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Dead again

By Kelly A. Mello
Mon Apr 20, 2009, 04:03 PM EDT

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HANSON - It all started in 1965, with the blues. It evolved into a psychedelic genre adding country and folk influences to the mix. Today, Grateful Dead's music is kept alive through tribute bands like Fennario.

"People still like the sound of Grateful Dead. With the death of Jerry Garcia [lead guitarist] I was afraid their popularity would fade, but it hasn't," Mike Young, lead guitarist and founding member of Fennario, said.

He said the band appeals to both younger crowds who were not able to experience the Grateful Dead live, as well as connoisseurs of the group.

Based in Hanson, the tribute band is made up of five seasoned veterans of the local and national Grateful Dead music scene.

Young, 43, was first intrigued by the guitar in second grade when a student played in front of the class.

Three years later, he took a musical aptitude test, which claimed the tuba was a good fit for him. Though it was a far cry from what he wanted to play, he gave it a try for a while before he gave it up for the guitar. In 11th grade, Young began going to Grateful Dead shows where people gathered in the parking lots to play their music. He picked up some of the notes and decided that this was worth pursuing. He joined another Grateful Dead tribute band called Laughing Water, which also included current band mates Ben Tallman and Dan Sullivan at one time or another.

Since Laughing Water is on hiatus, Young decided to start his own band. Through friends and their recommendations he gathered the other four members who make up Fennario.

For bassist Dan Crea, 33, of Waltham, Fennario is the first Grateful Dead tribute band he's played in. The St. Paul, Minn. transplant played in a garage band called The Farming Game in high school. Their name sprung from a stack of board games in his friend's garage, the weirdest one named just that.

"Music sort of resonates with me," Crea said. He also enjoys listening to Phish, John Coltrane and Radiohead.

The band also includes Tallman on keyboard and vocals; Sullivan on rhythm guitar and vocals; and Toby White on drums. They have all formerly been in Grateful Dead tribute bands.

"We all work hard individually, have the right amount of devotion and a lot of experience," Crea said.

What sets Fennario apart from other Grateful Dead tribute bands is that they have meticulously researched and duplicated both the music as well as the custom equipment that gave the Dead their individual sound and dynamics, Young said.

"We do it like the Dead did it," he said.

A lot of bands try to put their own spin on the Dead's already famous music, but Young suggests that in order to be a successful tribute band, you must "try to be very authentic to the live sound that [Grateful Dead's] got."

Fennario will play the Luck Dog, Pembroke, Saturday, May 30, at 9 p.m.

It also plays every Wednesday at Tammany Hall, 43 Pleasant St., Worcester.

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Courtesy photo
Mike Young, lead guitarist and founding member of Grateful Dead tribute band Fennario, says to be a successful tribute band, you must "try to be very authentic to the live sound that [Grateful Dead's] got."

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