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Grateful Dead. *July 1978: The Complete Recordings*. Rhino R2 554485, 2016. 12 CD box set with 50-page liner note booklet. \$129.98.

MICHAEL PARRISH

For each of the last several years, Rhino has released a deluxe box set chronicling a memorable segment in the touring history of the Grateful Dead. The offering for 2016, *July 1978: The Complete Recordings*, focuses on a short, relatively unusual tour that the band undertook in the Midwest and Rocky Mountains during the summer of 1978. Playing mostly outdoor stadiums, the band started the tour in Kansas City on July 2, where they were one of several acts performing at Willie Nelson's annual Fourth of July Picnic, displaced from Texas on this occasion. They were scheduled to play the next day in Milwaukee, as part of their multiday outdoor festival Summerfest, but the show was cancelled at the eleventh hour because of heavy rain, compounded by inadequate cover for the stage, creating safety concerns for the band and crew. (This was the only show on the tour I attended, joining a throng of other disappointed fans left staring despondently at the band's tarp-covered equipment from outside the venue.) Next, they moved on to a pair of indoor shows: July 3 at the St. Paul Civic Center, followed by another stadium show on July 5 at the Civic Auditorium in Omaha.

The tour concluded with the band's legendary two-night stand July 7–8 at Red Rocks Amphitheater just outside of Denver. One of the world's most beautiful concert venues, the amphitheater is carved into Mesozoic sandstones and has been the site of numerous legendary performances and events. Although the Dead had done their share of outdoor shows at stadiums, and had played the Hollywood Bowl three times in 1967, 1972, and 1974, this marked the beginning of their quest for exquisite outdoor settings for summer shows. That quest reached its apex later that year with the trio of shows they played at the Sound and Light Theatre in Giza, Egypt, and led to later shows at venues such as the Frost and the Greek Amphitheatres in the Bay Area and other memorable locales as Telluride,

Alpine Valley, Angel's Camp and, rather infamously, the Sierra Nevada's Boreal Ridge.

As a whole, 1978 was a relatively strong year for the Dead musically, coming after what most agree was their post-hiatus creative peak in 1977. After touring relentlessly from January through May, the Dead had taken a relative break during the last half of May and June, with only two weekend shows played in June in Santa Barbara and Eugene. Their repertoire had remained relatively static during that interval, with just a single cover, Warren Zevon's "Werewolves of London," introduced into the rotation during the April leg of the spring tour. One key structural change to the Dead's sets occurred that same tour with the introduction, starting in Tampa on April 6, of a regular "Rhythm Devils" segment in the middle of the second set, a formula that became institutionalized as "Drums" for the remainder of the band's touring history. However, from March through the July tour, this segment featured not only drummers Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann, but a significant number of other band members, crew, and family joining in on a variety of percussion instruments for what were often extended, loose excursions that were at least as interesting visually as they were musically.

Despite the lack of new material, the band's playing retained much of the precision and drive that characterized their work in 1977. One point of irritation to many fans was Bob Weir's introduction of slide guitar during the spring, something many would argue was both too much of a good thing and not quite ready for prime time. However, by July, Weir's slide excursions were both reined in and more expertly executed, now just another useful tool in his formidable arsenal.

The Kansas City show was an anomaly. Not only were the Dead wedged in between such outlaw country acts as Jerry Jeff Walker, Waylon Jennings, and Willie Nelson, they atypically performed a single set, comprising a run of country-friendly tunes including "Tennessee Jed," "Jack Straw," "Friend of the Devil," and "Big River," followed by the more adventurous meat of the set which included a majestic version of "Terrapin Station" and an energetic and adventurous "Playing in the Band." After "Rhythm Devils," they accented "Space" with some goofy and unidentified vocalizations, leading into "Estimated Prophet," a relatively concise

“The Other One” and a “Wharf Rat” capped with a ferocious guitar coda, wrapping up with a pair of Chuck Berry tunes, “Around and Around” and “Johnny B. Goode.”

