

Blueswax.com

The Grateful Dead & Various Artists

Dawn of the Dead & The Rise of the San Francisco Underground (DVD) (MVD Visual)

BluesWax Rating: 8

Bob Putignano reviews "Dawn of the Dead & The Rise of the San Francisco Underground." He says that you might really like it, "...if you are into a good flashback." Chip Eagle for Blueswax & Blues Revue Magazine.

Flashback: Can You Pass the Acid Test?

During the mid 1960s, psychedelic music became a movement that was born out of San Francisco. The local scene, and more specifically the Bay Area, musicians started experimenting (in more ways than with the music) with folk, country blues, and rock 'n' roll. The new blended sounds were typically created while they were under the influence of drugs, and this revolutionary era eventually exploded and caught the nation and the world by storm. But make no doubt about it that San Francisco was the epicenter of it all.

Dawn of the Dead is not just about the **Grateful Dead**, though they are the main focus. Other period bands are shown and talked about to some degree: **The Jefferson Airplane**, **Quicksilver Messenger Service**, **Janis Joplin** with **Big Brother & the Holding Company**, and others are all shown performing live from way back in the day.

There are also many interview segments with **Rock Scully**, **Peter Albin** of Big Brother, Dead publicist Dennis McNally, *The Grateful Dead Hour's* David Gans, Merry Prankster Ken Babbs, The Charlatans Mike Willhelm, and journalists Robert Christgau, Ritchie Unterberger, and my old grammar school and high school buddy Anthony DeCurtis of *Rolling Stone* magazine fame. For a two hour-plus documentary this video moves along at a non-boring pace, as the performances and interview segments are sequenced smartly. Highlights include **Tom Canstanten** saying how "Dark Star" was the perfect vehicle for the Dead to go all the way out there then come back to some sort of reality. There are also chapters on the making of *Anthem of the Sun*, which was the live performance/studio LP where the Dead paid to learn how to work in the recording studio. Bill Graham advising the Dead to write some songs! **Jerry Garcia** telling a story about how mad he was with **Phil Lesh** after they performed, and threw him down a flight of stairs. Jerry also says he was pretty high. There's talk about how, after *Anthem of the Sun*, Warner Brothers was growing skeptical of the band, and how the label wanted a live album, and the way the Dead were able to negotiate a three-record deal of the *Aoxomoxoa* studio recording and the two-LP (now legendary) *Live Dead*. Afterwards how the Hunter/Garcia songwriting team gained "accessible" acceptance with the back-to-back (more acoustic-based) *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* that basically formulated the band to begin to tour the world as a *tour de force* powerhouse band. Plus the Altamont concert fiasco (with the Hells Angels) is also featured with several performances. I also really enjoyed watching footage of Bill Graham tossing a musician out of his offices for cursing him; Graham was definitely (and legendary) for being one tough guy who took no bull, and this is very clear here.

Whether you like this era and music or not, there's no denying that psychedelic music changed the world. *Dawn of the Dead* shows how a lot of it went down and how the counter-culture movement soured too. So this documentary is fair at showing both sides of the rise and fall of what many thought was going to be a new dawn. That being said: I definitely enjoyed this video, and suspect you might too, especially if you are into a good flashback.

Bob Putignano is a contributing editor at BluesWax and the heart of Sounds of Blues.com