MOBY GRAPE

Title: Moby Grape Live

Label: Sundazed

Release Date: 2010

Medium: CD

Availability: Very Good

Venue: Monterey Pop Festival, Monterey, CA
Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, CA
Amsterdam, Holland
San Francisco, CA

Recording Date: Monterey - June 17, 1967
San Francisco - 1967
Avalon - 12/31/66 and 6/67
Holland - 2/12/69

Lineup: Skip Spence - Guitar, vocals
Peter Lewis - Guitar, vocals
Jerry Miller - Guitar, vocals
Bob Mosley - Bass, vocals
Don Stevenson - Drums, vocals

Set List: Ain't No Use (Avalon 1967)
Rounder (Avalon 1967)
Looper (Avalaon 1967)
Bitter Wind (Avalon 1967)
Changes (Avalon 1967)
Indifference (Avalon 1967)
Someday (Avalon 1967)
Introduction (Monterey)
Indifference (Monterey)
Mr. Blues (Monterey)
Sitting By The Window (Monterey)
Omaha (Monterey)
Sweet Little Angel (San Francisco 1967)
Murder In My Heart For The Judge (Holland)
I Am Not Willing (Holland)
Trucking Man (Holland)
Fall On You (Holland)
Omaha (Holland)
Dark Magic (Avalon 1966)

One of the West Coast's legendary sixties bands, Moby Grape was destined for stardom before they ran into a series of mishaps, some of their own doing and others by people around them. When they first came out of the same 1966 San Francisco scene that yielded Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Quicksilver Messenger Service, they were widely considered to be the best of those bands. All five band members could sing and they were superb musicians. Only the Buffalo Springfield could match them in terms of the three guitar lineup and all five members were songwriters.

Their first two albums each made the American pop albums top twenty five and are considered to be classic recordings from the late sixties. Yet, the band made hardly any money. They were tied into an horrible management contract, were victimized by their label's incomprehensible decision to release their first five singles simultaneously, and were severely affected by their own drug use. They broke up after only a handful of years. While they would reform and break up five more times, they never recaptured the magic of their first two records. In total, the group placed five albums on the American pop albums chart, along with one single on the U.S. pop singles top one hundred.

Their 1967 debut album is considered by many to be one of the best records released in the late sixties, yet it did not sell nearly as well as albums by their contemporaries. Moby Grape favored structured songs that combined elements of country, blues, psychedelic rock, and rock and roll over the free form jamming of many of the sixties Bay Area bands. They directly influenced such notable groups as the Doobie Brothers, Little Feat, R.E.M., The Smithereens, Wet Willie, and Weezer. They were also one of the founders of

country rock. After a forty year legal battle with their first manager, Matthew Katz, the band won the rights to their publishing and name in 2007. They have been active since.

The roots of Moby Grape go back to late 1966. Skip Spence was born Alexander Lee Spence on April 18, 1946 in Windsor, Canada. His father was a solo singer/songwriter who played piano at night and worked a 9 to 5 job as a machinist during the day. He relocated his family to San Jose, California in the late fifties when he got a new job in the aircraft industry. He bought his son his first guitar when he was ten years old.

Spence learned to play and by his late teens, he was a member of a surf combo named The Topsiders. In September, 1965, he was ready to join Quicksilver Messenger Service, who rehearsed at the Matrix, a San Francisco club part owned by Marty Balin. Balin saw him at the bar, was intrigued with his good looks, and invited him to join Jefferson Airplane, who were looking for a new drummer to replace Jerry Peloquin, who had just quit. When Spence explained to Balin that he was a guitarist and had never played the drums, Marty did not care. He handed him a pair of drumsticks and told him to practice. He learned to play drums within a week and was in the band.

At the time, the band was managed by Matthew Katz. he new band quickly developed a strong following. On October 16, 1965, they performed at the Family Dog's first concert at the Longshoreman's Hall. It was the first time that the group had played outside of the Matrix. Before long, Jefferson Airplane was the talk of San Francisco. They had made an audition tape for Columbia Records earlier that fall but the label did not bite.

However, RCA did and signed the band to a recording contract in November, 1965. They began recording their debut album at RCA's studio in Hollywood, CA. The band finished the album at the end of March, 1966. In February, 1966, the group released their debut single, "It's No Secret" (1966).

