



# Fare Thee Well: The Final Chapter of the Grateful Dead's Long, Strange Trip

*Joel Selvin*

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A tell-all biography of the epic in-fighting of the Grateful Dead in the years following band leader Jerry Garcia's death in 1995

The Grateful Dead rose to greatness under the inspired leadership of guitarist Jerry Garcia, but the band very nearly died along with him. When Garcia passed away suddenly in August of 1995, the remaining band members experienced full crises of confidence and identity. So long defined by Garcia's vision for the group, the surviving "Core Four," as they came to be called, were reduced to conflicting agendas, strained relationships, and catastrophic business decisions that would leave the iconic band in shambles. Wrestling with how best to define their living legacy, the band made many attempts at restructuring, but it would take twenty years before relationships were mended enough for the Grateful Dead as fans remembered them to once again take the stage.

Acclaimed music journalist and *New York Times* bestselling author Joel Selvin was there for much of the turmoil following Garcia's death, and he'll offer a behind-the-scenes account of the ebbs and flows that occurred during the ensuing two decades. Plenty of books have been written about the rise of the Grateful Dead, but this final chapter of the band's history has never before been explored in detail. Culminating in the landmark tour bearing the same name, *Fare Thee Well* charts the arduous journey from Garcia's passing all the way up to the uneasy agreement between the Core Four that led to the series of shows celebrating the band's fiftieth anniversary and finally allowing for a proper, and joyous, sendoff of the group revered by so many.

## Fare Thee Well: The Final Chapter of the Grateful Dead's Long, Strange Trip Details

Date : Published June 19th 2018 by Da Capo Press  
ISBN :  
Author : Joel Selvin  
Format : Kindle Edition  
Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Biography, The United States Of America

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# From Reader Review Fare Thee Well: The Final Chapter of the Grateful Dead's Long, Strange Trip for online ebook

## Brian Walter says

Wow... Phil, huh?

A very honest read... At least from other accounts I've read, and not the starry eyed mythology many next generation deadheads want to promote. I thought the treatment of the core four was fair, no real sides were taken, but again thats from an outsiders view. Sad to hear some of the stories, kinda like when your parents fight, you don't really want to known the mean crap that was said.

I did like the fact that it ended in Chicago...the newest thing is a postscript.

Writing was fair to average, some good splashes of colorful detail but more or less on point. A necessary follow up to "Long Strange Trip" to know the whole story. (but nowhere near as captivating or well written.)

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## Chaz Donaldson says

Read "Fare Thee Well" on the plane this weekend. It's not surprising that the Lesh family is not a fan, but I don't think it bashed anyone or had ill intent. An ok book about an interesting time. I'd really like a better history of what went down with Vinnie, he's barely mentioned. 3/5 ??

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## James McCallister says

This biographical compendium of twenty years of post-Jerry Garcia iterations of the Grateful Dead, rife with backstage machinations and petty squabbles that shaped the artistic trajectory of the remaining band members' careers, indulges in meticulous skullduggery in its depiction of one attempt after another to avoid being the Grateful Dead, while still trying to carry the torch for both themselves and the music-hungry fans willing to pay for the tickets. Fans wishing to remain aloof from a number of embarrassing human frailties displayed by their onstage rock & roll heroes would do well to skip the book entirely.

On a technical level, the writing is fine and keeps the pages turning. No arguing that the volume provides a wealth of anecdotal and factual detail, but suffers from repetitive info dumps that should have been cleaned up in the editorial rounds. Likely best absorbed by the completist who wishes to know the warts-and-all tale of boardroom battles, bad feelings, threats, assaults, slights, hubris and occasional avarice on the part of "the other ones" left in the wake of Garcia's death. Such readers will no doubt wish to find a spot for it on their shelf of Dead lit, but beware: it's far from a cheerful romp.

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## Joshua says

Tabloid summary of Dead World (R) 1995-2015, with choice snark reserved for Phil and Jill, who obviously refused to cooperate (e.g. "Lesh and his wife were alone in their appreciation of his vocal skills.") Probably

true, but totally unnecessary.

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### **Susan says**

I thought this was a pretty interesting account of the paths that the "core four" took following the death of Jerry Garcia. I had heard rumors over the years that there was a certain amount of discord between Phil Lesh and the rest of the surviving members of the Grateful Dead, and so this book sheds light on that. I did notice a few inaccuracies you can fact check with a simple Google search (for instance one error I recall is John Mayer was not 19 years old when his first album, Room for Squares was released in 2002 as Selvin states, rather he was 25). So, that is sloppy and I wonder what other facts Selvin got wrong, if he can't calculate someone's age accurately. Still, I found it very readable and enjoyable.

