

Shapiro



PETER SHAPIRO spent two years negotiating a twenty-year lease on the historic Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, New York, which had lain essentially empty for a quarter-century. He poured more than \$3 million into refurbishing the old movie palace and opened the hall for concerts in September 2012 for the first time since its glory years in the early seventies. Bob Dylan was his opening attraction. He had wanted to hold the opening on his fortieth birthday, but Dylan wasn't available on that date and he had to move the launch to three days earlier. For Shapiro, the Capitol would be the new, palatial home court to his growing enterprise.

Shapiro was the leading entrepreneur of jam-band nation. From the beginning of his career, his enthusiasm and ever-present optimism allowed him to plunge ahead fearlessly in enterprises he knew nothing about. Having never operated any kind of bar or nightclub in his young life, twenty-four-year-old Shapiro started out by taking over the operation in 1996 of the Wetlands Preserve, a Deadcentric rock club in lower Manhattan. Shapiro convinced the original owner, a hippie visionary who ran the club with an environmental and social justice angle, that he knew enough about the scene to keep the club's unique program running. Ignoring other big money offers,

the hippie sold him the lease for "basically nothing," according to Shapiro.

After closing the club in 2001, unable to afford the rising Tribeca rents, Shapiro concentrated on his work as an independent concert producer who presented everything from the Green Apple Music Festival on Earth Day to concerts for President Obama's first inauguration to his annual jam-band award show, the Jammys. In 2009, he opened the Brooklyn Bowl, which quickly became the nerve center of the entire jam-band movement. As it grew to be phenomenally successful, Shapiro opened subsequent branches in London and Las Vegas. He also bought *Relix* magazine, the mouthpiece of the scene. Shapiro was building a jam empire.

Ebullient, chatty, and eternally boyish, Shapiro was a born schmoozer. Raised in New York City's Upper East Side, he comes from a family of Jewish philanthropists. He never cared much about music as a youth, but was pursuing his undergraduate studies in film and media at Northwestern University when he stumbled across the Grateful Dead. Combining his first LSD experience and his first Grateful Dead concert was a zeitgeist moment for Shapiro, who felt instantly comfortable in the parking lot scene that snowy March 1993 at the Rosemont Horizon outside Chicago. He saw the drum circles and the hippie school buses and realized these people were seeking something they couldn't find at home. As soon as he could, he joined them.

On the road in the parking lots that summer, without any previous experience, Shapiro shot a documentary film about the Deadheads for school credit, and the film landed him a job as associate producer on *Tie-Died: Rock 'n Roll's Most Dedicated Fans*, which debuted at Sundance in 1995 only a few months before Garcia died.

What Shapiro had stumbled across in those final months of the Grateful Dead was nothing less than a sprawling subculture that was quietly spreading further and deeper into a growing movement. Garcia's death threw an unexpected spotlight on Shapiro's little *Tie-Died* movie. He was working as an intern at New Line Cinema in New York and showing his films alongside a Grateful Dead cover band when he heard the Wetlands owner wanted to sell. The owner wanted out.

Shapiro agreed to operate the place through the end of the existing lease and the club was his. He quickly assessed the situation and realized the growth potential. As the entrepreneurial leader of this new generation of Deadheads, Shapiro was uniquely positioned to lead this rapidly evolving audience to Deadland.

In the wake of Garcia's death, as the shadow of the Grateful Dead at first flickered off the scene, the jam-band audience began to factionalize. The New England Dead-inspired jam band Phish was the most immediate and obvious beneficiary. The band jumped from arenas to stadiums almost immediately. Some fans leaned toward the jazz-jam bands like Medeski Martin and Wood, and others went for the electro-bluegrass groups like Leftover Salmon. At Wetlands, the wellspring of the H.O.R.D.E. bands and fountainhead of the nineties jam-band scene, Shapiro worked at extending and expanding on the club's original vision. In the course of his five years running Wetlands, Shapiro booked virtually every act associated with the jam underground. He studied the scene and grew intimately acquainted with the details. He understood the crowd because he was part of the crowd. He was another psychedelized Deadhead looking for something he couldn't find at home, only he was the Boy Scout troop leader. With his trademark pluck, ambition, and drive, Shapiro quickly established himself as the key mover and shaker behind the scenes in jam-band world.

