

GRATEFUL DEAD STUDIES

Volume 4

2019/2020

ISSN 2572-7818 (Online)

ISSN 2572-7702 (Print)

Richardson, Peter

Review: Rosie McGee, *Dancing with the Dead*; Rhoney Gissen Stanley, *Owsley and Me*

CITATION INFORMATION

Peter Richardson

Rosie McGee, *Dancing with the Dead*; Rhoney Gissen Stanley, *Owsley and Me*

Grateful Dead Studies

Volume 4 (2019/2020)

Pages: 244–248

URL: http://gratefuldeadstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GDSv4_Richardson.pdf

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REVIEWS

Rosie McGee. *Dancing with the Dead: A Photographic Memoir*. Rohnert Park, CA: TIOLI Press and Bytes, 2013. Softcover, 322 pp. ISBN 9780984985210. \$22.99.

Rhoney Gissen Stanley, with Tom Davis. *Owsley and Me: My LSD Family*. Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2012. Softcover, vi + 271 pp. ISBN 9780983358930. \$15.95.

PETER RICHARDSON

More than two decades after the dissolution of the Grateful Dead, the literature about the band continues to expand steadily. That trend accelerated in 2015, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the band's formation. So far, the literary output has been long on memoir—no surprise, perhaps, given that the Dead were part of a generation and art scene that placed enormous emphasis on intense experience. Robert Hunter's lyric about the Dead's long, strange trip only hints at the nature of that experience.

A handful of figures in the band's inner circle have recounted their versions of that trip. Mickey Hart weighed in early with *Drumming at the Edge of Magic* (1990), which he coauthored with Jay Stevens. Rock Scully, who wore several hats in the Dead organization, collaborated with David Dalton to produce *Living with the Dead* in 1996. With the help of Joe Layden, crewmember Steve Parish added his account, *Home Before Daylight*, in 2003. Two years after that, bassist Phil Lesh's *Searching for the Sound* became the bestselling Dead memoir by far. In 2010, Sam Cutler contributed *You Can't Always Get What You Want*, and though the title reflects Cutler's stint with the Rolling Stones, his experience as the Dead's road manager makes up a substantial fraction of the book. Drummer Bill Kreutzmann's memoir appeared in 2015, and lyricist John Perry Barlow's was published in 2018.

Two other works directly complement these personal accounts: *Bill Graham Presents* (1992), which the rock impresario coauthored with Robert Greenfield, and *Dark Star* (1996), Greenfield's oral biography of lead guitarist Jerry Garcia. Neither work is a memoir in the usual sense, but each relies almost exclusively on interviews with its subject and those closest to him. Greenfield's technique is to weave together short excerpts from those interviews to produce a kind of continuous narrative. With their emphasis on *viva voce*, his books create a reading experience akin to collective memoir.

Taken together, these works offer a fascinating and consistently entertaining portrait of the Dead and their unique history. What they do not offer is a recognizably female perspective on that experience. *Dark Star* includes remarks by Donna Godchaux MacKay, Carolyn Garcia, and other women in and around the Dead's operation. But even in that book, the ratio of male to female speakers is almost four to one. Until recently, in fact, the only significant trade title about the Dead authored by a woman was Carol Brightman's *Sweet Chaos: The Grateful Dead's American Adventure* (1998). The sister of the Dead's lighting designer, Brightman focused primarily on the social and political contexts of the Dead's project and its remarkable durability.

Two recent memoirs, by Rosie McGee and Rhoney Gissen Stanley, have begun to even the gender odds in that genre. McGee, who observed the musicians from close range between 1964 and 1974, was Lesh's girlfriend for almost half of that time. Stanley was involved with Owsley Stanley, the Dead's early patron and sound engineer as well as America's most renowned producer of LSD. Although an established audience exists for almost all things Dead, neither memoir was acquired by a major publisher. Monkfish, an upstate New York imprint specializing in spiritual and literary works, produced Stanley's book, and McGee decided early on to self-publish, largely because she wanted control over the presentation of her copious photographs. Both books were reviewed in a scatter of mainstream and alternative venues, and it is a credit to both authors that their memoirs found their intended audiences.

With Stanley's book, some of that credit belongs to Tom Davis, the comedian who partnered with Al Franken onstage and at *Saturday Night*

Live. Both men were card-carrying Deadheads, and Davis lured the Dead onto *Saturday Night Live* in 1978, shortly after the band returned from Egypt. (Later, Davis also worked with Jerry Garcia on the screenplay for Kurt Vonnegut's *The Sirens of Titan*.) Stanley recalls meeting Davis in 2006, and though he was diagnosed with cancer three years later, he agreed to edit her memoir as he finished his own. (Grove Press published that book, *Thirty-Nine Years of Short-Term Memory Loss*, in 2010). Owsley took a dim view of Stanley's friendship with Davis, claiming that he introduced Jerry Garcia to freebase heroin in the 1970s. Garcia's subsequent addiction was not only a chronic health challenge for him, but also a creative one for the band. As Davis's own health failed, he began to refer to his "de-animation," which arrived in July 2012.

