

Searching for the Sound: My Life with the Grateful Dead

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An insider's look at the behind-the-scenes history of one of the world's most beloved bands told from the point of their bass player offers an honest and intimately detailed description of the people and events that made music history.

Right in time for the Grateful Dead's 40th anniversary, eccentric bass player extraordinaire Phil Lesh has delivered fans a most welcome gift: his autobiography. There are many books out there about the Dead told from the perspective of roadies, journalists, third party observers, and fans. However, with the exceptions of Jerry Garcia's ramblings in *Garcia: A Signpost to New Space* and *Conversations With the Dead*, Lesh's *Searching for the Sound* is the first time a founding member of America's favorite band tells their own story of what it was like inside the Grateful Dead. And what a wonderful, strange tale it is. Phil Lesh, considered the most academic of the group due to his avant-garde classical composition training, literate mind, and passion for the arts, decided to write his story himself. Written without the crutch of a ghostwriter, *Searching for the Sound* might be considered disjointed in places, but overall it comes across as conversational, intimate, informative, and candid (particularly regarding topics of drug use and death). If you are familiar with the band and their extended family, their history, the sixties' musical milestones and influences and all the band's famous tales (the Garcia/ Lesh "silent" confrontation, being busted on Bourbon Street, the Wall of Sound), you may be a little disgruntled there is not much new here in the way of content. However, what is "new" and totally satisfying is Phil's warm, optimistic perspective on the many events that helped shape his life. As described by Lesh, his life's journey, much like the Dead's music, is "a [series] of recurring themes, transpositions, repetitions, unexpected developments, all converging to define form that is not necessarily apparent until it's ending has come and gone." For the many fans who enjoyed the fruits of his life pursuit of sonic explorations, *Searching for the Sound* is a welcome addition to their Dead library. --Rob Bracco

Lesh, founding member of the Grateful Dead and bass-guitar visionary, adds his biography and his take on Dead history to the burgeoning literature about the band that is famous for its devoted fans, for keeping the spirit of the psychedelic sixties alive, and for rarely recording a commercial hit. After covering his childhood at a blistering pace (by page 12, he has flunked his army induction physical), Lesh turns his attention to matters musical, including meeting original Dead keyboardist Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, who seemed "greasy" but performed a "raucous blues stomp," and then encountering the rest of the Dead gang, not to mention psychedelized novelist Ken Kesey and sundry other sixties notables. He rehashes some notorious incidents in the band's annals, such as when in 1970 at the infamous Altamont free concert, the Dead refused to take the stage because they were scared; the atmosphere there was so unsettling, Lesh says, that he decided "not to take any acid that day"--given how things turned out (a tripping spectator was murdered by the Hell's Angels "security guards"), fortunate forbearance on his part. Lesh also recounts the subsequent comings and goings of band members, the death of Jerry Garcia, and life as a more mature presence on the rock landscape. Very few bands stay together as long as the Dead has, and fewer still attract new fans. A literate piece of rock history by a genuinely historic figure in rock music. Mike Tribby

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Other Books

San Francisco and the Long 60s, *San Francisco and the Long 60s* tells the fascinating story of the legacy of popular music in San Francisco between the years 1965-69. It is also

a chronicle of the impact this brief cultural flowering has continued to have in the city - and more widely in American culture - right up to the present day. The aim of *San Francisco and the Long 60s* is to question the standard historical narrative of the time, situating the local popular music of the 1960s in the city's contemporary artistic and literary cultures: at once visionary and hallucinatory, experimental and traditional, singular and universal. These qualities defined the aesthetic experience of the local culture in the 1960s, and continue to inform the cultural and social life of the Bay Area even fifty years later. The brief period 1965-69 marks the emergence of the psychedelic counterculture in the Haight-Ashbury neighbourhood, the development of a local musical 'sound' into a mainstream international 'style', the mythologizing of the Haight-Ashbury as the destination for 'seekers' in the Summer of Love, and the ultimate dispersal of the original hippie community to outlying counties in the greater Bay Area and beyond. *San Francisco and the Long 60s* charts this period with the references to received historical accounts of the time, the musical, visual and literary communications from the counterculture, and retrospective glances from members of the 1960s Haight community via extensive first-hand interviews. For more information, read Sarah Hill's blog posts here: <http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/musicresearch/2014/05/15/san-francisco-and-the-long-60s> <http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/musicresearch/2014/08/22/city-scale/> <http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/musicresearch/2015/07/21/fare-thee-well/>

⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ ⌘ . Merwin, W. S. *The Second Four Books of Poems: The Moving Target, The Lice, The Carrier of Ladders, Writings to an Unfinished Accompaniment* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1993). Middleton, Richard. *Pop Music and the Blues: A Study ...*"