

# GRATEFUL DEAD STUDIES

---

Volume 4

2019/2020

---

ISSN 2572-7818 (Online)

ISSN 2572-7702 (Print)

---

Dolgushkin, Mike

Review: Grateful Dead, *Thirty Trips Around the Sun*

---

## CITATION INFORMATION

Mike Dolgushkin

Grateful Dead, *Thirty Trips Around the Sun*

**Grateful Dead Studies**

Volume 4 (2019/2020)

Pages: 267–272

URL: [http://gratefuldeadstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GDSv4\\_Dolgushkin.pdf](http://gratefuldeadstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GDSv4_Dolgushkin.pdf)

---

## LICENSE

Download of this Grateful Dead Studies Licensed Content (hereafter Content) constitutes acceptance of the following terms and conditions: Provided they abide by the restrictions below, users may search, view, reproduce, display, download, print, perform, and distribute Content for the following Permitted Uses: research activities; classroom or organizational instruction and related classroom or organizational activities; student assignments; as part of a scholarly, cultural, educational or organizational presentation or workshop, if such use conforms to the customary and usual practice in the field; authors or other Content creators may at their discretion incorporate their Content into unrestricted databases or websites with prior written permission from Grateful Dead Studies.

The portions of Content that have been downloaded or printed out by a User may continue to be used in compliance with these Terms and Conditions even if such license should later terminate or expire.

Users may not: use or authorize the use of the Grateful Dead Studies Licensed Content for commercial purposes or gains, including charging a fee-for-service; undertake any activity such as the use of computer programs that automatically download or export Content, commonly known as web robots, spiders, crawlers, wanderers or accelerators that may interfere with, disrupt or otherwise burden the Grateful Dead Studies server(s) or any third-party server(s) being used or accessed in connection with Grateful Dead Studies; or undertake coordinated or systematic activity between or among two or more individuals and/or entities that, in the aggregate, constitutes downloading and/or distributing a significant portion of the Content; or make any use, display, performance, reproduction, or distribution that exceeds or violates these Terms and Conditions of Use.

Additionally, users may not: modify, obscure, or remove any copyright notice or other attribution included in the Content; incorporate Content into an unrestricted database or website; systematically print out or download Content to stock or replace print holdings; download or print, or attempt to download or print, an entire issue; reproduce or distribute Content in bulk, such as the inclusion of Content in course packs, electronic reserves, repositories, or organizational intranets.

Grateful Dead Studies encourages the use of links to facilitate access to the Content.

Grateful Dead. *Thirty Trips Around the Sun*. Rhino R2 547369, 2015. 80 CD box set with 45 rpm record, 288-page book, and poster. \$699.98.

MIKE DOLGUSHKIN

The year 2015 marked fifty years since the Grateful Dead began their long strange trip. This anniversary gathered much attention all over the world and spotlighted the phenomenon of a band that has not existed for twenty years, but is still attracting new fans. The highlight of the year was a series of performances, two in Santa Clara, California, and three in Chicago, by the actual band—or the closest lineup to it possible. With Phish’s Trey Anastasio substituting for Jerry Garcia on lead guitar, enough of the old Grateful Dead spirit came across to make the shows a satisfying experience. Of course, a great deal of merchandise also appeared during the anniversary year. In particular, several books were published that explored the Grateful Dead’s music and cultural footprint in new and unique ways. But Rhino Entertainment, who had been issuing a special annual box set for some years, could not let this opportunity pass unmarked and released *Thirty Trips Around the Sun*, containing one concert from each year spanning 1966 to 1995. While illustrating the futility of attempting anything close to a “definitive” Grateful Dead compilation, this release stands as a highly enjoyable collection and a thorough journey through the band’s history, stopping off once a year to take a snapshot of the Dead’s musical development.

The exact number of concerts the Grateful Dead performed will never be known for certain, but a good estimate is around 2,300. Recordings of about 2,000 of these circulate among fans and, in the decades since tape trading began, popular consensus has designated numerous shows as classics. Performances such as February 13, 1970, and April 29, 1971, at the Fillmore East; May 2, 1970, at Harpur College; August 27, 1972, at Veneta, Oregon; and May 8, 1977, at Cornell University, have long been recognized as among the best and therefore the most sought-after Grateful Dead concerts. But recordings of these upper-echelon shows

tended to catch fans' attention at a time when not many shows circulated, and merely reflected the best of what was available. Their status has not diminished in the years since, but as exponentially more recordings made their way into fans' collections, other concerts considered equally good became recognized. Some became exalted on a par with those mentioned above, but others just as good did not, for whatever reasons. Accordingly, it is possible to pick a seemingly unknown concert at random from the vast number available and often be amazed by its performance quality.<sup>1</sup>