Two nights later in St. Paul, still licking their wounds from the Milwaukee rain-out, the Dead played a solid show that saw the first set end with a powerful triptych of “Cassidy,” “Deal,” and “The Music Never Stopped.” The second set maintained that pace through “Scarlet Begonias” > “Fire on the Mountain” and a medley that opened with “Dancing in the Street” and wound through “Not Fade Away” and “Stella Blue” before climaxing with “Sugar Magnolia,” followed by a rough but rowdy encore of “Werewolves of London.”

The Omaha show, the last of three shows the group played in Nebraska, featured a long first set with several slow, stately numbers including the set-opening “Sugaree,” “Looks Like Rain,” and “Candyman,” before wrapping up with a powerful pairing of “Lazy Lightning / Supplication” and “Deal.” The equally generous second set featured a relatively conventional opening to the medley comprising “Estimated Prophet,” “Eyes of the World,” “Rhythm Devils,” and “Wharf Rat,” before veering off with “Iko Iko” and “Truckin’” and concluding again with a pair of Berry tunes, “Around and Around” and an encore of “Promised Land.”

The two Red Rocks shows immediately became the stuff of legend, both for the exquisite setting and the consistently high quality of the performances. I remember getting tapes of these shows a few days afterward and being astounded by the energy and vision the band brought to what was a relatively consistent songbook for the time. The July 7 set list looks extremely conventional, with the only tunes not played previously on the tour being “Passenger” in the first set and “Cold Rain and Snow,” “Beat It On Down the Line,” “Black Peter” and “U.S. Blues” in the second. However, the band’s energy level, high on the previous legs of the tours, is audibly elevated throughout the show, which opened with a cinematic “Jack Straw” and featured the first of two extremely generous Red Rocks second sets, following “Cold Rain” and “Beat It On Down the Line” with “Scarlet Begonias” > “Fire on the Mountain” and a medley highlighted by a jam between the drummers, Garcia, and Lesh, followed by a long rendi-

tion of “Not Fade Away” that hinted at “Nobody’s Fault But Mine.” Once again, the band resorted to Chuck Berry to wind things up, slipping their own rollicking “U.S. Blues” between “Around and Around” and “Johnny B. Goode.”

The tour-closing show is one that probably occupies many Top Ten Dead show lists, bolstered by an extraordinary second set medley that opened with “Estimated Prophet” and detoured into “The Other One” before settling into “Eyes of the World,” and later saw a powerful “Franklin’s Tower” slipped between “Wharf Rat” and “Sugar Magnolia.” After nearly three hours onstage, the band had still not had enough of Red Rocks, and returned for an extended encore including one of the most beautiful versions of “Terrapin Station” ever performed, paired with “One More Saturday Night” and followed by a memorable version of “Werewolves of London” to conclude the tour. The band’s next gigs, six weeks later, were another pair of shows at Red Rocks, this time featuring a generous dose of the material they were in the process of recording for *Shakedown Street*, and, although the Dead always brought their A game to Red Rocks, those shows did not match the excitement or the novelty of the two July gigs.

What made this box set attractive to serious tape collectors was the first appearance, outside of very restricted circles, of soundboard versions of the July 1, 3, and 5 shows. This box was also historic as it marked the first official release of material from the legendary Betty Boards, which had been MIA among tape traders following their acquisition during a storage locker sale in the 1980s. Kudos to Betty Cantor-Jackson for recording the shows so beautifully, and to Rob Eaton for his meticulous, labor-intensive restoration of the tapes, which had been damaged during their early storage.

The box’s packaging is also noteworthy, with the discs presented in DVD-format cardboard sleeves housed in a matching tall box that, along with the individual sleeves and an extensive fifty-page booklet, is adorned with beautiful paintings by Paul Pope that reflect each venue, linked together by themes of crows, skulls, and roses. Altogether, *July 1978: The Complete Recordings* ranks as one of the best of Rhino’s Grateful Dead releases.

MICHAEL PARRISH has written about folk, rock, and roots music for over two decades in publications including *Dirty Linen*, *Sing Out!*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *Down Beat*, and was a key contributor to the *Deadhead's Taping Compendium* series (Henry Holt, 1998–2000). As Dean of the College of Sciences at San José State University, he codirected the international conference *So Many Roads: The World in the Grateful Dead* in 2014. He is now Provost and Senior Vice President of the College of Staten Island.