A couple of months later, Spence went AWOL and wound up in Mexico with two girls. He was fired and was replaced by Spencer Dryden. However, Katz was also fascinated by Spence and continued to work with him. Spence turned down an offer to replace Kewey Martin in Buffalo Springfield as a result of Katz, who convinced him that he should form his own band. Katz was a middle aged businessman who was old school in his approach to his clients. He managed Jefferson Airplane until the summer of 1966, when Graham was able to get the band to fire him. Katz wound up suing the band and the case was not resolved for 22 years. It should have served as a warning to Spence, but he either didn't notice or cared.

With Katz' help, Spence recruited an extraordinary group of musicians to join his new band. The first two were guitarist Jerry Miller and drummer Don Stevenson. Miller was born on July 10, 1943 in Tacoma, Washington. He learned to play guitar at an early age and was part of the Northwest garage rock scene. While in high school, Miller played in a number of local bands. They included The Epics, the Gear Grinders, the Twelfth Street Taranulas, and the Searchers.

After graduating from high school in 1962, Bobby Fuller's drummer, Larry Thompson, heard him play at the Crescent Ballroom in Seattle. He took him to El Paso, Texas, where he recorded four tracks with Fuller, his brother Randall, and Thompson. One of them was an early version of "I Fought The Law". He toured with Fuller around Texas before returning to Washington in 1963. He played with all black combo called the Incredible Kings. That led to a gig with The Elegants.

During this period, Miller became friends with Jimi Hendrix and Larry Coryell, who was attending the University Of Washington in Seattle. They would jam together and watch bands as they passed through the area. One of the clubs they frequented was the Spanish Castle Magic, which was later immortalized in a Hendrix song of the same name. In 1965, Miller wound up in the Frantics, a bar band based in Seattle. The group had been around since 1955 and had released some records on Dolton Records, based in Seattle. By the time Miller joined, the drummer of that band was Don Stevenson (born October 15, 1941 in Seattle, Washington). Stevenson had learned his chops from Blues legends like Etta James and Big Mama Thorton.

In 1965, the Frantics moved to the Bay Area and started playing some shows. While there, Miller and Stevenson met Jerry Garcia at a club. When the rest of the band decided to return to Seattle, he convinced Miller and Stevenson to stay. A short time later, the two hooked up with bassist Bob Mosley (born James Robert Mosely on December 4, 1942 in Paradise Valley, CA).

Mosley had grown up in San Diego and had formed a band called The Misfits, who released a couple of singles in the early sixties. He had moved to San Francisco to join the Vejtables. That band played some shows with the Frantics and Miller, Stevenson, and Mosley became friends. Mosley decided to join The Frantics, which also included Chuck Schoning. However, he only stayed for a short period of time before returning to Los Angeles to join the Joel Scott Hill Trio, which also included drummer Johnny Barbata. The Frantics then changed their name to Luminous Marsh Gas.

While in Los Angeles, Mosley met Peter Lewis (born July 15, 1945 in Hollywood), who was playing in a band called Peter and the Wolves. Mosley had just left the Joel Scott Hill Trio. Lewis is the son of actress Loretta Young and writer-producer Tom Lewis. He attended military school as a child and eventually served in the Air Force. Once out, he turned to music, playing in a series of folk and country bands, including a surf band called The Cornells, which also included the sons of Art Linkletter, Dennis O"Keefe, and actor Charlie Correll. After being discharged from the Air Force, Lewis became part of the folk and country scene. He moved to Los Angeles, where he eventually met Mosley.

Katz convinced Mosley that he should return to San Francisco with Lewis to become part of a new band which would include Spence. They did just that and hit it off with Spence. Mosley then recommended Miller and Stevenson, and Moby Grape was formed. They started rehearsing in August, 1966. The new band named themselves Moby Grape, taken from the joke "What's big and purple and lives in the ocean?". Spence and Mosley came up with the name, which was distinctive and attracted attention.

