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St. Louis Character: Gateway Studios CEO Trey Kerr is living his musical dreams




Trey Kerr of Gateway Studios & Production Services photographed on the job site of the future home of his company in Chesterfield.

DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ



By **Gloria Lloyd** – Reporter, St. Louis Business Journal
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*Trey Kerr, CEO of production firm Gateway Studios and Production Services, which has a **\$150 million music production and live rehearsal campus under construction** in Chesterfield, firmly believes the venue will prove to be a popular live music rehearsal venue for big-name touring acts when it opens its first phase later this year, lured by a newly passed state tax credit.*

Behind the scenes, GSPS, previously known as Kerr's company 201 Productions, is the concert production services vendor for artists ranging from Odesza to the Doobie Brothers.

Before overseeing Gateway Studios, St. Louis native Kerr began his career in music in a way most teenage fans could only dream of. As an 18-year-old in the early 2000s, he set out to follow the summer solo tour of Trey Anastasio, lead singer of Phish, the jam band famous for its live shows. Busted by security selling T-shirts outside an Indianapolis concert to fund his travels, Kerr instead landed a gig volunteering with the band's nonprofit WaterWheel Foundation. Phish soon reunited, and Kerr went on to hold every possible role touring with his favorite band, which eventually became trusted colleagues and loyal clients. He's still the band's video director, most recently working on its New Year's Eve shows at Madison Square Garden.

"My brother wanted to be a doctor, and he became a doctor. And when I was 18, I wanted to be a roadie. And I became a roadie, which led to other successes," Kerr said.

Did you always plan to go into production? Phish had one of the best production managers in the industry, Hadden Hipsley. As an 18, 19, 20-year-old, I asked him, "I want to be a roadie when I grew up. How do I do this?" So he said, "Pay attention to all these other departments. If you can learn all these things, you'll never have to look for work." Our industry is very freelance-based. You never know where your next paycheck is coming from. I was always able to pick up anything that came my way, as a lighting tech, backline tech, carpenter, stage manager, tour manager or production manager. That's how I built my companies, and how I train people that work for us.

How did you transition to your own company? Phish has been around for 40 years, and I've been fortunate enough to work for them for 22 of those. Phish has always been the constant for me, and they're one of the highest-grossing bands of all time. But I worked on other things too, because Phish does 50 shows a year, three or four months of work. I toured with other artists and went to film school in Los Angeles. I realized the music industry does video too, and that's what I fell in love with and really enjoyed. Phish added video in 2010, and the guy they brought in and I had worked together on other things. He's like, "What are you doing here?" I work for the band. What are you doing here? "They just hired me to do video. You should do video for me."

When you told Phish that you were leaving to form your own company, what was their reaction? "We don't want to lose you." So they ended up coming over and being my first client. I grew up as a fan idolizing them, and now I'm friends with them and work for them, and they trust me with some of the biggest projects that they do, which is truly an honor. I don't take that for granted. It took a lot of guts for them to have enough trust in me that they're willing to, so to speak, jump off the cliff and follow me. We were very successful for four years, and then Covid hit and absolutely decimated the music industry. The owners of Gateway Studios approached me and said they wanted to build these studios out in St. Louis and asked me to consult on it.

What suggestions did you make? This is all great, but it doesn't work if you don't have the support of production services, a video vendor and audio vendor and lighting vendor. They offered to buy me out and then asked me to run Gateway. And they said, "Go do whatever you need to make this successful." We've been able to go out and acquire some of the best talent in the industry because a lot of people were out of work. A lot of people moved to St. Louis. There's companies that took 20 or 30 years to get to the level that we're at right now. And we've done it in three years. From a vendor standpoint, we've built a powerhouse, and we've put out 40-plus tours over the last three years. Pretty much any name you can think of in the industry.

How is construction going? The studios aren't for the faint of heart. They're going to be a huge component of all of this once they open. It's taking longer than we would like, but it's like anyone who's been dealing with construction since the pandemic. It's that

analogy of a Jeep spinning its wheels in mud. It's difficult to get things done. Costs have skyrocketed, but we've made the decision to keep pushing forward and get it done. We're going to open this year, which is huge.

Do you ever look back and realize how wild your life story is? To go from the kid in a parking lot to the CEO of a major national live event vendor, it's pretty cool. Just from the music side, being a fan of music, I've been fortunate enough to work with some really cool people. It's a constant journey. I just go where the wind takes me.

More about Trey Kerr

Age: 40

Title: CEO of Gateway Studios and Production Services and Phish video director

Family: Wife and two kids, a 3-year-old boy and 1-year-old girl

Current residence: Town and Country

Best place to visit while on tour: Day off anywhere! But if you mean cities, Auckland, New Zealand.

Frequent St. Louis-area restaurant/hangout: Westchester in Chesterfield

Favorite music other than Phish: I love it all! But currently... Nick Thorburn's Islands, Greensky Bluegrass, Goose, Talking Heads, My Morning Jacket, Radiohead, Labrinth, Feist, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift and any classic rock.