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A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History Of The Grateful Dead



Synopsis

The complete history of one of the most long-lived and legendary bands in rock history, written by its official historian and publicist—a must-have chronicle for all Dead Heads, and for students of rock and the 1960s™ counterculture. From 1965 to 1995, the Grateful Dead flourished as one of the most beloved, unusual, and accomplished musical entities to ever grace American culture. The creative synchronicity among Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann, Mickey Hart, and Ron âœPigpenâ • McKernan exploded out of the artistic ferment of the early sixtiesâ™ roots and folk scene, providing the soundtrack for the Dionysian revels of the counterculture. To those in the know, the Dead was an ongoing tour de force: a band whose constant commitment to exploring new realms lay at the center of a thirty-year journey through an ever-shifting array of musical, cultural, and mental landscapes. Dennis McNally, the bandâ™s historian and publicist for more than twenty years, takes readers back through the Deadâ™s history in *A Long Strange Trip*. In a kaleidoscopic narrative, McNally not only chronicles their experiences in a fascinatingly detailed fashion, but veers off into side trips on the bandâ™s intricate stage setup, the magic of the Grateful Dead concert experience, or metaphysical musings excerpted from a conversation among band members. He brings to vivid life the Deadâ™s early days in late-sixties San Francisco—“an era of astounding creativity and change that reverberates to this day. Here we see the group at its most raw and powerful, playing as the house band at Ken Keseyâ™s acid tests, mingling with such legendary psychonauts as Neal Cassady and Owsley âœBearâ • Stanley, and performing the alchemical experiments, both live and in the studio, that produced some of their most searing and evocative music. But McNally carries the Deadâ™s saga through the seventies and into the more recent years of constant touring and incessant musical exploration, which have cemented a unique bond between performers and audience, and created the business enterprise that is much more a family than a corporation. Written with the same zeal and spirit that the Grateful Dead brought to its music for more than thirty years, the book takes readers on a personal tour through the bandâ™s inner circle, highlighting its frenetic and very human faces. *A Long Strange Trip* is not only a wide-ranging cultural history, it is a definitive musical biography.

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed this book. I learned about the Dead, and the general environment that their characters, culture, and music developed in. The majority of the book chronicles the early years of the Dead, with less and less time being spent documenting the later years. At first, I was disappointed that not enough time was devoted to developing the 'characters'. Relatively few quotes are attributed directly to band members, and there is not much characterization of the band members in general. Towards the end of the book, more of this happens, and I realize why it was good that the majority of this book didn't concentrate on this. Its petty, and one-dimensional, and (most importantly) doesn't have a lot to do with 'The Grateful Dead' and their music. I believe there are many more books which do more of the gossip thing, but this book is intentionally not about that. It carefully develops and follows the Dead, their music, and their cultural and musical upbringing. McNally does a great job of putting just the right amount of generic historical information within the story to give it some context and relevance. The only thing I didn't understand, and wish he would have developed further are some internal conflicts within the band early on. He spends a good amount of time explaining that Jerry and Phil were pretty set on 'firing' Pigpen and Weir. He never really explains why, except for a brief mention of Weir's general spaciness, and uninspired guitar playing. Pigpen was co-frontman in the early days, and for good reason. He was a great performer, and gave a side to the dead that was never replaced. McNally mentions they wanted a better keyboardist, but personally I loved Pig's minimalist approach, and organ sound.

I have just finished reading McNally's "truth be told" novel on the span of the Grateful Dead's 30 year adventure into the world of insanity and chaos. Told from the point of view of an insider, rather than a biographer outside of the Dead community, McNally's book gives a great deal of insight into the multiple personalities, conflicts, exploits, and adventures that made the Dead Family who they

were. His story, coming from someone who was there, is told in a very honest manner, and it is one that any fan of the Dead will doubtless find addictive and entertaining. He doesn't write from the perspective of a fanatic, and doesn't sugar-coat anything. His stories are honest, yet he doesn't try and pass them off as fact, acknowledging frequently that other versions of the stories exist (honestly, who could actually expect anyone inside the Dead community to remember every little detail?). When times were good, McNally tells the story and takes the reader along on an adventure. When times were rough, he tells it, and while some of the stories, like those from the 90s, are hard for a fan like myself to read, he tells it like it is. The structure of the book is very well done, using an obvious chronological organization, with occasional chapters acting as interludes that describe a Grateful Dead show from the unloading of the equipment, through the setbreaks, and to the band getting on their flight for the next gig. The organization is well done, and makes for a very interesting read. The balance of the novel, however, gets off a little bit. He starts off with the very beginnings of each musician, and goes into great detail about how the Grateful Dead was formed, and about how they became the travelling behemoth that they were.

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