Every one of the jam bands traced their heritage directly from the Grateful Dead. In a sense, it is like the music played around the Western world these days called Gypsy Jazz. That is nothing but music derived from the French jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt. There is no Gypsy Jazz—it is all Django. He has become an idiom and so did the Dead. Given that in any night the Dead's music could touch upon Chuck Berry, Ornette Coleman, Bill Monroe, and Django himself, they staked their boundaries far enough apart to support and encourage experiments in practically any realm of American music. The progeny of the Dead range as far and wide, from the Dave Matthews Band to String Cheese Incident and beyond. Even bands that don't sound remotely like the Dead—like Widespread Panic or Umphrey's McGee—have borrowed crucial conceptual components from the band. So,

while the Dead have been largely absent from this expanding community for almost twenty years, the band's presence in this world, rather than go away, only enlarged. Tapes of old Dead shows constitute the standard indoctrination ritual for all who enter here. The band's songs serve as common literature. Even in their absence, the Grateful Dead ruled the jam-band scene with an invisible authority.

As the scene spread out, Shapiro could track the various tributaries, but he never lost sight of the fact that all streams flowed from the long-lost Dead. While the record industry, mainstream concert business, and broadcast media roundly ignored the movement, in many ways this outlier appeal made the scene all the more attractive to the newcomers. The breadth and depth of this audience consequently were obscured from view, but Shapiro could see it clearly.

He and his partners started the Lockn' Festival in Arrington, Virginia in September 2013, and Shapiro hired Furthur to headline all three nights. After having passed out on the disastrous spring tour, Weir had disappeared for several weeks. He went completely incommunicado; nobody seemed to know where he was. His friends presumed he had been steered—where else?—into rehab, but he was back by June sitting in with friends at shows around Marin.

He took a crack at resuming his Internet-based talk and music show, *Weir Here*, from TRI, a loose, decidedly informal little party mixing talk and music that showed off the host's natural charms to excellent effect: warm, witty, and intelligent, not to mention musical to the bone. Steve Parish played the sidekick who stole every show from his seat on the couch. Weir and the TRI staff had turned out more than a dozen episodes with a wide variety of guests before the April crash. He also made a rare appearance at Terrapin Crossroads, although, for some reason, Lesh did not join him that night. Weir also managed to squeeze in a handful of solo gigs on the road before the Furthur tour in July. So much for taking time off.

At Lockn', musicians from the other bands watched from the wings as Furthur romped through three nighttime headline shows. Maverick country musician Zac Brown joined the band the first night. The second night, Furthur began by playing the *Workingman's Dead* album song by song only to be joined on the final track, "Casey Jones," by

Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio, who stayed for the rest of their set. It was his first time sitting in with Furthur, a jam-band summit meeting.

Furthur was coming to an end anyway. By the time the band headed out to play Shapiro's Lockn' Festival and another handful of East Coast dates, Lesh had secretly secured his future. He and Shapiro had come to terms on a long-term exclusive agreement for Lesh to play thirty concerts in the next year at the Capitol Theatre. The multimillion-dollar deal called for Lesh to make a few additional performances at Shapiro concerts (Brooklyn Bowl in Las Vegas, Lockn' Festival), but the only other performances Lesh would do would be at Terrapin Crossroads.

Shapiro spent weeks negotiating this huge agreement with Jill Lesh and her husband. To Shapiro, this galvanized his position with the Capitol Theatre and ensured the venue's status, but this was a masterstroke of liberation for Lesh. In a single sweeping motion, he rid himself of any further need to be in the music business. He could play music, make millions, and not tour. He would play with his rotating cast at the same spots and the audience would come to him. Shapiro had acquired Lesh's entire career outside Terrapin. He owned the merchandising rights. He owned the recording rights. He had bought Lesh and paid handsomely.

