

The Newsletter of the

2023

# GRATEFUL DEAD STUDIES ASSOCIATION

## From the Executive Director

Welcome to the fifth newsletter of the Grateful Dead Studies Association! It's hard to believe how much has happened since our organizational meeting in Albuquerque in 2019. Despite the tumultuous events of the past few years, the Association has been able to thrive, thanks to the hard work of our officers and members. As we head into 2024, we are excited to continue our momentum with a range of projects to enhance and expand the scholarship on the Grateful Dead phenomenon and make that work accessible to an international audience.

Several of those efforts are featured here. The Executive Council is hard at work planning our annual conference (p.2), which will be held in Chicago, a storied city in Dead history and lore. Coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of the Iraq War, the conference will feature sessions on lyricist Robert Hunter's epic poem *A Strange Music*, his neglected opus about the first Gulf War. That is only one of several topics being planned, and there is room for more, so please submit your abstract soon.

Conference meetings are only one part of our work, and this fall, another flagship effort, the Duke University Press series *Studies in the Grateful Dead*,

will publish its first two volumes (p.3). Sponsored by the Association, the series provides scholars, readers and students with a wide-ranging survey of the Dead's achievement that will provide a foundation for further work. With several volumes in preparation now, the project promises to be the most extensive scholarly series devoted to a single band.

*Studies in the Grateful Dead* is an academic series, but a central part of the Association's mission is public outreach, and this issue introduces a new feature that focuses on that effort. Called Spotlight on Dead Studies, our inaugural story discusses Yellowstone Public Radio's *The Dead of Night*, hosted by the Association's Sue Balter-Reitz (p.4). Her wide-ranging interviews include Association members whose work has helped to make Dead studies such a vibrant and welcoming interdisciplinary discourse.

This newsletter coincides with an eventful year in the Grateful Dead phenomenon, with Dead & Company's farewell tour as well as the fiftieth anniversary of *Wake of the Flood*. Those milestones show that the subject of our work continues to evolve, ensuring that our mission is not only timely but current as well. And while the Association is still young, already we can look back on what we have accomplished with the same kind of pride that the Grateful Dead must have felt when they finished the last session for *Wake of the Flood* in August 1973. And like the band then, we also look forward to many more years of good work, which your continued support makes possible. Thanks so much for your participation and we hope to see you in Chicago!

Nicholas G. Meriwether



Chicago at Night



## In This Issue

From the Executive Director

Fourth Annual Grateful Dead Studies Association Meeting Set

GDSA Sponsors Duke University Press Series

Dead Studies Spotlight: Yellowstone Public Radio's *Dead of Night*



Downtown Chicago

## Chicago 2024

### *Fourth Annual Meeting Set for March 27–30*

When the Popular Culture Association announced that the 2024 conference would be held in Chicago, Grateful Dead scholars were delighted. One of the most storied sites in Grateful Dead history, the Windy City hosted the band 51 times between 1967 and 1995, with 13 more in nearby Rosemont. Legendary shows at the Electric Theater in 1969 and at the Uptown Theatre, where the Dead played from 1978 to 1981, helped to cement the city's al-

lure for fans, especially in the late 1980s, when the band was experiencing serious problems outside of venues.

To band manager Jon McIntire, Chicago proved how much they “wanted us there” and even ensured “extremely cooperative” police. The city enshrined its place in Dead history by hosting the band’s final shows, July 7–8, 1995, and anchoring the band’s 2015’s fiftieth anniversary reunion, dubbed *Fare Thee Well*.

“Chicago’s rich history makes the location of our fourth annual conference especially exciting,” Eduardo Duarte, Association Treasurer, commented. Held at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent

Mile, the conference will also be the first to feature the Grateful Dead as a permanent area of the PCA. “We’re delighted to have the PCA promote us from provisional status,” added Ariella Werden-Greenfield, Association Secretary. “It’s an honor the GDSA earned through the work of our members.”

The promotion acknowledges the contribution the Association has made in the three years it has

met at PCA. Testament to that is PCA’s decision to showcase the GDSA sessions on Robert Hunter’s long poem *A Strange Music*, his moving opus on the Gulf War, but that is only one topic the meeting will explore. “We’re excited to feature papers on the full range of the Dead’s work and its larger contexts,” Deepak Sarma, Association Vice President, noted. Sessions are filling quickly, however, so interested members should upload abstracts quickly to ensure consideration.

Details on submission requirements and dates can be found at the PCA’s website ([www.pcaaca.org](http://www.pcaaca.org)) and the Association website ([www.deadstudies.org](http://www.deadstudies.org)). The Executive Council is planning a full slate of social events, taking advantage of Chicago’s fabled nightlife and rich Grateful Dead history.

