

The NERDS at The Colorado Cafe

We look at the story behind the bands that rock the bars

By BILL BODKIN

SEEING STARS

When you're in a bar or club nothing gets you going like hearing live music. Sure you can hear all your favorite tunes played over a PA by a DJ or jukebox, but there's nothing like a band giving their own unique twist to your favorite songs. Whether it be classic rock, reggae, hip-hop or straight-up rock, when the band gets going the energy in a club turns all the way to 11.

Some of the biggest and best cover bands are the ones you can see gracing the summer stages of the Jersey Shore. Whether it be at Bar A, Jenks, The Osprey, The Quarterdeck or the other huge outdoor bars and super shore clubs you've probably raised your frozen drink or draft to the tunes of uniquely named bands like Big Orange Cone®, Screaming Broccoli or Dog Voices. These are New Jersey's bona fide rock stars. Sure, they may not have a record deal or be selling out Continental Airlines Arena, but these bands have a tremendous following and pack rooms of over 1000 people on any given night. However as the brisk fall winds send a chill through the shore air, the outdoor stages begin to close and the sounds of summer will not be heard for at least nine months. Luckily for those in the Somerset and Morris Counties, your favorite Jersey Shore cover acts have been making a home for themselves rocking the areas biggest and best clubs.

In fact, these bands not only are tearing up the Morris and Somerset scenes, they are tearing up everywhere from Atlantic City to Vermont to Pennsylvania to Staten Island to Bergen County and in places in between.

These bands are able to play such big clubs in diverse areas of the Northeast (and sometimes Vegas) through the workings of S.T.A.R.S. Productions, an artist referral agency (amongst other things) that helps promote acts like these as well as help clubs bring in big business.

In this story we will look at the company known as STARS as well as its bands and the clubs they play in.

STARS IS BORN

STARS was born in the mind of its founder Stephen Tarkanish. In 1966, Tarkanish, an accomplished, was working in the office of legendary concert promoter Bill Graham, who is most famous for the Fillmore West and Fillmore East Concerts that took place during the 60s. Even though Tarkanish worked as an assistant, the legendary promoter took the young drummer under his wing and taught him about the music promotion business. During his tenure with Graham, Tarkanish worked and met with all the greats and even got to hang out with Jimi Hendrix at his Electric Ladyland Studios.

STARS was started during the time and Tarkanish promoted shows in high schools and colleges in between Graham and drumming gigs.

Tarkanish soon would leave the east coast for Las Vegas where he was a house drummer at the MGM Grand and would perform with the greats including most of The Rat Pack. He also drummed at the Playboy Clubs around the world. Yet during his performance heyday Tarkanish kept STARS alive, booking bands, both local and national, throughout the the east coast. During the 60s and early 70s STARS became an integral part of booking cover bands in the Greenwood Lake area of New York. During his time the legal drinking age in New York was 18 years old but 21 in New Jersey.

Greenwood Lake was just right over the border near East Milford and became a huge spot with over 27 clubs. During this time Tarkanish would book bands like Colorado (fronted by the brother of Four Seasons singer Frank Valli) and Rhinoceros, who according to Tarkanish were the equivalent of Big Orange Cone® and The Benjamins in that decade.

STARS and Stars

(Plus the fall-out from the 80s) STARS in no way a small, local company. With both an east and west coast (located in Colorado) division STARS has an extremely impressive array of big names in the realms of music, comedy and even sports.

Through the years STARS has worked with such musical acts as: Anthrax, Beach Boys, Duran Duran, Joan Jett, Weird Al, Little Steven, The Ramones (who STARS booked over 30 shows for) and Clarence Clemmons and such comedians as Dave Chappelle, Gilbert Godfried, Steve Martin and Bobcat Goldwait as well as former New York Giants (and Super Bowl MVP) running back OJ Anderson. STARS helped get many national acts into colleges.

According to Tarkanish, STARS was instrumental in bringing Guns 'n' Roses to New Jersey (Obsessions Night Club in Randolph to be exact) in 1987.

STARS also was instrumental in the legendary Moscow Peace Festival organized by Doc Magee. The show featured: Ozzy Osbourne, Bon Jovi, Motley Crue, The Scorpions and Skid Row. Tarkanish, who is fluent in Russian, acted as translator of the crew and didn't stop speaking for a month.

However during the 80s and into the early 90s, the New Jersey cover scene according to Tarkanish completely died. Bands like White Tiger were no longer in demand and with the increase in liquor liability to bars and the decreasing of blood alcohol content levels, the scene died.

However, during this period is when STARS would groom its new generation of superstar bands (e.g. The Nerds, Dog Voices, etc.). Long had STARS been known for its state-of-the-art recording, video and rehearsal studios. However, after the fallout in the 80s, STARS decided to focus less on the studios and national acts and concentrate more on the homegrown talent.