And for Lesh, it would seem his dream was coming true. He was free of erratic Bobby Weir. He was free of booking agent Jonathan Levine, who drove around in a Porsche with a customized license plate reading THANXPHIL. Levine, who had been Lesh's booking agent since the beginning of Phil and Friends, was cut out of these negotiations so there was no agent to commission the deal. Lesh gave Levine the word backstage at Lockn'—an unceremonious end to what had been a long and fruitful association.

Without agents or managers or other partners to pay, the Leshes would net 100 percent. But more than a lavish payday, it was Lesh's ultimate triumph. He was now completely autonomous, free to fashion the legacy in his own image, in total command of his own destiny, unencumbered by responsibility to anyone outside his own family. He no longer had to share any of the revenue with anyone. He held off a public announcement. First, he had to finish off Furthur.

The next week, he announced that Furthur was going on "hiatus" on the band's Facebook page:

After more than four years of heavy, year-round touring, Phil Lesh and Bob Weir have decided to put their band Furthur on hiatus in 2014. After the four night Furthur run in Mexico in January, the band will take the rest of 2014 off so that Phil and Bob can focus on their countless solo projects. . . . The last time the word "hiatus" was used in regards to the Grateful Dead world was in 1974, and we all know how much good that break inspired. They returned a year and a half later, stronger than ever, and for another 20 years. Furthur's not breaking up; they're simply taking a much-needed break. One way or another, we'll see you around.

A couple of weeks after that, Lesh teased the audience of the syndicated Deadhead radio show *Tales from the Golden Road* in an interview with host Gary Lambert. "I'm getting tired after forty-eight years on the road," Lesh said. "After this tour I'm basically 'off the bus,' I won't be doing any tours per se. Phil Lesh and Friends has a really great setup going for next year for performances outside of Terrapin and we'll make an announcement about it this tour. . . . We've got the whole year of 2014 locked in for a really cool way. We'll expand the horizons of the whole scene. Phil Lesh and Friends will actually expand its membership into new areas."

In November, Lesh and Shapiro announced the agreement a week before the inaugural show under the deal at the Brooklyn Bowl. "I'm not retiring, and I'm not slowing down," Lesh told the *New York Times*. "I'm pretty sure I want to make music till I can't breathe anymore. I just want to do it within the most focused possible way. The future looks really exciting."

How could Lesh excuse the unfaithful behavior he had showed his brothers-in-arms? He had been at points cold, uncaring, even cruel, but he didn't seem to hesitate. One by one, he had discarded the drummers Kreutzmann and Hart and, now, Weir. His actions disguised a moral superiority that could have never existed in the group

under Garcia's egalitarian leadership. He had long before abandoned the one-for-all/all-for-one philosophy that had sustained the band through long years.

In many ways, Lesh was now free of them all—Garcia included—ending knotted, convoluted entanglements that had pervaded his life for more than forty years. He didn't owe anybody anything. His time had come.

Lesh, it seems, had become the dark knight of the kingdom. He would do what needed to be done. He had a resolute, clear vision and he would do his duty to see that vision through. He was done ceding territory to the other knaves in the court. He appeared to see himself as the one true, capable keeper of the flame. His only loyalty was family. Once again, he would forge ahead on his own.

The end of Furthur came as no surprise to the members. When the band first formed, they had been told it might last a couple of years. The last year, the strain had been showing, although the other musicians were largely unaware of the trauma behind the scenes. After Weir passed out at the Capitol in April, the fans were no longer surprised, either. It had been an amazing band and an action-packed four years. The songbook contained more than two hundred and fifty songs. The band's incessant touring pulled thousands of new people into the audience in every market. Furthur had restored the Grateful Dead catalog to active rotation in summer amphitheater concerts and allowed the Deadhead subculture to grow younger audiences and to multiply across the nation.

