up in grief, people have honored Jerry by keeping the music and the scene alive. In his book, Phil relays one of my favorite stories about Jerry. After the highly revered, somewhat mystical figure Neil Cassady died in 1968, the Dead were playing a show and in the middle of a song Phil, heartbroken, stopped playing his bass. This infuriated Jerry and after the show he shoved Phil and yelled “You play, motherfucker!” (Lesh 2005: 122). This response profoundly affected Phil. He states in his book, “Jerry’s vehement response shook me out of my lethargy, and I vowed to myself that in the future I would live up to Neal’s inspirational example” (Lesh 2005: 123). Instead of grieving, Deadheads have heeded Jerry’s advice to play on and as a result they have furthered a scene that is not like anything else. The magic has not gone away and people who play the music still strive to reach a state Deadheads commonly refer to as the X- factor, where the music plays the band, and as Rob Koritz explains “the crowd becomes one and the band becomes one and the crowd and band together become one and everyone is workin’ together for this experience” (Koritz et al. 2007).

While small Dead tribute bands have not really been written about, they cannot be overlooked. I feel in certain ways small local bands carry on Jerry's message better than the larger ones. Seeing small tribute bands often is much more financially feasible than seeing big name Dead bands like Furthur. The venues are often bars and the small spaces facilitate an intimacy between the musicians and the audience that larger venues cannot produce. Andy Bennett argues, "Although the gravitation of many rock and pop stars to the stadium...may have suited the commercial incentives of the music industry, it has not uniformly been to the liking of music fans" (Bennett 2006: 26). The Grateful Dead scene in a way became less pure after it blew up in popularity. Large venues are more sterile, impersonal, and produce barriers between the band and the audience. In the 80s during the dawning of the Mega-Dead era, Phil notes the stages were huge, "further removing us from contact with the audience, who receded into a blur of shapes lacking any individuality" (Lesh 2005: 218). Peter Shapiro, who used to own the famed New York City jamband venue the Wetlands Preserve (which featured free Dead tribute band concerts every Tuesday night) and is currently the proprietor of Brooklyn Bowl and the Capitol Theatre (where the Dead played 18 historic shows in 11 months during 1970-71), is highly attuned to the effect venues have on performances (Shapiro 2012). Peter told me he tried to facilitate the X-factor at shows where:

Everyone's feeding off each other's energy...by doing the venue right and the lightings right and the sounds right... and all these things come together and create an environment, then everything lifts each other. Higher water lifts all boats (Shapiro 2012).

The venues Peter owns (excluding the Wetlands which closed down in 2001) have been too big for most Dead/Jerry tribute bands to play (excluding DSO, JGB,

and the Zen Tricksters). Most venues tribute bands play in are bars and while bars may facilitate intimacy, they are not ideal. In talking about the early days of the Dead, Jerry noted:

It became clear to us that working in bars was not going to be right for us to be able to expand into this new idea...we got more into wanting to go...to take it farther. In the night clubs, in bars, mostly what they want to hear is short fast stuff (Garcia et al. 1972: 21).

Bob Guerra told me about the downside of playing Jerry Garcia Band tunes (which are often slow) and some of the slower Grateful Dead songs at venues Reflections plays. When compiling setlists, the bandmates in Reflections consider:

We can play a slow one in there, but not too much because these people will be sleeping on the floor and you don't want that. Then you lose them...Lets face it, if you were Jerry Garcia it didn't matter what you played. People were just thrilled to be in the same room with him and you knew you were gonna hear great guitar work and he was Jerry Garcia. He could play whatever he wanted (Guerra 2013).

Sometimes people at bars just want to hear fast, straight-ahead songs, or the most popular Dead songs. There may be a low turnout of fans. Bill Bonacci told me “on the negative side you have to divorce yourself” from the venue (Bonacci 2012).

Small Dead tribute bands typically play late and people leave throughout the show, which can be a drag especially because as Bill told me, “you save your better tunes or at least the more involved tunes and the jammier tunes at the time for the second set” (Bonacci 2012). Going along with the venue, there are other limitations that small Dead tribute bands face. These bands typically cannot afford or have room onstage for the sophisticated gear that was used by the Dead, which helped them create the live ambience and distinct tones they were known for. These bands also don't usually have guitar techs or sound crews (in Reflections the keyboardist/vocalist Paul Kates also mixes the sound) and so when things screw up on stage, fans may notice and the

problems aren't remedied immediately (Guerra 2013). Also small Dead tribute bands are not as stable as large ones because for the most part, band members do not make a living playing music (Reflections and Stella Blues Band play shows about once or twice a month) and they must attend to other obligations (Bonacci 2012). Lineups change more frequently for smaller Dead tribute bands and generally these bands have a more limited repertoire than larger acts because they aren't able to practice and play live as much.

Although small Dead tribute bands do not get the respect or acclaim that larger ones do, they are integral to carrying on the Dead scene. Bill Bonacci seems to have a profound understanding of the spirit of the Dead. He articulated:

You find you're playing in front of ten people and in a way it's a little bit of a downer but I always try to remember I don't care if there's one person there, I'm playing for them, and I want what I do to be good for them regardless of the fact that it's just them (Bonacci 2012).

There may not be many people in the audience, but Deadheads are not like typical music fans. They can be as Bill put it "ridiculously engaged and appreciative" and that inspires the musicians to play as well and creatively as possible (Bonacci 2012). Stella Blues Band is small and the Dead were huge but they still play in the spirit of the Dead and "mimic them in what they brought to the party" (Bonacci 2012). They don't imitate or try to sound exactly like the Dead but like the Dead they bring an improvisational take to the music and imbue it with passion and freshness, never playing two versions of a song exactly the same, each member contributing so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, delivering music that speaks to people on a deeply personal level (Bonacci 2012).

The Grateful Dead were rarely stagnant. They lived and performed “in the stream of becoming” and their fans, who had an “insatiable hunger” to be blown away, kept listening and going to see them perform live (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 9). After Jerry died, the fans wanted more and they got and continue to get more from all the musicians playing Dead music today. The Grateful Dead spoke and continues to speak to so many people. Fans and musicians alike hold on to the music because they crave it. Eventually all of the members that were in the Grateful Dead will die, but the music will live on. It will continue to be played, and will continue evolving. The music transcends mortality.

### Chapter 3 The Bus Came By and I Got On

The Grateful Dead cannot be analyzed without looking at the fans. The music, the musicians, and the fans are distinct yet inseparable. The Grateful Dead formed at a time when music was “elitist...imposed from above...a manufactured product for passive consumption” (Garcia et al. 1972: xvii). The Dead were revolutionary as the scene was “brought up from the people”—people who were active listeners and felt the music spoke to them on a deeply personal level (Garcia et al. 1972: xvii). Charles Reich surmised that while the straight world prefers escapist entertainment, Deadheads seek real music that addresses “sadness, bummers, fear, despair, adversity, desperation, as well as sex, sensuality, highs, and super-highs” (Garcia et al. 1972: xvii). Many fans express similar sentiments as Reid Genauer about Jerry and the Dead: “Listening to Garcia works for me at any time of day in any emotional state” or The Hold Steady’s guitarist/vocalist Craig Finn: “you can listen to his songs your whole life....it’s not like ‘oh I liked that band when I was 15,’ I can keep putting on these songs and these records and they might mean something new to me every time I hear them” (Relix 2012a, Kayce 2012b). The fans feel sincere, deep connections with the music that do not go away. And the musicians in the Dead likewise feel sincere, deep connections with their fans. As Mickey Hart told grieving fans in the memorial service in Golden Gate Park on August 13, 1995 to commemorate Jerry’s life, “We shared thousands of great grooves, magic moments, all of us...This means a lot to all of us and you kept us goin’. You were the fuel...we all love you for that” (Meeske 1995). The fans have continued to be the fuel since Jerry died and the scene still thrives. Before he died, Jerry theorized about the

underpinnings of the Dead scene: “There is a human drive to celebrate and we provide ritual celebration in a society that doesn’t have much of it” (Brown, Novick 1995). People continue to congregate around the Dead and celebrate together. The family-like aspect in the Dead community is unparalleled. Some fans may seem obsessive. As Jerry put it, “It’s amusing that people make so much stuff out of this”. Yet he goes on to say, “on another level, I believe it’s their *right* to do that, because in a way the music belongs to them” (Brown, Novick 1995). Jerry didn’t take ownership or try to take control of the scene. He believed, “We’re opening a door but we’re not responsible for what comes through it” (Brown, Novick 1995). What’s come through the music (the metaphorical door) that Jerry and the band created, or perhaps more aptly “channeled”, is the community and scene that exist today.

The Deadhead community both reflects and guides the music. There is an ensuing dialogue between the musicians and the fans that propels the scene forward. Among Deadheads there are elitists and people who perhaps for legitimate reasons are deemed degenerates, but there are definitely some kind, creative people that help make the scene beautiful and I feel as Jerry articulated in a Relix interview from 1989 that the “audience is getting a bad rap that it doesn’t deserve” (Peters 1989). In relaying his first experience at a Dead show, Peter Shapiro noted that the scene “didn’t just seem like just an excuse to party. It looked like there were people similar to me, from similar backgrounds like looking for something, looking to experience something they weren’t getting in their day to day life” (Shapiro 2012). While there is a sense of familiarity in the scene and there is an undeniable camaraderie among fans, identities are not fixed or uniform, and the differences among fans do not break

the cohesion in the scene. From *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95*

documentary a male fan, identified as a vice president of a silicon company, described Deadheads quite well:

There's a spectrum from everything from old people to young people, poor people to rich people. There's no one set stereotype of a Deadhead. When you watch the music and you watch the audience it's just a very cohesive connection between the audience, the band, and the vehicles of music. Music and philosophy—It's a way of life (Meeske 1995).

While there are certain general demographics in the Dead scene—most Deadheads tend to be white and heterosexual; most of the musicians playing Dead music tend to be male—this does not in any way indicate that the community is racist, homophobic, or sexist (more likely the demographics of Deadhead audiences and musicians reflect the fact that the members of the Grateful Dead were heterosexual, white males).

Deadheads are by and large pretty open-minded, accepting people. While in some ways they may appear homogeneous, they are diverse in terms of class, sex, age, education level, income, and political/religious views (much more diverse than fans in many other music scenes).

Deadheads like their heroes on stage, are driven to explore, to learn, and celebrate together. People who have written about the Dead often describe the scene as being family oriented and I absolutely agree. The Dead brings people together.

An unidentified older female fan in *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* documentary emphasized this reality: “I have all these friends from all over the country that I don't get to see anymore and so shows are a chance for us to all meet somewhere...and I can't think of anything else that could bring us together” (Meeske 1995). I've started to see my own friend groups become more diffuse as people move away and face new responsibilities and like the woman in the documentary, concerts

where Dead music is played have become sites where I reconnect with friends. Rob Koritz emphasized the notion of parents passing on the music of the Dead to their children and grandchildren and attending concerts together (Koritz et al. 2007). While my parents never listened to the Dead, my older brother Sam was the first person to get me into them by sharing his thousands of recordings with me and taking me to my first shows. For me, the connection of family and friends with the Grateful Dead cannot be overemphasized.

To say the Dead had one main message is perhaps too simplistic. But if not the main message, then certainly an important one can be summarized in the profound question Jerry asks in the song “Uncle John’s Band” (GD 1970c)—“Are you kind?” Bill Bonacci told me this is a lyric he tries to live his life by (Bonacci 2012). Kindness is a subjective and abstract term but it is something that Deadheads strive for. Some Deadheads are a bit naïve and passive; others are not; but regardless, the fans are usually welcoming, open minded, and there is a general friendliness that pervades the scene. Bill wonders “are good people drawn to this music or does this music and this scene in a way create good people?” (Bonacci 2012). No matter the answer to this chicken or the egg question (if there is one), kindness is without a doubt a key ingredient to the longevity and vitality of the Grateful Dead. Jerry noted both in his interview in 1972 with Reich and in his interview with Relix in 1989 during the height of the Mega-Dead era that his personal life was not invaded because “Deadheads are very kind” (Peters 1989). Jerry and the band were kind like the fans, and the shared humility and kindness drew the fans and the band together. As Phil professes, “The psychic connection and sense of community shared by the band and

the audience is the key to our music and to the Grateful Dead ‘experience’ ” (Lesh 2005: 281). Dennis McNally perhaps summarized the distinct, kind, ‘psychic’ connection best in 1995 after Jerry died, in writing: “The Dead stands for something—it stands for a cosmic sense of humor, for a spirit of adventure for compassion for our fellow beings” (Dennis McNally in [Dead.net](#) 2012).

The cosmic humor that exists in the Dead community is hard to define but it is real. The scene is goofy; it’s weird; it’s fun. And it’s not like anything else. Christian Amigo theorizes:

The Dead were able to articulate and facilitate a cultural space wherein mostly white Americans, including themselves, were able to broach certain cultural limits or social mores that American society...had imposed upon them (Amigo 2010: 19).

Deadheads refused to be confined to “the pragmatic, utilitarian mind of their WASP culture” (Amigo 2010: 19). The Dead formed in part because of their rejection of conventional, mainstream lifestyles or social mores. As Jerry told Reich, “I just wanted to be goofing out, goofing off, I didn’t want to get a job or go to college or do any of that stuff” (Garcia et al. 1972: 5). This is certainly not to say the Dead did not believe in hard work, but as Reich contended, “the Grateful Dead were rebels because they insisted work could be fun” (Garcia et al. 1972: xii). Like the Dead, most Deadheads also work hard and many take the same approach towards work that Jerry took. This is a very important aspect in carrying on the scene, which I explore in more detail in my next chapter, but for now my main point is that the Dead and Deadheads defied conventions and in a way are freaks, a unified family of “happy freaks” (Garcia et al. 1972: 75). The scene is carnivalesque. At festivals and shows where Dead music is played there are fire dancers, tie-die, face-paint and glow sticks everywhere; people dress in outrageous costumes and walk on stilts; there are vendors

selling practically anything “heady” whether it be clothing, jewelry, artwork, food, beer, drugs, incense, tapestries etc; the more humanitarian focused people set up booths to raise awareness about the rainforest, pollution and mobilizing the vote, and they facilitate charity drives; the more far-out philosophical Deadheads sell books on Zen, Taoism, they conduct yoga classes, give massages, strike gongs; and of course everywhere you look people blast Grateful Dead music from their boom-boxes or car stereos and play in drum circles or jam out on guitars. The lot scene can get ugly and I discuss this later, but it is almost always spectacular. *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* documentary portrayed the lot scene and the freak family nature of fans quite well. I really liked what an unnamed older male fan who followed the Dead in a van with his family said about his own background and the scene at large:

I grew up in a very hardcore Catholicism conservative family...there's like five out of forty that are totally black balled because this is our lifestyle. This is a more open society....You are welcome. This is as Christianity and anarchy as you get. It doesn't matter who you are. You're family and if you fall down there's somebody who's going to help you (Meeske 1995).

As suggested in this quote, there is something deeply spiritual about the Dead scene. Although nobody in the Grateful Dead except for Mickey Hart is Jewish, there was an interesting article published in *Relix* magazine last June called “Jews for Jerry” which explores the ways in which some Jewish people have incorporated philosophies of the Grateful Dead into their religious beliefs (Goodwin 2012). One group of ecstatic dancers at Dead shows that arose in the 1980s known as “Spinners” or the “Family of Unlimited Devotion” connected Sufi philosophies with the music of the Dead (Jackson et al. 2003: 414). Other people find spiritual meaning from the Dead in ways that are not tied to other world religions. Regardless if Deadheads see themselves as spiritual, or are just looking for a good time, they are a unique people.