MAKING THE BAND

The offices of STARS Productions in Newton, New Jersey get about 100 press kits a day from bands looking join the STARS family.

Bands can go to www.starsproductions.com and fill out the companies "Musician Marketplace" online form. After filling out this form, STARS looks at the band if they fit the criteria they're looking for they "jump on the band." With over 70,000 clients STARS has a lot of dates to fill and is always on the search for bands.

The STARS team according to Tarkanish are not just a representation company. They want to become a member of the band. They want to be part of the unit and work hard to make these bands succeed.

Yet despite this notion of being a member of the band, the success of a band is a two-way street.

"If you come in and think you're Joe Rock Star, you're not going to make it." Tarkanish says the best way for a band to succeed is for them is for them to fit the three principles of his golden triangle. The triangle consists of talent, desire and belief. Tarkanish believes if a band has a problem or fails, ultimately one of those principles was not there.

The second way a band becomes successful is the work of STARS. They are always on the look for new venues for their bands to play in as well as launching huge public relations and promotional campaigns via print advertising and such to get the bands name out there.

Another way STARS promotes its band are through its Showcase Events. These events, many of which take place at Bar Anticipation in Belmar are a stage for STARS to show off its newest and upcoming bands to bar owners and industry types. This fall's event saw: Exodus Supreme, The Characters, Urban Trip, Blasted, Crystal Roxx, Drop Dead Sexy, Bitter X and The Bomb!

Let's look at the band Urban Trip as an example of how STARS preps a band to go out into the cover circuit.

The members of Urban Trip have been affiliated with STARS Productions for about 10 years in various other bands including Dog Voices. According to Jay DeRuggerio, lead singer of Urban Trip, "Stephen sat down with us and helped us formulate a rough marketing plan. He also tried to place us in rooms that have a decent built-in crowd at first. This way there was much less pressure on us to bring people. It also helped us ramp up our own mailing list. Another thing they did was add us to their website: www.stars-productions.com"

THE BAND

The bands of STARS are undeniably the most popular and most sought after cover bands in New Jersey. From Bergen County to Atlantic City from the parking lot of Giants Stadium to Rutgers University to The Borgata, these bands are in demand. The bands that people and clubs can't seem to get enough are some of STARS longest running bands: The Nerds (20 years), Dog Voices (15 years), Big Orange Cone® (nearly 10 years) and The Benjamins (5 years).

These bands along with Screaming Broccoli, Urban Trip, Rumrats, Blasted and Bitter X are STARS big guns. They are some of the most in-demand bands in the area. STARS also sports a diverse line-up which includes island music (Flying Mueller Brothers, Exodus Supreme, Alienz, Jimmy & The Parrots), doo-wop (Bill Haley & The Comets, Gary "U.S." Bonds, Party Dolls), classic rock (The Characters), hip-hop influenced bands (Undisputed, The Bomb!), solo artists (John Eddie, Kim Sozzi) as well as a host of up and coming cover acts.

STARS also has a West Coast Division which is based in Colorado and is booking bands in Colorado, Las Vegas and California.

STARS also has a healthy relationship with other artist referral companies and are willing to provide the best bands for their clients.

THE CLUBS

So where can you find these bands in the area?

Rhythms of the Night in Manville is one of the newest clubs to book STARS bands. Located where the old Yellow Rose country dance hall was, Rhythms is a gigantic room that upon its opening catered to a more mature crowd.

Rhythms wanted to draw more of a younger crowd, so in September of last year the management contacted STARS Productions and started promoting the "best of the best from the Jersey Shore has come to Rhythms on Thursdays!"

"STARS has helped our business tremendously," said Rhythms manager Adam Florek. "Our Thursday nights are just crazy, we pack them in and move a lot of drinks because of these bands."

Rhythms of the Night has become a new home for Big Orange Cone®. The Cone can often be seen at Rhythms and they draw amazing crowds. Florek commented that any time he sees Big Orange Cone® available he tries to book them right away. And he should, Rhythms has drawn nearly 1,000 people with The Cone.

The Colorado Cafe in Watchung is one of the state's largest country dance halls and seems like an unusual place for rock. "Our country Fridays had been getting slower and slower over the past few years," said Colorado Cafe President Alan Bauerle. "We called STARS back in April 2004 and setup a schedule starting Fridays in October to do their bands in the "dance club." This decision was based on the popularity of their use of rock bands on Saturday nights in their sports bar during the bar's popular "Buck-N-Babes and Bare Chest Muscle Men Bullriding Contests." "By adding rock bands to our venue," Bauerle says, "we have expanded our customer base (some "rockers" come for now) and it has helped our business tremendously."

This was obvious when The Nerds came to Colorado Cafe on Thanksgiving Eve and people had to park miles away and walk to the club in the rain after its parking lot filled up.