Katz' vision for the band was to recreate the multiple lead singers and songwriters that Jefferson Airplane had as well as employ a three guitar attack similar to Buffalo Springfield. With these five musicians, he could do both. He also had the undivided loyalty of Spence, who was being postured to be the centerpiece of the band and certainly had the best credentials, given his work with Jefferson Airplane. The new band rehearsed for as much as twelve hours a day at Katz's club, the Ark in Sausalito, CA in mid October, 1966. Some of the rehearsals were open to the public so their first live show was during this period. However, they played their first advertised show at California Hall on November 4, 1966. Reportedly, they played before a few dozen people.

Katz funded their initial shows and became their manager. In mid November, he landed them two shows at the Avalon Ballroom. Their reputation grew when Stephen Stills and Neil Young jammed with them at the Ark around the same time. Both of them were fascinated by Spence, who had an aura around him that was universally appealing. On November 25, 26, and 27, they opened for Jefferson Airplane and the James

Cotton Blues Band at the Fillmore Auditorium. This stand of shows made them the new "hot" band in San Francisco.

They played at the same venue from December 2 – 4, followed by three consecutive nights at the Matrix. They returned to the Matrix for three more nights in mid December, then opened for the Grateful Dead and the Steve Miller Blues Band at the Avalon on 12/23 and 12/24. They opened for Big Brother and the Holding Company at the Ark, opened for the Grateful Dead at the National Guard Armory near San Rafael on 12/29, then closed the year opening for Country Joe and the Fish at the Avalon on December 30 and 31.

By the end of 1966, several major labels, including Elektra, Atlantic, and Columbia, were interested in signing the bad. Katz used all of this to his advantage. When Columbia sent producer David Rubinson to see them in person, Katz told him that unless the band members agreed to sign a management and publishing agreement with him, he would kill any deal. For whatever reason, the band members agreed that he had that kind of power. In October, 1966, they signed a management and publishing contract with Katz that was completely slanted in Katz' direction.

A short time later, Katz told Spence that he also needed rights to their name to book concerts for them. Spence relayed the information to the other four members and all five agreed to sign over their rights to their own name. They did not realize that a simple power of attorney would have sufficed. The five men were advised not to sign the deal by none other than Neil Young, but did not take his advice and made a tragic mistake that would haunt them until 2006, when they finally won back their name.

In early 1967, the band continued to play better and better venues. They played the Avalon and the Fillmore Auditorium, while still doing shows at the Ark. Columbia and Rubinson eventually won the bidding war and signed the group in February, 1967. On March 3, 1967, they played their highest profile show to date at Winterland, third billed to Love and the Grateful Dead. They would headline the venue three weeks later. Later that month, they returned once again, second billed to the Byrds, who had a significant impact on the band with their layered harmonies and integration of folk and rock.

Their debut album was recorded at Columbia's Hollywood studios in March and April for a paltry cost of $11,000. Rubinson produced the album. While their contemporaries were playing twenty minute jams, Moby Grape was producing four minute power rock gems that were nearly punk like in intensity. Their music included elements of psychedelia, country rock, glam, and power pop. There was nothing out like it at the time but they never took advantage of their talent.

While recording, they continued to play live shows. On June 6, 1967, the label rented the Avalon Ballroom and threw a lavish release party. They flew in journalists from across the country, showered the venue with purple orchids, handled out 700 bottles of wine (without any corkscrews), and gave each audience member a package containing five new singles. The entire thing was an exercise in excess and aroused the suspicions of any dedicated music fan. Of course, the coup de grace was simultaneously releasing the same five singles they had handed out to the audience to the public on the same day as the album, proclaiming that each of them would be hits.

Later that night, Miller, Lewis, and Spence were arrested in Marin County, caught with three underage girls. Miller was also arrested for possession of marijuana. The entire arrest was misrepresented. In fact, there were many other people at the impromptu party when the police showed up and no marijuana was actually found. All the charges were subsequently dropped but the damage was done.

Columbia flew the group to NYC right after the three were released from jail to play a three night showcase at The Scene before returning to CA to play the Monterey Pop Festival. They initially were booked in a prime spot, right before Otis Redding, but Katz demanded a millin dollar appearance fee or he would not allow them to be filmed or recorded. Every band was playing the festival for free and the organizers responded appropriately. They dropped the band to the Saturday evening opening slot, when they would play while the audience was still taking their seats. They also filmed and recorded the set, but did not release any of it. As it turned out, the band was spectacular but no one would ever know for years.