As the line from “Eyes of the World” (GD 1973b) goes—“Sometimes we live no particular way but our own”.

Deadheads are a particular breed. But they are extensive. Hundreds of thousands of Deadheads and many more people who would probably not consider themselves Deadheads per se have found/continue to find guidance and meaning in the songs and lyrics of the Dead. What’s perhaps strange about the Dead is the fact that neither Jerry nor Bobby or for that matter Phil or Brent Mydland (who occasionally sang lead) really ever wrote lyrics to the music they wrote. Robert Hunter wrote most of the Dead’s lyrics, followed by John Perry Barlow (a Wesleyan alum who wrote the lyrics for most of the tunes Bob Weir and Brent Mydland sang on). In the case of original songs that Jerry sang, Hunter was a master craftsman and fashioned his words specifically for Jerry in a way that as Aaron Maxwell (the singer/guitarist of God Street Wine) put it “just came from a real soulful, truthful place” (Relix 2012b). Part of the beauty about Dead lyrics is that they are amorphous, familiar yet cryptic, transcendental, and “dripping in profound ambiguity” (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 8). Bill Bonacci describes the lyrics as being “if not overtly spiritual”, then at least possessing the theme that there is “something bigger than us, something more meaningful than maybe what meets the eye...what may lie beyond” (Bonacci 2012). In this way the lyrics are enigmatic but as Bill also argues, the lyrics register for people “at such a primal, foundational level” (Bonacci 2012). The messages in the lyrics are not always clear and the beauty of this ambiguity is that they harken for introspection and can over time “become more meaningful to us in a subjective way” (Bonacci 2012). As Hunter’s lyrics fit perfectly with Jerry’s voice and demeanor and

seemed to be about him, they also “had the uncanny quality of seeming to comment on the experiences that all were sharing” and “Deadheads felt that Jerry was talking directly to each member of the audience” (Carr 2010: 112, 115). Even though Jerry’s gone and fans now only get a taste of the cosmic connection that existed between him and the audience through recordings and videos, the lyrics have stood the test of the time.

Deadheads still relate to the lyrics and as I suggested earlier from the line “Are you kind?” from “Uncle John’s Band” (GD 1970c), the lyrics guide and mirror Deadhead’s lives. The lyrics took on importance “beyond the boundaries of the songs themselves” and “became the building blocks of the Deadhead world view” (Carr 2010: 108). Some lyrics offer guidance and encouragement such as “the first days are the hardest days” from “Uncle John’s Band” or “We will get by” from “Touch of Grey” (GD 1987) or “I’m still walkin’ so I’m sure that I can dance” from “Saint of Circumstance”(GD 1980), or my personal favorite, “When you get confused just listen to the music play” from “Franklin’s Tower” (GD 1975). Other lyrics became “cultural speech codes”. For example the lot scene/marketplace that formed in the parking lots at Dead shows became known as “Shakedown Street” (GD 1978). Free tickets became known as “Miracles”, in reference to the Weir/Barlow tune “I Need a Miracle” (GD 1978) (Carr 2010: 109). And what brings me to the title of this chapter, people who were hip and understood the Dead scene often referred to themselves and other likeminded folks as being “on the bus”. This is a reference to the line, “the bus came by and I got on that’s where it all began” from the early polyrhythmic Dead masterpiece “The Other One” (GD 1971b). This lyric is a

reference to the Dead's early connections with the Merry Pranksters and LSD. One who was "on the bus" originally meant someone hip to LSD, someone figuratively and/or literally traveling on the "Furthur" bus with Ken Kesey and the rest of the Pranksters around America.

Many Deadheads constantly reference the lyrics and continue to find new wisdom and guidance from them. The lyrics can take on special significance at particular times as well. In what the ethnomusicologist Katherine Meizel refers to as "metacantic moments", the audience is actively engaged and "singing about the actions of the singer and the listener in the moment of singing" (Carr 2010: 113). No lyric "is inherently metacantic, it only becomes so when the performance of the lyric intersects in space and time with a listener who is acting out the narrative" (Carr 2010: 113). For example metacantic moments at Dead shows occur when the audience sings along with the band "Gonna be a long, long, crazy, crazy night" during "Feel like a Stranger" (GD 1980) or the audience claps and chants "You know my love will not fade away" when the band leaves the stage to close out their second set after performing their classic take on Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away" (GD 1971b) (a rather predictable yet wonderful experience for any Deadhead who has seen multiple shows). Metacantic moments can be made. I will never forget how amazing it felt the second time I saw Phil Lesh and Friends, which was at the Gathering of the Vibes festival in 2008, and singing along to the opener "Here Comes Sunshine" (Phil Lesh and Friends 2008) when the sun was coming out after a day of torrential downpour. Over the time I've been a Deadhead, lyrics have continued to take on new meaning and significance for me. The lyrics are profound and abstract,

yet deeply embedded in American folklore and while the meanings are subjective, the lyrics don't clash or contradict. They are consistent and cohesive and oftentimes a distinct sentiment of freedom can be gleaned from them.

In such a crazy, sometimes chaotic scene as the Grateful Dead, issues over freedom have been pushed to the forefront. The ideal of freedom has always been integral to Deadheads and I agree with David Gans that:

The Grateful Dead embody the real American dream, not the materialistic American dream of a house in the suburbs and a lawn of your own, you know the bogus sort of consumer version of that. I think the Grateful Dead embody the real American dream of self-determination (Marre 1999).

The band was not about party politics. Recently there has been controversy and arguments amongst Deadheads because the living members reunited and did a benefit show for Barack Obama in 2008 when he was running for president. Up until this point the Dead for all intents and purposes steered completely clear of articulating party allegiances. I don't feel the Obama benefit is representative of a future change in the Dead's meaning/legacy. The Dead's philosophies on freedom went deeper than squabbling factions and superficial party platforms. The Dead and Deadheads alike drew on American folklore and embraced freedom to explore and form new cultural spaces and "rather than celebrate a ready-made Americanness, they invented their own....the stars and stripes gave the Grateful Dead a form to begin from in order to create a new nationalism" (Williams 2010: 245). Jerry was "not looking to say something to everybody" and in a similar vein he did not believe the Dead would change the world at large (Garcia et al. 1972: 103). Yet Jerry, the Dead, and their fans changed their own worlds they lived in and their positive vibes were infectious. Instead of passively accepting bullshit, they articulated a new sense of being. They

believed in a freedom that entailed getting high and exploring the unknown. This is not to say that freedom could exist unfettered. Jerry articulated in 1972 what he termed the “freedom lie” that “freedom means absolutely and utterly free” (Garcia et al. 1972: 37). Free riders (along with the media) ruined the hippie scene in the 1960s and ruptured the Grateful Dead scene in the 1990s. Jerry believed in rebelling against a conventional, pragmatic society, but he did not believe in laziness. He understood that “For any scene to work, along with that freedom there’s implicit responsibility” (Garcia et al. 1972: 37). So while the Dead were libertarian in a sense, they were realists. The scene managed to survive because many Deadheads shared Jerry’s philosophy and while some “fans” took advantage of the freedom of the scene and caused chaos particularly when the Dead got huge in the 1980s, other fans used their freedom to tell unwieldy, obnoxious Deadheads who compromised the experience to essentially fuck off. In general Jerry was correct in his presumption that “if somebody isn’t putting the right vibes right now, then they get out real quick” but as is depicted in *The End of the Road: The Final Tour ’95* documentary, the scene got chaotic at the end and the band and perhaps the ‘truer’ fans were forced to take initiative against gate crashers (Garcia et al. 1972: 37). After a riot emerged in Deer Creek on July 2, 1995, the band wrote a letter to Deadheads and poignantly stated, “When you hear someone say ‘Fuck you we’ll do what we want we want’ we want you to remember something—that applies to us too” (Meeske 1995). This statement echoed Jerry’s philosophy regarding freedom in 1972. While the Dead scene is smaller and more diffuse now, problems and ugliness still occur and it is through the freedom and initiative of Deadheads to determine how good the scene can be.

It is also up to Deadheads to decide how political the scene will be and in what direction the Deadhead nation will move. To some, the Obama benefit was disconcerting. Without being overtly tied to parties and bureaucracy Deadheads have been politically active in their own ways. Going hand in hand with the sensibility of kindness, Deadheads' politics have been about enacting what positive change in the world they can through humanitarian efforts (Brown, Novick 1995). The first highly visible, widespread humanitarian effort connected to the Dead scene was the creation of the Rex Foundation (named after the Dead's tour manager Rex Jackson who died in 1976) in 1983, which took donations (partly from nonprofit Rex benefit gigs that the band would play) for various causes such as saving the rainforest and the ocean and supporting "creative endeavors in the arts, sciences, and education" ([rexfoundation.org](http://rexfoundation.org) 2013). The Rex Foundation has raised millions of dollars over the years and still flourishes today. As the scene grew so have the humanitarian programs/efforts. *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* documentary depicted one such program—Rock Medicine, an organization devoted to offering free medical assistance to fans without them having to go through legal or financial entanglement and angering the larger communities. The medic who was shown in the documentary described the program as "the original free clinic" devoted to the notion that "Healthcare is a right, not a privilege" (Meeske 1995). Rock Medicine still exists today and other humanitarian efforts in the scene have continued to be carried out through awareness outreach programs and charity drives at festivals and particular jam-band Dead inspired venues like the Wetlands Preserve (the venue Peter Shapiro used to own) (Shapiro 2012). Deadheads continue to carry out humanitarian acts and

their efforts encourage more people to enact positive change so the scene moves forward.

While the Dead scene is moving forward, the music is always reflexive on the past. The music, lyrics, and philosophies emanating from the songs are deeply embedded in American folklore. There is something that is very patriotic and American about the Dead—not in purporting dogma, or encouraging blind allegiance—but in the ideas of drawing on diverse styles, incorporating American themed art, images, and folklore, broaching social mores, looking toward friends and family for support while also having the courage to be independent thinkers and/or entrepreneurs. Some Deadheads may be a little too caught in the American exceptionalism mindset, which may distort their views, but I feel the idea of American pride in the Deadhead community does not rely on imperialism or denigrating any other country/heritage, so pride in this sense doesn't really have deleterious ramifications (Williams 2010: 246).

I was struck by Annabelle Garcia's quote at her father's memorial service in 1995 about the distinctly American nature of the Dead scene:

There's no way that this could happen in any other country in the world than America and I want you all to remember that we are all Americans and my father was one of the greatest Americans that was ever born (Meeske 1995).

Although this is a strong statement and the "what if?" question can't be answered because the Dead did happen to form and thrive in America and not another place, I think Annabelle has a valid point. Jerry's life can be seen as a classic American success story. Charles Reich argued in the introduction to his 1972 interviews with Jerry:

Jerry Garcia is a symbol of everything that is new and changing and rebellious in America. Yet when we read his story, we find that he is the very essence of the old American dream, the poor boy who makes good, who follows in the footsteps of his dead Spanish musician father” (Garcia et al. 1972: xi).

Jerry, like many great Americans, came from a fairly blue-collar background. His father, blacklisted by a musicians’ union ,was unable to get a job as a professional musician and became a bartender (Garcia et al. 1972: 2). Jerry couldn’t read music but played by ear; he dropped out of high school; he married young because he got a girl pregnant; he joined the army, as it was the only “acceptable” alternative to school at the time (Garcia et al.1972: 2, 4,15).

Like many other kids from the San Francisco area, Jerry was influenced by many of the cultural movements (perhaps specifically white middle class movements) that were sweeping America such as the Beat movement and the Zen boom of the 50s and 60s (Boone 2010: 29). These movements opened his eyes to possibilities outside of constrictive mainstream expectations. While these movements were revolutionary, in a way rebelling against societal norms is a transcendental characteristic of Americans. The Dead built on this legacy. Timothy Leary argued that Jerry and the Dead provided a space where “young people go to question authority” that goes back to “early American transcendentalism traveling troupes coming together to share humanism, a celebration of togetherness, which we all hunger for” (Shapiro 1993). Perhaps because of unique aspects of American culture—bohemianism/Beat culture, transcendentalism, traveling vaudeville circuits, a cultural fascination with far eastern philosophies, the emergence of psychedelic drugs, “and popular folk/pop mythologies including rural Anglo-America, the Wild West, outer space, science fiction”, and particular strands of political and racial upheaval, it was inevitable that the Grateful

Dead formed in the place and time that they did (Boone 2010: 32). John Perry Barlow argues about the band, “They’re filling a sociological niche that’s wide open to be filled in this country and that nobody else is addressing and if the Grateful Dead didn’t exist it would have been necessary to invent it” (Shapiro 1993). Fans related to Jerry’s distinctly American story and the cultural space from which the band emerged. Many fans would agree with Phil Lesh that “there’s *nothing* more American than the Grateful Dead” (Lesh 2005: 252). Identity as a Deadhead and identity as an American reinforce each other.

American imagery has not gone away from the Dead scene. The American past is invoked in so much of the Dead’s music whether it’s in looking at specific historical hardships (“1920 when he stepped to the bar, drank to the dregs of the whiskey jar/ 1930 when the wall caved in, he made his way sellin’ red eyed gin”<sup>17</sup>), discussing the plight of American workers in general (“Lotta poor man got the Cumberland Blues, He can’t win for losin’, Lotta poor man gotta walk the line, Just to pay his union dues”<sup>18</sup>), wistfully reminiscing of the vitality and idealism of a time that is passed (“All we ever wanted was to live and learn and grow”<sup>19</sup>), or just finding strength from our national heritage in general (“old glory standing stiffly, crimson, white, and indigo”<sup>20</sup>). Regardless of the particular sentiment, Deadheads continue to “wave that flag, wave it wide and high”<sup>21</sup>. The patriotism is not about undermining other cultures but in cultivating respect for them. As America is composed of a

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<sup>17</sup> Grateful Dead, “Brown Eyed Woman”, 1972.

<sup>18</sup> Grateful Dead, “Cumberland Blues” 1972.

<sup>19</sup> Grateful Dead, “Days Between”, 1999b.

<sup>20</sup> Grateful Dead, “Standing on the Moon”, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Grateful Dead “US Blues”, 1974a.

diverse mix of ethnicities and heritages, the Dead's music is a mix of so many styles/heritages of music—many that originated in America like blues, bluegrass, rock n' roll, jazz, country, ragtime, funk, and disco; and musical styles from other parts of the world such as reggae, Celtic folk, Hindustani, Andalusian, Salsa, Son, Ghanaian drumming, and Mande music. The Dead's music and the scene at large, which are distinctly American, speak to a "broad swath of people" from various backgrounds/heritages (Bonacci 2012). The Dead offer a new vision of nationalism, which draws people further into the music and scene.

A big part of the American experience and of the Dead scene for better or worse is the prevalence of drugs. People who eschew the Grateful Dead often do so because of the drug culture associated with the band. To defend the band, one cannot say the Dead were not about drugs. They totally were. But in the idealist sense, as Phil Lesh put it, drugs:

were seen as tools—tools to enhance awareness, to expand our horizons, to access other levels of mind, to manifest the numinous and sacred, tools that had been in use for thousands of years by shamans, by oracles, in the ancient mystery schools, by all whose mission was to penetrate beyond the veil of illusion (Lesh, 2005: 36).

