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## Music DVD Review: Grateful Dead - Dawn of the Dead

By Greg Barbrick, BLOGCRITICS.ORG  
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In addition to being a fairly cleverly titled [Grateful Dead](#) documentary, *Dawn of The Dead* tells a pretty fascinating story. The newly released DVD mainly concentrates on the first five years of the band, and of the San Francisco sound in general during the mid-to-late '60s. If any group epitomizes the power, light show, and free-flowing music scene of that era, it is the good old Grateful Dead.



The various members of the group had been kicking around the Bay Area coffeehouse folk world during the ear

decade. Like just about everyone else though, they were inspired to "go electric

**The Beatles.** After some false starts as The Warlocks, The Grateful Dead came during **Ken Kesey's** legendary Acid Tests. They became the "house band" for th which were designed to basically recreate the LSD experience.

For a number of reasons, there happened to be a great deal of very talented m San Francisco during those years. There was also a budding promoter by the n **Graham** in town. While the Acid Tests provided the template for what would e a huge industry, it took the entrepreneurial Graham to capitalize on what Kes had pioneered.

Most music fans know the basic hippie-trip synopsis. 1967 was the summer of tremendous strife and the assassinations of **Martin Luther King Jr.** and **Robert** was the year of Woodstock, followed by the tragic Altamont concert. In 1970, back and began "tending their own gardens," as it were.

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What makes *Dawn of The Dead* so interesting is not so much the history, but the insider's view of it that we get to see through the Dead's eyes. One very effective ploy is to show how the group's albums during this period evolved, and reflected the world around them. While their first album, simply titled *The Grateful Dead* (1967) was not an unmitigated disaster, it is widely agreed that they were simply not ready to enter the studio when it was recorded. They were still in many ways a "street" band, and had not yet defined their music, outside of the jam element.

Their second effort, *Anthem of the Sun* (1968) was much closer to the avant-garde spirit they embodied, perhaps too much for some. Like the first album, it did not exactly set the world on fire sales-wise. There was still a huge hype around all things related to San Francisco however, so the label green-lit what would eventually become *Aoxomoxoa* (1969).

As a studio entity, the guys were still finding their way. During one of the interviews, former manager **Rock Scully** explains that they were about \$100,000 into recording *Aoxomoxoa*, and the pressure was really on. So they struck a deal to release a live double album as a stopgap, which would essentially give Warner Bros. three albums for the price of one. It was a brilliant move for the band, because it not only calmed the executives down, but *Live/Dead* (1969) was the best representation of what The Grateful Dead were all about that anyone could ask for.

Although there is some interview footage with **Jerry Garcia** included from as late as 1993, the timeline of the film basically ends in 1970. That year saw them "getting back to their roots" with the release of *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty*. It is an appropriate place to stop, because the band was entering the next phase of what would become a very long and rewarding career. *Dawn of The Dead* does a fine job of detailing those crucial first years, and is recommended.

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