In the end, the showcase and Monterey accomplished little. Radio stations had no idea what to do with five singles at the same time and were offended by Columbia's Moby Grape Manual, which dictated how the band should be marketed. Then, the natural backlash took place and Moby Grape was instantly labeled as the most overhyped group in rock history. The album, *Moby Grape* (#24-1967), received great reviews and would do amazingly well, considering all the negativity, but it was not the hit that everyone hoped.

Columbia compounded their errors by sending Moby Grape on a national tour opening for the The Mamas And The Papas. The bill also included The Buckinghams. At the first two shows of the tour, on June 24 in Cleveland and June 25 in Pittsburgh, it was painfully obvious that the acts were not compatible. Not willing to tone their act down the least bit, Moby Grape played an intentionally frenzied wild set that had nothing in common with the other two acts. They were booted off the tour after the two shows at the insistence of Mama Cass.

Through all of this, the album, which is now considered to be a classic late sixties recording, had managed to crack the American pop albums chart top twenty five, peaking at number 24. It reportedly generated sales of 200,000 copies. One of the five singles, "Omaha" (#88-1967), had even made the lower reaches of the U.S. pop singles chart. The album has been ranked at number 121 on Rolling Stone Magazine's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. The Spence written "Omaha" was ranked number 95 on Rolling Stone's 100 Greatest Guitar Songs of All Time. It would be the band's finest moment.

After being booted off The Mamas And The Papas tour, the band played eleven shows in early August, then recorded a new song for the movie, Sweet Ride. On August 21, they played the first of five shows at the famed Whisky-A-Go-Go in Los Angeles. They then started work on their next album. With the group's partying and ego reaching epic proportions, little got done. They flew back to NYC and filmed a session at The Scene on September 4. They also played some shows near the city, then returned to the West Coast. By this point, they had finally had enough with Katz and fired him, setting up what would turn out to be forty years of litigation between the two parties.

Columbia had no idea how to reign them in and decided to continue recording sessions for the new album at their NYC studios. They returned to the city on November 6 and began to record once again. While Rubionson struggled to get the five musicians in the studio at the same time, he made progress on the record. In late November, the band played a series of show around NYC, then played three shows in Philadelphia and two at the famed Grande Ballroom in Detroit in early December. They returned to Los Angeles in mid December and played seven show at the Shrine Auditorium and the Whisky. They ended the year with a New Year's Eve show at the Avalon in San Francisco.

The band returned to NYC in early January to wrap up recording sessions for the new album. While recording in NYC, the band members continued to use drugs virtually non stop. Spence fell in with a hard partying crowd and injested copious amounts of hallucingens. Lewis' marriage was falling apart and he had started taking downers to cope with his pain. The sessions for the album took an unexpected turn

when Columbia had the band record a second disc of largely improvised jams. Al Kooper and Mike Bloomfield were brought in to play on one song each.

In between recording the second album, the band continued to perform live, including shows in Boston, Maine, and NYC. Despite all the obstacles, Rubinson wrapped up recording sessions in February. As if things weren't complicated enough, Katz put together a phony version of Moby Grape made up of Seattle based musicians and had them tour under the name Moby Grape. While they played mainly on the West Coast, their shows complicated matters considerably. Audiences had no idea which version of the band was playing on any given night.

By March, 1968, the band had made their way back to the West Coast, playing shows at the Fillmore Auditorium and Winterland in March. On April 1 or 2, they peformed at the Palm Springs Pop Festival. The new album, *Wow/Grape Jam* (#20-1968), was released on April 3, 1968. It entered the U.S. pop albums chart in early May and eventually peaked at number 20, four slots higher than their debut. The double album set included the new studio album as well as the jam album, which contained the five mostly improvised songs recorded in January and February.

The real Moby Grape hit the road in earnest in May, 1968 in support of the album. They performed throughout the month, then made their debut at the Fillmore East on May 31 and June 1, 1968. By the time they played the famed venue, Lewis had returned to Los Angeles to deal with his marriage, forcing the band top play the shows as a quartet. Significantly, they were the last two shows that they played with Spence until the 1971 reunion.