Drugs like marijuana and acid that are arguably mind expanding have been contrasted to drugs that people use to escape from reality like heroin or the more recently controversial nitrous oxide. Often the line is blurry (pretty much any kind of drug could/can be found in the Dead scene) and drugs can be seen both as the impetus behind the Dead and also the cause of the ugliness that tore (tears) apart the band and the scene. In the 1990s people outside the scene and many Deadheads themselves were appalled by the rowdiness of gatecrashers and their intoxication and belligerence, which many attributed at least partly to drugs. Often people wrote off

the Dead scene because of this image. One of my favorite musicians, Isaac Brock (guitarist/vocalist from the band Modest Mouse) told an interviewer, “I was so turned off by their entire thing, you know the Deadheads and everything that I disliked them without listening to them” (Brock 2010). Isaac later relays:

I remember when the last time the Grateful Dead ever played Seattle...after the show I don't know I was walkin' to work or something and I had to walk past where it happened and I had never seen so much fuckin' just filth, a mess, debris, like there was just mountains of garbage and crap. You'd expect them to be these green-minded folk...but no it was the filthiest I've ever seen Seattle. It was the filthiest I've ever seen anything ever...it's like what a collection of fucking assholes you know tripping your balls off in squalor (Brock 2010).

Isaac is a little harsh and he admits he is ignorant of the Dead's music, but he does have a point. As depicted in *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* documentary, the Dead scene did get sketchy a lot of the time during the 90s and many fans were hypocrites and assholes. The parking lot for many was a place to party and do drugs. In a way, I don't think escaping reality is always necessarily bad. In *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* I felt sympathy for the gate-crasher, grimy, drug addict stereotype (colloquially denoted in the Deadhead community as “wookies” after the creatures from Star Wars), when an army veteran was interviewed and he explained “Vietnam really sucked...I came back and nobody wanted us back. It caused me to go out and enjoy myself, say fuck it” (Meeske 1995). When asked how many shows he'd been to, the veteran replied, “I've been to a lot of them on the outside. Haven't made it in to any of them on the inside but I've had a blast at every one of them” (Meeske 1995). There is something heartening about this interview, but did this veteran contribute to the pathology in the scene? He may have. The scene was jeopardized seriously by gatecrashers and drugs. As Robert Hunter explained in 1988, “Many doors have been closed to us... due to the trash and boogie behavior of

new fans who have no regard for the way the Dead do things” (Jackson et al. 2003: 352). Venues stopped inviting the Dead back to play. People stopped being able to camp at shows. The band even threatened to break up. Fortunately since Jerry has been gone, the scene has cleaned up a lot. A smaller, more diffuse scene generally means fewer problems and in a way the scene is better now than it was in the early 90s.

While drugs paid their toll, nonetheless getting high was the mantra of the Dead, whether by imbibing in drugs or getting high by other more “natural” means (many Deadheads don’t take drugs or like Phil Lesh, they stopped taking drugs, and Deadheads have founded programs most notably the Wharf Rats<sup>22</sup>, which help recovering drug addicts cope and provide insight into how to get high without taking drugs). Jerry told Reich:

I think basically the Grateful Dead is not for cranking out rock and roll, it’s not for going out and doing concerts or any of that stuff, I think it’s to get high... To get really high is to forget yourself. And to forget yourself is to see everything else... I’m not talking about unconscious or zonked out, I’m talking about being fully conscious. Also I’m not talking about the Grateful Dead as being an end in itself. I think of the Grateful Dead as being a crossroads or pointer sign and what we’re pointing to is that there’s a lot of universe available (Garcia et al. 1972: 100).

Jerry was aware of the negative side of drugs, but nonetheless drugs were consistently a part of his life and ultimately led to his demise. In reminiscing about the dark days of the Dead scene Phil explains, “The irony was undeniable: Drugs had helped us to create our group mind and fuse our music together, and now drugs were isolating us from one another and our own feelings, and starting to kill us off” (Lesh 2005: 251). Drugs continue to be a contested issue among Deadheads. The psychedelic drug culture was magical at a particular time and place—namely San Francisco (more

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<sup>22</sup>Grateful Dead “Wharf Rat”, 1971b.

specifically in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood) during the Acid Tests of the mid-late 60s, and while for some, drugs may be positive, for many they have negative effects.

The Dead scene has grown and people have learned from past mistakes and continue to experiment and learn. The community may never reach the same level of highness, and purity of the Acid Tests or the Haight-Ashbury in the mid 60s, but nevertheless it will not go away. In a rare video of the Dead playing at the Playboy Mansion in 1969, Jerry told Hugh Hefner “Well, Haight Ashbury is just a place you know. It’s just a street. It’s not really the thing...it never was the thing that was going on” (Playboy 1969). In his interview with Reich, Jerry denies that there ever was a separate “counter culture” in the Haight, and he explains, “We hang out together. That’s really how we started...So we still hang out together and our scene still represents a place where other energy comes—it’s just that now it’s not in San Francisco, it’s not in the Haight-Ashbury” (Garcia et al. 1972: 40). Maybe the media and free riders did destroy the Haight. I am unfamiliar with the Dead scene in California but I do know that the Dead scene thrives in New York and other northeastern states. Besides seeing the large national acts like DSO and Furthur, Deadheads commune at shows played by small tribute bands all over my area. Perhaps the Dead scene isn’t as strong in other sections of the country, but if you go to [gratefuldeadtributebands.com](http://gratefuldeadtributebands.com), you can see there are Dead tribute bands listed in practically every state. The national acts don’t play everywhere and they are expensive to see so these local bands are invaluable. As Andy Bennett notes, local tribute bands appeal to their audiences partly because they are familiar and inject

regional humor at the shows (Bennett 2006: 23, 28). Being so American, the Dead made references to particular places in their lyrics (i.e. “New York, it’s got the ways and means but just won’t let you be”<sup>23</sup>, “Tennessee, Tennessee there aint no place I’d rather be”<sup>24</sup>, “Well I’m a wanted man in Texas bust the jail and I’m gone for good”<sup>25</sup>). Deadheads, especially since Jerry died, vary somewhat by region and the fans incorporate their regional identities into their identities as Deadheads. For example in New York I’ve seen shirts with the Dead skull and roses symbol with the caption “Yank your face” referring to the Yankees or “Steal your Superbowl” referring to the Giants (alterations of the famous Dead logo and slogan from “He’s Gone” (GD 1972), “Steal your face”). While some Deadheads like sports fans can be divisive, the regional pride that the Dead evokes does not usually constrict fans and many travel though different states to see shows. The community is in general more unified than divisive.

The small cover bands and the communities that form around them are in a way the future of the scene. A lot of the musicians know each other and the bands overlap and as Bill Bonacci said “The Deadhead musician community is very incestuous” (Bonacci 2012). Bill shared stories about playing with other Dead tribute bands like Mountains of the Moon (Bonacci 2012). Mik Bondy and Kat Walkerson who often play with Stella Blues Band are also in the Garcia Project and Acoustically Speaking. Kat has performed with Jerry’s co-collaborator Melvin Seals, singing background vocals for JGB. Bob Guerra told me stories of playing Reflections shows

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<sup>23</sup> Grateful Dead, “Truckin’”, 1970d.

<sup>24</sup> Grateful Dead, “Tennessee Jed”, 1972.

<sup>25</sup> Grateful Dead, “All New Minglewood Blues”, 1978.

where they featured famous Deadhead musicians such as Jeff Mattson, Rob Eaton, John Kadlecik, Steve Kimock, Buddy Cage, and the former Grateful Dead vocalist Donna Jean (Guerra 2013). The smaller local Dead bands can really put on great shows especially when the fans are engaged and motivated to add to the culture of the scene. Some of my friends are obsessed with the band Reflections, call themselves Reflectors, and go to all of their shows and one of my friends, Woody (aka “The Reflector Director”), even wears and sometimes dresses his dog Lucy (named after the Dead tune “Loose Lucy”<sup>26</sup>) in what he calls “Reflector Gear” at their shows (an array of fluorescent reflector vests and hats loaded with Grateful Dead and Reflections patches and stickers). The fans who go to shows and/or listen to the music should never be underestimated. They can be a bit strange, but generally they are good people and in the Dead scene the good almost always far-outweighs the bad. Deadheads will continue the scene.

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<sup>26</sup> Grateful Dead. “Loose Lucy”, 1974a.

#### **Chapter 4: Show Me Something Built to Last, or Something Built to Try**

Continuing the Grateful Dead scene can be a burden, but it's a joyful burden. It's a burden that Deadheads have readily accepted and continue to take on because the music and the scene are rooted in love and passion. As I alluded to earlier, Deadheads get a bad rap for being lazy but this is a misconception. Like the band members in the Dead, the fans work hard. Papa Mali, of 7 Walkers, explained in a Relix interview that he lives by Jerry's philosophy regarding work: "no matter who you are, no matter what you do, do it well and take pride in it" (Relix 2012b). This echoes Jerry's words to Charles Reich that I mentioned in Chapter 1: "I don't think sacrifice is contribution. I think that contributing is contributing your own positive energy" (Garcia et al. 1972: 49). In this chapter I explore how Deadheads have internalized and carried out this mantra through their somewhat meticulous attention to delivering high quality products, whether it be in utilizing cutting edge technology in recording shows and sharing the Dead's music with other fans, in selling high quality, unique goods at shows and festivals, or in being energetic, devoted, and innovative in more conventional jobs that may or may not have to do with the Grateful Dead. Reich speculated, "to the straight world, there's a choice: unpleasant work or no work at all" (Garcia et al. 1972: xv). Jerry did not buy into this grim outlook. He understood that competing in the work force commonly meant denying others and "being a pawn or being an unconscious tool", but he rejected this notion and suggested that people could cooperate and mutually benefit by creating something together that was greater than what one could create on his/her own (Garcia et al. 1972: 178). Analogous to what Bill Bonacci said about the Dead's

music lending itself toward originality because within the framework of a Dead tune “there’s a whole lot of space” to go, within the Dead community, Deadheads carve(d) out a cultural space in which they could contribute positive energy, thrive, and become “agents of change” (Bonacci 2012, Garcia et al. 1972: xviii). Deadheads have been and continue to be pioneers.

One of the most visible ways in which Deadheads have been pioneers is in the extensive taping community that arose around the band. The Dead had a unique and revolutionary policy regarding taping. The band members were not greedy or overly concerned with profiting and consequently they allowed thousands of people to tape the shows and distribute the tapes as long as the tapers didn’t sell them for profit. One of Jerry’s most famous quotes was “once we’re done with it the audience can have it” (Paumgarten 2012: 43). The fact that thousands of recordings have been made accessible (on the online archives and official releases) has contributed immeasurably to the widespread popularity of the Dead especially since Jerry’s been gone. According to Nick Paumgarten, “the Dead have more recorded music in circulation than any performing group in history” (Paumgarten 2012: 43). Out of the 2,318 shows the Dead played, over 2,000 are available, most of which can be streamed or downloaded legally for free online (Paumgarten 2012: 43). After Jerry died, Deadheads once again on the frontier of technological innovation, began to digitize the vault and put recordings on the Internet archive. On the archive there are 8,976 recordings of Dead shows (over 6,000 more than any other band) (Paumgarten 2012: 48). Paumgarten notes that some of these recordings have been downloaded so many times that if they had been sold they would have been gold albums (Paumgarten

2012: 48). The official commercial releases of recordings get removed from the archive, but still the immense body of work that is available for free “invites and sustains obsession” (Paumgarten 2012: 43).

I got into the Dead mainly through the live recordings that my brother and I found on the archives. And we found a lot. It may seem obsessive to have 38 versions of “Dark Star” but the beauty of the Dead is that each version really is different. Not only were the recordings of a particular song varied because of how the band played (determined by how they were feeling/how engaged they were, how they improvised, the era, where the song was positioned in the setlist, the equipment/instruments used in the performance, etc.), the recordings were also affected by the venue’s acoustics, the in-house mixing, and by the taper’s recording apparatus, his/her positioning in the venue, and the type of recording made (i.e. soundboard, audience recording, radio broadcast, matrix). All these factors rendered particular recordings unique or as Paumgarten phrases it, “as having distinct odors or auras” (Paumgarten 2012: 47). Deadheads who are actively engaged in the music have preferences and opinions about recordings. Bill Bonacci explains:

You know there’s always the debate about soundboards and audience amongst Deadheads, you know what’s better, a good soundboard or a good audience, and that debate goes on and on...audience gives a nice presence like you are there. The soundboards you can argue are kind of sterile but the soundboards are the best thing for learning (Bonacci 2012).

Paumgarten notes that the variability in sonic fidelity is part of the appeal of recordings and that while in live performances the Dead played in the moment and improvised, when listening back to the tapes, “the performances held up, and the music, on repetition, began to feel like something composed, rather than improvised. It took on a life of its own, apart from my experience of having witnessed its

creation” (Paumgarten 2012: 43). I believe many people share this feeling and this desire to capture the magic of the Dead compelled people like my friend Woody’s brother to tape over 250 shows. Many people still capture the magic of the Dead by taping shows of Dead tribute bands like Dark Star Orchestra. Part of the reason DSO became so successful can be attributed to taping. Rob Eaton was an assiduous taper of the Dead for 20 years, and influenced by his experience, in DSO he has utilized technology to create as Rob Baracco explained “a database of the towns we’re going to and what we’ve played there before, so he makes sure we’re not repeating eras and shows we’ve played before and so we’re not repeating songs night to night as well so it keeps it fresh for us” (Koritz et al. 2007). By embracing technology, Eaton has kept DSO exciting for both the fans and the band and they continue to create amazing musical experiences.

As tapers and people like Rob Eaton embrace technology and are devoted to high quality, in a way this emanates from the fact that the Grateful Dead were so devoted to high quality. Paumgarten notes the irony that the Dead, “this group of virtual anarchists, playing their ragged, improvisational amalgam of old-timey American music, fronted what may have been the most technically sophisticated sound operation in the music business” (Paumgarten 2012: 47). From the Dead’s origins they were devoted to using the best, most innovative equipment and technology available to produce their distinct sound. Their first manager, benefactor and renowned LSD chemist, Stan “Bear” Owsley, brought as Jerry suggested “a real solid consciousness of what *quality* was, to our whole scene” (Garcia et al. 1972: 44). Owsley’s ideas as Paumgarten posits, “were not always practical” but his “near-

evangelical dedication to sonic fidelity and steady supply of acid created an atmosphere of a groundbreaking company called Alembic and, later, in the so-called Wall of Sound” (Paumgarten 2012: 47). Alembic designed most of the band’s guitars and basses, which were on the vanguard of instrument technology and had versatile, distinctive tones that helped the musicians craft their unique sounds and inspired them to go further out. The Wall of Sound which “consisted of six hundred and four speakers, channeling twenty-six thousand watts of power...has been called the greatest vessel for the amplification of sound in history” (Paumgarten 2012: 47). Since it was extremely impractical—it took a very long time and a very big crew to assemble, and was very expensive to maintain, the Dead only used it in 1974. Yet the sound design from the Wall of Sound was revolutionary both in influencing further sound systems the Dead developed and in influencing P.A. systems in general. Paumgarten argues, “every modern P.A. system is based on it; it employed a so-called line-array system that is now the industry standard” (Paumgarten 2012: 47). Phil Lesh describes the basic paradigm behind Owsley’s Wall of Sound in his book:

His ideal was musical sound undistorted by the artifacts present in the sound-reproduction system—the entire signal path from pickup through preamp through amp to speaker. Only the vibrating string and the vibrating air had purity...everything else was compromised and must be made transparent (Lesh 2005: 77, 78).

