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CITATION INFORMATION

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Grateful Dead Studies

Volume 6 (2023/2024)

Pages: 271–275

URL: https://gratefuldeadstudies.org/GDSv6_Carlson.pdf

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Mark A. Rodriguez. *After All is Said and Done: Taping the Grateful Dead, 1965–1995*. Brooklyn, NY: Anthology Editions, 2022. Hardbound, 315 pp. ISBN 9781944860509. \$50.00.

SCOTT CARLSON

Obsession is almost never used with positive connotations, but it is easy to argue that the obsessive nature of Deadheads and Deadhead culture had about as much to do with the success of the Grateful Dead as the band’s music did. Quite a few people got on the bus because of fan evangelism, whether it was friends traveling from city to city following the Dead or experiences on Shakedown Street; indeed, the early years of computer science and online culture are steeped with stories of Deadhead programmers using their technological access to transcribe and share Dead lyrics and set lists (Jarnow 2018, 91).

One of the most obsessive corners of this subculture was filled by the tapers—people who, early on, risked ejection from venues (and the wrath of Dead roadies) to sneak in state-of-the-art recording equipment to stealthily document a band that almost always eschewed a set list. Taper obsession came to encapsulate cutting-edge recording technology and techniques, eventually making them enough of a nuisance that a specific ticketed section of the audience was set aside for their use. The recorded shows proliferated through private mailing clubs, classified ads in *Dead Relix*, and friends-of-friends, converting new Deadheads along the way and inventing another obsessive type of Deadhead: the tape collector, who may never have recorded a single show but voraciously consumed enough Dead tapes to hold preference for specific tapers and their techniques, as much as some Deadheads preferred specific performance years or tours. As business scholar Barry Barnes has noted, the Dead’s retrospective permission and grudging development of a taping policy eventually turned the obsession of a growing number of fans into “a brilliant business decision” that directly enhanced the band’s popularity in the 1980s and 1990s (Barnes 2011, 74).

The Grateful Dead themselves have reiterated numerous times that it was the circulation of fan-recorded Dead shows that cemented the band's status in popular culture. Despite this, the impact of tapers and taper culture are rarely dissected in Dead histories, leaving it to languish as a niche topic. Thankfully, taper and taping history have outgrown this status over the past twenty-five years, thanks in no small part to a string of publications that jumped feet-first into the subject matter. Starting with John Dwork and Michael Getz's multivolume *The Deadhead's Taping Compendium* (1998–2000) and leading to more recent works (Jim Daley's self-published memoir *Grateful Memories: Ten Years on the Road Taping the Dead* and in-depth chapters in Jesse Jarnow's *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America*, to name a few), Deadhead taping history is finally being recorded.

To this list, we can now add Mark A. Rodriguez's *After All is Said and Done: Taping the Grateful Dead, 1965–1995*. Rodriguez's book is difficult to categorize; it is equal parts art exhibit, citizen archive project, and ephemera fetish object, all gathered and arranged under the banner of Deadhead tapes and taping history. In an interview conducted in the wake of the book's release, Rodriguez provided a canny insight to the germination of the book: "I'm going to give you something that no one probably would ever want to do or think to do: address just this very one specific thing, instead of it being like this little, tiny paragraph in each of the books that I've read over the years that detail the history of the Grateful Dead" (Norsen 2022). Consequently, a traditional rundown of the book's contents would miss the point. While there is certainly a story it tells, that is accomplished via artifacts, objects, interviews, and primary documents. Taken together, *After All is Said and Done* is a paean to the obsessiveness of Dead tapers and tape-traders, expressed in its own obsessive recounting.

