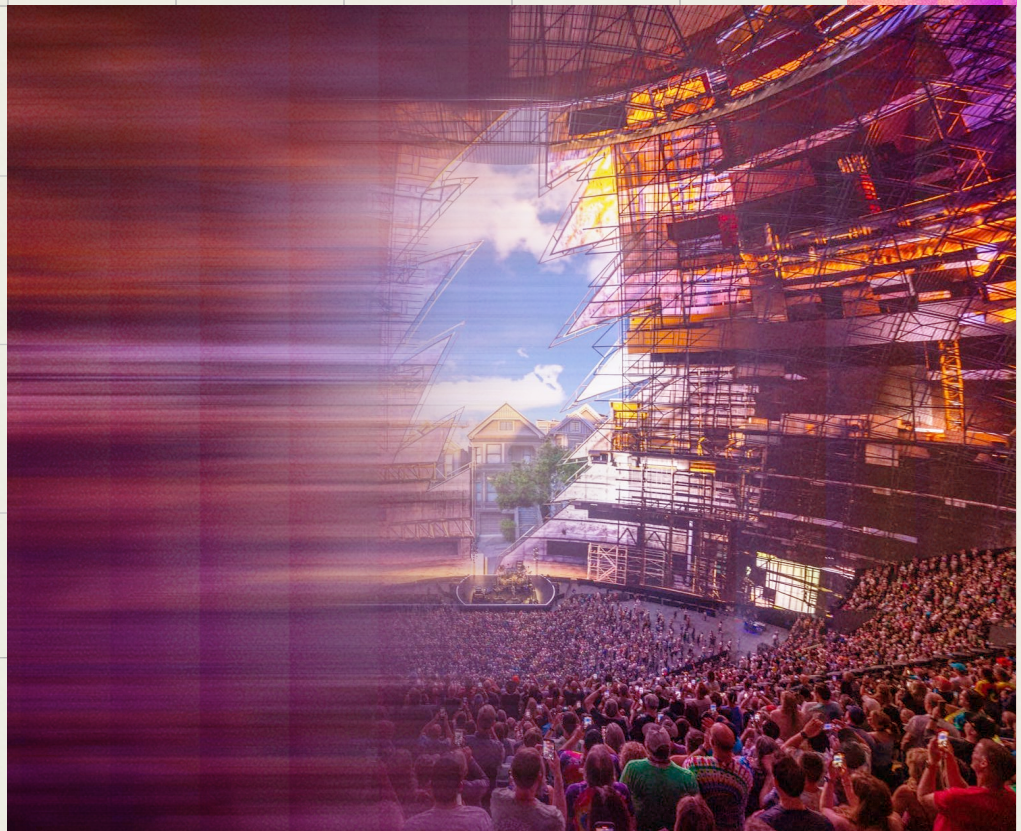




WEKA Teams With Dead & Company at Sphere to Power Its Most Ambitious and Immersive Concert Experience Ever

Case Study



When John Mayer discovered the Grateful Dead in 2011, he quickly became one of the band's biggest fans. Four years later, the original members of 'The Dead' reunited to celebrate the band's 50th anniversary. That same year, John invited Bob Weir to perform with him on The Late Late Show. Their soundcheck famously morphed into a two-hour jam session, where the idea for Dead & Company was born. In August of 2015, Dead & Company announced their first tour.

Forever Pushing Boundaries

The Grateful Dead has pushed boundaries since the beginning, a legacy that continued under the Dead & Company moniker. The group stunned the music industry in early 2024 when it broke [the record for the most Top 40 albums to chart on the Billboard 200](#) despite retiring the Grateful Dead name in 1995.

But as any veteran musician can attest, touring takes a toll. After 30 years on the road bringing their beloved live concert experiences to its vast community of fans, Dead & Company announced its Farewell Tour in 2023, a decision hailed as the "end of an era."

Endings, however, seem to elude this musical mainstay, and Deadheads everywhere rejoiced when Dead & Company announced the band would return to the stage with its Dead Forever residency at Sphere in 2024.

QUOTE

“Life is too short to play it safe. Take risks, make mistakes, and keep evolving as an artist.

BOB WEIR



The Next Frontier of Live Entertainment

Sphere is the most talked about live entertainment venue in the world right now. The world's largest spherical structure, which houses a massive 16K x 16K LED canvas and more than 36,000 individual audio channels, has widely been heralded as the eighth wonder of the world.

Building on the Grateful Dead's legacy of reinvention and improvisation, Dead & Company has remained steadfastly committed to ensuring each show is unique. Sphere's state-of-the-art venue, which can accommodate over

20,000 people, allowed the band to bring its fans to the music rather than its music to the fans as it had in the past—and an opportunity to deliver an unparalleled new live concert experience.