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### **Jason says**

I really enjoyed this book. I found it well written, full of interesting facts and anecdotes, and perfect for someone like me who did manage to see Grateful Dead in the nineties, but most of my experience with and appreciation for the Dead has come post 8/9/1995 (Jerry's death - where the book starts), through Phil & Friends, JRAD, Dark Star Orchestra - and also all 3 Chicago Fare Thee Well shows. (It also touches on Phish and other jam bands that I regularly see and listen to.) I am sure the many others who are fans of the Dead in their mid-40s will also find the book enjoyable.

That is not to say i agreed with the author's take throughout the book. The Leshes are certainly not portrayed all that well in the book, and that seems to be a valid interpretation. However, another interpretation is that the Leshes were alone among the remaining core 4 to get serious and treat the multi-million dollar enterprise as a business. Given the lack of focus and insobriety of Bobby, Mickey and Bill, it could be easy to see why the Leshes would take an authoritarian approach and want to distance themselves a bit—even if they took it too far at times. I also don't agree with the author's praising of Bobby's vocal skills - and while Days Between in the final set of Chicago 3 may be a highlight for the author, i thought it was a complete downer. (On the other hand, I completely agree with the author's assessment of Phil's vocals...not good!)

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### **John Dito says**

I think all of us close to the GD universe for a long time knew how dysfunctional it could be but some of the antics are truly surprising.

Joel Selvin treads a fine and respectful line in telling the post Garcia story of the organization. There were huge missed opportunities (licensing dead.net platform), petty power plays, toxic personalities etc....

For me the one specific criticism I have of the "core four" is the extremely poor execution of the Fare Thee Well concerts. Re-listening to them they are as bad as I remember, no fault of the supporting players.

But at the end of the day we have the positive spirit of our communal experiences, we have ROBERT HUNTERS SONGS!!

The spirit lives on, go see live music, whatever it is that turns you on!

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### **Josh Firer says**

This kind of gossip book about musicians is my guilty pleasure reading. There is a glut of information about the history of the Grateful Dead, but almost all of it ends with Jerry Garcia's death in 1995. However, the surviving members have continued to play the Grateful Dead songbook in various incarnations since. This book is about that post-1995 history. I found plenty of fascinating stories that were new to me, such as the sad story of Doug Irwin, the luthier who created Jerry Garcia's famous guitars. I only wish there was more information about Dead & Company, but the book basically ends with the creation of Dead & Company. Highly recommended for fans of the Grateful Dead.

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### **John says**

I really love a well written, gossip, "behind the music" book and Fare Thee Well did not disappoint. It confirmed what I already observed: Phil took charge of the Grateful Dead legacy post Jerry and was calling all the shots. What I didn't realize was how much of a dick he was about it.

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### **John Marricco says**

This gets 4 stars if you are a Grateful Dead fan as I am, having seen 12 shows right before Jerry passed on. But if you are not a fan, it still gets a robust 3(wish we could give 1/2 stars!). I also believe that the constant listing of names as to who's playing with who starts to become a little redundant but is also very informative at the same time. I am sad that the 4 living members had so much animosity towards each other. I'm also amazed at how Jerry was able to keep balance within the band but could barely keep balance within himself, I miss him now more than ever. I also regret missing the Fare Thee Well shows, or at least not streaming a show or 2 to my TV. "I got no wine but I got some time to tell my story."

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### **John Lester says**

I doubt this will be the final chapter of the Grateful Dead. I look forward to many more years of struggle, greed, and turmoil. Meanwhile I'll just listen to the music and memories.

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### **Saul Tannenbaum says**

The story of the members of the Grateful Dead after Jerry Garcia's death is like a car wreck. You know you shouldn't wallow in the profound grief of band members but if you're at all curious about how the music gets made, it's a compelling read.

It is, however, flawed. On the small side, it seems sloppily edited, reintroducing people who have been

introduced before. But the bigger flaws are two. First, it's a bashing of Phil and Jill Lesh, taking care to include a "she was just a waitress" insult. She did violate the Grateful Dead code, that the women shouldn't assert themselves, that a patriarchal marriage/relationship was ideal.

Second, and more importantly, the story ends with John Mayer joining Dead & Company, and is thus framed as an unsuccessful search for a new band that had the old magic. As almost anyone who has followed Dead & Company acknowledges, that search is now successful. Perhaps there's another book in the making.

