



The Newsletter of the

GRATEFUL DEAD STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Welcome

Rock critic Mikal Gilmore once called the Grateful Dead’s audience “perhaps the largest genuine alternative communion in all of rock: a sprawling coalition of fans, entrepreneurs and home-grown media that surrounded the band and promoted it as the center for a worldwide community of idealists.” In the two decades since he made that remark, the discourse community studying the band and its impact has come to resemble that subculture, in all of its facets, from student enthusiasm to studied excellence, but always informed by the academic equivalent of that fierce idealism.

For those first encountering the scholarship on the Dead, that can be surprising, but not to insiders. From the beginning, the Dead attracted scholars of all stripes, academics who saw the Dead and the phenomenon they inspired in the terms of their discipline and found themselves drawn to the conversation. That dialogue has continued to grow with every passing year, fueled by regular conference meetings, a growing bibliography, and a deepening interdisciplinarity that shows no signs of waning.

That interest produced this newsletter and the organization that sponsors it. After the twenty-second annual Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus conference in February (see p.3), thirty participants gathered to express their interest in forming a professional scholarly group. Founded as an academic not-for-profit organization, the Grateful Dead Studies Association has been formed to help shepherd the scholarly discourse on the Grateful Dead phenomenon. Under its aegis, the ongoing work of that discourse—holding conferences, publishing scholarship, fostering research—will be able to continue, but with greater accessibility, support, and rigor.

An early article on the Dead noted that “They were not to be psychedelic dabblers, painting pretty pictures, but true explorers.” That describes the work of the scholars studying the band as well, which the founding of the Grateful Dead Studies Association demonstrates. This newsletter serves as an informal introduction to the group, its goals, and its formation. Welcome! And thanks for your interest.



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The Caucus in Session, February 22, 2019



Organizing the Grateful Dead Studies Association



Every meeting of the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus is a showcase for cutting-edge theories and new ideas in Grateful Dead studies, but usually those don't take the form of self-analysis. This year, however, was different. On Saturday afternoon, February 23, after the formal close of the conference, thirty participants gathered in the group's hospitality suite at the Hyatt to hear presentations by Nicholas Meriwether, G. Ganter, and Andrew McGaan about the formation of a professional organization devoted to Dead studies.

The meeting was the culmination of two years of discussions, conference calls, and research by an ad hoc task force formed at the end of the 2017 meeting, when Ganter and Kurt Torell approached Meriwether to suggest the establishment of an organization to help steward the work of the group. The three researched a wide array of comparable entities, distilling their work into a twelve-page pamphlet with a draft constitution and bylaws for the new organization, which was distributed at the meeting. Caucus presenter and attorney

Andrew McGaan is spearheading the incorporation process, with the able assistance of a team of experienced attorneys from his firm.

After the meeting was called to order, Meriwether explained the rationale for the proposed organization, noting that much of the work of Dead studies occurred at conferences, and remained inaccessible and ephemeral: "We have demonstrated what we're capable of accomplishing, but right now, those efforts are not formally organized, and that makes them fragile."

Ganter provided an account of the task force's work, concluding, "This is about sharing respon-

sibility, governance, workload, and expenses." With ongoing publications, a growing professional profile, and increasingly expensive meetings, some sort of organization is necessary. McGaan then explained the process of incorporation and outlined the remaining steps, now well underway, which his team hopes will be concluded no later than spring 2020.

Comments from the floor followed, with senior scholars in the group voicing their support for the idea. Several noted that this kind of effort was logical and appropriate, given the history of Dead studies and the continuing interest in the discourse. Everyone present completed prospective membership cards, and thirty charter members of the Grateful Dead Studies Association voted to incorporate the group.

After that, a slate of officers was proposed, and ballots were distributed. The results were unanimous, with Meriwether elected to serve as the first President, Ganter as President-Elect, Torell as Vice President, Beth Carroll as Treasurer, and Jan Wright as Secretary. Their two-year terms will commence as soon as the incorporation process is completed, but their work has already begun.

For longtime participants, the meeting felt like a benediction. "This has been a long time coming," one Caucus veteran observed. He was one of several participants who remembered the discussion at the tenth Caucus, when the idea of organizing first emerged. Since then, the increasing rigor and scope of the work of Dead studies meant that the question had changed from whether to organize to how best to do so. "We've thought about what we do long enough," another commented. "It's time to act."

After the election, participants had a champagne toast to formally launch the Association, along with a cake emblazoned with "Congratulations Grateful Dead Studies Association." Much work remains before we complete the incorporation, but everyone agreed: we couldn't have asked for a better start to the new organization.



Top: The founding members of the Grateful Dead Studies Association, Feb. 23, 2019. Middle: The cake, celebrating the inaugural meeting of the GDSA. Above: The first slate of officers (L to R): Beth Carroll, Treasurer; Nicholas Meriwether, President; G. Ganter, President-Elect; Jan Wright, Secretary. Not pictured: Kurt Torell, Vice President.

The 22nd Annual Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus

For four days in February, forty-five scholars and enthusiasts gathered in Albuquerque for the twenty-second annual meeting of the Grateful Dead area of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association conference, nicknamed the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus. This year's meeting featured more than two dozen presentations, two roundtable discussions, and two special sessions, organized in fourteen panels. Participants came from thirteen states and every region of the country, with one international presenter traveling all the way from Montreal. Geography was a theme in several presentations, and it was interesting to see how participation mimicked the geographic distribution of the Dead's fanbase, with California and New York contributing the most participants, followed by North Carolina and Massachusetts.

