

Search



ABOUT | SUBMISSIONS | ADVERTISING | STAFF



FEATURES ▾ COLUMNS ▾ BLOGS ▾ NEWS ▾ MUSIC ▾ FILM ▾ TELEVISION ▾ DVDS ▾ BOOKS ▾ COMICS ▾ MULTIMEDIA ▾ EVENTS ▾ CULTURE ▾

### DVDs

Home > DVDs > Reviews



## 'Grateful Dead: Dawn of the Dead' Could Use More Life

By **Jedd Beaudoin** 23 May 2012

It took the Grateful Dead some time--and LSD--after its 1965 founding to become the great experimental force it was in its prime (and beyond). This overly long documentary treads familiar ground and winds and winnows its way twixt 1965 and 1969 with occasional mastery. The title promises that the film will touch on other bands from the San Francisco area and indeed Big Brother & The Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, and the lesser-known band The Charlatans get some play. But they are, for better or worse, ancillary to the tale of Jerry & Co.

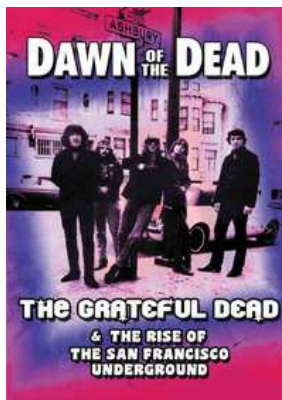
For those who are new to Dead scholarship, the story goes like this: Flung together by friendship and the fates the various members of the original Grateful Dead had wide musical tastes--guitarist Jerry Garcia was a prodigious banjo picker who loved bluegrass, his guitar student Bob Weir loved gritty blues; drummer Bill Kreutzmann could claim an interest in jazz, vocalist/keyboardist/harmonica man Ron "Pigpen" McKernan loved his R&B and bassist Phil Lesh pledged allegiance to serialist composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez.

The band was primarily a dance hall covers act until the introduction of LSD into the SF scene and the subsequent expansion of the universe. Ken Kesey and The Merry Pranksters helped this along, as did the inimitable music promoter Bill Graham (you'll love the footage of him doing his best tough guy bit), and acid guru Stanley "Bear" Owsley. The Dead lived together in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood until the area was overrun with teenage ne'er-do-wells who thought they could live for free and wear flowers in their hair. A drug bust meant the band no longer lived together and that The Haight, by 1968, was Paradise Lost.

The Dead, for its part, created some of the least accessible music of the era, via albums such as *Anthem of the Sun* (1968) and *Aoxomoxoa* (1969), which collapsed the band's disparate influences with varying degrees of artistic success and virtually no degree of commercial acceptance.

As the '60s ended by calendar the tragic concert at the Altamont Speedway slammed the railroad spikes in the decade's coffin and the freewheelin' and freelovin' bands of the psychedelic era had to atone--which the Dead did with two gorgeous 1970 albums, *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*.

In short, *Dawn of the Dead* tells the familiar story of the Dead in its earliest years, albeit in one concise package. Tom "T.C." Constanten (the only keyboardist, save Bruce Hornsby, to have survived beyond his tenure with the band), former manager Rock Scully, Big Brother's Peter Albin, Mike Willhelm of The Charlatans and Dead biographer/publicist Dennis McNally all turn up as does



### Dawn of the Dead: The Grateful Dead & The Rise of The San Francisco Underground

(US DVD: 22 May 2012)

[Amazon](#)

Like

PRINT

EMAIL

0 COMMENTS

SHARE

Text: **A** **A** **A**

### NOW ON POPMATTERS

Today • Recent • Popular • Discussed

#### Features

Flash Points: Chicks, Sluts and Facebook  
Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup

#### Columns

PRINT THE LEGEND: Sherlock Holmes, Dirk Gently and the Case of the Eccentric Detective

#### Blogs

MOVING PIXELS: 'The Witcher 2' Does the Exposition Dump Right

[More](#) ↓

### PM PICKS



### FILM ARCHIVE

A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K |

journalist and DJ David Gans, plus critics Robert Christgau, Ritchie Unterberger, and Anthony De Curtis.

If you don't already know the Dead story and are looking for a quick and dirty primer, this will do the trick. But McNally's *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* or the Classic Albums DVD *Anthem To Beauty* offer a more nuanced discussion of the band and its early history.

Extras include a forgettable performance of the song "Fell In The Crack" by Ken Babbs and Walker T. Ryan and contributor biographies. The DVD box suggests that extended interviews are included but they are not.

**Rating:** **Extras rating:**

L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V |  
W | X | Y | Z | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |  
8 | 9 | 0 |

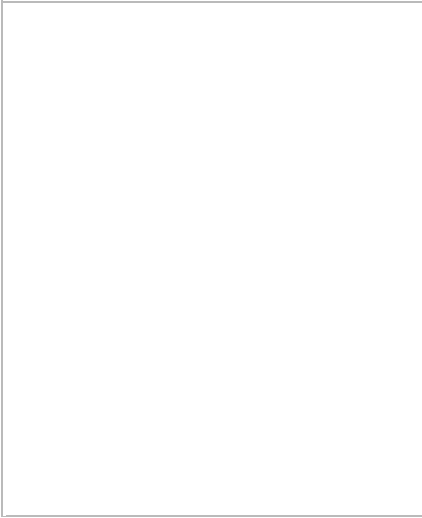
**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Call for Papers: PopMatters Celebrates The Jam in Massive Special Section  
Call for Music Critics and Music Bloggers

**More**

Like

**MEDIA**



**COMMENTS**

Like

Add New Comment

[Login](#)



Showing 0 comments

Sort by popular now

[Subscribe by email](#) [RSS](#)

**RATINGS**

- 10** - The Best of the Best
- 9** - Very Nearly Perfect
- 8** - Excellent
- 7** - Damn Good
- 6** - Good
- 5** - Average
- 4** - Unexceptional
- 3** - Weak
- 2** - Seriously Flawed
- 1** - Terrible