The mercurial Spence had gotten himself involved with Joanna, a groupie and a self proclaimed witch who supplied him with all the drugs he could handle. While it was normally Spence who had an hypnotic like power over people, he was completely under Joanna's control. The two hung around with an old person they found on the streets who claimed he was an oracle. They got Spence hooked on blue cheer, which combined LSD with methedrine. They convinced him that Stevenson and Miller were evil and had to be killed to save them from themselves. On June 3, 1968, Spence showed up at their hotel room at the Albert Hotel with an axe and tried to chop down the door. Fortunately, the two musicians were at the recording studio at the time.

By the time Spence got to the studio, still dressed in pyjamas and wielding the axe, Rubinson had been warned that he was coming. He confronted Spence on the street and was able to get him to drop the axe. The police arrived and arrested the singer, who was then admitted into Bellevue Hospital. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia and remained there for six months.

There is a second version of Spence's arrest that references a second attack that took place in Columbia's art director Bob Cato's office. In this acccount, Spence and Joanna attack Mosley and Cato sometime after the axe incident. Cato decided to press charges and both were arrested. Whatever the true reason, Spence wound up in jail at this time, then was admitted into Bellevue in June, 1968. He would be given a daily dose of thorazine for the next six months.

The remaining four decided to continue without him. Lewis had returned to the band in late June for a high profile show at the Schaeffer Music Festival in Central Park, NYC on June 29, 1968. The quartet played the newly opened Fillmore West in San Francisco from July 23 – 25, 1968. They continued to tour through the remainder of 1968, while working on their third studio album, which was finished in November,

1968. High profile gigs took place in Philadelphia in October (The Quaker City Rock Festival), SUNY, Chicago, Pasadena, and the Felt Forum in NYC.

The new album, *Moby Grape '69* (#113-1969) was released on January 30, 1969. By this point, the buying public had mostly lost interest and it did not crack the American pop albums top one hundred. The album was country rock oriented, similar to what Poco and The Eagles would be soon playing. In February, 1969, the group toured Europe for the first time. By the end of the tour, Mosley had lost his patience with all the mess surrounding the band. He abruptly left the group in March after a show at the Avalon and got a job as a janitor. Soon after, he received a draft notice and decided to enlist in the Marine Corps. Within nine months, he was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic after attacking an officer and given a medical discharge.

Meanwhile, Miller, Lewis, and Stevenson recorded their fourth studio album, *Truly Fine Citizen* (#157-1969), with Nashville session bassist Bob Moore in late May, 1969. It was released on July 30, 1969 and barely charted, exiting the pop albums chart after six weeks. The group disbanded shortly after it's release.

Spence was discharged from Bellevue in December, 1969. While there, he had written an entire album and Columbia agreed to release it. They gave him an advance, which he used to buy a Harley Davidson motorcycle. He drove non stop to Nashville and recorded the entire album by himself. That album, *Oar* (1969), has become a cult classic and proved to be highly influential to an entire generation of musicians.

After breaking up, Miller and Stevenson formed a new band, The Rhythm Dukes and toured through the later part of 1969 to the early part of 1971. They recorded a new album but it was not released until 2005. The band also included bassist John Barrett and drummer John Oxendine. Stevenson switched to guitar. This band was often billed as Moby Grape in late 1969. During this time period, Lewis was idle.

In 1970, the California Labour Commissioner voided all of the band's contracts with Katz. However, he appealed the decision and in August, 1973, agreed to a settlement proposed by the band's lawyer without the group's consent that gave ownership of the name and songs back to him. During that period, the original five members of the group reunited in 1971, teamed with David Rubinson once again, and were signed by Reprise Records. They recorded a new album, *20 Granite Creek* (#177-1971), which was released in September, 1971. It was credited to the five original members, even though Spence was only able to contribute one song. The album barely charted. The group played a few shows in support with Spence, but the concerts were disasters. Before long, Spence could no longer continue and the band broke up yet again.

