

Jonathan Shank's shows at Red Light Management include Peppa Pig Live! and the Fresh Beat Band.



## Family Friendliness

Red Light Management's Jonathan Shank loves shows that audiences can interact with and get excited about

BY BRAD WEISSBERG

RED LIGHT MANAGEMENT'S Jonathan Shank has been the driving creative force behind some of the most beloved family shows touring today, including Disney's Junior Dance Party, Peppa Pig Live!, the Fresh Beat Band and Octonauts. His brand of connecting generations of kids and adults with classic characters has sold over 2 million tickets and made more than \$80 million at the box office.

Shank spoke to *VenuesNow* about how he transitioned from managing acts to producing shows, what makes a successful family show and how he finds his properties.

### How long have you been at Red Light?

Eight years. I started in a senior management position, but we weren't producing shows yet; we were mainly a management company at the time. I started this division to produce various

shows, many of which have fallen under the family show vertical.

### Where were you before you joined Red Light?

I was working at Front Line Management for Irving Azoff. (Azoff is a co-founder of Oak View Group, which owns *VenuesNow*.)

### When did you start producing shows?

In 2012. ... We're very pleased with the progress and continue to

strive to produce first-class events and try to package entertainment in unique ways that people are excited about. We love shows that the fans can interact with and leave feeling fulfilled.

### How many people are in your department?

Six. We are lean and mean. Until a year ago there was only two or three of us. We've been adding in specific positions for marketing, ticketing, branding and production just in the last year. But along with our great core team we also have the ability to attract great third-party partners as well. The irony is that when we set out to do this, we thought we'd build this great, robust division, but now we've found out that the secret is not having a huge division but instead having great partners.

### Are you still seeking out partners or are rights holders now coming to you?

We're at a point where it's probably 50-50. For the first few years we really were sharpshooters and we were pinpointing exact targets and people we wanted to work with. Now having more resources, we've been able to open it up a bit, and go a bit wider, with some of the ideas and platforms we want to tackle. It's an evolving process and our philosophy is that we only want to produce events we are passionate about and ones we feel are scalable and sustainable.

### What other aspects do you look for to identify a potential project?

It depends on which demo you are looking to appeal to. One of the prime factors is on-air marketing and presence. We look at where the entry point in pop culture for this property or IP is, and how many eyeballs are seeing this on a daily or weekly basis and what the impact is. On-air can be TV or digital, but traditionally network-based properties have driven a lot of highly successful tours.

### Is digital catching up?

It will eventually. The curve right now is that network shows dominate. But there have been some really successful tours that have evolved from the digital platform, and that trend will continue to grow.

### What are some of your current shows?

We're producing the Disney Junior Dance Party, which will have over 100 performances this year. We're in our third year of producing Peppa Pig Live! We also just finished producing a Grammy-week show for the Otis Redding Foundation at the Apollo Theater as part of our fundraising celebration series.

### Is there a strategic and procedural difference between producing a youth-oriented show and an adult show?

The Disney tour is approached entirely from a branding perspective and obviously appealing to a family audience and making sure we can re-create the Disney experience on a nightly basis. When we approached the Otis Redding show we looked at it more like an awards show, building a roster of artists around a cause.

*Shank paused the conversation*

to "say hello to one of my friends, a member of Fifth Harmony."

### What are family show audiences looking for in 2018?

All of these families want to connect with their favorite characters. Disney Junior has some of the most beloved characters in the world, and children want to be brought into their world when they come to a show. They want that special, tangible experience. Here's an example: When Dave Grohl (Nirvana, Foo Fighters) brought his kids to see the Fresh Beat Band, he pulled us aside and said, "For my kids this is like seeing (Jimi) Hendrix." That's the experience we are looking to create. Something palatable for the parents and a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the kids.

### Is merchandise involved in the tours?

Of course! We sell a ton of plush and light-up items, which the

kids seem to gravitate towards. We have the ability to get unique, exclusive items that are not available in retail stores on the tour, and that makes for a special offering. We want to have great products for all our tours, presented in a first-class way.

### What is the range of ticket prices?

We generally look at a range of \$20-\$50. In some markets it may go a little above that. I like to keep it at a \$49.50 top if I can.

### Do you offer VIP packages?

Yes. For the Disney Junior tour we have "Breakfast With the Characters," "Afternoon Tea" with the princesses, and we have an "After-Party." So it's three different VIP experiences and they all come with premium seating, character greetings and unique experiences. It costs an additional \$100 on top of a (Premium 1) ticket for each experience, and we

only do two of them a day.

### How many buses and trucks does a typical family show tour require?

Most of our tours travel in two buses and two trucks.

### How many cast members are in the Disney tour?

A dozen. That's the figure we look for in a theater tour for these types of shows and these size stages.

### Are there any security concerns?

Safety is always a priority, and the key is that we all work together with the venues and the promoters to make sure that safety is a priority.

### Do you have your eye on any properties right now?

We have a few that we are in the early stages of developing. We'll keep you posted. ▣



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