“If you haven’t been able to make it to a GDSA conference yet, this is a superb opportunity to see what the live experience of Grateful Dead studies can be,” G. Ganter, Association President, added. Years ago, Dead scholars coined the phrase, “there is nothing like a Grateful Dead studies conference!” This year’s meeting promises to take that to a new level.



## Chicago 2024

- 4 days, March 27–30, 2024
- All sessions held at the Chicago Marriott Downtown
- Proposals due November 30
- Early (reduced fee) registration closes December 31
- Regular registration closes January 31
- Late registration ends February 10

*Right: Soldier Field, Site of the Dead’s Final Shows in 1995 and Fare Thee Well in 2015*

# GDSA Sponsors Duke University Press Series *Studies in the Grateful Dead*

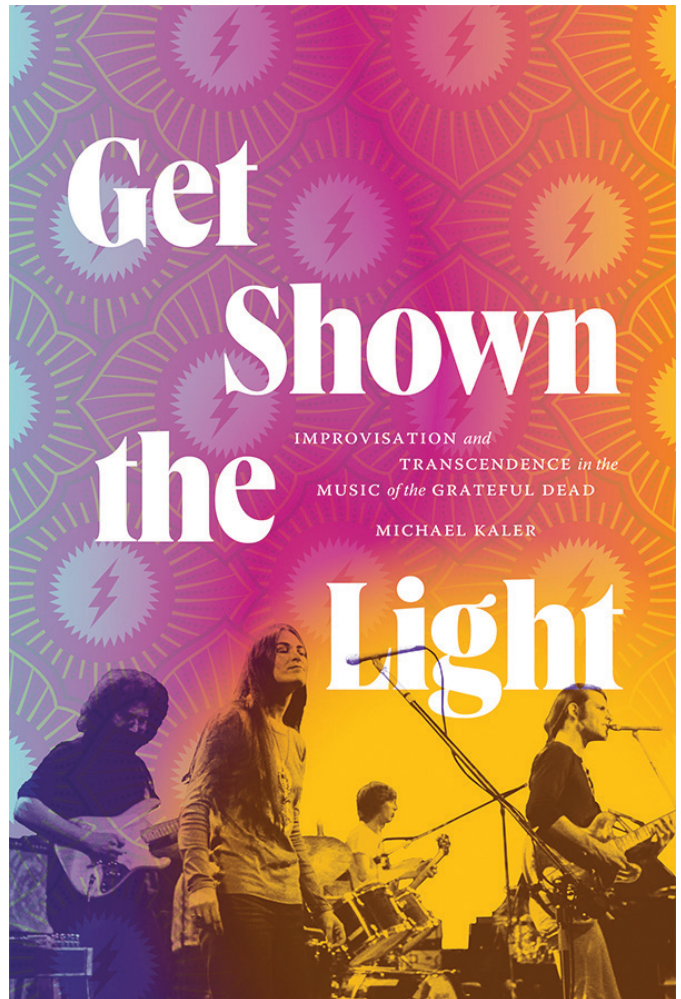
In November, Duke University Press will publish the first two volumes of a groundbreaking new series devoted to the Grateful Dead. Called *Studies in the Grateful Dead*, this landmark project is the result of more than eight years of work by more than a dozen scholars, and it also represents the crown jewel of the Grateful Dead Studies Association's ambitious publications program. Designed to provide an authoritative survey of the academic contexts of the Grateful Dead phenomenon, the series is stewarded by a seasoned editorial board featuring literary scholar Wai Chee Dimock, historians David Farber and Michael Kramer, and Association members Jay Williams and Nicholas G. Meriwether. At Duke, the project was fortunate to find a champion in Dean Smith, the Director of the press who is also the acquiring editor for the series. "It's been a long, hard climb," Smith commented recently, "but we're excited to see these first two books published and are looking forward to having the next several volumes under contract shortly."

These books attest to the range and depth of Dead studies, but already, even more volumes are in development. Duke's peer review process, considered among the most rigorous and extensive in the industry, has made the journey from proposal to publication a multi-year effort, but the result is a series that has already attracted considerable interest and attention. For the Association, sponsoring the series offers a way of expanding the reach of our work with the imprint of one of the nation's top university presses.

The series includes both monographs and edited anthologies, and is designed to frame the academic study of the Grateful Dead in the widest terms. The first volume, by religious studies scholar and musicologist Michael Kaler, assesses the spiritual dimensions of the Grateful Dead's music, establishing a fundamental core of the Grateful Dead's impact. One of the central mechanisms for promulgating that spirit was through the band's pioneering approach to live recording, the subject of the second book in the series, by musicologist John Brackett.

"The combination of these two titles makes a fine opening statement about the series," Board member Jay Williams noted. "The Dead's significance derives from both their music and its impact, and these books outline that achievement in ways that will appeal to experts and general readers alike." Reaching that audience is no easy feat, which is why both books went through years of work and revision. COVID also slowed their progress, but that only makes their publication all the more welcome.