In 1973, Lewis, Miller, and Mosely reformed the grupup with guitarist Jeff Blackburn, and drummer Johnny Craviotto and played some live shows into 1975. Because of the 1973 fraudulent settlement, the group started touring under different names to differentiate themselves from the phony Moby Grapes that Katz kept on the road. All told, the original band toured under the names Maby Grape, the Melvilles, Mosley Grape, Grape Escape, Fine Wine, the Grape, the Original Grape, the Hermans, and the Legendary Grape.

In July, 1977, they reformed again. This lineup included Lewis, Miller, Spence, Cornelious Mumpus, John Oxendine, and Chris Powell. Oxendine eventually left and was replaced by Danie Spencer. The new lineup toured under the name Moby Grape and recorded some shows in San Francisco and Cotati, CA. They were released as *Live Grape* (1978) on Escape Records. Because of the ongoing dispute with Katz, the name Moby Grape does not appear anywhere on the album and the group could not release any of their

older songs. This particular series of shows ended in March, 1978. During the tour, the band used the Grape and the Original Grape as their moniker.

In 1983, Lewis, Miller, Mosley, and Stevenson teamed for a new studio album, *Moby Grape '84* (1984). It was released on Katz's San Francisco Sound label under an agreement with Katz that also required the band to list him as producer. It also did not chart. This reunion ended the following year. In February, 1987, the original lineup reformed for some live shows. These would be the last live shows with Spence, who had continued to struggle with mental illness and drug addiction ever since his stay at Bellevue Hospital in 1968.

In 1989, Lewis, Miller, Mosley, and Stevenson teamed with Dan Abernathy to record a new album, *Legendary Grape* (1989), which was initially released as a limited 500 unit cassette only run on Herman Records under the Moby Grape moniker. Katz immediately sued the band and the group had to repackage the recording under the moniker The Melvilles. As had been their practice, the four band members included one of Spence's songs even though he was too ill to participate in the recording.

This version of the band lasted until 1991 when Mosley's mental illness incapitated him for the next five years. He actually was homeless during this period, living on the streets around San Diego. Lewis never gave up on him and tried to help him out without success. However, in 1996, he found him again living along the side of a San Diego freeway and he agreed to rejoin the band. They began to tour once again, with the renion lasting until 2001.

Spence had been in and out of mental institutions since 1968. He had battled heroin and cocaine addictions in addition to his mental health. In the early seventies,he had formed a rock band named Pachuca, then another band called The Rhythm Dukes. When he could, he wrote songs, mostly with Lewis and participated in band reunions. He nearly overdosed on heroin in San Jose. Much of his time was spent as a ward of the State of California. In his later years, he was homeless until he bought a trailer in Capitola, CA.

In 1994, he participated in a San Francisco sponsored music program for the mentally ill. Two years later, he was commissioned to write a song for The X-Files television series. It was never used. His last live performance with Moby Grape was on August 9, 1996 in Santa Cruz. After all the years of abuse from drugs, his body eventually gave out. While he officially died from lung cancer on April 16, 1999, he had been hospitalized with several ailments in the previous few years. He was survived by four children, eleven grandchildren, a half brother, and a sister. His estate would continue to fight the ownership and royalty payments with Katz long after his death.

In March, 2006, the band finally won their forty year battle with Katz. After a five day trial in San Francisco, the Superior Court Of California degreed on July 20, 2005 that all ownership rights relating to songs and recordings prior to 1973, as well as their name, were the sole property of Lewis, Miller, Stevenson, Mosley, and Spence's estate. As a result, Katz was order to pay back royalties. As was his continual practice, Katz appealed the decision but this time he lost. On July 7, 2006, The Court Of Appeal upheld the original verdict. Lewis, Miller, Mosley, and Stevenson immediately began touring under their own name.

In September, 2007, a reunited Moby Grape performed in front of 40,000 fans in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. The lineup included Spence's son, Omar, on vocals. One month later, Sundazed reissued the band's first five albums, including bonus tracks, on CD and vinyl. Incredibly, Katz sued them once again,

claiming that he owned the artwork, which had not yet been litigated. That was too much for Sundazed, who recalled the first two albums. After the show, Stevenson left the band and was replaced by Miller's song, Joseph, on drums.

