

Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart are the Rhythm Devils.

For nearly three decades they were the two-headed, eight-limbed, polyrhythmic engine that drove the Grateful Dead. Now, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart are the Rhythm Devils, and when the veteran percussionists take to the road this summer, even the most Deadicated of fans will be in for some big surprises.

“The music is quite different,” says Kreutzmann. “It’s real groove-based. It has lots of percussion and electronics. It’s very danceable. It’s gonna be quite a mix up there.”

Hart says, “This music will take you to a very special place, I think. It’s like a super friendly rhythm snake that has wrapped itself around the world a few times and now it’s coming our way. It’s electric; it’s got rhythm, has words and flies. It’s the Rhythm Devils.”

Joining Hart and Kreutzmann in the Rhythm Devils for this tour will be Nigerian talking drum master Sikiru Adepoju, returning from the last RD tour in 2006, Back Door Slam’s Davy Knowles (guitar, vocals) and Andy Hess (bass). Plus one-man-band Keller Williams (guitar, vocals) makes his first run as a Devil, joining the band on select dates, as does The Mother Hips’ Tim Bluhm.

The Rhythm Devils name has its origins in the late '70s. As Hart explains, “I remember Jerry looking at Bill and I one time. He shook his head and just said, ‘You guys are Rhythm Devils.’”

But the 2010 incarnation of the Rhythm Devils is guaranteed to be unlike anything that’s come before—the dynamic mix of the musicians’ individual but complementary styles and approaches is sure to lead to some serious sparks. “It’s a great combination,” says Hart. “You have the deep trance music from Nigeria and West Africa that Sikiru brings to us and there’s Davy who at any moment just might rip the sky apart with his guitar and Andy Hess is a real gem of a bass player. Joining us for the first part of the tour is the ‘one man band’ Keller Williams and on the second part of our tour is Tim Bluhm, who will bring his ferocious California guitar style and beautiful vocals to the mix.”

While both Hart and Kreutzmann promise that the music will be percussion-driven, another factor contributing to the Rhythm Devils’ special mojo is the troupe’s repertoire: Not only will they be reconstituting some familiar Grateful Dead tunes in their unique way, but the Devils will also be performing numerous tunes written exclusively for them by Robert Hunter, the legendary songwriter whose collaborations with the late Jerry Garcia provided the Dead with their most beloved and durable material.

“Robert Hunter is a major force in all of this. He has written his heart out in these new songs,” says Hart. “There will also be enormous, exciting electronic sections

of pulsing, throbbing, beautiful zones. There are places and sounds still unknown and unborn that we will no doubt visit.”

Kreutzmann and Hart have been inextricably entwined as partners since they first met in 1967, two years after the formation of the Grateful Dead with Kreutzmann the sole drummer. On that first night, they literally “played the city,” walking around San Francisco with drumsticks banging on everything in sight. Hart joined them immediately and except for a brief hiatus in the '70s, the pair remained with the Dead until 1995, when Garcia’s death signaled the end of an era. Since then, Kreutzmann and Hart have continued to make music both together (most recently in The Dead) and apart, but they both agree that a special chemistry takes place when their percussive minds are in sync.

“When we get together and we’re in the groove it’s a tractor beam,” says Hart. “Anyone around that will be drawn in. But we always thought of the Grateful Dead, and anything that we did together, as a work in progress. This too is a work in progress and that’s the best thing you could say. We’re looking to the future with this kind of music. In the Grateful Dead we created a body of work that we’ll not leave behind. But we also have an identity as the Rhythm Devils, and that’s who we’ll be.”

When they’re not working together as the Rhythm Devils, both Hart and Kreutzmann are involved in other projects. Kreutzmann plans to release a new album later this year with his other band, 7 Walkers, which features singer-songwriter Papa Mali (who has also been collaborating with Hunter on new material), multi-instrumentalist Matt Hubbard, and George Porter Jr. on bass.

Among Hart’s recent endeavors is the tentatively titled Rhythms of the Universe, a project of enormous scope. Hart is currently working with leading scientists to capture raw light waves from Space and then transform those light waves into sound waves. Hart then uses those sounds to compose Universal music. Hart’s goal is nothing less than exploring what the universe really sounds like, from the Big Bang to the galaxies, to the stars and planets and beyond.

But for both Kreutzmann and Hart, it’s the upcoming Rhythm Devils tour that’s got them most excited. “It’s part of my lifelong partnership, my 40-year rhythmic experience, with Bill Kreutzmann,” says Hart. “It’s time for Bill and me to get together and explore new rhythms and take it to the next level. We share a unique rhythm and we’ve got some great guys with us who we’re going to explore what it sounds like on this planet...star date; 2010.”