

Rock Scully, Grateful Dead's Manager Who Put the Band on Records, Dies at 73

By Douglas Martin

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Rock Scully learned his mission in life at an Acid Test, one of the drug-drenched, strobe-lit parties the author Ken Kesey staged in the San Francisco area in the mid-1960s.

Owsley Stanley, the notoriously prodigious maker of LSD, introduced Mr. Scully in 1965 to the scraggly, zonked-out members of a band that had just changed its name from the Warlocks to the Grateful Dead. "Rock's going to be your manager," he said.

"Hey, good luck, dude," said the band's guitarist and vocalist Bob Weir, according to "Living With the Dead" (1996), the memoir Mr. Scully wrote with David Dalton.

So began a long, strange trip that saw the Dead go from a makeshift sort-of-bluegrass band that played for nothing in San Francisco parks to one of the biggest, most remarkable acts in rock 'n' roll history. They sold 35 million albums, many to self-described Deadheads committed to following the band from concert to concert, night after night.

Mr. Scully organized tours, negotiated the group's first record contracts and successfully demanded that promoters of the Woodstock Music and Art Fair pay the group up front. In 1968, he used a bread truck to smuggle the band onto a Columbia University campus that had been shut down by student strikers. The next year, he may have arranged for Hells Angels to provide what turned out to be grossly inadequate security at the Altamont Speedway Free Festival, where a man was stabbed to death as the Rolling Stones played.

Mr. Scully died at a hospital in Monterey, Calif., on Tuesday. He was 73. His brother, Dicken, said the cause was lung cancer.

Managing the rambunctious Grateful Dead was probably even more of a challenge than herding cats, but Mr. Scully at least had help. At its peak, Dicken Scully, who worked as the Dead's merchandise manager, said the band's management staff numbered 30. But from 1965 to 1985, Mr. Scully was always among the top five managers, his brother said, even as he sank into opiate addiction at the end of his tenure.

"Rock was a big part of it all," Mr. Weir said in a statement. "He put in the miles with us. He knew the words to all the songs. He knew the right things to say, to tell people, to let them know what we were all about without ever actually explaining anything, because he knew it couldn't be explained."

Mr. Scully worked particularly closely with the group's other early manager, Danny Rifkin, sometimes using the old good cop-bad cop routine. "I'd be the hippie and sweet and nice to everybody," Mr. Scully was quoted as saying on the Dead's website after his death. "But I don't know what my partner, Danny, will say."

The website praised Mr. Scully's "central sweetness." It went on to say that if he conned you, "it was almost always in the service of a higher ideal and for the best of reasons."

In an interview, Mr. Dalton, Mr. Scully's co-author, called him "one of the great talkers of all time." He also called him "a world-champion liar" with the sense of humor of "somebody who had taken a lot of acid."

Rock Robert Scully was born in Seattle on Aug. 1, 1941, exactly a year before Jerry Garcia, the Dead's lead guitarist and singer. His parents, Robert and Dorothy Scully, named him Rock after his great-grandfather's beloved horse. They divorced when he was 6, and that same day his mother married Milton Mayer, whose distinctions included being placed on permanent probation at the University of Chicago for throwing beer bottles out a dormitory window and writing the book "They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933-45," which told of a group of ordinary people in Nazi Germany.

As a youth, Mr. Scully shuttled between Carmel, Calif., and Europe, where Mr. Mayer often worked, and graduated from a Swiss boarding school. After graduating from Earlham College in Indiana in 1963, he did graduate work in history at San Francisco State University. In 1964, he participated in protests against local employers who discriminated against blacks. He was arrested for disturbing the peace and spent 30 days in jail.

His brother said that after coming to the conclusion that the civil rights movement needed musical relief, Mr. Scully "joined the circus." He organized dances at his graduate school and managed the Charlatans, one of the first groups to combine rock, folk, country, jug band and blues influences in what became known as the San Francisco sound. He joined the Family Dog, a gaggle of hippies who promoted concerts at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom.

He also fell in with a crowd, including leather workers, smugglers and musicians like Janis Joplin, that hung out at a clothes shop, Mnasidika, at the intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets. "We didn't even know we were hippies," Peggy Caserta, the proprietor of the store, said in an interview, though it is said to have been the place where the San Francisco Chronicle columnist Herb Caen first thought to use the word in a column, to apply to devotees of the new counterculture.

The hippies at Mnasidika were at first less than entranced with the Dead. "We never gave a prayer that they would ever make a nickel," said Ms. Caserta. "They were truly nobody." But they quickly built a following, and by 1967 they were world-famous avatars of San Francisco's "summer of love."

Mr. Scully's longest romantic involvement, with Nicki Rudolph, began in 1969 and lasted for 15 years. They were never legally married, but she uses his last name. She survives him, as does their daughter, Sage Scully. In addition to his brother, he is also survived by Acacia Scully, also known as Spirit, Ms. Scully's daughter from a previous relationship, and a granddaughter.

Mr. Scully and Tangerine Steinbrecher had a son, Luke Scully, who died in the tsunami 10 years ago while vacationing in Thailand. Many sources say Mr. Scully was briefly married in the mid-1970s to Carolyn Christie, a shirttail member of the British aristocracy, but his brother said he doubted that was a legal tie. Ms. Christie later married Roger Waters of Pink Floyd.

Mr. Scully was fired by the Dead in 1984 because of an addiction to morphine and cocaine that he shared with Mr. Garcia, Dicken Scully said. Band members blamed Mr. Scully for Mr. Garcia's descent into the same drugs he took. He returned briefly in 1985. Mr. Garcia died in 1995.

After beating his drug habit, Mr. Scully fought alcoholism and ultimately stopped drinking. In what his brother called "a very humbling time," he returned to Carmel, where he took care of his mother, painted houses and became involved in local civic issues.

"The old Rock was slowly coming back," Dicken Scully said.

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