However, for bands performing at Sphere, the venue pushes the boundaries of what they’ve encountered before and presents unprecedented data management, performance, and scale challenges.

QUOTE

“I wanted to use live cameras to bring the audience closer to the action and create a cinematic living document of this really special run of shows.”

BRANDON KRAEMER,
TREATMENT STUDIOS

A hallmark of Dead & Company’s concert experiences is its immersive three-dimensional video content, which required significant performance to render and playback at scale for Sphere. The band was also adamant that it would preserve the improvisational nature of its performances, a choice that would further push the limits of the Dead Forever production team’s capabilities. Without time codes for their set, Dead & Company’s creative team had to prepare and manage enough video to transition when necessary during the performance while still maintaining its organic feel.

Treatment Studio’s Brandon Kraemer, who served as the Technical Director for Dead Forever, is no stranger to technology-intensive shows. His production philosophy is rooted in an almost reverent awareness that technology, when used correctly, has the power to amplify creativity and transform the experience for artists and audiences alike.

Developing the technology stack that would underpin what Rolling Stone magazine called “the most dazzling visual show in Grateful Dead history”

was no easy feat. To create a show that could run and dazzle at scale on Sphere’s unprecedented canvas, the production team knew they had to bring the right tools to the project, or it would be insurmountable.

Producing an experience that ran on a 1.5PB dataset, rendering the enormous files required for high-quality 3D images, and preserving the flexibility necessary for the flow of an experiential show built around musical jam sets without a pre-determined order or time limits required a flexible, high-performance technology platform.



Deadheads' Delight: A Wildly Immersive Experience Powered by WEKA

Dead & Company selected WEKA as its Official Technology Partner for its Dead Forever residency at Sphere, using its turnkey WEKApod™ Data Platform Appliance to power the show.

Leveraging WEKA Data Platform software, the WEKApod effortlessly optimized the processing of enormous datasets at lightning speed, making it a critical component in supporting the show's pre-production workflow. It enabled Dead & Company's production team to render impossibly large video files in record time, unleashing their creativity as they embraced the full scale of the Sphere's immersive venue to bring their music to life for fans.

"WEKA made working with what were once unthinkable resolutions and file sizes a near-effortless experience. There is no other solution that could prove to be as fast, flexible or reliable," said Kraemer.

The WEKApod appliance also functioned as the data hub for the entire project, supporting the post-production pipeline, storing camera records and videos, and providing a centralized system for distributing the live show's D3 media playback servers. This ensured that Kraemer and his team did not have to worry about waiting hours to transfer files to the media servers.



"With WEKA as the repository for all our screen encoded files, we were able to distribute incredibly high-resolution files across 23 media servers in minutes."

WEKA is no stranger to helping bands push the boundaries of live entertainment, but when the company partnered with Dead & Company and their crew, something truly magical happened.

"Technology is at its best when it gets out of the way of the creative process, and that is exactly what WEKA did for us at Sphere. It allowed us to focus on the show's creative elements and not agonize over the technical logistics of the rendering and delivery pipeline. Without WEKA, we wouldn't have had the speed or depth necessary to explore even half the creativity we designed into this show," Kraemer said.

DEAD & COMPANY ON WEKA

1.5 PB

data under management

90 TB

data per show

100 GB

network at line-rate speeds

WEKA helped to supercharge the production team's creativity by enabling its artists to render and encode in minutes instead of hours, supporting a more iterative creative process.

The Dead Forever experience has been a euphoric celebration of this music's legacy. Deadheads have gathered at Sphere to be immersed in a musical journey that travels from the present day back to the origins of the music.

"I've never heard some of these songs performed so well," Brandon said. Even amid the next-generation technology, however, he is emphatic that 'it's still about the band. And it's still really about the music. With our creative capabilities, we can tell the story of what they're doing live. It's about being in the moment with what they're doing. And it's a fantastic experience for everyone involved. It's been the gig of a lifetime for me."

Bob Wier once said, "Music is a journey, and the destination is always changing." That statement has never rang truer for Dead & Company fans than this year at the Sphere.

Working with WEKA, Dead & Company achieved new creative heights with an immersive, multi-dimensional, globally praised extravaganza. More importantly, a band renowned for creating unforgettable experiences for its beloved community of fans combined the best of the Grateful Dead's decades-long musical legacy with bleeding-edge technology to delight over 20,000 'Deadheads' each night.

"I can't imagine approaching a project as landmark as Dead Forever without the right tools to make the magic happen—WEKA has been one of the sharpest tools in the shed for us," Kraemer said.

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