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## THE HISTORY OF DARK STAR ORCHESTRA

After thumbing through the 1990 edition of DeadBase, John Scott's compendium of Grateful Dead setlists, John Kadlecik hit on the idea of performing complete Grateful Dead shows. Not everyone with whom he shared the concept had a positive reaction but, he says, **"I was able to talk the band I was in at the time, Hairball Willie, into playing an entire second set as a contest. I can't remember the exact show now, although it had to be either 4-25-77 or 5-25-77. Nobody guessed correctly, but a few got the year right and the closest guess received some band merchandise. But that was pretty much it for a while."** John went on to play with Uncle Jon's Band and form his own band Wingnut after Hairball Willie dissolved.

Later in 1997 as John was looking to form a new band a mutual friend suggested Scott Larned. **"I had heard great things about Scott back when he was playing with the Junction. So I called him, and when he said 'I've got this idea about covering entire shows out of DeadBase,' I knew something was going to happen."** John also called up his Uncle Jon's Bandmate Kevin Rosen to play bass and local singer Lisa Mackey to play the part of Donna Godchaux. Through friend and club owner Ray Quinn they secured four Tuesday night gigs at Martyrs' in Chicago. The band name came in a brainstorm session that discarded other likely candidates (such as "Terrapin Nation".)

The first Tuesday (Nov. 11, 1997) saw only 78 people, the next week doubled that, the third exponentially doubled that and by the fourth week they had sold out. Obviously there was a demand for this. They signed on for four more weeks. By year's end they became the regular Tuesday night houseband routinely selling out the room. By Spring, after the first Colorado tour, they were also regularly playing Wednesday nights at a West Chicago nightclub Synergy II and a few weekend shows around the midwest.

**"What we offer is sort of a historical perspective at what it might have been like to go to a show in 1985, 1978 or whenever,"** says keyboardist Scott Larned. **"Even for Deadheads who can say they've been to a hundred shows in the 90's we offer something they never got to see live like Here Comes Sunshine performed with one drummer and a Donna vocal."**

In November of 1998 on the eve of their first anniversary they were playing a show at Martyrs' when Mike Gordon and Jon Fishman showed up. Still in town after the previous night's Phish show, Fishman ended up sitting in for the majority of the evening including a rollicking drum section with four percussionists on stage. The ensuing gossip caused some national interest in the band and the emails began to pour in asking them to tour. That winter, their second tour of Colorado sold out at practically every stop. Their MP3 website was getting millions of hits and everyone wanted to know how they got their sound so precise.

Scott explains, **"Everybody changes their gear; John Kadlecik who does the Garcia stuff has a few different guitars he uses and Rob Eaton who does the Bob Weir stuff has multiple amps on tour so if it's a '74 show he uses the exact same amp that Bobby used in 1974. And the drummers have diagrams and stage plots so if it's an 80's show they build the Beast. They have a Beam replica and they really try to go for the style of playing that Mickey and Billy were using in those years."**

**"I think for all of us, we saw so many shows and we've listened to this music so intensely over so many years it's just kind of like in there. I've heard so many tapes of Brent playing songs that the best thing I can do when we're doing this project is get out of the way and let that flow out in his spirit."**

In 1999, the band was touring fulltime with some 250 dates per year spread across America from Charlotte, SC to Seattle, WA. The next two years would see them playing at medium to large sized theatres joined by special guests such as Tom Constanten, Vince Welnick, David Hidalgo, Bill Payne, David Nelson, Michael Ray, Vassar Clements, "Mean" Willie Green and David Gans who has featured DSO on his nationally syndicated radio show "The Grateful Dead Hour" and has occasionally joined the tour as an opening act.