Stanley's book is a welcome addition in large part because Owsley's LSD business required extraordinary discretion. Rarely photographed and even more rarely interviewed, Owsley never penned his own story, and one of the best sources of biographical information has been Jay Stevens's *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1998). We know a good deal more about Owsley's connection to the Dead, especially the years leading up to his federal prison stint from 1970 to 1972. After his release, he never regained his stature within the Dead's operation, but he remained closely associated with the band in the public mind. We also know something about his unconventional ideas. He believed that humans were natural carnivores, and that "plant food"—fruits and vegetables—caused cancer. Having convinced himself that climate catastrophe would cover the planet's northern hemisphere in ice, he moved to Queensland, Australia, where he lived off the grid and perished in a 2011 automobile accident.

As the title implies, *Owsley and Me* recounts the author's relationship with the LSD kingpin. Unconventional in almost every way, their acid-drenched life together also involved Melissa Cargill, the chemistry student who facilitated Stanley's early LSD efforts in their Bay Area laboratories. Cargill remained Owsley's lover even as he became involved with Stanley, and she figures significantly in the memoir.

Although Owsley and Stanley never married, she bore his son and eventually took his surname. Along the way, Owsley also seduced Stanley's cousin. When asked why, he replied that it was the best way to

get to know someone. Tired of depending on Owsley for financial support, Stanley returned to New York to study dentistry, and their contact diminished dramatically after Owsley repaired to Australia. In addition to detailing Owsley's outlook and operation, Stanley's account includes ample photographs, many of them taken by Alvan Meyerowitz and Rosie McGee. One of the McGee photographs, in fact, accompanied Owsley's obituary in the *New York Times*.

Like Stanley's memoir, McGee's is a quick and entertaining read. Born Florence Nathan in Paris, she moved to San Francisco with her family in 1951. After studying theater at San Francisco State College, she landed a job with Tom "Big Daddy" Donahue, the Top 40 disc jockey who also owned Autumn Records, ran a psychedelic nightclub called Mothers, and promoted concerts in and around San Francisco. Her romance with Lesh began at the Muir Beach Acid Test. In 1966, she accompanied the band to Los Angeles, where she developed an antipathy for Owsley. "His dismissive view of women and his condescension were almost unbearable," she recalls, and she resented the claim he made on Lesh's attention. When the band returned to the Bay Area that summer, she and Cargill searched for housing. McGee spotted a newspaper advertisement for Rancho Olompali, the site of the Dead tribe's Summer of Love in 1966. The *hoi polloi* would have to wait another year for theirs.

McGee was present at most of the major concerts and turning points in the Dead's early years. (She missed Woodstock only because she was cat-sitting for Bob Weir.) Her romance with Lesh ran its course, but she also connected with road manager Jonathan Reister and musician Jesse Colin Young. She served as a translator on the Europe '72 tour and worked for both Alembic, the sound equipment company sponsored by the band, and Fly by Night Travel, the travel agency that handled the Dead's arrangements. Her connection to Tom Donahue also furnished her with a spot in the Medicine Ball Caravan, which transported her across the country and over to Europe in 1970. Her memoir ends in 1974, when she moved to New Mexico with Greg Ende and started a family.

McGee is a reliable guide to the Dead scene, especially on the subject of its fluid sexual arrangements. Those were determined in no small part by the band's itinerancy, which left the girlfriends alone and bored

much of the time. Although McGee's perspective and anecdotes make for good reading, her memoir's chief contribution may be the sheer volume of visual information conveyed by her photographs. They allow Dead aficionados to register the details of several key sites—from Rancho Olompali to 710 Ashbury to Mickey Hart's Novato ranch—as well as the moods and appearances of the band and its inner circle. The overall effect is subtly evocative. “Most of her photos are new to me,” Carolyn Garcia notes in the foreword, “stirring up the fever from way back when. I can smell the park and the eucalyptus trees, feel the chilly fog rolling in, and remember the warm sun and leisurely conversation on the steps on a sunny afternoon.” If Rod Stewart was right that every picture tells a story, McGee's memoir tells an edifying one on almost every page.

PETER RICHARDSON is the author of three books, including *No Simple Highway: A Cultural History of the Grateful Dead* (St. Martin's, 2014), and is a widely published reviewer. He teaches humanities and American Studies at San Francisco State University.