

The Perfect Remedy

PERCUSSIONIST SEEKS THE RHYTHM THAT HEALS US ALL

BY CHERIE YURCO



See Mickey Hart performing at www.makingmusicmag.com/vibes/mickeyhart.

PHOTO: CHERIE YURCO

■ As a child, Mickey Hart never wanted anything more than to be a drummer, and he spent more than 30 years drumming for the Grateful Dead. But over the years, the concept of rhythm and how it's affected nearly every culture around the world intrigued him to the point of becoming an ethnomusicologist, and traveling the world collecting recordings, and writing books on the subject.

Still, the concept of music therapy might never have occurred to him had it not been for one very personal experience more than 20 years ago.

“WHO KNOWS THE INNATE POWERS THAT LIE IN MUSIC, IF WE KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH IT?”

“My grandmother was in advanced Alzheimers and she couldn't talk for like six or eight months,” says Hart. “I played a drum for her and she said my name, and she said it multiple times. It was very apparent that the rhythm, the vibration, somehow allowed her to reconnect and be able to speak. When I stopped playing she couldn't speak.”

Following that experience, he teamed up with renowned neurologist and psychologist Oliver Sacks. In 1991, the pair testified before Congress, receiving a music therapy grant from the Senate Committee on Aging. Together they organized mass drum circles and sponsored music therapy programs.

Today, Hart sits on the “Music and the Brain” board at the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function at Beth Abraham Hospital. Last year, he was involved in the release of the film *The Music Never Stopped*, about a young man passionate about music who is stuck in the '60s counterculture after a brain injury. Based on a true study by Sacks, the doctor uses the music of the Grateful Dead to reach his noncommunicative patient.

Over the years, the more Hart has learned about the connection we all have to

rhythm, the more he sought its roots, tracing rhythm further and further back through history. In the past few years this led him to outer space, where together with a team of astrophysicists, he's harnessed and “sonified” the vibrations of the universe and the big bang, and incorporated them into his latest album, *Mysterium Tremendum*.

“*Mysterium Tremendum* is about going to the unknown and finding out things you didn't know,” says Hart. “To me it is about the tremendous mystery of life, and how things work, and if you don't understand sound, vibration, spheres, gravity, rhythm, movement, and flow—all the things really innate in music—then you really can't understand life.”

“Who knows the innate powers that lie in music, if we know how to deal with it?” asks Hart. Bottom line: music heals.

Today the 68-year-old drummer with the energy of a man 30 years younger sees what music has done for him in his own life. “Music is the elixir of life,” he laughs. “It keeps you energized. It's all about the imagination and the spirit world, so even if you abuse yourself a little bit, music is the perfect remedy.”