Owsley, with the help of Tim Scully, “converted the guitars to a low-impedance output mode so that they could be played through the ‘hi-fi’ rig that was now our amp line” and for Phil, Owsley with the help of Ron Wickersham converted his “Big Red” bass “into a new kind of super instrument: custom-made low-impedance pickups, the first active electronics ever installed in a string instrument, and best of all, a quadrasonic pickup with which I could send the notes from each string to a separate

set of speakers” (Lesh 2005: 78, 144). For practicality’s sake, the Wall of Sound did not last, but the dedication to high quality sound did not go away. The Dead’s sound mixer Dan Healy formed the company UltraSound in the late 70s and created a P.A. system with the help of physicist John Meyer (who Owsley discovered) that “approached the transparency of the Wall” and “was able to be packaged in a way that made it practical to use for touring” and to the delight of Phil Lesh fans who would position themselves in the venue where the bass was loudest (known as the “Phil Zone”), the P.A. system “provided us first with the massive ‘earthquake’ subwoofers” where Phil would drop his famous “bass bombs” (Lesh 2005: 249). Technological innovation continued in the 80s as the synthesizer technician Bob Bralove (previously famous for being Stevie Wonder’s synth tech) worked with Jerry and Brent Mydland in programming MIDI to create innovative, “out-there” highly-sought after tones (Jackson et al. 2003: 346).

The technological innovation that occurred is not just a relic of the past. Like most Deadheads, I don’t like the fact that Furthur charges so much for concert tickets, but every time I see them I am blown away by the sound quality. Many of the instruments that Furthur uses are custom built by Alembic and the amplification and speaker designs at their shows any gear head would marvel over. Dark Star Orchestra also has pretty amazing sound quality. Part of the reason why the tickets are expensive for these two national acts is because the equipment is so expensive. A lot of the smaller Dead tribute bands can’t afford the gear or don’t have room onstage for it. Bill Bonacci told me he could not quite get the “sparkle or that fatness” of Jerry’s tone because he didn’t want to spend an exorbitant amount of money on the gear that

Jerry had (Bonacci 2012). Instead of buying a custom made Alembic that would meet Jerry's specs, he purchased a cheaper Post guitar, "an economical Jerry guitar if you will" (Bonacci 2012). Bob Guerra decided he had to shell out the cash for a model of Jerry's Alembic custom-built "Wolf" guitar because it was his dream guitar (Guerra 2013). But while Bob can get that Jerry-like tone from his guitar he can't totally get the sound because he's "playing through a hotrod deluxe and pedals" (Guerra 2013). To get the nuances of Jerry's tone down, it's expensive. Jerry's custom-built McIntosh amp, his rack, his modded pedals, and MIDI interface really make a difference. Mik Bondy from the Garcia Project, like John Kadlecik and Jeff Matson, has pretty much the same gear Jerry played with and as a result his tone is exceptional. For most local Dead tribute bands, however, buying the gear Jerry used in his rig is impractical and so the sound quality is better for the national acts. But although these local tribute bands have to compromise a bit, they still are very concerned with tone and deliver the best sound they can and in this way they follow in the footsteps of the Dead with their spirit of being devoted to delivering high quality. As long as bands continue to value good sound quality, the fans will be receptive and drawn further into the music. So in a way the technology and gear drives the scene forward.

Technology has been utilized by Deadheads from the beginning as a means to communicate and share the music and spirit of the Dead. The Dead's first fan club, The Golden Road to Unlimited Devotion<sup>27</sup> (named after the band's first "hit"), formed in 1965 (Dollar 2010: 281). Then there was the note on the back of the Dead's *Skull and Roses* live album in 1971 that as a result formed the Grateful Dead

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<sup>27</sup> Grateful Dead, "The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)", 1967.

newsletter, “Dead Freaks unite! Who are you? Where are you? Send us your name and we’ll keep you informed” (Dollar 2010: 282). According to Natalie Dollar, The Grateful Dead newsletter:

employed additional communication resources, such as original artwork, creative writing, and tour reports [which] would become a significant resource spawning Deadhead’s own tour and show reports...and it unintentionally supported the growing taper community by providing tour information which Deadheads meticulously archived (Dollar 2010: 282).

This newsletter/ mailing list quickly grew to 200,000 people and evolved into the *Grateful Dead Almanac*, which in turn evolved into the Dead’s website ([Dead.net](http://Dead.net)) (Dollar 2010: 282). Besides the newsletter, Deadheads kept informed through Relix Magazine, which was founded in 1974 by Les Kippel, Jim McGurn, and Jerry Moore, who were also the creators of the Grateful Dead Tape Exchange. Relix, which included “show reviews, tour stories, and columns devoted to themes of relevance to the Deadhead community”, still thrives today (Dollar 2010: 283). Relix facilitates connections between Deadheads as well as providing entertainment. One of the most interesting columns is the fan letters from jail that emerged in the late 80s when undercover cops started cracking down on people at shows. This makes me think of Charles Reich telling Jerry that the Dead serve as company for people not just accompaniment (Garcia et al. 1972: 159). Besides Relix magazine, newsletters that people distributed at shows like Duprees Diamond News (DDN) became an important means in keeping Deadheads connected. DDN still exists under the name In da Groove (which now covers other jam bands as well) (Dollar 2010: 285).

As technology changes, Deadheads adapt to the times. While Relix and newsletters are certainly important means by which Deadheads stay connected,

perhaps a more significant communicative resource in drawing people to the Dead is in Grateful Dead radio stations. Dollar argues:

SIRIUS Grateful Dead Channel is the latest improvisational response to availability of technology...and the challenges that face a community grounded in a band that no longer exists except in the thousands of hours of recorded music they left (Dollar 2010: 280).

This station which features programs such as “Grateful Dead Concert Recordings”, “Tales from the Golden Road, “Head Set”, “Today in Grateful Dead History, and the “Celebrity Guest DJ series” provides a space where Deadheads can articulate identity and communicate and learn from one another. Also significantly, Dollar points out:

For Deadheads who have not attended a Grateful Dead show, particularly those who avoided the concert scene due to a stigma associated with Deadheads, SIRIUS and Grateful Dead radio allow listeners to develop an interest in the music and community without attending a show (Dollar 2010: 290).

People who would never think to go to a Dead show even if they could have seen Jerry are now being brought into the scene and are shedding their misconceptions and this is a beautiful thing. In addition to SIRIUS, it is worth noting that more local radio shows serve an important role in bringing people into the Dead scene and serving the interests of Deadheads. I got a chance to talk with John Whalen who started his show Dead Air with Uncle John at Wesleyan University’s radio station in 1985 and now has done over 400 shows delivering Dead gems each week. When I met John, my friends Mik and Kat from the Garcia Project came to play on his radio show. Thus not only does the program give people the chance to listen to great recorded Dead music but it also sparks people’s interests and draws them to check out and see local Dead/Jerry Garcia tribute bands. This program as well as other programs that feature Dead music are a significant technological means in which Deadheads continue the scene. As long as people love the Dead, the radio programs

won't go away, and conversely, more people will start listening to the Dead because of these radio programs.

Besides newsletters and radio stations, Deadheads have utilized other media technologies to articulate their identities. There are tons of Grateful Dead related Facebook groups, which are significant as they provide means in which Deadheads can keep informed about shows, discover more music, and connect with likeminded folks. In addition to bigger Grateful Dead fan pages, there are pages that are more localized and intimate. For example the page Westchester Deadheads is relevant to me and a lot of my friends from Westchester County, so we belong to this group. Besides Facebook, many Deadheads are very active on the Internet posting on various Dead forums such as Philzone, rukind, Ratdog.org, or the forum on [Dead.net](#). I disagree with Nick Paumgarten that Deadheads are often “uncritical in the extreme” (Paumgarten 2012: 44). Anyone who frequents forums knows that although Deadheads are cohesive and generally get along, they are opinionated about everything and can be quite harsh about a bad performance. They were so harsh one time when Ryan Adams was playing with Phil Lesh and Friends that Phil went on the forum and expressed his anger and disappointment with the fans.

Most of the time fans get along or argue playfully and share great music and breaking news related to the Dead, so overall I think forums are positive to the Dead scene. Media attention in general, however, is a more contested issue. When the Dead came out with their “Touch of Grey” (GD 1987) music video in 1987, thousands of new people were drawn to the scene, many of whom didn't value the philosophies of the band. Many of these so-called “touch-heads” became the gate-

crashers/rioters I described in Chapter 3 that jeopardized the scene. Similar to how Chester Anderson's article about hippiedom in 1967 and the media attention of the Haight-Ashbury drew low-lives and free riders to the area and this soured the scene, the media attention the Dead received late in their career drew masses to the scene that made it unruly and contentious at the end (Garcia et al. 1972: 39). The Dead threatened multiple times to break up. One of the only reasons they didn't (or at least the reason why they didn't take a break) was because the Grateful Dead became such a big enterprise with so many employees that depended on the Dead touring for their livelihoods. The size of the Dead and the financial obligations certainly affected how good the music was. As Jerry expressed sometime in the mid-80s, "The pressure is so great that we can't stop. It's hard to be creative with a gun held to your head" (Lesh 2005: 298). After Jerry died, Grateful Dead Productions essentially dissolved and trying to keep the scene small and contained for the most part became an obsolete idea.

While in a way media hurt the Dead, I think overall using media to spread the music and messages of the Dead is a good thing. I first became interested in the Dead by watching the last episode of the short-lived TV show *Freaks and Geeks* when the protagonist, Lindsey, is shown listening and dancing to "Box of Rain" (GD 1970d) and the show ends with Lindsey ditching her academic summit to go on tour to see the Dead as the song "Ripple" (GD 1970d) plays in the background (Feig 2000). After hearing these 2 songs I became intrigued by the Dead and further utilized media to learn about the Dead by watching hundreds of Dead videos on youtube (to supplement my early meager collection of Dead music which consisted of *American*

*Beauty, Wake of the Flood, and Europe 72*’). Although this is a personal example and I’m biased, I definitely believe media can be a positive force in drawing people to the Dead.

I look at my evolution as a Deadhead in terms of steps or significant moments that drew me further and further into the scene. After the Freaks and Geeks interaction with the Dead, one of the next steps was when I first went to a music festival (Mountain Jam 2008 which Ratdog co-headlined) and I saw all the vendors and experienced “Shakedown Street” for the first time. This brings me to my next point. Thus far I have focused on Deadheads’ attention to high quality in terms of using technology. Now I focus on this same attention to high quality, but through an economic perspective. The community of vendors seems to be a hidden enclave that most people outside of the Dead scene aren’t familiar with. It evokes a feeling of a time that is gone, an illustrious past. As a female vendor I know named Catherine Pinkna, who sells tapestries, purses, jewelry, fragrances, clothing and other imports from India or Nepal, put it, “Vendors are the last bastion of mercantilism that hasn’t been taken away by corporations. It’s like the last mom and pop store where you can still make a living being old-fashioned traveling peddlers” (Pinkna 2013). Seeing all the various vendors at a Shakedown Street at a festival or a Dead show (Furthur, DSO, Phil Lesh and Friends etc.) is truly something to be experienced. Matthew Sheptoski describes it as “a bizarre bazaar” (Sheptoski 2000: 163). From his time touring with the Dead and interviewing vendors in the early 90s Sheptoski learned:

Vending at Grateful Dead shows was more than an economic activity...for most, the primary concern was making just enough money to buy food and gas to get to the next show...vending provided the means by which participants were able to construct and sustain feelings of connectedness, community, and group consciousness (Sheptoski 2000: 163).

Although Catherine told me that in some shows vendors like all other business people can be cutthroat, when she works at shows where Dark Star Orchestra is playing the fans are the “friendliest and most interested” in her goods and the vendors are cooperative because “a good show promotes good vibes for all” (Pinkna 2012). Catherine doesn’t consider herself a Deadhead and she doesn’t vend to get to the next show (she does vend at many festivals where Dead tribute bands play), but vends to support herself in a way where she can travel and be free and work for herself instead of being ordered around and subordinate (Pinkna 2012). I’m sure these feelings are shared by many Deadhead vendors. Catherine, like many vendors and the Grateful Dead scene at large, is devoted to seeking freedom and beauty, and to delivering high quality products.

While Catherine works at festivals as a licensed vendor, has tax numbers in several states, and sells only legal goods, many Deadheads are unofficial vendors, which are more controversial. Shakedown Street did get pretty ugly in the early 90s and its free nature and charm doesn’t exist to the same extent as it once did for unofficial traveling vendors. As Bob Guerra told me:

I remember being so into going to those vendor sites at Dead shows... This was more a family, communal kind of thing. That’s what I miss when the law enforcement started keening in on that and busting people for drugs and really making it hard to go to the Dead. That was the last refuge to go where you could do whatever you wanted to do (Guerra 2013).

Perhaps the vending scene isn’t as free as it used to be, but it’s still pretty spectacular, and unofficial, unlicensed vendors are still a big thing at Dead shows. It’s just now they have learned from mistakes and are more careful and discrete in their dealings. Unlicensed vendors, as Matthew Sheptoski found, would display their wares on tarps that could easily be folded to hide their goods when it was necessary to do so

(Sheptoski 2000: 170). At times when security personnel were particularly vigilant, unlicensed vendors would yell “sixup!” to warn others to hide their goods before security could confiscate them (Sheptoski 2000: 172). Many security guards hassled vendors who sold t-shirts that violated copyright laws, so Deadheads adapted by displaying few shirts and stuffing the rest in their backpacks or cars so if questioned by security they could say they were not selling shirts but had just purchased them (Sheptoski 2000: 172). Unlicensed vendors learned the laws and how to “play the game” in dealing with security—being respectful and acting like they would comply. Oftentimes confiscations were illegal since most items (besides drugs and articles of clothing that violate copyright laws) could only be taken if security gave a receipt and a court date to vendors, so Deadheads learned to deal with abusive security guards (i.e. by asking for their I.D.s or asking to speak with their managers) to prevent violations of their freedom (Sheptoski 2000: 173). Though some people dislike the unlicensed vendor scene at times (i.e. the band members and family in the Grateful Dead organization in the early 90s), I feel a lot of unlicensed vendors provide quality products and add to the color of Shakedown Streets so I think for the most part it is a good thing that Deadheads have learned to adjust and circumvent perhaps puritanical laws so they can still sell their products and continue following Dead national acts like Furthur and DSO. Most unlicensed vendors sell pretty much the same goods as licensed ones do (food, clothing, tapestries, pins, jewelry, crystals, hemp bracelets, marbles, philosophical books, pipes, glassware, stickers etc.). By and large the goods sold are of high quality and many are handmade either by the person selling the goods, by friends, or by indigenous people in foreign countries. Of course some

“vendors” are selling beer, drugs, and goods that may violate copyright laws. Deadheads, however, are usually pretty libertarian and don’t object to the sale of these items as long as people who purchase and sell them don’t get violent or mean. Most of the time, unlicensed vending doesn’t sour the scene but in fact adds to its vibrancy.

