

History of the... DARK STAR ORCHESTRA

It's really about the sound that's created. It's about a sense of familiarity. It's about a feeling that grabs listeners and takes over. It's about a contagious energy: it's about the experience.

Dark Star Orchestra has been delivering this experience to old and new Grateful Dead fans for 10 years, after guitarist John Kadlecik contacted keyboardist Scott Larned with a concept -- performing complete Grateful Dead shows out of history. When Scott mentioned having the same idea, John knew they were on to something.

Dark Star secured four Tuesday night gigs at Martyrs' in Chicago. The first night, November 11, 1997, saw only 78 people, but by the fourth week they had sold out the room. By spring they had toured Colorado and had steady Tuesday and Wednesday night gigs in Chicago. The band will perform their 1500th show in late 2007.

"For us it's a chance to recreate some of the magic that was created for us over the years," John Kadlecik explains. "We offer a sort of a historical perspective at what it might have been like to go to a show in 1985, 1978 or whenever. Even for Deadheads who can say they've been to a hundred shows in the 90s we offer something they never got to see live."

On lead guitar and vocals, John Kadlecik sings with an uncanny resemblance to Jerry Garcia, using amp rigs and equipment to suit the near-exact, Garcia guitar tone from the show being recreated. Playing a full Hammond B3 and on vocals, Rob Barraco provides incredible vocal and keyboard replications of the show renditions of the sound of the three Grateful Dead keyboardists from 1972 - 1995. When the show is from the 70s, vocalist Lisa Mackey provides the female harmonies, performing the Donna Godchaux parts in perfect key.

Dino English combines his training in percussion and jazz and his experience in Dead-oriented groups to deliver the rhythmic drumming sounds of Bill Kreutzmann. On the other drum set, Rob Koritz, a classical and jazz influenced musician gets into the soul and spirit of the music while filling the Mickey Hart role. Like Phil Lesh, Kevin Rosen provides a very distinctive, fluid style of bass playing and a devotion to the music of the Dead. On rhythm guitar and vocals, Rob Eaton provides an extension of the incredible feeling, instrumentation and tone created by Bob Weir.

In November of 1998, on the eve of their first anniversary, Mike Gordon and Jon Fishman of Phish joined Dark Star at Martyrs' after their own show. Fishman sat in for the majority of the evening, which included a rollicking drum section with four percussionists. The ensuing buzz caused national interest in the band. That winter, their Colorado tour sold out almost every stop, their MP3 web site was getting millions of hits and everyone wanted to know how they got their sound so precise. Soon after, the *Washington Post* declared them "the hottest Grateful Dead tribute act going"; *USA Today* claimed DSO was "channeling the Dead," but what they do is not just a tribute to the Grateful Dead but a testament to the enormous number of unique set lists they performed in their long career.

Continuing the growth, the band had performed up to 250 dates in a year. They have grown continually, playing at larger venues and theaters, collaborating with guests including Grateful Dead alumni Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzmann, Donna Jean Godchaux-Mackay, Vince Welnick, and Tom Constanten.

In 2006, Dark Star Orchestra performed 168 shows throughout the U.S to over 120,000 Deadheads and music fans. Tragically, during the band's 2005 spring tour, co-founder Scott Larned died of a heart attack; the band has recently filled the keyboardist seat permanently with Rob Barraco, a veteran musician who has toured with The Dead and Phil Lesh & Friends among scores of others.

Due to their explosive growth, the band has begun playing two and three night stands in towns where the audiences are growing and coming out to enjoy the experience of a DSO show. The timeless music of the Grateful Dead has no age boundaries as fans at DSO shows range in age from teenager to post-baby boomer.