You can also see STARS bands at The Funky Monkey Bar and The Fireside. The Funky Monkey features STARS bands Thursday through Saturdays and get a full house. The Monkey often features Undisputed, Screaming Broccoli, The Flying Mueller Brothers and Big Orange Cone®. The Fireside, which prides itself on being a rock bar, has featured The Cone, Dog Voices and Urban Trip on stage in the past and promises to keep rocking out every weekend with the best bands.

For more information on STARS Productions visit www.starsproductions.com or to find out where your favorite STARS band is playing check out our Bars & Bands listings every month.

NATIONAL PROFILE

By **BILL BODKIN**

STARS Productions, providing the sounds of your summer

When you're in a bar or club nothing turns the excitement up like when a band hits the stage.

Sure, you can hear today's top hits being spun by a DJ. However, nothing beats a band giving your favorite song of the moment or classic bar anthem their own unique twist.

The time when these cover bands are most popular is undoubtedly the summer in Monmouth and Ocean counties. The gloomy cold of winter has been replaced with sunny days and every weekend is a getaway filled with frozen drinks, short shorts, boardwalk pizza and, of course, those cover bands. When it comes to cover bands, STARS Productions, an artist referral agency, is the company that provides your favorite hangouts like Bar A, Joey Harrison's Surf Club, Jenks, The Osprey (to name a few) with uniquely named bands like Screaming Broccolli, Dog Voices and Big Orange Cone® (amongst others).

STARS Productions was born in the mind of its founder Stephen Tarkanish. In 1966, Tarkanish, an accomplished drummer, came up with the idea while he was working in the office of legendary concert promoter Bill Graham. Graham was the mastermind behind the famous Fillmore East and West concerts. Tarkanish learned a lot from working with Graham and began promoting shows in high schools and colleges under the STARS name.

Tarkanish would keep STARS running while drumming in Las Vegas where he performed at the MGM Grand with such greats as The Rat Pack. During his Vegas run, Tarkanish's company would become an integral part in booking cover bands for the Greenwood Lake area of New York. Just over the border from East Milford in Jersey, Greenwood Lake had over 27 clubs and booked bands like Colorado and Rhinoceros, two bands comparable to The Benjamins and Big Orange Cone® today. Greenwood Lake had become a huge hot spot for those in Jersey in the 18-20 age range because the legal drinking age in Greenwood Lake (just minutes from East Milford, NJ) was 18 while it remained 21 in the Garden State.

From high schools to colleges, STARS soon became a national powerhouse booking such acts as: Anthrax, The Beach Boys, Duran Duran, Weird Al, Joan Jett, Little Steve, The Ramones (who STARS booked over 30 shows for) as well as comedians like: Gilbert Godfried, Steve Martin and Dave Chappelle. The company was also responsible for Guns 'n' Roses first Jersey area appearance in 1987 at Obsessions in Randolph.

Speaking of 80s metal, Tarkanish and STARS also had a hand in the legendary Moscow Peace Festival which included a super metal lineup of: Ozzy Osbourne, Bon Jovi, Motley Crue, The Scorpions and Skid Row. Tarkanish, who is fluent in Russian, acted as a translator for the crew and didn't stop talking for a month.

During the 80s and into the early 90s, the New Jersey cover scene, according to Tarkanish, died. Their top bands like White Tiger were no longer in demand and, with the increase in liquor liability and the harsher penalties for driving while intoxicated, the scene dried up.

However it was during this down period that STARS groomed their current all-star line-up. They concentrated less on booking national acts and less on their recording and rehearsal studios and focused on local bands like The Nerds and Dog Voices. STARS pushed bands like these as the new generation of cover stars and soon they were embraced by their audiences.

In essence, the day to day job of STARS Productions is finding new bands, promoting their current bands and providing bars and clubs with the best possible cover talent out there.

Every day STARS gets over 100 press kits from bands looking to join the company. Bands can go to www.starsproductions.com and fill out the companies "Musicians' Marketplace" online form. After filling out this form, STARS looks at the band and if the band fits the criteria that STARS is looking for they "jump on the band." With over 70,000 clients STARS has a lot of dates to fill and is always on the search for bands.

According to Tarkanish, the STARS team is not just a representation company. They want to become a member of the band. They want to be part of the unit and work hard to make these bands succeed.

Yet despite this notion of being a member of the band, the success of a band is a two-way street.

"If you come in and think you're Joe Rock Star, you're not going to make it." Tarkanish says the best way for a band to succeed is for them to fit the three principles of his golden triangle. The triangle consists of talent, desire and belief. Tarkanish believes if a band has a problem or fails, ultimately one of those principles was not there.

The second way a band becomes successful is the work of STARS. They are always on the look for new venues for their bands to play in as well as launching huge public relations and promotional campaigns via print advertising and such to get the bands name out there.