This year's meeting had an especially strong literary tenor, with a dozen presentations exploring a wide array of influences in the Dead's work, from Shakespeare to Vonnegut. Presentations ranged from highly theoretical to practical, with topics addressing philosophy and critical theory to pedagogy and poetic practice. A highlight was returning presenter Bob Cooperman's spirited reading from his recent book *Saved by the Dead* (see p. 4), with commentary by longtime Caucus presenters Jon Ney and Mary Goodenough. Overall, presentations spanned thirteen disciplines and fields, from art history to feminist studies, business theory to musicology. History, traditionally one of the least represented disciplines in Caucus meetings, also had a strong showing this year, with four papers assessing different aspects of the band's career.

Participants were treated to two panels—and several late-night informal events—featuring unreleased master recordings made by Owsley “Bear” Stanley, courtesy of Hawk Semins of the Owsley Stanley Foundation. One panel explored the implications of Stanley's recordings of the acid tests, based on two recordings of these seminal countercultural events, and the closing session of the conference presented the complete performance of the Dead's remarkable but little-known performance in Santa Rosa on June 28, 1969.

The big event this year was the official launch of the Grateful Dead Studies Association in a special meeting held after the conference ended (see p.2), but there were several other firsts as well. The annual poster commemorating this year's Caucus meeting was by well-known Grateful Dead artist Richard Biffle, whose Hamlet-inspired theme was particularly apt, given the two Shakespeare papers this year. The seventy-page conference program continued the format set with the twentieth meeting, adding detailed session abstracts to help document the proceedings. A thoughtful foreword by longtime participant Jay Williams and an eloquent poem by Bob Cooperman made this volume a keepsake as well.

In addition to long-standing Caucus traditions of a hootenanny and group dinners, we had our first evening listening session, held in the group's hospitality suite at the Hyatt. Introduced by Mike Dolgushkin, it featured the second set of the acclaimed Vault release *Nightfall of Diamonds*, a copy of which was presented to each participant in a gift bag along with a commemorative handbill. A raffle during Friday night's hootenanny gave four lucky winners original Dead-related posters, including the famed *Garcia on Broadway* and Stanley Mouse's air-brushed masterpiece *Tuesday Night Jam*, from the Dead's cooperative venture, the Carousel Ballroom. Every participant received a complimentary ticket.

This year the SWPACA celebrated its fortieth anniversary, and as the conference's most successful and longest-running area, the Caucus honored the larger organization for its years of pioneering service and support. In a brief ceremony, area chair Nicholas Meriwether recognized two officers of the SWPACA instrumental in the area's survival and success, Lynnea Chapman King, the current Executive Director of the SWPACA, and retired officer Ken Dvorak. “We would not be here today had it not been for these two scholars,” Meriwether noted.

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The 22nd Caucus At A Glance:

- 4 Days
- 25 Papers
- 14 Panels
- 2 Roundtables
- 2 Special Sessions
- 33 Presenters
- 12 Guests



Top: Michael Crowley, Julie Roth, Michael Parrish, and Dennis Rothermel contemplate a question at the last session, Feb. 23. Middle: Mike Dolgushkin introduces the special listening session, Feb. 21. Inset: the gift bags, with a handbill and a copy of *Nightfall of Diamonds*, given to all participants.

New and Noteworthy



In 2018, two new books joined the literature on the Grateful Dead, both welcome additions to the library. Longtime Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus participants Barry Barnes and Bob Trudeau's *The Grateful Dead's 100 Essential Songs* (Rowman and Littlefield) provides a useful introduction to the band's corpus, with thoughtful essays that frame the band's songwriting prowess in a volume that will appeal to longtime fans and neophytes alike.

For knowledgeable fans, new approaches to the Dead's music are increasingly rare, and the authors are to be commended for providing a fresh take on even well-worn chestnuts. The book's greatest utility may be as a primer for those too young to have seen the Dead in their heyday, or who just missed the bus and wonder what the fuss is all about.

One of the Dead's signal achievements was the way that they turned fans from being passive observers into active participants, converting concert-goers into cocreators and partners in what everyone understood as an art of the moment. That democratic bohemian ethos allowed parking lot entrepreneurs to become successful businessmen, but it also inspired a host of musicians, artists, photographers, and writers.

Bob Cooperman's poetry demonstrates the enduring power of that ethos and the inspiration it provides. His latest volume, *Saved by the Dead* (Liquid Light Press), represents something of a culmination of his decades-long award-winning career. His carefully crafted poems embody both the Dead's message and model, providing an eloquent meditation on themes and lessons rooted in Cooperman's own journey as a poet and a fan.



Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus Meeting Scheduled

Mark your calendars! The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus will hold its twenty-third meeting at the forty-first Southwest Popular/American Culture Association conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 19–22, 2019, where academics interested in the study of the Grateful Dead have met since 1998. More than thirty presentations will provide a vibrant snapshot of Grateful Dead studies. We will have updated information on the organization of the Association then, too. For details and registration, see www.southwestpca.org. See you in February!

The 22nd Annual Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus

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"They championed us when it would have been far easier to simply let the area fade away." Their years of service and indefatigable support were matched by the efforts of the first two area chairs, Rob Weiner and Barry Barnes, who were also honored. Weiner, who was unable to attend, received a large, handmade card signed by the group, and all four honorees received a handsome crystal plaque with the

Caucus's logo, naming them a "Lifetime Member." The honorees thanked the group and congratulated the Caucus on its success and longevity.

It made a wonderful close to the conference, and a fitting way to honor the hosts who made our twenty-second meeting one of our best.

Right: The handbill for the evening listening session.



Left: Lynnea Chapman King and Barry Barnes at the awards ceremony, Feb. 23. Center: A Friday session. Right: Michael Crowley presenting, framed by the Sandia Mountains.



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