

Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation

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More than fifteen years since the death of lead guitarist and singer Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead stand as a symbol of the unresolved cultural clashes of the 1960s. The band's thirty-year odyssey is a testament to the American imagination, with thousands of live concert recordings by fans and the band itself, preserved alongside an impressive array of images, artwork, and paraphernalia. Most recently, the Grateful Dead have released from their vault their entire 1972 European tour, one of the largest boxed sets of live music—seventy-three compact discs—ever released. This publicly available archive of recorded music lays the groundwork for David Malvinni's exploration of the band's musical signature as the ultimate jam band in *Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation*. Malvinni considers a select group of songs from the Dead's early repertoire, from its unique covers of "Viola Lee Blues," "Midnight Hour," and "Love Light" to original masterpieces like "Dark Star." Marrying basic music analysis to philosophical frames offered by improvisatory musings of Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze, Malvinni presents the core aesthetic underlying the Dead's musical styling.

In tracing the evolution of the band's unique jam style, Malvinni outlines the Dead's gift as gatherers and inventors of old and new soundscapes in their multifaceted improvisations. Like no other band, the Dead brought together a variety of styles from roots and folk to country and modal jazz to postmodern European art music. Devoted Deadheads reveled in the band's polyglot, risk-filled approach to playing live and the joint band-audience quest to reach a type of sonic cosmic ecstasy, commonly described as the "X factor."

Although fans and scholars alike recognize the Grateful Dead as icons of psychedelic music, the band's improvisatory approach still remains an enigma to the uninitiated. In *Grateful Dead and the Art of Rock Improvisation*, Malvinni unravels this mystery, walking readers through the band's musical decision-making process. Written for rock music fans with little to no background in music theory, as well as scholars and students of popular music culture, the book reveals the method behind the seeming chaos of America's greatest jam band.

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Patti Wooden:

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Nancy Sherman:

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