But for Weir, Furthur had been costly. He had aggravated his shoulder injury to the point that it was becoming disabling. That, along with his high stress levels, contributed to substance abuse. He had given up his flagship RatDog. Without Furthur, his income would plummet. His high-tech studio was draining funds. He kept TRI fully staffed, operating full-time. They abandoned the *Weir Here* Webcast. Weir kept guitarist Mark Karan on the payroll through his yearlong battle with cancer. He had reformed RatDog for one of the Webcasts and did a couple of other dates with his old band, but after Furthur came back from Lockn' in September, Weir did not play music in public again until the end of the year.

the most active retirements a musician could imagine. He earned his respite. Terrapin remains his great gift to the community. In its short time, thousands of shows have been presented, dozens of bands have blossomed, nurturing a wellspring of Dead music for years to come.

Hart went back to both active touring with Dead & Company and his various projects in his typical whirlwind way of creating mania and magic: recording imaginative, complex percussion pieces at his home studio on his Sonoma ranch, studying neuroscience, and serving on nonprofit boards. The mystical drummer does yoga every morning in his Japanese garden and drives everybody who works for him crazy with his unflagging energy.

Kreutzmann returned to Hawaii. Dead & Company tours provided him enough drum time. He needed to restore himself with the long, lazy tropical days in Hawaii, snorkeling, surfing, fishing. His book brought Kreutzmann out of the shadows, and his pride in the Grateful Dead is unquestioned, even if he remains the most aloof of all four from the legacy. His primal needs are less complex, and the once-brutish, angry young man has mellowed into an acerbic but avuncular white-bearded grandfather.

Weir the troubadour dove into Dead & Company and picked up his schedule of guest appearances, dusting off his solo act, appearing regularly at benefits at the Sweetwater and elsewhere. With Fare Thee Well in his rearview mirror, he was free to take the repertoire and be himself. He will stay on the road the rest of his life, spinning tales with his guitar. He found his destiny long before the final Fare Thee Well—merely another adventure in an adventure-filled life—and as always, he will be on his way to the next project.

And, for all the sweat, goofs, blown cues, and impossible tasks, Trey Anastasio got what he came for as much as anybody. He lived out the fantasy of a lifetime. He belonged to the Grateful Dead. The night after the first concert at Levi's Stadium, the most tense and intimidating moment of his career, Anastasio sent his wife a text message: "That was the most fun I've ever had playing music in my whole life."

Certainly, Peter Shapiro got what he wanted. His concert and all the ancillaries couldn't have been more successful. But for Shapiro, the

victory was much larger than box-office grosses. He became a made man, the single most important concert producer of his day, "Bill Graham without the yelling," said one Dead associate. He picked his way through a minefield to reach his goals and, in the end, after a series of historic concerts, he could rest gratified that he had done what he set out to do as well as he could have. Shapiro may not have been there when the Dead started, but he was there to help put them away and they couldn't have done it in grander, more extravagant style.

But it was the Deadheads who won the biggest prizes. In a stunning statement of joyful unity, the Deadheads proclaimed their independence over the Fourth of July weekend in Chicago. They celebrated an entire nation of Deadheads and saluted the core four and their associates as the spiritual leaders of a movement they clearly had no intention of abandoning.

In fact, over the twenty years since Garcia died, the band's impact and influence—and their audience—may have grown to an even greater magnitude than when the Dead existed. It is an astonishing phenomenon and this would never happen to, say, the J. Geils Band, or even the Rolling Stones without Jagger. But the Grateful Dead, in spite of everything, continued to have momentum with the combination of a staggering number of great songs the band added to the catalog over the years and the extraordinary revolutionary concepts about the possibilities of a rock band.

The Deadheads won, not only because they summoned forth these concerts and willed them into existence, but because now they were the band. They brought the spirit; the musicians only played the songs. It was the Deadheads who filled the stadiums with the kind of joy they so well remembered and turned the shows into the harmonic convergence they were. Whatever had been lost had been recovered. The truth was what Mickey Hart said in an interview way back at the beginning of this journey, fresh after Garcia's death: the Deadheads are the Grateful Dead now.

These people wanted to go to one more Grateful Dead concert. And they did. It did not matter who was on the bandstand or what they played, Fare Thee Well was a genuine Grateful Dead concert. The last one.