**"As many tapes as anybody has, there is nothing that replaces getting out and doing it live with a whole bunch of people who are doing the same thing,"** says Scott, **"because it's just more fun to be in public with all your friends dancing and having a good time listening to these songs on a big kick-ass system and, y' know, having fun. It's a different experience from sitting in your living room or driving in your car and of course it's NOT the same thing. We never intended for it to be. For us it's just a chance to recreate some of the magic that was created for us over the years."**

The band has taken it another step and has begun incorporating Jerry Garcia Band show setlists and, on rare occasion, a setlist of their own choosing. In fact, picking the showdate for a given evening is a complicated affair. Sometimes the venue space or curfew can affect what show is played; those 70's shows could get pretty long. Sometimes the unavailability of a drummer dictates the show. Picking the show too far ahead of time can be fraught with problems. Last minute changes are a way of life in this band. Often outside influences such as nature herself play a part; a Terrapin played for a "brand new crescent moon". Once upon a time, a delayed start due to a sound system problem forced the band to perform a made-up setlist. Nowadays "original" setlists are much more common and help the band work in new material.

Numbers seem to play a large part both in show selection and in a band whose first show was on 11-11. Shows with the same date are regularly performed and they seem to give some cohesion to the event which comes out in the music. And the odds of getting a show at the same original venue are getting better all the time as the band moves into bigger venues that have been previously played by the Grateful Dead themselves. Sometimes a song will suggest itself for a given area; a Tennessee Jed in Knoxville, for example. The band's E-Mail box overflows with requests for shows with emotional stories attached; engagement days, birthdays, first shows, memorials, you name it. All are read and considered. And you can be sure the requests page on the band's website is regularly checked for suggestions; sometimes the best ideas are those of another mind.

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## The Players

**John Kadlecik:** (lead guitar, vocals) John Kadlecik: (lead guitar, vocals) – John's voice has caused many a jaw to drop as he sings with an uncanny resemblance to Jerry Garcia. He uses amp rigs and guitars to suit the show being recreated, employing his midi guitar for some shows. He played in the Chicago area with Hairball Willie and Uncle Jon's Band before forming his own band Wingnut and ultimately cofounding DSO. Lately he has been sitting in with Melvin Seals and JGB.

**Rob Eaton:** (rhythm guitar, vocals) – Rob's name may be familiar to those in the recording business both professional and the vast Grateful Dead taping world. He has been involved in the Grateful Dead community since the 70's and studied literally at the feet of Bob Weir from the vantage point of hundreds of front row seats as well as numerous backstage passes. He previously played all over the East coast with his own Dead-oriented band "Border Legion" before signing on full-time with DSO.

**Scott Larned:** (keyboards, vocals) – Scott uses a full Hammond B3 when recreating Brent Mydland shows from the Eighties. His voice is right on the money for Mydland's solo songs and high harmonies from the period. Scott has played with many bands including Freddy Jones Band, Citrus, The Junction, Brother Brother and Smoking Fish.

**Kevin Rosen:** (bass guitar, vocals) – Kevin was a founding member of DSO along with Scott, John and Lisa. He has returned to the bass position after playing around the Chicago area with Uncle Jon's Band (UJB).

**Dino English:** (drums) Studying percussion in College and playing in Jazz and concert bands allowed Dino to adapt to many musical project both live and in the studio. After discovering the Dead, Dino's love for that music led him to play in a series of Dead-oriented groups culminating in his current position playing the part of Bill Kreutzmann in DSO. Dino has played with The Schwag, The Kind & Vitamen A and has a side project called Tron's Meat and Potato Band.

**Rob Koritz:** (drums) – Rob, a good friend of Dino's, was classically trained at the University of Arizona before realizing there was little career opportunity in classical music and returning to Missouri where he got his music degree in jazz studies. In his off time he gives workshops teaching teamwork and communication through the use of drums. He played in The Schwag as well as Kerosene Willie, before taking on the Mickey Hart spot with DSO. He's also a pretty funny guy!

**Lisa Mackey:** (vocals) – Lisa Mackey: (vocals) – When the show is from the seventies Lisa signs on to provide the harmony. It's always a pleasure to hear her rendition of Donna Godchaux's solo songs performed in perfect key. She still performs with Dime Store String Band and other local bluegrass projects.