As Catherine relayed to me and Matthew Sheptoski suggested in his essay, life on the road isn’t easy. There are some Deadheads who sell basically the same kind of products as vendors at shows and festivals but in stores or online companies (i.e. Liquid Blue, Lot Life, Gypsy Rose etc). Some have achieved substantial economic success doing so such as the folks at Mexicali Blues<sup>28</sup> who now have 7 store locations in Maine ([mexicaliblues.com](http://mexicaliblues.com)). For these people, their work may not be as wearing (though not necessarily since for many, their livelihood is contingent upon traveling to foreign countries to get their goods). For those vendors who travel selling their goods at shows and festivals, life on the road may entail dirtiness, sleep deprivation, sickness, and irritability, but as one of the vendors Sheptoski interviewed put it “I feel the disadvantages really aren’t disadvantages, because you learn to appreciate the things that life on the road can’t provide” (Sheptoski 2000: 166). Vendors may be hassled and they may lose money and their merchandise, but Deadheads often share the power of positive thinking and difficulties aren’t viewed as “drawbacks, hindrances, or failings, but as learning situations” (Sheptoski 2000: 166). The vendor lifestyle is not necessarily ideal and neither is the Grateful Dead scene at

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<sup>28</sup> Bob Weir, “Mexicali Blues”, 1972.

large, but as one girl expressed in the *And Miles Before I Go Before I Sleep: On Tour*

*With the Grateful Dead Summer 1993* documentary, the scene:

Opens your eyes to start thinking there are different ways to live from paying off expensive bills and basically selling your life to an institution. I wouldn't call this ideal living but I think this is like a stepping stone towards it. It's another option so it kinda opens your eyes (Shapiro 1993).

While many Deadheads have embraced the oftentimes nomadic, vendor lifestyle, most have more conventional jobs and financial obligations. This does not mean these people are “square” or inauthentic. Deadheads internalize Jerry’s message of hard work and cooperation in how they conduct their lives, even in fields that may seem mundane or corporate. Deadheads can find economic success in the monetary sense and not undermine their identities as Deadheads. For example Peter Shapiro has been very successful in running the Brooklyn Bowl, the Capitol Theatre, and Relix magazine. He’s an extraordinarily busy yet good-natured, levelheaded person and as I mentioned in Chapter 2 he is very much concerned with delivering the best sound quality and providing the best atmosphere for concerts as possible. Kevin Calabro, while not as financially prosperous as Peter, also was able to find considerable success as a Deadhead entrepreneur in a traditionally corporate industry—the record industry. He owns and manages his own label, Royal Potato Records, which puts out albums of some great jam bands (many of whom are highly influenced by the Grateful Dead) such as Marco Benevento, Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey, and the Slip. Early on in his career Kevin worked at a big entertainment PR firm and worked with artists like the Spice Girls and R Kelly. Although it didn’t pay badly he didn’t like the work and as Kevin put it, “I wanted to help bring that music into the world that parts the clouds and let’s the sunshine down to us all”, not music

he didn't believe in that was marketed for the sole intention of making money (Calabro 2011). For a while Kevin was distraught but found hope and inspiration in the Grateful Dead (particularly in the line from "Saint of Circumstance" (GD 1980), "I sure don't know what I'm goin' for but I'm gonna go for it for sure") and his big break came when he met the legendary Atlantic Records producer, Joel Dorn, and they formed a few independent labels together. While his current label doesn't make a ton of money (Kevin confessed, "it's not like a way to get rich or anything. The label barely pays for itself and I still have to do all this side work to actually make the label run"), Kevin has gotten by doing something he loves and he attributes much of this to his love for the Dead which as he explained "made me want to learn more...it made me realize that I don't have to get a 9 to 5 job when I graduate from college and I can pursue this dream" (Calabro 2011).

Kevin's job and Peter's job are far from mundane and they are perhaps somewhat exceptional cases (though a band like the Dead draws the exceptional), but most of the people I know who love the Dead have more traditional jobs working alongside non-Deadheads. Some of them have found significant economic success. For example the new rhythm guitarist for Stella Blues Band, Steve Liesman, is the senior economics reporter for CNBC. He's a kind, non-greedy, approachable guy who hasn't let power or success go to his head. Bill Bonacci was enlightening on how one can have a "conventional" job and still be an authentic Deadhead. He told me:

I'm a supervisor at my job, so I'm a boss, but I look at myself as a compassionate boss. I'm not a dictator. I work with the guys, but you know it's a delicate balance because when you have that kind of a dynamic with people, let's say while on the job, on the one hand you want to be kind and compassionate and fair, and on the other hand you can't be weak, so you're always dancing that line because people will

walk all over you if they sense your weakness. Some will anyway. Others that are of a like mind will take your kindness and they'll turn it back to you. And that's what you're always looking for in the world and we take that out into the world at large (Bonacci 2012).

I feel this statement Bill made really highlights the main point I'm trying to make in this chapter. Jerry influenced Deadheads to work hard, to not be afraid to blaze their own paths, or work in a way that isn't contingent upon being cutthroat and greedy. Deadheads can be found in pretty much any occupation. What unites them is not so much the work that they do, but how they approach work—being fair, delivering high quality, being kind without being timid, being enthusiastic and passionate.

Deadheads who continue to work hard and who are devoted to quality will continue the scene. Many utilize technology to share the music and the culture of the Dead. Fans may or may not be tech savvy, their jobs may or may not involve the Grateful Dead, but regardless of whatever they do, in general Deadheads work hard and they deliver quality. As my title in this chapter (a line from “Built To Last” (GD 1989), one of the last great songs Jerry wrote) suggests, Deadheads are looking to sustain their community and enthusiasm for the music and they are building something that has stood the test of time. When I talked to Bob Guerra, he told me, “I think the music will live forever...I can't see it disappearing unless the world just evaporates” (Guerra 2013). There is no way to tell the future so one can't say for certain that the Grateful Dead will continue to be so important for such an extensive group of people, but by the sheer fact of Deadheads being hard workers and dedicated to quality, the scene is if not “built to last” then it is certainly “built to try”<sup>29</sup>. Try we

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<sup>29</sup> Grateful Dead, “Built To Last”, 1989.

have, try we will, try we must and as long as we Deadheads continue to have this attitude we won't let the scene go away.

## Chapter 5: Transitive Nightfall of Diamonds

In the previous two chapters I've focused primarily on the culture surrounding the Dead: the way Deadheads have found guidance, comfort, and identity in the music and the way they continue to innovate and celebrate in solidarity and carry the scene forward. In Chapter 5, I explore what it is specifically about the music of the Dead that sustains such a distinct, somewhat obsessive following (the "legions of the Dead" if you will) (Robert Hunter in [Dead.net](#) 2012). The adventurous, revolutionary, improvisational spirit of the Dead rubbed off on their fans. Christian Amigo theorizes that just as "in order to advance beyond the basic melodic and harmonic frameworks of a standard song or composition, a student has to improvise", in order to live fulfilling, meaningful lives (going beyond a mundane, animalistic existence), fans have realized the need to improvise (Amigo 2010: 23). Mary Goodenough postulates, "In a society changing more rapidly than we can grasp, the ability to adapt and improvise becomes not only beneficial for success but also increasingly necessary for survival" (Goodenough 2010: 213). This ability to improvise emanating from the music is apparent in the ways Deadheads utilize technology, reject binaries and the notion of work as unpleasant sacrifice, conduct their business, go on the road, learn and grow from each other, and embrace innovation and new creations.

As I've suggested earlier, the Dead were not perfect. I missed seeing the Grateful Dead with Jerry, but based on my experiences seeing Dead bands, especially Bobby and Phil (while I've experienced many amazing musical moments), I can see where Nick Paumgarten is coming from when he writes, "They could be sloppy,

unrehearsed. They forgot lyrics, sang out of key, delivered rank harmonies, missed notes, blew takeoffs and landings, and they lay down clams by the dozens...they bombed the big gigs” (Paumgarten 2102: 44). I’ve been to disappointing shows and seen hundreds of screw-ups but the bad moments don’t dissuade me from going to more shows. I think Peter Shapiro put it well:

Sometimes they suck. They take chances to make it work and I think a lot of people like the Dead because they didn’t know what kind of show they’d always see. It wasn’t the same set. They didn’t have it always nailed down. Sometimes it wasn’t that good but when it was great, it was great and better than great of a band that does the same thing every night (Shapiro 2012).

The high points at Dead shows where “the band’s firing on all cylinders” and the jams reach new levels compel me to keep coming back to shows and keep listening to the music (Koritz et al. 2007). The highs outshine the lows, and the lows aren’t usually that bad (i.e. hearing Bobby messing up the lyrics to “Truckin” (GD 1970d) after all these years is pretty hilarious). The fact that the Dead were/are not flawless gives them an endearing, human quality fans can relate to. Not attaining perfection but striving for higher consciousness is a sentiment shared by fans and musicians alike. In an interview with Relix in 1995, Jerry admits, “There’s always a dissonance between what you wish was happening and what is actually happening. That’s the nature of creativity, that there’s a certain level of disappointment in there” (Brown, Novick 1995). Yet Jerry speculates:

I think the audience enjoys it more when it’s a little more of a struggle...The tension between *trying* to create something and creating something, between succeeding and failing. Tension is a part of what makes music work—tension and release, or if you prefer, dissonance and resonance, or suspension and completion (Brown, Novick 1995).

The contrast between dissonance/chaos and consonance/familiarity keeps fans enthralled. Unlike perfectionist musicians that are hindered in terms of their creative

potential by their fear of making mistakes, in the Dead, as Phil Lesh put it, mistakes were seen “as opportunities rather than liabilities” (Lesh 2005: 53). The band members listened and reacted to mistakes instead of suppressing them. There was a certain give and take that was endemic to the Dead, which propelled the music to new dimensions. While perhaps individually not the most virtuosic musicians, together the band was brilliant and became as Phil Lesh explains, like “fingers on a hand” (Lesh 2005: 56). Most Deadheads would agree Jerry was the band’s leader (despite his humble rejection of this designation), and a majority of the Dead’s songs are often referred to by fans and musicians alike as “Jerry tunes” but as Jerry told Charles Reich, “If it’s one of my songs, it’s never what I originally heard, it’s always something that includes more than I might have conceived” (Garcia et al. 1972: 52). As I made reference to in Chapter 1 through Jerry’s metaphor of revealing faces to others and inspiring others to reveal faces back, the Dead were so amazing because the music was a collective, dialogic, group-minded experience/experiment. The give and take of musical ideas has not gone away. It keeps growing. The improvisational music has infinite potential.

When analyzing the particularity, excitement, and longevity of the Dead’s group improvisation, it is essential to realize the importance of balance. Part of the idea of the band being a gestalt (the whole being greater than the sum of its parts) has to do with the fact that each member was keenly aware of balance—experimenting with new ideas yet incorporating familiar phrases and licks, playing lively and making provocative statements yet knowing when to leave space for others to interject, being conscious of what the main melody and characteristic themes of a

song are yet not blocking streams of consciousness or instinct. Although classification for the way the Dead improvised may seem problematic because they had such a diverse repertoire, I think Jim Tuedio and Stan Spector do a good job at setting up a framework for analyzing the improvisation through their categories of hierarchical and associative improvisation. Hierarchical improvisation is the more traditional of the two and it occurs in most music genres, operating “whenever musicians play spontaneously and extemporaneously in front, or against the background, of an underlying structural framework” (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 11). The Dead employed this kind of improvisation in many of their “short” straight-ahead rock tunes (i.e. “Touch of Grey” (GD 1987), “Ship of Fools” (GD 1974a), “US Blues” (GD1974a) etc.) and most of their cover tunes (i.e. “Me and My Uncle” (GD 1971b), “Peggy-O” (GD 1999a), “Queen Jane Approximately” (Bob Dylan, Grateful Dead 1989) etc.). In contrast to hierarchical improvisation, associative improvisation “is more free-flowing, insofar as the underlying structure and framework are abandoned by musicians busy setting in motion suggestive new ideas leading to other new ideas” (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 11). This kind of improvisation occurs often at peaks or the trippiest/weirdest parts of the show. Some fans get bored with super long jammy songs that incorporate associative improvisation such as “Dark Star” (GD 1969c), “Playin’ in the Band” (1971b) or “Bird Song” (Jerry Garcia 1972) but many Deadheads live for the spontaneity or “X-energy when the music plays the band” (Koritz et al. 2007). The Dead were great at both types of improvisation and in many songs they incorporate both types (i.e. “Let it Grow” (1973b), “Help on the

Way/Slipknot” (GD 1975), “Shakedown Street” (GD 1978), “The Music Never Stopped” (GD 1975), “Cassidy” (Bob Weir 1972) etc.).

I don’t think one type of improvisation is necessarily more difficult than the other, but I feel the associative improvisation, group consciousness is really what made the Dead stand apart from any other group. Often I have found when there is only one soloist or people trade solos the music can get stale and though I’m a jazz fan I think the form of playing a head, trading off solos for an allotted number of bars, and then returning to the head can be predictable and boring. Jerry was the only lead guitarist and the Dead didn’t really trade off solos (I suppose Jerry did a bit with Brent Mydland, and John Kadelick does with Jeff Chimenti in Furthur more than the Dead ever did) but Jerry and guitarists who play in Dead tribute bands consciously do not overplay their part. Their soloing rarely gets boring in the long jams because the jams are not guitar solos in the traditional sense where one person solos and every other member is in the background or playing predetermined parts. In Dead jams, as Tuedio and Spector put it:

Not only does the soloist improvise against the groove of the rhythm section, but members of the rhythm section also improvise collectively in establishing that groove. The essential thing is for each player to have something to weave into the musical unfolding conversation, so that the music is in fact an extemporaneous conversation between the players (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 12).

While this kind of improvisation can be chaotic and oftentimes a song’s framework is largely abandoned, the Dead still maintained cohesion. Their musical styles were diverse, but they didn’t clash. The Dead played so many genres and yet retained their distinct sound that couldn’t be confused with anyone else largely because they were balanced and able to weave seemingly disparate genres together fluidly through jamming (Lesh 2005: 151).

I often feel the most magic occurs during associative improvisation jams, but hierarchical jams can also be great. The associative improvisation grew out of the hierarchical and I don't think one can be studied without the other. The Dead always held onto the hierarchical to complement the more free-form associative, and they were able to solo hierarchically and still make cover songs their own. They loved rock artists like Chuck Berry and country artists like Merle Haggard and they usually soloed in a hierarchical manner on these kinds of songs. Although the Dead didn't really cover jazz songs, they were very influenced by jazz music, which is primarily rooted in hierarchical improvisation. Listening to jazz musicians profoundly affected every member of the band. In particular, Phil Lesh (the most musically trained member of the Dead) was forever changed by listening to John Coltrane. As he writes in his book:

Coltrane just blew me away. His sound was so radical...chords stacked upon chords, phrases looping over the tiniest fraction of the beat, all with the most soulful inflections and passionate intensity...This encounter with Coltrane was my first inkling that jazz and improvised music could carry the weight and spiritual authority of the greatest classical works (Lesh 2005: 10,11).

