



Get Your Kicks with The Mix

[STEWART OKSENHORN](#).

On the spectrum of artistic creativity, the drummer for a Grateful Dead cover band falls near the bottom, just above the person who specializes in paint-by-numbers works.

So don't dismiss Greg Anton as a drummer for a Grateful Dead tribute act. Yes, Anton plays drums for The Mix, a band with deep Dead connections and no small smattering of Dead-related material in its repertoire. But ask Anton what he does apart from keeping time for The Mix - which plays gigs Saturday night, April 10, at the Ship of Fools in Carbondale, and on Snowmass Mountain, as part of the Budweiser Hi-Fi Series on Sunday afternoon, April 11 - and you'd better make some time for the response.

Anton is the leader of Gregg's Eggs, a San Francisco jam-rock band that has one album to its credit. He also plays in the Heart of Gold Band, which features former Grateful Dead singer Donna Jean Godchaux. Anton is set to begin touring shortly with Colorado bluesman Otis Taylor, considered by some to be one of the freshest voices in the blues realm.

Away from the stage, Anton - who also plays piano - has emerged as a principle songwriting partner with Robert Hunter, the Dead's primary lyricist. And away from the music realm, Anton practices law, specializing in criminal defense work - especially marijuana cases - and environmental law. He writes poetry and the occasional article on marijuana. He is the father of five children.

And when it comes to music, originality and creativity are Anton's guiding philosophy. "I just play," he said. "I'm just interested in original music of any kind."

It is understandable for people to see The Mix as a Grateful Dead tribute band. Two members - singer-guitarist John Kadlecik and bassist Kevin Rosen - are part of Dark Star Orchestra, a band whose raison d'être is covering Dead concerts in their entirety. The band is led by keyboardist Melvin Seals, famed for playing beloved, long-running second fiddle to Jerry Garcia in the Jerry Garcia Band. (Playing the upcoming shows, and hailing from another corner of the tribute world is Paul Murin, lead singer and guitarist of The Phix, a Colorado band that devotes itself to covering Phish songs. Murin is a temporary replacement for Jeff Pevar, himself a former member of Dead-related groups Phil Lesh & Friends and Jazz Is Dead.) When The Mix played its first Aspen show, early last year at the Double Diamond, the set was heavy on Dead and Garcia Band tunes.

But that was the earliest incarnation of the band, playing its first shows. Now into its fourth tour, The Mix has a repertoire that relies more heavily on original material.

When the band enters the studio next month to make its first recordings, they expect to lay down 12 original songs, including several Hunter-Anton compositions, as well as a cover of John Lennon's "Nobody Told Me." When The Mix plays this weekend, Anton promises songs and a

sound of the band's own making.

"That's our direction," he said. "The Garcia stuff came from the fact that that's what John and Melvin have in common. So that was a natural starting place. But we want an original sound and that's where we're headed."

Anton says he never became a drummer. He was a drummer from the start.

"I was born a drummer," said the 53-year-old Anton, a product of Hartford, Conn. (where one of his early jamming buddies was his current bandmate Pevar). "I was banging on things and begging for a drum set by the time I was 8 years old."

Not even an incident, when he was 13, with some homemade fireworks kept Anton from drumming. He lost a hand in the accident, but quickly adjusted to playing by putting a drumstick into a prosthetic stump. Anton doesn't even see the lack of a hand as a disadvantage.

"It's not a big deal, having one hand," he said. "At this point in my life, there are other things I'd rather have than another hand. I actually kind of like it. If I had two hands, I might have become a guitar player."

In the mid-'70s, Anton drifted to the West Coast, attracted by the San Francisco scene and sound. But it was not so much the music of the Grateful Dead that attracted him as the bigger California sound.

"I was attracted to that sound," he said. "I was a little bit of a Deadhead. I'd always checked them out, but it's only one of the many musics I've been influenced by." (Other key influences have been electric-era Miles Davis and early Led Zeppelin.)

Soon after landing in San Francisco, Anton found himself heading in a variety of directions. He co-founded The Ghosts with late keyboardist Keith Godchaux, then a member of the Grateful Dead. He also went to the University of Puget Sound Law School, from which he graduated in 1975.

In the early '90s, Anton co-founded Zero, which included at various times Dead keyboardist Vince Welnick, Garcia Band bassist John Kahn and occasional Garcia collaborator Martin Fierro on saxophone.

Perhaps the most critical Dead connection was lyricist Robert Hunter, who contributed the words to almost all of the songs on Zero's two albums. But Anton was looking at Hunter not as the Dead's former lyricist, but one of the finest wordsmiths in rock music. His aim has never been to duplicate or approximate the music of the Dead.

"They're just based on my world," said Anton of his songs. "My friends, my family, my music. How my stomach's feeling that day."

Even with a busy music schedule, Anton finds time to maintain his law practice, working the phones while on tour. "I do a lot of both," he said. "It seems to work. It's a good balance - the insanity of the music scene and the relatively rational world of lawyering."

Even with all his hats, Anton isn't done searching for new experiences. One of the latest projects he took on was contributing songs to "Shakedown Street," a play by Michael Mann set in 1930s San Francisco. The play, set to open in New York later this year, includes many Garcia/Hunter songs and three Hunter/Anton songs, including a new one, "The Long and the Short of It." "It was real interesting to write a song for a play. Because it follows the story line, so it has to be different from verse to verse," said Anton.

Anton has a quick answer for how he manages to be so productive.

"I don't watch TV. I don't have a TV," he said.

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