In 2009, Sundazed released a new compilation, *The Place And the Time* (2009). It includes demos, outtakes, alternative studio recordings, and live material. The following year, Sundazed released *Moby Grape Live* (2010), which includes live recordings from 1966, 1967, and 1969. Notably, the set includes their entire four song performance at the Monterey Pop Festival. Both sets have sold well.

While the band continues to play occasional live shows, they have been largely inactive since 2015. In 2018, writer Cam Cobb published **What's Big and Purple and Lives in the Ocean? The Moby Grape Story**. He was able to get extensive cooperation from Miller and Stevenson to write the book. As of March 2019, Miller and Lewis continue to perform with their individual bands. Stevenson also plays on occasion but is more involved with real estate. Mosley is also well and living in Santa Cruz, CA.

Moby Grape is featured on four compilations. Sony's 1993 set, *Vintage: The Very Best Of Moby Grape*, contains 48 tracks, including three live tracks. Sony's 2004 release, *Crosstalk: The Best Of Moby Grape*, includes 24 tracks. Columbia's 2007 set, *Listen My Friends! The Best Of Moby Grape*, contains 20 tracks. Finally, Sundazed's 2009 release, *The Place and the Time*, contains 25 tracks, including three live tracks.

The band is also featured on two official live sets. Sundazed's 2010 release, *Moby Grape Live*, includes 19 live recordings taken from four shows in 1966, 1967, and 1969. It includes their entire Monterey Pop Festival performance. Escape's 1978 set, *Live Grape*, contains 10 tracks recorded during their 1977/1978 reunion tour, which included Lewis, Miller, and Spence.

For years, the only live recordings available from the original version of the band were through bootlegs. I had one called *Long Gone* which included their four song Monterey performance, four more poorly recorded tracks from their 1968 Foundation Jam performance in San Francisco, and 7 tracks recorded in Amsterdam during their 1969 European tour.

However, in 2010, Sundazed finally released an official live album called *Moby Grape Live*, which included the Monterey set, four of the seven Amsterdam tracks, eight tracks recorded at the Avalon Ballroom in 1966 and 1967, and a great version of the blues classic, "Sweet Little Angel", that was recorded in San Francisco in 1967. All of these tracks were pristinely recorded and for the first time, the magic of the original lineup is documented for all to hear.

The set begins with seven tracks recorded at the Avalon Ballroom on June 6, 1967. Columbia threw a lavish release party at the venue on June 6 that has become the stuff of legend for sheer excess. While there is no indication that these tracks were taken from that night or another show that same month, they are soundboard recordings that contain the exact set list the group played that night. Interestingly, only four of the seven tracks were included on their debut album. "Rounder", "Looper", and "Bitter Wind" were not selected for the album, an indication of just how strong that album turned out to be.

All the tracks are short, with the longest coming in at less than five minutes. "Ain't No Use" is a country rocker, written by Miller and Stevenson. It features the entire band on vocals and is played at a fast pace. It also contains a brief psychedelic guitar solo from Miller. "Rounder", written by Spence, shows their Byrds influence. Again, it is played at a ferocious punk like pace and once again features all the vocalists and a

Miller guitar solo. Stevenson and Mosley show why they were one of the strongest rhythm sections in music at the time.

The group slows things down for a beautiful version of “Looper”, which features Lewis on lead vocals. It starts slow, builds in intensity, then flows seamlessly into “Bitter Wind”, which features Mosley on vocals. The sequence ends with “Changes”, which was included on their first album. The Miller/Stevenson composition is also country based and played at a fast tempo. It also features all of the vocalists. Miller gets off a great guitar solo while Lewis generates feedback in the background. Stevenson is also outstanding.

The band launches into a terrific version of “Indifference”, one of Spence’s best compositions. It is one of their best early songs, a raging combination of rock, country, and psychedelia that never lets up and rivals anything that Jefferson Airplane recorded at the time. The ensemble vocal work is off the charts, with lead vocals shared by Spence and Miller. The set ends with the Miller/Stevenson/Spence composition, “Someday”, which features Spence on lead vocals. It is played at a ballad pace and is heartbreaking.

The group’s appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival should have been their national breakthrough but through the incredible incompetence of their manager, Matthew Katz, the band squandered the opportunity. They were initially booked at a prime Saturday evening spot right before Otis Redding. Knowing that the festival was being recorded and filmed, Katz demanded a million dollar appearance fee even though all the acts were playing for free to support local charities. The festival organizers responded by moving Moby Grape from the prime slot to the Saturday evening opening slot, which would be played while the audience was still coming into the arena.