The cutting-edge arguments that the books advance are especially timely now. Known for his work on Gnosticism as well as his innovative work on the Dead—including essays in the Association's journal and forthcoming in the Proceedings—Michael Kaler brings the kind of rigorous interdisciplinary approach that defines Dead studies at its best. John Brackett's thoughtful reading of a central yet little appreciated dimension of their craft also marks a welcome addition to the discourse.



The cover of Michael Kaler's *Get Shown the Light*, the inaugural volume of the Duke University Press series *Studies in the Grateful Dead*

The two volumes make an auspicious start to the series, representing exactly the kind of innovative and rigorous work that the Association is dedicated to fostering.

Sponsoring the series requires significant support, and we welcome patrons who wish to help. Contributions are fully tax-deductible and will help make the series accessible. For sponsors who give \$100, the Association is offering a special, limited edition poster designed by noted Grateful Dead artist Richard Biffle (please add \$12 S&H); Association members can consult the flyer included with this newsletter for more details, or for those reading an electronic version of this newsletter, email us at [deadstudies@gmail.com](mailto:deadstudies@gmail.com) for details on how to order. And for more information on the series, please see <https://www.dukeupress.edu/series/Studies-in-the-Grateful-Dead>.

# Dead Studies Spotlight

## Yellowstone Public Radio's *The Dead of Night*

*Editor's Note: This column inaugurates a new feature for our newsletter, the Dead Studies Spotlight. It will alternate with the Year in Dead Studies column to provide a more in-depth look at some of the ways that scholars are fostering wider engagement with the study of the Grateful Dead.*

In 2021, Montana State University–Billings rhetorical and argumentation theorist Sue Balter-Reitz was musing about the implications of her field. Communication theorists focus on the academic study of media representation and its effects on culture, yet few scholars actually participate directly in the production of mass media. Her interest in Dead studies had already provided her with a fascinating case study of a cultural phenomenon with a significant media footprint, but the continuing interest in the Dead's music, and the increasing audience for the band's legacy, suggested opportunities for expanding how scholars consider media, particularly in shaping the public discourse.

So when Ken Siebert, General Manager of Yellowstone Public Radio approached her about the possibility of hosting a radio show devoted to the Dead, it was an easy decision. *The Dead of Night* was the result.



Creator and Host Sue Balter-Reitz in the studio



*The Dead of Night's logo, by artist Ken Schneidman*

radio as a way of expanding their reach and lessening ticket pressure. The band's radio presence has continued, with dozens of dedicated shows continuing to promulgate the Dead's music today, but *The Dead of Night* occupies a unique niche in that crowded field.

"The show is about the music and the phenomenon it sparked, but it's also something of a platform for Dead studies," Balter-Reitz explains. "Many of the scholars studying the Dead and their contexts are not only gifted speakers, they're also thoughtful public intellectuals. *The Dead of Night* offers them a different kind of platform, but it's a format that suits them well."

That also makes the show a natural forum for the work being done by the Grateful Dead Studies Association. Although *The Dead of Night* covers the entire sweep of the Dead phenomenon, it has featured several members of the Association and even devoted one episode to the Association. "It's been a great outlet for us to explain our work," Association President G. Ganter notes, "but even more, it represents a wonderful example of a central part of our mission, which is to reach beyond the ivory tower." The thousands of listeners who tune in every week would agree.

*The Dead of Night* can be heard on Friday nights at 9 p.m. at 91.7 FM (Billings) and across Montana, northern Wyoming and eastern Idaho, or worldwide at <https://www.ypradio.org/show/the-dead-of-night>.

Equal parts journalism and public history, the show frames the Dead's impact through interviews, music, and deeply researched segments. Launched in 2022, the show has achieved an impressive track record with just over 100 shows to date, earning a coast to coast audience.

The topics covered have been as diverse and eclectic as the Dead's music. Bands such as Terrapin Flyer and musicians such as Marco Benevento have offered thoughtful takes on what it means to interpret the Dead's songbook, and scholars such as Natalie Dollar, Peter Richardson, Mark Mattson, and Beth Carroll have discussed their work on the Dead phenomenon. "The show takes a broad view of the cultural landscape of the Dead, which keeps listeners coming back for more," Siebert notes.

Broadcast journalism might seem like a stretch for most scholars, but it was an easy reach for Balter-Reitz, who had honed her interest in the medium working at her college radio station. Hosting a show also naturally complements her view of administration and citizenship: Balter-Reitz takes those seriously, serving as Assistant Provost at Montana State–Billings and also as President-Elect of the Grateful Dead Studies Association.

The show takes some of its inspiration from its subject. The Dead always made a point to harness technology in creative ways, and as early as 1971 they saw

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