Another way STARS promotes its band are through its Showcase Events. These events, many of which take place at Bar Anticipation in Belmar, are a stage for STARS to show off its newest and upcoming bands to bar owners and industry types. This fall's event saw Exodus Supreme, The Characters, Urban Trip, Blasted, Crystal Rxxx, Drop Dead Sexy, Bitter X and The Bomb!

Let's look at the band Urban Trip as an example of how STARS preps a band to go out into the cover circuit.

The members of Urban Trip have been affiliated with STARS Productions for about 10 years in various other bands including Dog Voices.

According to Jay DeRuggerio, lead singer of Urban Trip, "Stephen sat down with us and helped us formulate a rough marketing plan. He also tried to place us in rooms that have a decent built-in crowd at first. This way there was much less pressure on us to bring people. It also helped us ramp up our own mailing list. Another thing they did was add us to their website: www.stars-productions.com"

The bands of STARS are undeniably the most popular and most sought after cover bands in New Jersey. From Bergen County to Atlantic City from the parking lot of Giants Stadium to Rutgers University to The Borgata, these bands are in demand. The bands that people and clubs can't seem to get enough are some of STARS longest running bands: The Nerds (20 years), Dog Voices (15 years), Big Orange Cone® (nearly 10 years) and The Benjamins (5 years).

These bands along with Screaming Broccolli, Urban Trip, Rumrats, Blasted and Bitter X are STARS big guns. They are some of the most in-demand bands in the area. STARS also sports a diverse line-up which includes island music (Flying Mueller Brothers, Exodus Supreme, Alienz, Jimmy & The Parrots), doo-wop (Bill Haley & The Comets, Gary "U.S." Bonds, Party Dolls), classic rock (The Characters), hip-hop influenced bands (Undisputed, The Bomb!), solo artists (John Eddie, Kim Sozzi) as well as a host of up and coming cover acts like the all midget Kiss cover band, Mini-Kiss.

STARS also has a West Coast Division which is based in Colorado and is booking bands in Colorado, Las Vegas and California.

STARS also has a healthy relationship with other artist referral companies and are willing to provide the best bands for their clients.

And their clients agree. Ken "Tex" Tecza, manager at the legendary Osprey Night Club (201 First Avenue, Manasquan. 732.528.1800) has enjoyed a healthy relationship with STARS Productions for over 20 years. "We can't tell you how grateful we are for STARS. We've had a very successful relationship with them," said "Tex." He commented that STARS bands are the type of bands the customers at the Osprey want to see and they fill the club to capacity everytime a band like The Nerds or any of STARS top guns comes to town.

The owners at Columns (601 Ocean Ave., Avon, 732.988.3213) don't have the same history with STARS as the Osprey. This summer Columns will be bringing in such STARS acts as Dog Voices, The Nerds, Urban Trip and Dog Voices. Columns management commented that the reason they are working with STARS is because they want to spice up their line-up with bands that people can come have fun and dance to. While Columns still features local acts, STARS acts will take the stage Thursday through Saturday.

Bar Anticipation (703 6th Avenue, Lake Como. 732.681.7422) has enjoyed a great relationship with STARS. Hosting numerous STARS showcase events, Bar A is one of the few places you can find STARS bands during the winter season.

Bar A has also held numerous STARS showcase events which allows the companies newer talent to shine in front of bar and club owners. Bar A will also be holding their 24th Annual Spring Bash on Saturday April 30 featuring eight of STARS top bands.

Jenk's in Point Pleasant is another winter home for STARS. On Fridays and Saturdays Jenks draws in crowds from all over with STARS bands and in the summer it's a virtual STARS all-star line-up every week with The Benjamins every Sunday, The Nerds every Wednesday and Big Orange Cone® every Thursday.

In Seaside Heights look for STARS bands to invade two of their most popular venues: Club XS and the Bamboo Bar. Both located on Boulevard, these clubs known for their DJ-centric parties are also home to STARS bands. XS has used STARS talent during Parade Day in March while Bamboo will be doing "Go Live Fridays" starting in June with bands like Blasted, Big Orange Cone® and The Benjamins.

Just outside of Seaside in Ortley Beach, Joey Harrison's Surf Club (1900 Ocean Ave. 732.793.6625) also rocks out with STARS talent. Look for Big Orange Cone® in May during the club's "Planet Surf Fridays."

On LBI look for STARS bands at The Quarterdeck (351 W. 9th Street, Ship Bottom) and the newly re-opened Joe Pop's (2002 Long Beach Blvd., Ship Bottom. 609.494.0558)

So this summer if you're out partying on the Jersey shore and you hear a cover band rocking out on the boardwalk or on an outdoor patio, you can thank STARS for providing that extra bit of awesomeness to your party.