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### **Brad Zerkel says**

Boy did this guy make Phil and his wife the bad guy. In short it's about how lost the remaining members were wafted Jerry's death. Most of the "trash" written was already known within our deadhead community. I don't really know what the goal was here honestly. It was definitely slanted against Phil and it seemed like he favored Weir although he did show some nasty sides to him.

I think the thing that was really untrue was that the band really didn't understand or care about the Deadheads but Phil became the enlightened one after Jerry died and he alone picked up the burden that was the legacy.

It's hard for me to go below 3 stars being a deadhead because it wasn't a bad book by any means.

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### **Adam Ziarnik says**

If you're a fan of the Grateful Dead and you think you might enjoy reading an account of what's been going on behind the scenes for the last 20+ years, AND you're not bothered by the idea that you're going to see the guys *warts and all* then you'll likely enjoy this book. After all, life isn't all sunshine daydreams. If you're one of the Deadheads who considers any cross word spoken against any of the boys as a personal affront to your chosen deity, then you should probably stay away.

Basically it's an account of how the surviving members coped (or didn't cope) with the loss of Jerry Garcia, and the loss of touring income that they had come to enjoy as they had been filling stadiums for the last several years of touring as the Grateful Dead. For me it was an enjoyable, quick read, but sometimes a little frustrating when you see the warts on your heroes. It is quite apparent that musical skill aside, these guys are fallen people just like everyone else.

It's worth noting that as much as I enjoy Phil Lesh as a musician (he's one of the best and most unique rock bassists ever IMO), I came away from this book not really liking him so much as a person. I know there's two sides to every story, but in this case there's at least 4 sides, and Phil & Jill Lesh come out not looking so great in the way they've handled relationships with the rest of the band, crew, management, etc., as well as some of the supporting musicians in the extended Dead family.

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### **David Ward says**

Fare the Well: The Final Chapter of the Grateful Dead's Long, Strange Trip by Joel Selvin (Da Capo Press 2018) (782.42). This purports to be "...the last chapter in the saga of the Grateful Dead." It covers the period

from Jerry Garcia's death in 1995 through the band's triumphant 2015 concerts commemorating the Grateful Dead's Fiftieth Anniversary at Soldier Field in Chicago. During that twenty year period, author Joel Selvin reports, the culture of the band underwent a heart-wrenching change from "all for one" to "all for me." If Selvin is correct, then the entire Deadhead nation was hijacked and held hostage by the oldest surviving member of the band, bassist Phil Lesh. If this reporting is accurate, Phil Lesh should be ashamed of himself and what he has become. I am mortified on his behalf. However, knowing that there are two sides to every story, I look forward to hearing Phil's response, for he has certainly been portrayed as a selfish and mean-spirited douchebag in this volume. And in the author's telling, there is one other person in the Grateful Dead sphere of influence who is even more loathesome than Phil Lesh, and that is Deborah Koons Garcia who was the fourth Mrs. Jerome John Garcia. By virtue of having married Jerry a year before his death, she became "The Widow Garcia." She was a principal in an excruciatingly uncomfortable scene at the post-funeral dockside gathering of Jerry's closest friends and family as they congregated to board a yacht to spread Jerry's ashes in San Francisco Bay.

Anyway, the book ends after the 2015 Fiftieth Anniversary shows in Chicago. Author Joel Selvin deems this to be the Grateful Dead's final chapter. Fortunately it appears that he was referring to the particular iteration of the band known as "The Grateful Dead." As all fans of this band know, the core group of musicians has been reconfiguring and reinventing itself since the 1960's when the beloved original keyboard player (and acknowledged leader of the Grateful Dead) Ron "Pigpen" McKernan died of terminal alcoholism at the age of twenty-seven. Granted, the Grateful Dead lost its rudder in 1995 with Jerry's passing. A lot of soul-searching was required of the surviving band mates. Fortunately the band has once again rejiggered and reconfigured itself after the Fiftieth Anniversary concerts and is back in the business of playing Grateful Dead music under the name "Dead and Company." The music never stopped; the band has simply retired the name "The Grateful Dead" and has cut Phil Lesh loose to do his own thing musically thus freeing the other three surviving original band members to do the same.

As a loyal Deadhead of long standing, I for one will miss Phil, and I know that all Deadheads wish him only the best. However, if Joel Selvin's reporting of the situation is accurate, it was time to say goodbye to bassist Phil Lesh. What a long, strange trip indeed. My rating: 7.25/10, finished 6/22/18. I purchased a new hardback copy from Amazon on 6/15/18. HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

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