Jazz, (especially Coltrane as evinced from this quote) influenced the Dead's sound.

Yet "jazz" doesn't encompass or define it. The members of the Dead are humble and

I find it interesting that in an interview at Bonnaroo in 2006 when asked what the

biggest misconceptions about the Dead are, Bobby answered:

One is that we were the godfathers of jam music when in fact you go back to Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, those guys, they had a pretty good handle on it back when. We made it electric. Our book is different but the approach is exactly the same. You state a theme. You take it for a little walk in the woods (Weir 2008).

I do think the Dead are like the other great artists Bobby mentioned in that they are transcendent but I also feel there was something radical about the Dead's music,

(playing in the now, fluidly weaving together so many different styles of music, abandoning old forms to create new forms), which sets them apart from other greats (it wasn't just making the music electric). While most jazz artists improvise in a hierarchical manner where one person solos at a time while the others comp, some definitely have explored group improvisation, abandoning form, and playing in the now. Yet I don't think any of these musicians have reached such a widespread, devoted audience as the Dead have. Most jazz artists who employ associative improvisation appeal to a narrower, more esoteric audience. To have an experimental, fearless band attain so much popularity and retain a shared consciousness and intimate connection with their fans is quite amazing.

Although I don't fully agree with Bob Weir and I feel jazz can be too rigid and/or not always accessible, I do not want to underestimate the importance of jazz or other musical roots (rock n' roll, blues, bluegrass, country, folk etc.) in the Dead's music. In the most chaotic moments it could seem as Jerry put it "we're nowhere and we're nothing, and from nothing we can invent anything" (Garcia et al. 1972: 126). But for the most part the Dead "appropriated what was already shown to be possible, then transformed it, and made it their own" (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 11). The band members never stopped listening to other musicians and they refused to limit themselves and block out inspiration. I think Jerry expressed the band's relationship to roots and finding influence in diverse styles the best: "The more things you have in your mind, the more there is for random input to manifest itself in weird thought" (Garcia et al. 1972: 211). The band members constantly learned and explored a plethora of music styles and these styles became part of their vocabulary and inspired

innovation and “weird thought”. Considering all the new, fresh music that Phil, Bobby, Billy, and Mickey play today, I feel the band members are still learning and exploring new styles.

In terms of transitioning from the hierarchical to the associative, it is important to look at the early years of the Dead when they played mainly blues and R&B songs electric. One of the earliest songs that the Dead transformed into a vehicle for associative improvisation was “Viola Lee Blues” (GD 1967). Phil explains how they electrified this old Noah Lewis jug band tune “with a boogaloo beat and an intro lick borrowed from R&B artist Lee Dorsey’s ‘Get Out of My Life Woman’ (Jerry Garcia Band 1991)” and cut the typical 12 bar blues into 11 (sometimes 11 ½ ) bars (Lesh 2005: 59). David Malvinni theorizes, “this odd-count feature, along with the fact that the song substitutes bVII for V in the turnaround, lends it a psychedelic air but also propels the straight groove part of the song” (Malvinni 2013: 71). What really made the Dead’s versions unique and associative was how they played in between the verses. Each jam section, Jerry would play progressively longer and as Phil explains “the longer the solo, the less interesting it became to play the same material as background, so those of us who weren’t soloing began to vary and differentiate our ‘background’ material almost as if we were also soloists” (Lesh 2005: 59). Thus Jerry prodded his band mates to go beyond the hierarchical and as Phil put it:

After each of the three verses, we tried to take the music *out* further—first expanding on the groove, then on the tonality, and then on both, finally pulling out all the stops in a giant accelerando, culminating in a whirlwind of dissonance that, out of nowhere, would slam back into the original groove for a repetition of the final verse (Lesh 2005: 59).

This became the basis of associative improvisation for the Dead and thus I agree with Malvinni, “the Dead’s first indications of what the future might hold were revealed in their versions of blues and R&B songs” (Malvinni 2010: 77).

Part of the reason the Dead were so attracted to the blues was because the genre was harmonically simple and allowed room for interpretation in soloing. The Dead were able to tread so much new ground and explore new ideas because during the jams they did not really play over complex harmonic progressions (often a characteristic of jazz and progressive rock music). Nick Paumgarten points out that jazz buffs often dismiss the Dead as “harmonically shallow” because “they played one- and two-chord jams that went on for twenty or thirty minutes” (Paumgarten 2012: 44). Some of the Dead’s most epic live songs were two or three chord jams centered around the Mixolydian mode such as “Fire on the Mountain” (GD 1978), “Franklin’s Tower” (GD 1975), “Wharf Rat” (GD 1971b), and “Dark Star” (GD 1969c). The simpler the harmonic structure, the more space the band members had to improvise and render each performance unique. The first jammy song the Dead wrote together, “Caution (Do Not Step On The Tracks)” (GD 1968b) consisted of only one chord. Phil notes:

Playing on one chord, or root note, might seem restrictive, but I found it empowering. The possibilities engendered from playing any other interval against the tonic note are virtually infinite (to say nothing of the potential when a third, or a fourth, note is added) and I began to think of those infinities as my personal playground (Lesh 2005: 94).

Phil, who was classically trained and a jazz and avant-garde aficionado, initially was not blown away when he met/saw Jerry (whom Phil dismissed as being too “simple”), but he came to realize that he “just hadn’t been *listening*” (Lesh 2005: 19). Soon afterwards Phil discovered:

Jerry's delivery was both spine-tingling and blood-curdling, presented without histrionics and with a fearless objectivity—just letting the song speak for itself. That was my first intimation that music with that kind of directness and simplicity could deliver an aesthetic and emotional payoff comparable to that of the greatest operatic or symphonic works (Lesh 2005: 2).

Jerry knew how to leave space and “sing” with his guitar. Bill Bonacci told me that from Jerry he learned:

It isn't so much how many notes you're playing or your technique per se...it's something more. I always want to say something...so I became very conscious of being melodic, having phrasing where you play a phrase and the next one complements it (Bonacci 2012).

In a similar vein Bob Guerra told me “playing those solos, it's like a story” (Guerra 2013). Instead of “floundering how to get from point a to b” and focusing on scales, Bob learned to feel the music and translate his feelings onto the guitar (Guerra 2013). By listening closely to the Dead to learn their music he realized “the Dead did a lot of repeats in their soloing. And those little repeats start building up to crescendos so that when you finally get to that top peak it's like (explosion noise) and it escalates down to coming back into something” (Guerra 2013). The repeats, subtle variations, and characteristic licks orient the listener and as Bob suggested, they build up and become the peaks of many jams (for instance in my favorite version of “Sugaree” (GD 1977a) from May 11, 1977 Jerry plays the same basic triplet pattern as he ascends the fret board from approximately 5:20 to 6:05, which builds anticipation and tension until the band explodes in a cacophony of sound and then they transition into a soulful, relaxed third verse).

If it seems I've suggested that the Dead's music is easy to play, that is not my intention. The music is accessible and *can* be easy to play but to play it well is challenging. The music is multifaceted and it continues to enthrall good musicians because they can keep honing in on nuances and discover new ways to innovate over

familiar frameworks. Most of the music is very melodic and delivered simply and so musicians who learn Dead tunes usually learn the basic parts first. Bill told me when he learns a Dead tune he doesn't usually play Dead riffs note for note but learns the basic melody so he can have room to experiment and branch out from there (Bonacci 2012). Many Dead songs are based on Ionian major pentatonic scales but as Bill told me:

I could just play any note on the major pentatonic and it works. Of course it works to a certain degree. If you want to get really interesting and make your phrasing provocative, there's a lot more you need to do...whether it's playing chromatics, flattening a 3<sup>rd</sup>, changing key, there are a whole lot of things that could be going on, so it was this evolution of understanding how those riffs were put together that opened a lot of doors (Bonacci 2012).

The deeper one gets into the Dead, the more one discovers the potential improvisational possibilities that exist over simple harmonic frameworks.

Interestingly some of the more complex improvisational songs are built around simple structures. "Eyes of the World" (GD 1973b), which often functions as an improvisational center piece in the second set of a Dead show, sounds very jazzy and there are several key changes (particularly in versions before 1975), but the key changes, unlike most jazz songs, don't occur rapidly. Most of the soloing is on the tonic, E Major. After the first and second verse the band improvises in E Ionian over EMaj7 for 2 bars and then E Mixolydian for 2 bars over Bm and AMaj, and they repeat this pattern for an un-predetermined number of times. After the third verse typically Phil plays a bass solo in the E Ionian mode, and then in classic "Eyes" (GD 2004) from 1975 and earlier (such as 8/6/74 Dicks Picks 31), as noted in the popular Grateful Dead tab site: Jdarks, usually the band plays around on G# Dorian, then goes back to E Ionian, they repeat this harmonic pattern, then they play D# Dorian, and then they play some chaotic D# diminished arpeggios, and resolve it beautifully into

E Ionian ([jdarks.com](http://jdarks.com) 2001). The jam goes back to D# Dorian, then they play a characteristic riff that is counted as 6+7, then they alternate between this riff and soloing in D# Dorian a handful of times and finally after the last riff they play a jam in D Dorian to finish the song. While this harmonic framework (which the Dead loosely followed before 1975) may seem complex, the key changes occur gradually and over the changes typically only one chord is played (albeit in many interesting voicings) so overall the song is not that hard to play and the varied harmonic structures are simple enough to lend themselves to innovation. Of course there are some Dead songs that do have more rapid key changes and are difficult to play such as “King Solomon’s Marbles Pts. 1 & 2” (GD 1975) and “Unbroken Chain” (GD 1974a) but the Dead rarely played them live.

One of my favorite things about Furthur is that they perform many songs that were not in the Dead’s live repertoire, such as the two aforementioned tunes. Also they perform fan favorites that the Dead dropped later in their career such as “St. Stephen” (GD 1969b), “Lost Sailor” (GD 1980), and “Weather Report Suite” (GD 1973b). Furthur, like their name suggests, continues to evolve. Despite Billy Kreutzmann’s criticism of them, Furthur does in fact play new music that the Dead never performed. The Dead played the traditional folk song “I Know You Rider” (GD 1966) throughout their entire career and this song segued from “China Cat Sunflower” (GD 1969b) sometimes paired with a “Feelin’ Groovy Jam” (GD 1974b) (a jam on the Simon & Garfunkel song, which Malvinni notes previously was incorporated into some early 1970s versions of “Dark Star”(GD 1970a) became one of the liveliest peaks of a Dead show (Malvinni 2013: 76). China>Rider (as fans

notate when writing setlists) was almost always exciting and fresh and no matter how many times the band played it, it made (and still makes) Deadheads ecstatic. Furthur imbues fresh energy into “I Know You Rider” by sometimes pairing it with their tune “Mountain Song” (Furthur 2011) (a song whose chorus had been written by David Crosby and Jerry Garcia but which Furthur developed into a whole song). The “Mountain Song” segued into “I Know You Rider” (Furthur 2011) astounded me the first time I heard it and seeing it at other Furthur shows, it has held up in repetition. Furthur doesn’t play new songs often, but when they do, it can really be a treat. One of my favorite concert moments was hearing Furthur open up their second set at Gelston Castle on July 3, 2010 with the beautiful instrumental Grateful Dead rarity “Sage and Spirit” segued into the new Weir/Hunter song “7 Hills of Gold” (Furthur 2010b).

As the Dead changed the ways they played their songs so much throughout their career, so have modern configurations playing Dead music (particularly those led by living members of the Dead—Billy, Mickey, Bobby, and Phil). When the Dead changed how they played tunes it could be fantastic—I feel the updated disco take on “Dancing in the Streets” (GD 1995b) that they played in 1977 revived the song and made it shine more than it did when the Dead played it as a rock version closer to famous Motown Martha and the Vandellas’ version from the 1960s. Although it’s too bad the Dead dropped the end jam section of “Eyes of the World” (GD 2004) that I analyzed above (thankfully DSO plays the end jam when they perform setlists before 1975), I think the Dead have played later versions that are just as magical as the early versions (such as the lightning-fast version of “Eyes of the

World” segued into my all time favorite “Space” (GD 1979) from 10/31/79 or the psychedelic, jazzy version from 12/31/90 (GD 1990b), which features Branford Marsalis on tenor sax and Bruce Hornsby on piano). Yet some changes the Dead made in their songs can be frustrating and debatably don’t hold up to classic versions (i.e. making “Friend of the Devil” (1977c) painfully slow in the mid-70s, breaking “Sugar Magnolia” into two parts in the 80s—the main song and the “Sunshine Daydream” (GD 1998) reprise, etc.) I’ve seen Furthur play amazing jams during “Dark Star” (GD 1969c) but something about separating each sung verse into three parts (sung by Phil, John, and Bobby respectively) disrupts the flow of the song and somewhat diminishes the gravity and mystical quality of the lyrics. In some ways playing the songs more how they were intended, which Dark Star does, appeals to fans more than consciously trying to change the songs. Bob Guerra confessed:

I have to tell you this and you have Phil Lesh and Bob Weir in this band. I’d actually rather go see Dark Star. I hate to say it. I love what Kadlecik does, but when you got Weir singing parts of “Peggy-O” (GD 1999a) and you got Phil singing Jerry tunes, that’s not what this was about obviously (Guerra 2013).

Despite some fans’ wishes, the members of the Dead view songs as templates in which they innovate and make changes. As Jerry expressed:

Part of it is that we’re just constitutionally unable to repeat anything exactly. Everyone in the band is so pathologically anti-authoritarian, that the idea of doing something exactly the same way is an anathema—it will never happen (Brown, Novick 1995).

Sometimes the innovations are pronounced and the feel of a song may change drastically. Rob Baracco notes that when he played in Phil and Friends:

We would take songs—like even say Cumberland Blues (GD 1972), which is a pretty straight read. It’s got a lot of energy, great crowd pleaser, but in the middle of the tune we would just like pry open the thing with a can opener and all sorts of crazy stuff would start to happen and we would do that approach with just about every song (Koritz et al. 2007).

Personally, I love when Phil takes “Cumberland Blues” out in new directions but I can see how sometimes it’s best to keep the short, straight ahead songs short to balance with the long associative improvisational jams. Innovation doesn’t necessarily entail expansion. For example Billy has altered certain songs like “Turn on Your Lovelight” and “Bertha” (7 Walkers 2010) in 7 Walkers by delivering them with a swampy, Cajun feel, and Mickey has altered songs like “The Other One” and “Franklin’s Tower” (Mickey Hart Band 2012) in Mickey Hart Band by incorporating heavy, tribal percussion and utilizing “exotic” percussive instruments like the talking drum. These versions aren’t usually longer than original versions. They are just different.

Probably the song that has varied the most (and perhaps consequently has been written about more than any other Grateful Dead song) is “Dark Star” (GD 1969c). David Malvinni surmises that this song is so integral to the Grateful Dead because probably more than any other song, it has served and still serves “as a springboard and repository for new ideas” (Malvinni 2013: 73). In describing the early development of “Dark Star”, Phil Lesh shares:

As we played around with it, it started expanding itself into a flood of endless melody, and from there into some scarifying chaotic feedback, and back to the original theme, almost of its own accord—as if the music wanted to be expanded far beyond any concept of ‘song.’...This theme, because of its infinite mutability, became our signature space-out tune, consciously designed to be opened up into alternative universes—a tone poem reflecting the possibility that the collapse of a star into singularity in our universe could be the birth of another complete universe. (Boone 2010: 85).