The vast number of available Grateful Dead concerts, however, provide satisfying to excellent listening without falling into the "legendary" category. And this is where the majority of those selected for *Thirty Trips Around the Sun* fall. To be sure, two of the released performances, November 10, 1967, and September 28, 1975, qualify as outstanding due to the very paucity of shows and/or recordings from those two years. Others come close to that as well, among them the 1970, 1979, 1982, and 1989 offerings. Many, however, fall somewhat short of the very best the band played. For example, the September 18, 1974, concert from Dijon, France, is a very good show from that year but pales in comparison to such monsters as February 23–24, June 18, August 6, and at least two of the October Winterland performances. The 1968 offering from October 20 at the Greek is a curious choice given what is available and unreleased from that year. The 1977 show is especially odd, a run-of-the-mill concert from what is widely considered an outstanding year. But a better comparison can be made between the 1973 selection, from November 14 in San Diego, with Dave's Picks 16, the March 28 show in Springfield from the same year. While the former is a solid and sometimes great performance with a quirky song selection, the latter is a long-recognized classic.

This choice suggests that the shows selected for *Thirty Trips Around the Sun* are meant to provide as much of a chronological overview as can be managed, with the truly outstanding shows saved for individual release. But what of the fact that the thirty shows in the box cover only the years 1966–1995, ignoring 1965? No extant live recordings from 1965 exist, so a special 45-rpm vinyl record containing "Caution" from the November 3, 1965, Autumn Records studio session, backed with the July

9, 1995, “Box of Rain,” the last song the Grateful Dead ever performed, has been included as well.

If none of the shows in this set are completely representative of their particular years, it should be noted that no Grateful Dead concert can make that claim. Still, other performances than those included here might have been selected to better explain where that particular year fits into the band’s musical development. The March 20, 1992, show from Hamilton, Ontario, for example, contains none of the new material that had been premiered earlier in the year. The same can be said about July 3, 1988, at Oxford Speedway. While it does contain the new Mydland tune “I Will Take You Home,” the night before featured good versions of “Victim or the Crime,” “Foolish Heart,” and “Blow Away,” which would have better highlighted the new material that was so much a part of that tour. On the other hand, the November 28, 1980, show from Lakeland, Florida, contains two electrified tunes that were played acoustically during the Warfield, New Orleans, and Radio City runs in October, which definitely colored the very end of that year (Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1999, 50, 73, 85–86).

Those looking for a complete or nearly complete representation of the Dead’s live repertoire throughout the years will be frustrated by *Thirty Trips Around the Sun*. Several tunes, such as “Might as Well,” are conspicuous in their absence, and repetition abounds. Both the 1972 and 1973 shows open with “Big Railroad Blues.” The second sets of the 1991 and 1992 shows both end with “Standing on the Moon” into “Turn On Your Love Light.” Five shows open with “Hell in a Bucket” and none with “Promised Land,” one of the band’s most common lead-off tunes. But this is ameliorated largely by the inclusion of a chart that lists each song the Grateful Dead played live and the years they were included in the repertoire, arranged chronologically by debut date (Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1999, 202–03).

Another feature of *Thirty Trips Around the Sun* that helps to contextualize the featured concerts is Nicholas Meriwether’s lengthy essay, “Shadow Boxing the Apocalypse: An Alternate History of the Grateful Dead.” This piece is structured much like the box set itself: broken down

by year plus a paragraph or two introducing each decade. Each year's touring schedule is described with the released show serving as a centerpiece, surrounded by a narrative detailing what was going on around the band and the cultural currents occurring at the time. Much good visual material, largely selected by Meriwether in his capacity as Grateful Dead Archivist at UC Santa Cruz, illustrates the essay: posters, photos, band contracts, even Vault Archivist Dick Latvala's tape notes, all serve to remind us that the shows presented here did not take place in a vacuum, musical or otherwise, and that the history recounted in the essay helped to inform the Grateful Dead's music.

For example, in the 1967 segment of this essay Meriwether mentions the addition of lyricist Robert Hunter and percussionist Mickey Hart to the band during September, and the fact that the featured concert from November 10 was recorded in multitrack by Warner Bros. for a possible live release. The 1973 portion relates Pigpen's death, the touching letter his father wrote to the band afterwards, the fact that two horn players joined the band for the September tour, and excerpts reviews of the featured concert on November 14. Elsewhere one finds information on changes to the repertoire, details of changes in the sound systems, and reports on changes in the band's management structure.

