

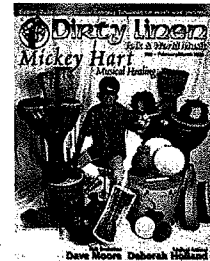
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Dirty Linen

Cover Story

Mickey Hart
Musical Healing
by Michael Parrish

Mickey Hart is best known as one of the two percussionists for the now-defunct San Francisco band Grateful Dead. As that group became one of the most popular and financially successful touring bands in the late 80s and 90s, Hart easily could have retired, or at least focused his energies entirely on his work with the Dead. Instead, he expanded his horizons to become an author, an expert at restoration of fragile archival recordings, overseer of two encyclopedic series of world music recordings, and, most recently, a congressionally appointed member of the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Archive of the Library of Congress.



Hart's latest project, his third book, is titled *Spirit Into Sound: The Magic of Music*. During a promotional tour for the book, Hart took time to chat about how the book came together, and several of the many other irons he currently has in the fire.

Although originally trained in the marching band/military rudimentary drumming style as a child, Hart expanded his repertoire as a percussionist early on, and his role in the Dead was as much a percussionist as a second drummer. When he joined the Dead in late 1967, the group's sound shifted from a straight-ahead, if psychedelized, country-blues to something richer and more adventurous, embracing polyrhythms, bassist Phil Lesh's interests in contemporary "serious" music, and the group improvisations that became the band's trademark. A year later, Hart struck up a friendship with veteran tabla master Alla Rakha, who was touring with Ravi Shankar, and met Rakha's teenaged son Zakir Hussain. Hart went on to work with Hussain in many different musical contexts, including the Diga Rhythm Band and Planet Drum.

At the beginning of 1971, Hart took a three-year leave of absence from the Dead and immersed himself in solo projects recorded at his barn-studio in Marin County. During this period, he also became an expert at recording, archiving, and restoring sound, through producing his own records and making field recordings of musicians like Rakha. Despite rejoining the Dead full time in 1974, Hart's interests in recording, and in music of the world, continued to grow and consume his energy. He worked with a multicultural percussion ensemble, The Diga Rhythm Band, and began making audiophile recordings by artists as diverse as Nubian vocalist Hamza El-Din, the Latvian Women's Choir, the Gyuto Monks, and the Golden Gate Gypsy Orchestra. In the meantime, his influences took the Dead in new directions again, as he and Bill Kreutzmann in 1978 made an improvised percussion passage a regular part of the band's concerts, and Hart's interests in global percussion brought in guest artists like El-Din, Babatunde Olatunji, and Airto Moriera.

In the early 1980s, Hart began compiling data for what he envisioned as an encyclopedia of percussion. In *Drumming on the Edge of Magic*, he described how he initially gathered the pieces of information for the book in the form of a sprawling time line, which he laid out as a linear time-line in his recording studio-barn. Hart dubbed this sprawling array of facts, references, and quotes "the Anaconda," in recognition of the way it snaked across the walls of his studio. Eventually the Anaconda needed to be coaxed into a digital format. "I was using the computer music artificial intelligence lab at Stanford as a

sort of home base in the early 80s when I was starting to compile data for *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, back when it was going to be an encyclopedia of percussion. I would use the mainframe there to hold all the information. Andy Schloss, who was working at the lab, suggested I meet Fred Lieberman, who had just moved to UC Santa Cruz to be chair of their music department. Lieberman is a bibliographer who knows where everything is, and that's exactly what I needed. I needed to find all the arcane texts. Fred knew a lot about what I wanted to know and what I didn't know, he could guide me to. So Fred and I struck up a friendship, and our collaboration began back then."

Lieberman worked with Hart on both of his percussion books and was also instrumental in preparing some of the archival field recordings released in the Endangered Music Project. During the data collection phase, Hart began assembling inspirational phrases about the energetic and transformational power of music. "I had gathered a lot of these quotes, and they were of no use for *Planet Drum* or *Drumming on the Edge of Magic* because they weren't percussion based. I just stored them away for inspiration, really. When I needed a bump, a lot of times I would just scroll through the Anaconda, searching for what I had left by the wayside, and these quotes always came to the top. I kept going back to them, and I always felt great when I read them."

The inspiration for the book came when Hart sent six or seven of his favorite quotes to his buddy, rock vocalist Sammy Hagar. "He went over the top. He thought they were incredible, and started citing them to me verbatim. They were so full of wonder for him that I thought 'I've gotta share this.' "

This is an excerpt. Read the full article in Dirty Linen #86 (Feb/Mar '00).

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