

# Note worthy/

## the Grateful Dead

At a time when only a handful of the big rock groups remain from the 60's, each Grateful Dead appearance has become an event rather than just a concert.

Last year the San Francisco-based group drew 150,000 fans to Englishtown — the largest gathering for an entertainment event in New Jersey history. On Saturday they will play Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, and over 25,000 tickets were sold the first day they were available.

Why such popularity for a group seldom found on a Billboard list of top record sales or heard on an AM radio station?

Part of the reason is the vast cult following the Dead have accumulated in their 13 years of existence. The first song on their first album was "The Golden Road (to unlimited devotion)," and for many of their fans (known in rock circles as deadheads) who travel great distances to see a performance, that first song has special meaning.

Another reason is the decreasing number of rock bands remaining from the 60's. The Beatles, the Byrds, the Allman Brothers, the Band, and Lovin' Spoonful used to dominate the airwaves.

Today they have been replaced by solo performers and a wave of pop/disco oriented bands. To their fans, the Grateful Dead are a monument to the spirit of the 60's and survivors in the billion-dollar music industry of the 70's.

Formed by lead guitarist Jerry Garcia in Palo Alto, Calif., in 1965, the group still has three other original members: Bob Weir on rhythm guitar, Phil Lesh on bass, and Bill Kreutzmann on drums. A second drummer, Mickey Hart, was added in 1967, and Keith and Donna Godchaux came aboard in the early 70's for keyboard and vocal backup. Original member Ron "Pigpen" McKernan died in 1973 from a liver disorder.

The group was originally known as the Warlocks. The name Grateful Dead was acquired one afternoon while Garcia and Lesh were pondering a 1912 edition of "Bartlett's Quotations." Garcia came upon the collected ballads of Francis Child, an American scholar who had grouped English and Scottish folksongs into 10 categories—one of which he called Grateful Dead.

In the beginning, the Dead's music was inspired by LSD and the group aimed at sustaining levels of intense energy while departing from the use of time as a measure of a song's or concert's length. During this period, it was not unusual for a concert to run six or seven hours.

In the late 60's the Dead became less drug-oriented and began to fuse elements of country, jazz, and blues into what has become their distinctive rock sound. The group has produced 15 albums containing more than 175 songs.

As single artists, five of the group's members have produced at least one album.

But the Dead have always fared better as a live act. Weir once described the band's going into a recording studio as "a camel becoming a racehorse by committee." Most of their albums have not sold well, and their latest release, "Terrapin Station," was produced by Keith Olsen of Fleetwood Mac fame in an attempt to get a more commercially viable album.

As the Dead influenced the 60's with their communal lifestyle, revolutionary sound systems, and drug-inspired music, they have also tried to pave some new roads in the 70's with their self-made movie, "The Grateful Dead." Although viewed as an artistic success by most critics, the film, which took more than two years to complete, put the band into debt and did not draw well at the box office.

But despite these and other problems over the years, the group has survived. "Our scene is always healthiest when it's really struggling," said Garcia in a Rolling Stone interview in 1973. "Basically our situation is on the borderline of collapse all the time anyway."

The group's legendary song "Truckin'" concludes:

Sometimes the light is shining on me.  
Other times I can barely see.

Lately it's occurred to me,

What a long, strange trip it's been.

For the Grateful Dead and their devoted following, hopefully the long, strange trip will continue.

— BILL GLOVIN