Stuart Krimko's introduction to the book discusses Rodriguez's 2010 art exhibition, *1st Gen* (and its follow-ups, *2nd Gen*, *3rd Gen*, and so on), which consisted of wood cassette racks containing thousands of Grateful Dead live tapes. Collected by Rodriguez from Deadheads across the United States via Craigslist ads, these tapes are the source of the first section of the book, "Scanning the Trader Network," which contains

approximately 160 pages of full-color reproductions of Dead tape J-cards, the paper sleeves designed to fit inside plastic cassette tape storage cases that, when folded, resemble the alphabetical letter. Some are ornately illustrated, leaving only enough space to record the date and venue; others are jam-packed with show metadata and other quantifiable information—one particular J-card for the February 28, 1969, Fillmore West show is rated an eight out of ten on the card’s “Sweetness Scale.” Other sleeves are templates, procured from entrepreneurs and small businesses that offered professionally-printed J-cards specifically for traders acquiring and sending cassettes in bulk. The gamut of these sleeves is not only an example of the obsession frequently attached to Dead tape-traders, but also a reminder that they are examples of folk art, almost always reflective of the tape collector’s highly personal focus.

“Scanning the Trader Network” is a fun and engaging collection, but the second section, “How it All Went Down,” makes the case for the book. Rodriguez switches gears and presents a history of Dead tapers, taping, and tape-trading through reproductions of vintage articles and interviews along with recent interviews. Longtime Dead staffers including Dan Healy, Dick Latvala, Dave Lemieux, Dennis McNally, and Francine “Frankie” Accardi-Peri are represented, along with well-known tapers such as Les Kippel, Stu Nixon, John W. Scott, and Mike Dolgushkin of *DeadBase*, among others. Interspersed are primary documents, letters, and other ephemera from personal collections and the Grateful Dead Archive at the University of California–Santa Cruz. Minutes from the Dead’s 1984 board meetings trace the internal decisions that led to the taping policy and concert tapers section; mailings from tape-trading groups like the Stella Blue Club show what the scene was like before internet music sharing; and letters sent by Kippel to the Dead proposing that his Free Underground Grateful Dead Tape Exchange be absorbed as an official part of the Dead’s organization.

The stories told in “How it All Went Down” follow their own internal chronology, but never feel disorienting. Likewise, artifactual reproductions and vintage interviews are injected where appropriate, and offer refined insights to the modern discussions. Some may find their presentation and juxtaposition within the section jarring. The closest comparable

work, in its form and obsessively precise focus, is *Look! Listen! Vibrate! Smile!*, Dominic Priore's zine-turned-monograph that collated his collection of 1960s music magazines into a de facto oral history of the Beach Boys between "Good Vibrations" and their unfinished *SMiLE* album. Like Priore's book, *After All is Said and Done* is not necessarily for the average Deadhead scholar or even Dead fan; its hyperfocus on a particularly niche topic, even within Dead culture, may prove exhaustive even for some enthusiastic audiences. Fans and scholars interested in the intersection of audience fandom, live music taping, and Grateful Dead history, however, will likely find this work a boon to their interests; to paraphrase Jerry Garcia, not all Deadheads like licorice, but the ones who do will probably *really* like this licorice.

The book is not without missteps. Much of the minutes of the Dead's business meetings contain personal and sensitive information about people outside of the immediate Grateful Dead family. While the content pertinent to the scope of the book is highlighted, the fact that this other information is left intact raises questions about their necessity; the sections on the taper policy certainly could have been presented in isolation without lessening its informational impact. That raises troubling questions about the library housing the archive, which documents many living people whose right to privacy is still binding. No ethical repository would permit such use.

Finally, the book's main critical content omission—the rise of digital music sharing and its massive effect on the landscape of Dead taping over the past thirty years—is, after all is said and done, perhaps not actually an omission. The inclusion of the J-cards and the details of Rodriguez's art projects sets the book's focus squarely on Dead shows distributed via cassette. The portable, customizable, and inexpensive nature of the medium made cassettes instrumental in the proliferation of the Dead and Deadhead culture, but like all magnetic tape media, they are an ephemeral and (as his *Gen* series shows) ultimately disposable medium. But that is the point—after all, no one is collecting and exhibiting broken hard drives that once contained terabytes of Dead shows. (At least, not yet.) Still, there is plenty left to document about Dead tapers and show-trading in the digital age—notably, the creation of the etree digital

music community or the so-called “Thanksgiving Day Massacre,” when access to Dead shows on the Internet Archive’s Live Music Archive was abruptly (and temporarily) curtailed in 2005 (Berg 2013). There’s always hope for an encore.

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