The sequence believes with an introduction by Tommy Smothers that explains how difficult it was to play in that time slot. He implores the audience to give the band a warm welcome, which they do. The group then blazes through a short four song set, featuring material from their debut album. The songs include a raging version of “Indifference”, the country blues based “Mr. Blues”, which features Mosley on lead vocals, the laid back “Sitting By The Window”, sung by Lewis, and an incredible version of their one pop chart single, “Omaha”, which is a four minute rock classic, with layered vocals and stinging guitar work.

The performance is exceptional. The triple guitar attack of Miller, Spence, and Lewis works well. No one gets in anyone else's way, despite the fact that they are all playing different note sequences. The overall affect adds depth to their sound. The rhythm section of Mosley and Stevenson is solid, propelling the guitarists at whatever pace the songs require. Vocal quality is also very good. The five men harmonize extremely well and both Lewis and Spence are strong lead singers. Had any one of these songs made the film, the career arch of Moby Grape might have been totally different.

The compilers of this set follow with another incredible finds, a cover of B.B. King’s “Sweet Little Angel”. This is pure blues at its best, with great guitar solos from Miller and Lewis as well as gritty vocals. I believe that Miller is featured on lead vocals.

The next five tracks were taken from a live radio concert the band performed at the RAI Congresgebouw in Amsterdam on February 12, 1969. The band actually performed on the radio show twice, on February 12 and February 15. The later show included seven tracks. By this point, Spence had left the group. The remaining four members had just released their third album, *Moby Grape '69* and were in the midst of an European tour that went badly. The five tracks captured here feature the foursome at their best. While the group's sound was more streamlined without the vocals and guitar of Spence, they were as versatile as ever.

Two of the tracks, “I Am Not Willing” and “Trucking Man” come from the new album. The band also resurrects “Omaha” and “Fall On You” from their debut album. Lastly, they play “Murder In My Heart For The Judge” from *Wow/Grape Jam*. Recording quality is excellent.

While the first two tracks, “Murder In My Heart For The Judge” and “I Am Not Willing” are played at a medium tempo, the band picks up steam on the roots rock treatment of “Trucking Man”. They continue the killer pace through the country rocker, “Fall On You”, and an extended version of “Omaha”. Miller stretches out the guitar solo during the later, which ends the set on a high note.

While Moby Grape was down a man, these five tracks, along with the seven tracks recorded two days later for the same radio show, document how good a performance band they had become. Mosley's bass lines are much thicker, like vintage Jack Bruce, and Stevenson was an active drummer. Miller's lead guitar work had also matured, taking on an Mick Taylor like feel. Lewis stays mostly on rhythm guitar but is verfy active vocally, singing “I Am Not Willing” virtually by himself.

The trademark five piece harmonies are gone but the four singers still manage to create a big sound. While the music is more country rock oriented, they throw in elements of roots rock. For the most part, Mosley takes over the original Spence vocals and adds his own magic to them.

The album ends with a surprise, the first ever non bootleg release of “Dark Magic”, which was never recorded in the studio. This recording comes from their New Year’s Eve performance at the Avalon in 1966. Supposedly, Spence wrote the lyrics on the spot, with the band jamming behind them. While nearly all of their original material never lasted longer than a few minutes, they stretch this song out for over 17 minutes, all the while proving that they could even beat their contemporaries at the art of jamming if so inclined.

The song begins with a long instrumental portion that features Miller on lead guitar, with Lewis and Spence contributing a series of sound effects. At one point, someone makes their guitar sound like a keyboard. Spence’s vocals are minimal at best and difficult to decipher and the trademark multiple harmonies are not present until the ending sequence. Instead, we get a good old fashioned psychedelic guitar oriented jam that works surprisingly well.

In the end, this set of music is remarkable, showcasing the sheer versatility of this band along with their undeniable talent. They were one of the best in music history but have been consigned to the used record bins through their own miscalculation, ego, bad luck, and tragic personal problems. Pick this one up while you can.