As Phil suggests, “Dark Star” is deep and prodding both musically and lyrically. Lines from the song such as “Mirror shatters in formless reflections of matter/ Glass hand dissolving in ice petal flowers revolving” evoke “the cycle of movement from form to formlessness, being to nothingness, cosmos to chaos...cosmic wheels of

motion” (Boone 2010: 87). While the lyrics “evoke disintegration and loss on different levels, from the cosmic to the psychological and emotive” they also offer companionship “countering the external, galactic aspect of the lyrics with the effect of an internal, emotive cosmos whose humanizing impact is cemented in the chorus (‘Shall we go...?’)” (Boone 2010: 88). The lyrics are a call to communal exploration. The call to explore the “Transitive Nightfall of Diamonds”<sup>30</sup> affected the jamming.

As Jerry expressed:

The reason the music is the way it is, is because those lyrics did suggest that to me. That’s what happened. They are saying, ‘This universe is truly far out.’ That’s about it. You could take whatever you will from that suggestion. For me, that suggestion always means, ‘Great, let’s look around, let’s see how weird it really gets’ (Boone 2010: 86).

The Dead certainly took “Dark Star” far out and in their performances of the song they suggested “infinite mutability” (Lesh 2005: 85). While “Dark Star” “was a continuum, something that changed from night to night”, like other Dead songs, “Dark Star” did have some structural poles and identifying characteristics (Malvinni 2013: 85). Graeme Boone devised a pretty ingenious way to analyze some of these characteristics by invoking the Buddhist concept of *mandala*. According to Boone the concentric circles of a *mandala* convey “the meditative qualities of the music and the balance of forces within it, with their pull to order and to chaos, to center and to periphery; and it reflects the intensely spiritual, metaphysical world in which the Dead lived” (Boone 2010: 35). In the *mandala* “mapping system” Boone uses to describe 1968-1969 versions of “Dark Star”, Boone illuminates some of the structural poles in a *mandala* diagram through symbols that surround the tonal basis I (A chord) (Boone 2010: 94). For the sake of simplicity, I focus on some of the structural poles

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<sup>30</sup> Grateful Dead “Dark Star”, 1969c.

found in a classic version of “Dark Star” (GD 1969a) from 3/1/69 at the Fillmore West. Boone’s label “R” represents the *arpeggio riff* Jerry played often to mark the arrival of the second jam, which creates melodic tension driving the jam forward. The “M” represents a *modal shift* in which one of the players (usually Bobby) makes a modal shift, from Mixolydian to Aeolian or Dorian (Boone 2010: 98). The modal shifts in “Dark Star” don’t really mark key changes. As Malvinni surmises “ ‘Dark Star’ is much more tonally ambiguous, seemingly modal and yet something else at the same time, deconstructing the idea of a modal center” (Malvinni 2013: 84). The openness of “Dark Star” makes it the quintessential associative improvisation jam. While the *arpeggio riff* and the *modal shift* create melodic tension, Jerry creates “timbral tension” by employing what Boone terms “VD”, *volume dial* episodes, a swelling effect “sounding like a bowed violin or cello”, which “functions as another exploratory signpost” (Boone 2010: 97,98). The “GR” *growling* episodes that follow the volume swells when Jerry “creates a sandpaper, curdling sound like a growl through simple electronic and picking effects” produces the opposite effect of the volume swells (thus complementing the swells nicely), which functions as another signpost to goad the band to “get strange” (Boone 2010: 98).

While the signposts or structural poles that Boone maps out are very useful in understanding many of the 1968-1969 versions of “Dark Star” (modern tribute bands like DSO still employ some of these structural poles), the song was constantly in flux, and as Jerry put it “There are certain structural poles which we have kind of set up in it, and those periodically we do away with” (Garcia et al. 1972: 58). Boone notes that later versions of “Dark Star” would invoke different *mandalas* (Boone 2010: 99).

Some of the later structural poles that arose in “Dark Star” enthralled fans and led to the creation of new songs. I mentioned earlier that the “Feelin’ Groovy” (GD 1974b) jam originated in “Dark Star” before being played in between “China Cat Sunflower” (GD 1969b) and “I Know you Rider” (GD 1966) (Malvinni 2013: 76-78). At the Capitol Theatre on 2/18/71 the Dead first played “Wharf Rat” (GD 1971a) (which like “Dark Star” is based on two chords) sandwiched in between “Dark Star” (GD 1971a). In the second half of this version of “Dark Star” they went into one of my favorite 2-chord jams ever (Bm to AMaj) aptly titled “Beautiful Jam” (GD 1971a) (Malvinni 2013: 75). On 10/31/71 they quoted the Archie Bell and the Drell’s song “Tighten Up” (GD 1995a) (marked by its distinct Maj7 chords) within “Dark Star” (Malvinni 2013: 75). This arguably led to the creation of the main theme of “Eyes of the World” (GD 1973b). Malvinni notes that the basis of the song “Slipknot” (GD 1975) can be traced to a “Dark Star” (GD 1974c) the Dead played on 7/25/74 (Malvinni 2013: 82). Perhaps most famously, “Playin’ in the Band” (GD 1971b) (what the Dead in the early 70s referred to as the new “monster jam”) can be traced back to “Dark Star”. The intro which is in 10/8 timing was originally called “The Main Ten” (GD 1970e) and can be heard coming out of “Dark Star” (i.e. 11/8/70). “Dark Star’s” potential clearly is vast and sparks musicians’ imaginations and as Malvinni notes, it “could emerge in a variety of emotional matrices, from joyous to terrifying”(Malvinni 2013: 85). While the Dead stopped playing “Dark Star” frequently after 1975, the gem, which became a rarity, did not lose its vitality. One of my favorite versions ever was performed by Bob Weir with Bruce Hornsby and Branford Marsalis on 12/31/90 (GD 1990b) (the same show as the “Eyes of the

World” I alluded to earlier). Recently I was fortunate enough to see a dissonant, jazzy version (Bob Weir, Bruce Hornsby & Branford Marsalis 2012), which may rival the 12/31/90 recording. On 7/20/12 at Gathering of the Vibes I saw Bob Weir perform in a trio with Bruce Hornsby and Branford Marsalis and they took the song to new dimensions/“planes of existence” that just blew me away (Boone 2010: 86). Although I sometimes am bothered by Furthur and Phil Lesh and Friends splitting up the vocals for “Dark Star”, I have seen them play some wonderful versions that have profoundly affected the way I view musical innovation—namely seeing Furthur play the song (Furthur 2012) on 7/13/12 at MCU Park, Coney Island and seeing Phil and Friends play it (Phil Lesh and Friends 2012) with the jazz guitar tapping extraordinaire, Stanley Jordan, on 11/13/12 at Roseland Ballroom. These versions renewed my faith that there is infinite possibility in music and that the music of the Dead won’t lose its freshness.

At the crux of my essay is the notion that the Dead’s music can still astound people and be taken to new places. Part of the reason for this is the fact that the living members that were in the Dead till the end—Phil, Bobby, Billy, and Mickey—are such, innovative, genius musicians, “not virtuosos in the sense of technical skill” but “unique, peerless, sui generis” (Paumgarten 2012: 45). Phil Lesh, who didn’t play bass before joining the Dead, did not play like anyone else. Some compare his style to playing lead guitar but I think this comparison is unfounded and people who make it are thrown off because he plays with a pick and often plays loudly, melodically, and energetically, unlike typical bassists. Phil learned to play “ ‘in a way that heightened the beats by omission, as it were, by playing around them,’ in a manner

that ‘cogenerates not only rhythm, but [also] the nature and rate of harmonic motion’” (Tuedio 2010: 134). Phil’s playing adds excitement to common harmonic progressions and complements guitar playing. He doesn’t mimic guitarists. As Phil explains about himself and the Dead as an ensemble in general:

I wanted to play in a way that moved melodically but much more slowly than the lead melodies sung by the vocalists or played on guitar or keyboard. Contrast and complement: Each of us approached music from a different direction, at angles to one another, like the spokes of a wheel (Lesh 2005: 57).

Bob Weir’s guitar contributions are often overlooked since his playing is not usually “showy” or loud in the mix, but they shouldn’t be. In a way he was “the tonal glue, the gravitational force” in the Dead holding the band together (Lesh 2005: 173). Phil describes Bobby’s playing well:

Bob’s guitar playing, like his sense of humor and attitude toward life in general, is quirky, whimsical, goofy—and rich in nuance and allusion. Harmonically, he grasps and extends the implications of what he hears in a unique and provocative manner, enhanced by his prestidigitatorial ability to play on guitar (with only four fingers) chord voicings that one would normally hear from a keyboard (with up to ten fingers) (Lesh 2005: 194).

Part of the reason that Grateful Dead fans dance so ecstatically at shows has to do with the fact that the music is so rhythmically driving, and the drumming/percussion is so heavy, variable (different versions of songs are played in different tempos and densities), and active (the drums are not just a background instrument). For most of the Dead’s career Billy and Mickey defied the single drummer rock convention by playing together. They had different styles yet they complemented each other in an extraordinary way. Billy has a certain looseness, a swing-like, wobbly, yet smooth feel that isn’t exactly rock or jazz or blues but “some kinda genre-busting rainbow polka-dot hybrid mutation” (Lesh 2005: 61). Mickey added a real tribal, African percussive sensibility. In the 90s Mickey expanded his

musical horizons by forming the band Planet Drum (whose self-titled album won the Grammy award for best World Music Album of 1991), which featured a diverse group of renowned drummers such as Skikiru Adepoju on dundun, Zakir Hussain on tabla, Jose Lorenzo on berimbau, and Babatunde Olatunji on djembe (Jackson et al., 2003: 381). While he was in the Dead, Mickey was constantly driven to explore world music genres and discover instruments unfamiliar to most westerners and this prompted the drums/space portion of the Dead show, which became a staple, and prompted him to create The Rhythm Devils with Billy and write music for the movie “Apocalypse Now” (The Rhythm Devils 1989). In his current projects Mickey still seeks out the best drummers in the world from various backgrounds and he is still learning and innovating through his collaborations. Mickey may be more exotic and Billy may be more accessible to western listeners but both drummers apart and together are exceptional. They have created and still create mind-bending rhythmic music.

It should also be noted: the reason a lot of Grateful Dead songs were rhythmically distinct was because the Dead often played in weird time signatures (i.e. “Estimated Prophet” (GD 1977b) and “Lazy Lightning” (Kingfish 1976) are in 7/4, the jam in “Unbroken Chain” (GD 1974a) is in 15/8, “the Eleven” (GD 1969c) as the name suggests is in 11/8, and “The Other One” (GD 1971b) is made up of a 3 over 4 polyrhythm). Part of this may be due to the fact that Mickey discovered unusual time signatures by taking lessons from the tabla player, Alla Rakha, in the late 60s (Boone 2010: 33). Also Bobby and Phil wrote in weird time signatures to prod the band to get far out. Jerry’s songs in contrast were fairly straightforward and simple. Although

most fans would argue Jerry was the leader of the Dead, all the members added significantly to the music and their brilliance still shines through in performances today.

While the living members of the Dead have contributed most to the evolution of the Dead's music, tribute bands also have made/make significant contributions. Unlike bands with previous members from the Grateful Dead, bands like Dark Star Orchestra, Reflections, and Stella Blues don't play new material. Yet they still push the music forward because originality is inherent to the improvised nature of Dead tunes. Many Dead cover bands create setlists the Dead never played and weave songs together through segues that are created in the moment. Bands like Reflections mix their setlists with Jerry Garcia Band tunes and Grateful Dead tunes (which the Dead didn't do live) and play songs that were never played in the same show or in the same era (i.e. "Turn on your Lovelight" (1969c), "Mission in the Rain" (Jerry Garcia 1976), and "Boogie On Reggae Woman" (Legion of Mary 2005). DSO usually replicates setlists the Dead played but the jams and segues are improvised and fresh sounding. DSO is traditional in the sense that there is a "Jerry guy" and a "Bobby guy" who fulfill the same basic roles in terms of vocals and guitar playing that Jerry and Bobby filled (Guerra 2013). Unlike the Dead and DSO, both Reflections and Stella Blues Band have prominent female vocalists who sing lead on many songs that Jerry, Bobby, and Pigpen sang. Lizzy Loves (Reflections, John Kadlecik Band) and Kat Walkerson (Stella Blues Band, The Garcia Project, Acoustically Speaking) both have a presence and consistency that Donna Jean lacked while playing in the Dead.

Dead music is polyphonic and each member contributed so much, so therefore most tribute bands choose to have a similar instrumentation as the Dead had, but this isn't always the case. Reflections only has one guitarist and for this reason their keyboardist, Paul Kates, is forced to carry more weight and as a result their sound is different than the Dead's was (Guerra 2013). This is also the case with the bands Jazz is Dead, 7 Walkers, and BK3. Whether bands that play Dead music change the instrumentation and style of songs the Dead played, or they stick more to as Rob Baracco put it "the way they were intended", the music can still be fresh and exciting (Koritz et al. 2007). As Phil Lesh expressed, the music "is so deep it can never be boring, or run out of challenges" (Lesh 2005: 3).

The music is so deep because it is a group amalgamation. The Dead improvised and created together and as the band expressed, " 'Improvisation is built on trust, love, and time in the groove...and intuition...and playing together, and listening really closely...and really listening closely ...and conversation' " (Trist 2010: 131). As Phil shares everyone in the Dead could be "endearing and frustrating at the same time" but they were "connected by a bond that's 'thicker than blood' (Lesh 2005: 203, 4). This same solidarity and trust exists in bands today that play Grateful Dead music. By feeding off each other's energy ("plug[ging] into the cosmos") the music will continue to grow (Garcia et al. 1972: 198).

## Chapter 6: The Wheel is Turning

The Grateful Dead scene is profound and full of ironies and paradoxes. One of the chief ironies is that fans have the tendency to measure current Dead configurations and other jambands to what the Grateful Dead were with Jerry. Many idolize/worship Jerry and can be fairly close-minded towards other music, which is an attitude that is antithetical to what Jerry believed. Everyone in the Dead, including Jerry, considered themselves vessels, delivering music to transport their fans to higher levels of consciousness (Brown, Novick 1995). Jerry understood the music to be a group effort, a product that went beyond individual ownership. As he told Charles Reich, “I’m not the leader of the Grateful Dead or anything like that, there isn’t any fuckin’ leader” (Garcia et al. 1972: 50). But in a way he was the heart of the band. Nick Paumgarten argues, “Garcia was the band’s most accomplished songwriter, most soulful singer, most charismatic figure, most eloquent interviewee, most recognizable icon, most splendid thaumaturge” (Paumgarten 2012: 45). Yet “he was also the Dead’s most inconsistent performer” particularly in the early 90s (Paumgarten 2012: 45). In some ways the music played now is better than it was in Jerry’s last few years with the Dead. On the other hand even when Jerry screwed up, his delivery could be bone-chilling especially on ballads like “So Many Roads” (GD 1999b) and “Black Muddy River” (GD 1987). There is something captivating about his imperfect voice in the later years. As Neil Cassal put it:

There’s something in his voice we could all relate to, something piercing, something penetrating about his imperfect voice; he always sounded like he was half-crying, there was a yearning, just such a humane quality to his singing, something so common yet transcendent and extraordinary and other-worldly (Relix 2012d).

