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There are tribute bands. And there are cover bands.
And then there is **mrCharlie**.

The five-piece, Philadelphia-based band is redrawing music boundaries with a one-of-a-kind, sonic blueprint that conjures classic rock and soul music in a manner inspired by the Grateful Dead.

"We are not a Dead cover band," remarks mrCharlie's founder, lead vocalist and guitarist, Lloyd Bashkin. Instead, he explains, the group's concept is to re-imagine songs by the likes of The Beatles, Marvin Gaye, The Stones, Sting and Bob Dylan in a way that makes the listener hear – and experience – them in new and surprising ways, just as the Grateful Dead interpreted such diverse artists as Jimmy Reed, Chuck Berry, Wanda Jackson and Dylan.

"We all grew up loving classic rock, Motown, reggae ... the most classic rock and soul of the 1960s and '70s," says Bashkin, who has actually played guitar with Jerry Garcia. "This is an opportunity to fuse our appreciation and love of The Dead and to take that incredibly creative improvisation the Dead do and fuse it with these classic songs."

While there is no mistaking the aural similarities between mrCharlie and the Dead, that is a purely organic happenstance, rather than a calculated game plan.

"It's not our goal to sound like the Dead," explains Bashkin.

"But because many of us, myself included, learned our instruments playing along to their music, the Dead has become an integral part of how we think about music. The result is a fusion between the Dead and how they experience music, with the classic love of rock and soul that we grew up on.

"The combination is awesome, it's moving. And it cuts an irresistible groove that reaches my core."

"Charlie" (hence the moniker). Winning fans with its uncanny covers of the Dead, the band quickly became a local favorite, performing at many of the city's top-tier venues, from the legendary Ripley Music Hall and Chestnut Cabaret to, most recently, World Café Live! They've also played numerous outdoor festivals, and have attracted - on their own, as the only act - and ignited crowds ranging from 500 to 15,000. No matter what the size of their live audience, mrCharlie never fails to get everyone dancing with abandon.

By 1990, however, mrCharlie progressed well beyond the "tribute" and "cover" band realms. The five musicians have found a way to express themselves, while still being guided by the spirit of the Dead that initially moved them so many years ago. Throw in other influential grooves from the likes of Bob Marley and the Golden-Age-of-Motown Funk Brothers - along with the polyrhythmic, syncopated double-drummer attack that allows mrCharlie more adventurous possibilities with their uniquely original arrangements - and you have a sound that is at once as new and adventurous as it is familiar. And one that connects on a level that goes beyond the simple act of hearing.

"I enjoy developing that feeling from playing," offers Bashkin. "To me, it's considerably about the feeling that the musicians can derive, and the audience can experience from the music. And that comes from a band that is connected with each other and connected with the audience, emotionally and musically.

"That connection is what really builds and generates the feelings, the music, the desire to dance. It touches people - us as musicians and the audience. It's a pretty incredible experience."