



Message is the message
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Dead Heads

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An interesting sample of humanity at its mellowest

The Grateful Dead: Music is still the universal language

"A Grateful Dead concert," says a popular bumper-sticker, "is like nothing else in the world."

That particular bumper sticker says what many of us — fans or not fans — already know about that definition-defying 1960s San Francisco "acid rock band," the venerable Grateful Dead. The charisma of the band is difficult to tag, mainly because its music can't be classified as strictly rock, strictly bluegrass, strictly folk, strictly jazz or even strict. One observer put it well: "They (the Grateful Dead) aren't the best at what they do. They're the only ones who do what they do."

But just as the band itself defies being

filed under a specific musical classification, neither can the Grateful Dead fans be easily indexed; they aren't all hippies, all preppies, all yuppies. There just isn't one classical, "typical" Grateful Dead fan. Not all the fans take drugs, wear tie-dyed T-shirts, or collect concert tapes from the 20 years the Grateful Dead has been performing. Of course many of them do. But "dressing-up" isn't an essential criterion for being a Dead fan; at a Grateful Dead concert, anyone can get away with wearing almost anything (including nothing at all), as long as anyone is groovin' to the music. These fans come in tie-dyed T-shirts, shabby cotton skirts and broken-down Birkenstocks; beads and bangles and colorful stockings; Levis, IZODs, Varnets and Nike running shoes.

Music is the one element which bonds



the fans together — entraps them like flies caught in a web. Only, unlike ensnared insects, these people thrive on the encounter — the music, the experience, the *tarantism*. The actual feeling of the music.

Most Grateful Dead fans consider themselves serious about the time they spend pursuing the Dead's music, either at concerts or through albums and tapes. There are the traveling Dead Heads everyone hears about — the ones who plan their summer vacations around the band's tour schedule. There are also the two-or-three-shows-a-year fans, like John.

John and Bob: A contrast in fans

John graduated from the University in 1982 with three degrees — in Marketing, Finance and Economics. Now clean-cut and athletically fit at 24, he is, by many modern American standards, a successful businessman. Not only is John the controller for Nature Expeditions International (a Eugene company which organizes international wilderness outings for large groups), but he is also a private business consultant. In his spare time he adamantly enjoys playing tennis and flyfishing. And, of course, listening to the Grateful Dead.

"I listen to them all the time," says John, who has been a consistent Dead fan for about "five or six years." He's even seen a few of the group's live performances — "15 or 20," to be more ex-

act. He trades concert tapes; he wore an Arrow button-down shirt to the Dead's last Eugene concert. John considers himself a serious fan, but he doesn't chase the band across the country. "Some people do that," he adds.

Bob does that. A native New York Dead Head, now transplanted in California, Bob has spent the past few months traveling across the country, intent upon seeing the Grateful Dead perform on their spring tour. He was in Eugene for the Hult Center concerts at the beginning of May. The band played in The Big Apple before coming here; Bob was there too. In fact, he saw the past 21 shows, but he said the Eugene shows were his last for awhile; he was headed back to Santa Cruz to resume his career as a neon sign and sculpture maker.

Bob is a serious fan too. He's got to be to have that kind of enthusiasm. His long blond hair and Grateful Dead T-shirt might serve to give him the label of Dead Head. For Bob, the entire Grateful Dead experience "is just a great time." While on his recent transcontinental adventure, Bob and some friends canvassed for the CCC — the Cosmic Charlie Campaign ("Cosmic Charlie" being a song the band hasn't played in concert for more than seven years). The group passed out leaflets with the song's lyrics, and advised unknowing Dead fans where to write to offer their support for Cosmic Charlie.

"It's just fun," says Bob of the campaign. His strategy is mildly non-committal: He says if the campaign works, it works. If it doesn't, that's OK too. "I don't know. The whole thing just makes people feel good." And feeling good, like, that's what it's all about, right?

Some like it hot, others like it naught

When the band comes to town, there are very few people who don't know about it. The group's last two Eugene appearances have been three night, three show sell-out gigs at the city's constantly newsmaking Hult Center. But while everyone is aware that the Dead is around, not everyone loves it.

The Hult Center staff is not exactly used to people lurking on the front steps of their grey monstrosity just to get tickets



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