

The Living Dead: Community Love and Longevity in the Grateful Dead's Music **Grace Lott, Class of 2026**

Music has been an outlet of expression throughout history; this summer, I focused my attention on the last tour of the Grateful Dead (now grouped as Dead & Company), a staple of the acid tests and broader 1960s counterculture. It is quickly apparent to anyone attending a Dead & Company show that the Dead and their music are anything but a relic of their time. Rather than a remnant of history, the Dead community is alive and growing, with intergenerationally being one of its defining features. A substantial portion of the devoted fan base never had an encounter with the original band – myself included. However, this has no bearing on the devotion of show attendees. The intense, often spiritual connection that grew between the music and the band's original devotees is maintained in 2023, even reaching a much wider audience. The gathering space of a concert is steeped in not only love for the music, but love for the people at the show; the community space is just as cherished as the music itself. Bobby Weir, an original and current member of the band, described a Dead show as not a band performance and not an audience gathering, but rather something that happens in the air between the two. The Grateful Dead's music has a modern relevance that demands attention, and that is completely unlike any other music from the same era.



This project was a privilege to complete. Throughout this process, I witnessed the stigma and derision that is often directed at the Dead, no less at someone trying to bring the subject into academia. These sentiments *only* ever came from people unfamiliar with or outside of the community of Deadheads. The Deadhead community, those that may only attend one show or those that follow the whole tour (as is very common), are the kindest and most welcoming community I have ever had the pleasure to be a part of. I have found the general attitude of Deadheads, with a great intent toward deeper meanings and toward listening most of all, to be analogous to the attitude of a student. So, my role as a student researcher and a community member found a natural existence. The photographic portion of my project was very successful, and I believe it will be a valuable aid to teaching people about the community; the photo featured here is of a spinner at the first show in San Francisco, on July 14th.

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