

GRATEFUL FOR THE GRATEFUL DEAD



Jim Billington, founder of Hidden Wings, bangs on a table drum donated by Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead. Grateful Dead items will be auctioned off in Chicago with some proceeds going to Hidden Wings.

Hidden Wings to benefit from once-in-a-lifetime memorabilia auction

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Rock drummer Mickey Hart is helping Hidden Wings soar. One of the founders of the Grateful Dead, Hart has made it his mission to direct what could be tens of thousands of dollars from this weekend's once-in-a-lifetime auction of Dead memorabilia towards the Solvang center for young adults living with autism.

Hart is a longtime supporter of Hidden Wings, and helped in the development of its breakthrough use of drums to facilitate communication among adults on the autistic spectrum. Along with the late Jerry Garcia, Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann, and several other musicians, Hart helped found the Grateful Dead 50 years ago. Its fans, known as Deadheads, are legendary and legion.

The auction of over 700 pieces of Grateful Dead memorabilia and fine art, billed as The Grateful Dead Family Jubilee Auction, takes place April 11-12 at Donley Auction Services in Chicago.



Jim Billington, founder of Hidden Wings, holds a drum signed by Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead. Grateful Dead items will be auctioned off in Chicago with some proceeds going to Hidden Wings.

Auction

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The auction will be both live and online and is expected to bring in several million dollars. A preview of items was open to the public on April 8, with a ticket price of \$25.

The items on auction are all owned by former employees of the band and of Garcia. He died from a heart attack, at the age of 53, in 1995, and the Dead disbanded immediately after. The band is reuniting in Chicago this summer for three shows commemorating what would have been their 50th anniversary.

It's unlikely the Dead's staff and crew members realized it at the time, but the posters, paintings, previously unseen photographs, hand written set lists, speakers, and even furniture given them over the 1965-1995 history of the Grateful Dead would eventually be of considerable value.

"So many of the things that were given to them have deeply personal significance," said Donley Auction Services president and auctioneer, Randy Donley. "The chair known as 'the throne' that Jerry Garcia always sat in at his office and that he was photographed in for the cover of Rolling Stone, is an example of what's at auction."

Other items include Garcia's Colt .25 pistol, with an estimated selling price of \$30,000 and the original 1971 U.S. Patent and Copyright

certificate for the name Grateful Dead — possibly the Magna Carta of all Grateful Dead historical documents — with an estimated selling price of \$25,000. At the very top end, the original artwork for the 1966 Golden Road to Unlimited Devotion Grateful Dead Fan Club poster is set with an opening bid of \$420,000.

Enter Mickey Hart and Hidden Wings. "We just learned about Hidden Wings a few weeks ago when we received a call from a young lady with the Mickey Hart organization," explained Donley. Hart wanted to personally donate some items into the auction with 100 percent of the proceeds going to Hidden Wings. One of those pieces is a signed artist proof of "Beam Man," the only one ever released to the public and the highlight of Mickey Hart's "Drum Ki" Art Collection.

Donley was so taken by what he heard about Hidden Wings and Hart's dedication to it, he took it a step further. He made Hidden Wings the official philanthropic partner of the auction, donating more than 50 percent of the ticket price for those who attended the public preview to Hidden Wings.

"This is the finest collection of Grateful Dead memorabilia ever put at auction," said Donley. "We're thrilled to be helping Mickey benefit Hidden Wings through it."

So is Jim Billington, founder along with his wife, Dr. Julia Billington, of Hidden Wings. While there are many facilities



Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart and Jim Billington, founder of Hidden Wings.

for children with autism, once they graduate from high school they and their families are largely on their own. This was something the Billingtons, who have two sons with autism, discovered first hand and decided to do something about.

From its clubhouse-like cottage in downtown Solvang, Hidden Wings helps young adults with autism develop life skills, skills that will help them do everything from make a friend to get a job. The curriculum includes yoga, ocean kayaking, hiking, advanced horse grooming and drum circles. There are also computer and photography classes, and academic tutoring.

Jim Billington was deeply involved in trying to help those dealing with autism for years before founding Hidden Wings in 2009. It was the subject of a conversation he had with Mickey Hart when the two men first met through mutual friends in 2001. Billington had been thinking about rhythm and how to turn it into a language relatable to the autistic but hadn't yet come up with a solution.

"Mickey had been working with helping Alzheimer's patients through music for more than 20 years, and when he heard I was involved with autism, he thought it could also be applied to that. The result of the conversation was a relationship that's now spanned 14 years and led to the development of drums specifically for Hidden Wings. They

all have the logo "NSL," meaning "not so loud" on them.

With Hart initially as the idea man, renowned drum maker Remo Belli executed the drums, and has likewise developed a strong association with Hidden Wings. "Mickey's the fire. Remo's the fire place," Billington said of the man who has built drums and drum sets for everyone from the Rolling Stones to George Strait.

"Sensitivity to sound is a big issue for autistic people," Billington added. "Drums, at the right tone, can sound like a heart beat. They can be very healing."

The first drum Hart sent to Hidden Hills is not much larger than a tambourine and has a handwritten message on the skin: "Play me. I will make you happy." A much larger drum table sits in the middle of the main room at Hidden Hills. Students often gather around it, and communicate through the drum rhythm. "It helps calm the chaos," said Billington.

Billington's long term dream for Hidden Wings is a 10-acre campus. He candidly points out that they don't have a "sugar daddy" of a donor giving them millions. But with support of the likes of Mickey Hart, Remo Belli, and now, Randy Donley, they're on their way.

For more information about Hidden Wings, visit www.hiddenwings.org. For more information about the Grateful Dead Family Jubilee Auction, visit www.donleyauctions.com.