Jerry's guitar playing, like his singing, was paradoxical and enigmatic. As Phil shares, Jerry "would make connections between disparate thoughts and make them fit in harmonious ways...He had that shit-between-the-toes, barnyard, down-home funkiness, and at the same time he could play the farthest-out spacey shit" (Paumgarten 2012: 45). The other members of the Dead did not receive the same attention Jerry did, but their playing could be just as deep. They all brought their own unique sensibilities to the music and so have many other musicians playing Grateful Dead music today. The key is not to imitate Jerry but to learn from him—to play with purpose, to explore the unknown, to listen and be receptive to others, and in turn feed others with joy and inspiration. At Jerry's memorial service, a choked up Bob Weir told grieving fans:

I want to ask you all to join me, not just now but daily. Take your heart. Take your faith and reflect back some of the joy that he gave you. He filled the world full of clouds of joy. Just take a little bit of that and reflect it back up to him or wherever he is and shine it back to him (Meeske 1995).

Deadheads, musicians and fans alike, continue to honor Jerry by internalizing his messages and carrying on the music and the scene.

One could argue that the Dead were a product of a particular time and place. The band was serendipitous and while the music was transcendent, it was also intimately connected to the specific members of the Dead. Jerry expressed in 1989, "I don't think we could put up with anybody else to tell you the truth! It's gone past family. It's gone past blood. We've been together and intimate for so long that it's beyond any other kind of relationship. There's just nothing that quite compares to it" (Peters 1989). The Grateful Dead does not exist as a touring act today and without Jerry perhaps the members of the Dead are not as close as they once were. The living

members deliver brilliant performances but often in separate bands. But the camaraderie and spirit of the Dead has not gone away in these separate groups or “small circles” (Mountain Girl in [Dead.net](#) 2012). Being such a long-lasting entity as the Dead were, in 1989 Jerry was asked whether the Dead were simply a “grand nostalgic trip”. Jerry responded:

I don't think anybody who comes to our shows would say that. First of all, there are kids at our shows. It's not nostalgia for them—it's happening now...The Grateful Dead has evolved—it does things. It isn't a steady state, it's not a remnant. Really, the whole thing has been slowly growing all this time. It didn't level off at some point and then people started re-energizing it. It's been gradually picking up energy (Brown, Novick 1995).

At some points the Dead grew faster and were consistently more magical than at other points, but in any era the Dead could play mediocre music and they could play brilliant music. Likewise, today the music can be executed in an uninspiring, boring manner, but it also has the potential to be fresh, exciting, and innovative. The members of the Dead were not naïve idealists. They had dark times as well as highs. Jerry reasoned, “periodically you have darkness and periodically you have light, like the way the universe is in the yin/yang symbol. There's darkness and light and it's the interplay that represents the game that we're allowed to play on this planet” (Garcia et al. 1972: 56). Over time, the musicians playing Dead music and the music itself have changed for better and/or worse. In a similar vein, the culture surrounding the Dead and the band's *mediascape* (what Revell Carr denotes as “an extensive complex of images, narratives, sounds, and meanings, which Deadheads inhabited as it was created”) have changed and will change with time (Carr 2010: 107). Carr argues:

The Grateful Dead's mediascape will only continue to grow and change as the world changes with it, and the meanings ascribed to lyrics may change with time....What

will not change is the power of the Grateful Dead's music and lyrics to transform listeners, and in turn, for those listeners to transform reality (Carr 2010: 116).

The Dead phenomenon continues to be relevant to fans of all ages. People still learn from it and innovate on the music and the scene. The Dead will never be what it was while Jerry was alive, but in honoring Jerry's spirit, Deadheads continue to create and channel the extraordinary.

When Jerry died in 1995 the fate of the Dead was uncertain. Fans were devastated and shocked. Jerry had survived a diabetic coma in 1986 and because of his tenacity and radiance, many fans like Bob Guerra felt "that guy would live forever" (Guerra 2013). As an unnamed elderly female Deadhead expressed *The End of the Road: The Final Tour '95* documentary, Jerry's death was "such a wakeup call that things can end...The Dead gave us the belief it wouldn't end, it would go on forever and so now we will have to see if it will. So your generation has to take over" (Meeske 1995). Newer generations of fans have proved as devoted and passionate about the Dead as older fans and the music and the scene have lived on since Jerry's death.

Death can be tragic and can fracture any scene. When Pigpen died in 1973 it really hurt the band. Pigpen's badass, front-man demeanor and soulful whiskey-fueled blues vocals captivated audiences, anchored the band, and helped them develop their beloved American outlaw image. When he died his former bandmates felt "aching loneliness" and were uncertain if they could continue (Lesh 2005: 213). But they persisted and found new magic and honored Pigpen's memory. As Phil put it, "I realized that Pig would always be with us, and his spirit would live in our music" (Lesh 2005: 213). The Dead experienced more tragic losses throughout their

career with the deaths of keyboardists Keith Godchaux in 1980 and Brent Mydland in 1990. While Jerry carried more weight than anyone else in the band and his loss was more pronounced, the music still went on after he died and similar to Phil's quote about Pigpen, Jerry's spirit lives on in so much music that is played today. Death has always been an integral theme in the Grateful Dead's music and scene (as suggested in the name of the band itself). Jerry argued back in 1972, "security trips are fear of death...And death is something that's been handled so incredibly awkwardly in society" (Garcia et al. 1972: 105). People are scared of death so much that they are afraid to take risks and live creative, fulfilling lives. Friedrich Nietzsche believed "death is not opposed to life: 'What is living is just a subset of what is dead, and a very rare subset'" (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 9). Robert Hunter echoed this idea in the end lyrics to "Box of Rain" (GD 1970d) about Phil Lesh's dying father, "Such a long, long time to be gone, and a short time to be there" (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 9). The members of the Dead learned to appreciate the wonders of life, and despite hardships they "chose to live and perform in the stream of becoming" and this rubbed off on their fans (Tuedio, Spector 2010: 9). Instead of mourning and fearing death excessively and sinking into bouts of depression and self-pity (handling death awkwardly), they chose to celebrate life and honor the dead by playing music and living life to the fullest.

The musicians that honor Jerry by playing his music have provided immeasurable joy for thousands of people and have really helped the Dead scene thrive over the seventeen years since Jerry's been gone. But what will the future hold? What will it be like when all of Jerry's former bandmates die? Some fans

prefer DSO to any of the other current Dead projects, but what will happen when the members of DSO die? Bob Guerra told me that after John Kadlecik left DSO, “Rob Baracco said ‘there’s only one man in the planet who could take this role right now and that’s Jeff Mattson’ and they offered him the job....who would you replace with him?” (Guerra 2013). Some of the smaller Dead bands are great, but they don’t compare to DSO in terms of how frequently they play, the number of people they draw to their shows, their sound quality, or the number of Dead songs they can execute successfully. No other Dead band (not including bands with living members who were in the Grateful Dead) has found the same degree of financial success as DSO. Members of other Dead tribute bands do not make their livings solely from playing Dead music. After all the members of the Dead and DSO pass away, I don’t know if there will ever again be a group of musicians who can support themselves solely by performing Dead music. Yet most people who play Dead music don’t do it for the money but for the joy of playing deep, collaborative music that has vast creative potential.

Dead tribute bands won’t go away. Many professional musicians and bands that love the Dead and have supported themselves playing music supplement playing Dead songs with originals (often influenced by the Dead). Most of these musicians and bands today are jam bands (some of which I’ve quoted in this paper such as Reid Genauer of Assembly of Dust and Warren Haynes of Gov’t Mule). Other musicians and bands are more surprising. In 2011 Phil Lesh formed a venue in Marin County, CA called Terrapin Crossroads inspired by Levon Helm’s legendary Midnight Rambles. The concept behind the venue, Phil explains:

I want to bring musicians who maybe have not had a lot of contact with the Grateful Dead into a band setting and work with them and engage them. It's not necessarily to teach, but to pull out of them that way of looking at music. So that they can play this music not the same way but with the same spirit, with the same perspective and goals that we did (Paumgarten 2012: 52).

Some of the musicians Phil refers to who aren't typically associated with the Dead that have played Terrapin Crossroads are God Street Wine, Les Claypool (Primus), and Chris Robinson (Black Crowes). Bob Weir carries on a similar idea as Lesh but instead of playing shows with a rotating cast of musicians in a venue, he plays them with a rotating cast in his home recording studio called TRI and films and records them, which can be streamed online. One of the best shows Weir did at TRI was 3/24/12 featuring the spacey, avant-garde, indie-rock band, the National (a band I doubt anyone would put in the jam band category).

Even after Phil and Bobby die I think the concepts of Terrapin Crossroads and TRI will live on. Musicians who are able to support themselves playing music, whether or not they sound like the Dead, will continue to play Dead tunes, but in order to make money I think most will have to play other songs (non-Dead tunes) as well. Members of local Dead tribute bands don't support themselves solely by playing in these bands, but nonetheless, they continue to play, and small Dead tribute bands do not seem to be slowing down any time soon. In fact they are burgeoning. There are now more bands playing Dead music than ever before. "The wheel is turning and it can't slow down"<sup>31</sup>. In order to find gigs and draw in fans, tribute bands can't settle for mediocre. As Bob Guerra told me about playing Dead music, "I gotta get better at it. Then if I don't who's going to come see you play? Plus you've got all these great bands out there doing it and doing it well so there's that extra sense

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<sup>31</sup> Jerry Garcia, "The Wheel", 1972.

of pressure” (Guerra 2013). This pressure doesn’t lead to band rivalries or malice. The repertoire Jerry and the Dead played is so vast and the music has so much creative potential that the bands don’t really compete but as Bob put it, it’s more like “they’re doing their thing and we’re doing our thing...As I learn more, I realize there’s so much room for improvement” (Guerra 2013). Since there is such an abundance of Dead tribute bands, they must keep striving to get better and take the music out to new places. Playing small venues in a local tribute band is not easy or glamorous. Bob told me:

Sometimes you get up there and you don’t feel good. Each one of us has played with a virus or a flu. I’ve played with kidney stones, everything and you just have to. Some nights I’ll go up and (groan) I don’t know if I can do this tonight. I’m tired and then all of a sudden it starts. It’s amazing what music does. You kind of go into another dimension and that’s a nice thing (Guerra 2013).

Music is a mystical healing force for musicians and fans alike. Phil Lesh describes the relationship in the Dead scene between musicians and the audience:

To make music for dancers like these is the rarest honor—to be coresponsible for what really is the dance of the cosmos...The fervent belief we shared then, and that perseveres today, is that the energy liberated by this combination of music and ecstatic dancing is somehow making the world *better*, or at least holding the line against the depredations of entropy and ignorance (Lesh 2005: 69).

The relationship Phil describes is beautiful and as his quote suggests the magic has not gone away.

The Dead are cosmic and mysterious, yet deeply personal. Some songs are simple and fun and about having a good time. Others are pensive and wistful. Almost all are multifaceted and address a wide gamut of emotions. Reich describes the Dead’s music as a “friend” as “it shares your moods and your downs and ups and everything” (Garcia et al. 1972: 216). For Phil, music helped him cope with the loss of his father, Pigpen’s death, drug addiction and severe depression in the 70s, and

later on Jerry's death. As he put it, music is "a healing force beyond words to describe" (Lesh 2005: 190). In Chapter 1, I relayed Merl Saunders' story about playing a show the night Jerry died and feeling Jerry's presence which gave him an urge to play. While Jerry's death devastated thousands of people, people continue to find influence in him and are urged to honor his memory by keeping the music alive. As Bob Weir put it, "As far as I'm concerned, he's still here really, inside me and all around. His leadership and his influence isn't something that disappeared with his body. I hear it whenever I'm playing" (Spies 2005).

The Dead and their fans are about friendship and family. Death can be tragic for anyone, but in the aftermath of Jerry's death, many Deadheads learned to cope and were inspired to honor their deceased loved ones through engaging in music. Bob Guerra told me the one time in his life he stopped playing guitar was when his son died. He said, "I didn't play the guitar for about two years. I just couldn't, but then I started again and at that point, I don't know what happened. Maybe he was kinda sending me signals. I started to play better" (Guerra 2013). My friend Woody isn't a musician but loves the Dead and went to hundreds of shows with his brother Barry. When Barry died, Woody was very upset, but instead of wallowing in depression and trying to forget the past, he continues to celebrate his brother's memory by seeing Dead tribute band concerts, listening to Barry's old Dead tapes, and sharing countless stories about seeing the Dead with Barry. I am fortunate and have not yet experienced the loss of the people I love the most, but I have had my share of hard times. Listening to the Dead, going to shows, and playing music has helped me get through them. My best friend is my brother Sam and some of the best

times we've had together have involved listening to the Dead and going to shows. A few years ago I wrote a song about getting through hard times by listening to the Dead with Sam, called "Walkin' these Roads", which brings me to the title of my essay. The end lyrics go:

I'll walk these roads, till the road walks me/  
Been hangin' on a thread, my covers  
torn at its seam/ I aint livin' right, numbin' my mind and scrapin' by/  
But when the music takes hold and eases my soul and I'm headin' towards the sky/  
I feel so high/  
Just dancin' along to those old roses and skulls/  
Our souls coalesce, we know ourselves the best/  
And we're brought back to the days when we were young kids/  
I don't know what's right, don't know what to believe/  
But I got you brother and brother you got me

These lyrics are fairly self-explanatory. The "skull and roses" is one of the most familiar Grateful Dead icons and the line "eases my soul" is a reference to the lyrics of one of my favorite Dead songs, "So Many Roads" (GD 1999b) ("so many roads to ease my soul"). Nothing compares to family, friends, and music. No one knows what the future may hold. I don't believe there are easy answers or shortcuts to living, and similarly the Dead never provided easy answers. The Dead illustrate that there are possibilities to be discovered and moments to be cherished. It is a scene founded on commitments to family, friends, and creating meaningful music, which fans can learn and grow from.

The ideals and magic that the members of the Dead believed in when they formed the band didn't go away—not when the 60s hippie movement fell apart, not when the Dead became immensely popular in the 80s, not even when Jerry died. The Dead and their fans are creative, determined, and resilient people. In 1993 Ken Kesey made a prophetic statement regarding the Dead: "In twenty years whoever is still alive will be workin' at what they're doing...They're going to defend it for the rest of their lives. They're warriors" (Shapiro 1993). This has proven true. Although

Jerry's death struck a big blow, it didn't irreparably destroy the music or the scene.

As Phil writes:

I continue to seek out multiple musical partners, in a quest for that elusive chemistry that comes and goes as it wishes. Sometimes 'it' happens onstage, or sometimes in rehearsal, but it always leaves me breathless and wonder-struck: The music is still *there*, waiting for us to approach, to open ourselves, to let it pass through (Lesh 2005: 332).

Phil just turned 73 and he still plays shows all the time. I believe Kesey's projection that the living Grateful Dead members (Phil, Bobby, Billy, and Mickey) will play music until they die, but the fact of the matter is, they are old and probably won't be alive in twenty years. Yet the music and the scene will be. Others have taken up the Dead's legacy, their warrior cry, and continue to spread the magic, as will more in the future. We will continue to love and create, "dancin' along to those old roses and skulls".

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