Meriwether's essay comes to us in an attractively bound book. Turn it upside down and the other side presents reminiscences and impressions from Deadheads and from interested observers related to or who worked for the band. These tales range from seeing the band for the first time to meeting Garcia in a hotel lobby to selling a San Francisco policeman an extra ticket. These, too, serve to complete the story, a reminder that as band members always noted, the band truly did not consist only of the musicians on stage. Most of all, these reflections and anecdotes remind us that the Grateful Dead meant something different to each participant, a quality that continues today.

Grateful Dead archivist David Lemieux's liner notes for each of the thirty shows give insights into why they were selected. The criteria appear to have been based on a good song here, a good song there, an atypical sequence, or a tune unusual for its time. For the September 24, 1972, concert in Waterbury, Connecticut, Lemieux mentions the expansive "Bird

Song” and the fact that the thirty-five-minute “Dark Star” segues not into “Morning Dew” or “Sugar Magnolia” but into “China Cat Sunflower,” an unusual move. For the May 14, 1978, show in Providence, he notes that the second-set-ending sequence does not feature the usual ballad. That may be the best way to approach a project like this: to select shows that might not stand on their own as individual releases but nonetheless offer good and often great listening.

And the best way to enjoy such an expansive set is to listen to the shows in chronological order and forget about the criticisms detailed here. When you do, the box *will* provide a sense of how the Grateful Dead’s music developed over the years, and it is an amazing survey indeed. Nor is it necessarily unrepresentative: if March 20, 1992, was the only show of that tour you saw, for example, you would not have heard any of the new material live. That would have been your experience of that time and it would be no less valid than anyone else’s, and that perspective can be extended to every other show in *Thirty Trips* as well.

Another significant development is Rhino’s release of *Thirty Trips Around the Sun* as not only a deluxe box set but also on a 128-gigabyte flash drive. This option recognizes that many Grateful Dead fans are no longer collecting their music in a physical format but are storing it on hard drives and listening via computer. Perhaps this will lead to more concerts being available for download, which the band tried a few years ago but abandoned.

In the liner notes for the Grateful Dead box set *So Many Roads (1965–1995)*, Blair Jackson described the selection process as “quite a challenge. How do you boil down 30 years of inspired composition and improvisation into five CDs? You can’t” (1999, 51). Nor can you boil that down to eighty compact discs and a seven-inch single. Indeed, it is almost impossible to produce a truly comprehensive overview of the Grateful Dead’s musical history. Given that, *Thirty Trips Around the Sun* does an admirable job of presenting the Grateful Dead’s music and history over their remarkable three-decade career. The fact that the overwhelming majority of these tracks were unreleased is all the more remarkable. David Lemieux is to be congratulated for this achievement, and Rhino deserves particular accolades, not only for its creative and compelling packaging

but most of all for its commitment to such a mammoth, welcome, and admirable undertaking.

---

## NOTE

1. See, for example, Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1988, 222, 224–25, 227; Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1989, 317–18, 336; Scott, Dolgushkin, and Nixon 1999, 131–44; Getz and Dwork 1998, 225–32, 243–47, 329–30, 401–11; Getz and Dwork 1999, 153–56.

## WORKS CITED

- Getz, Michael M., and John W. Dwork, eds. 1998. *The Deadhead's Taping Compendium*. Vol. 1, New York: Henry Holt.
- , eds. 1999. *The Deadhead's Taping Compendium*. Vol. 2, New York: Henry Holt.
- Jackson, Blair. 1999. "On the Selection Process." In *So Many Roads (1965–1995)*, by the Grateful Dead, 51–53. Arista GDCD 4066, 1999, 5 compact discs.
- Scott, John, Mike Dolgushkin, and Stu Nixon. 1988. *DeadBase: The Complete Guide To Grateful Dead Song Lists*. 2nd ed., Cornish, NH: DeadBase.
- . 1989. *DeadBase: The Complete Guide To Grateful Dead Song Lists*. 3rd ed., Cornish, NH: DeadBase.
- . 1999. *DeadBase: The Complete Guide To Grateful Dead Song Lists*. 11th ed., Cornish, NH: DeadBase.

MIKE DOLGUSHKIN, a 291-show veteran, is coauthor of *DeadBase*, the definitive performance reference series for the Dead. A poster artist since 1984, his Hot Tomato Studios has designed hundreds of posters and flyers for Bay Area musicians. A frequent contributor to Dead-related journals, he is a processing archivist in the California history section at the California State Library.