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VT PULSE

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION FROM VENUES TODAY

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Quote of the Week

"I tell my friends that there are more people doing brain surgery than there are reuniting the Wu Tang Clan."

— Guerilla Union President Chang Weisberg, organizer of the Rock The Bells Tour.

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Greetings Riley,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." This week, reporter Dave Brooks was dispatched to the Orange County Fairgrounds in Costa Mesa, Calif., to cover a town hall meeting hosted by President Barack Obama. Read our article on the logistics of the event below.

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[VT NEWS](#)

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SHORT TAKES

>> **K-ROCK CENTRE HONORED** – The K-ROCK Centre in Kingston, Ontario, was chosen as “Major Facility of the Year” by the Canadian Music & Broadcast Industry awards after just one year of operation. The K-ROCK Centre received the award on March 12th at the Canadian Music Week Conference in Toronto. *Contact: Kate Kristiansen, (613) 650-5065*

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

INDY WRESTLES WITH VENUE DEFICITS

Game night at the Conseco Fieldhouse, Indianapolis



There is no question Indianapolis benefits greatly from conventions, major sporting events and two major league teams, the Indiana Pacers of the National Basketball Association and the Indianapolis Colts of the National Football League. In fact, Pat Early, vice president of the Capital Improvement Board, which operates Lucas Oil Stadium, home to the Colts, and the Indiana Convention Center, and manages the debt service for those and Conseco Fieldhouse, Pacers home, said the Convention and Visitors Bureau markets the economic impact at \$3 billion. Direct tax income is \$400 million.

But in these tough economic times, tough decisions may be in the making. Early said the CIB is looking at a \$25 million deficit this fiscal year, with revenues of \$100 million, less than half of that from hotel/motel and food and beverage taxes.

“In total we use revenues to run the convention center and cover the debt service on all these facilities we own,” Early said. “Lucas Oil Stadium is the main cause of funding difficulties. In the money generated to build the stadium, no funds were set aside to operate it. Finding operational dollars out of existing revenues is an impossibility. This community always figures it out, but the path there is not crystal clear.”

The economics of professional sports in small markets is very difficult, Early stated. “People look at them and say you’re subsidizing rich people, but we get such tremendous benefit from our strategy over time, it’s part of the cost of having this strategy.”

>>ARMY NATIONAL GUARD SPONSORS WRESTLEMANIA

– The Army National Guard is confirmed as sponsor of the 25th anniversary of World Wrestling Entertainment’s WrestleMania. The Army National Guard will use this sponsorship to enhance their recruiting and activation goals for the year. WrestleMania will take place at Reliant Stadium in Houston on April 5, 2009. *Contact: Sarah Bruckner, (203) 406-3632*

>> U2 SELLS OUT – Over 312,000 tickets for the U2 360° Tour sold out over the weekend for shows in Gothenburg, Sweden; Milan, Italy and Amsterdam. Second shows have been added for those cities, and tickets for the UK, France, Ireland, Italy and Poland go on sale this week. *Contact: John Vlautin, (310) 867-7127*



And on top of that deficit, much of it related to this year’s debut of Lucas Oil Stadium, which costs \$27 million a year to operate and generates \$7 million, the CIB is also discussing the possibility of taking on the operating costs of Consecro Fieldhouse, which Early said they have estimated to be \$15 million.

That last piece of the puzzle has gotten the most press of late. Early said the Pacers began providing financial reports to the city two years ago in accordance with their contract. The building opened in 1999 and there is an early termination clause that can be exercised 10 years into the agreement if the venue is not performing financially. “We were on notice that was occurring. We did not want to wait for them to say ‘we’re terminating, you have 30 days.’ Once they started filing these reports they were in effect putting us on notice. That precipitated the conversations.”

The cost of operating the venue would be \$15 million with or without the team, Early said. Offsetting those costs with revenues generated is an unknown and not a consideration at this point. The goal is to cover utilities, cleaning and maintenance.

“Right now, it’s [the Pacers] a \$100 million operation of which \$15 million is operation of the building. Our difficulty is that there is suite, naming rights, club seat and restaurant revenue, but if you don’t have an NBA basketball team, what happens? Without the team, all that revenue begins to crumble,” Early said.

The Colts get 100 percent of the revenue they generate and the CIB considers them a tenant a dozen days a year. The Pacers also get 100 percent, but they are on the line for 100 percent of the expanses of operating the building.

The CIB does not have the financial means to do anything at this point. “We are dependent on the legislature, mayor and city council to create funding,” Early said. “A lot will be dictated by the amount of funding we have and what conditions are placed on that funding. Possibly we would take over operations [at Consecro] or it would be a subsidy or stipend.” The goal is to put the Pacers in a position they feel they have the opportunity they can financially perform and certainly taking some of their revenues would not be a likely scenario, Early said.

Ann Lathrop, treasurer, Capital Improvement Board, said there are some upcoming hurdles in all of this, one in June and one in September, that were really created as a result of the credit crisis in this country. When the credit markets became constricted for variable rate debt, the CIB ended up needing to make a termination payment of \$22 million. “We used \$5 million in cash and a \$17 million short term loan. That loan is coming due at the end of June and as we all know the credit market hasn’t freed up very much. We will need to refinance into a longer debt structure or reissue another one-year short term note. We’re in the process of talking to underwriters or private placement.”

The CIB also has previous debt issues that were insured from bond insurance and surety policies, “and when AMBAC and MBIA were downgraded by the rating agencies late last summer, our bond trustee issued a notice we had until September to fund the debt service reserve funds either with cash or replace the surety policies with another surety that is double A rated.” The CIB is now in the pack of institutions seeking such backing. That amount, due in September, is \$26.4 million, Lathrop said.

“We are in discussion with every stakeholder that relates to the CIB, the



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Pacers, the Colts, the vendors, our unions, the arts people that get grant funding from us, hotel/motel folks, along with legislators at the city and state level to look at how to come together and solve these long-term fiscal problems,” Lathrop said. So far the CIB has announced \$7 million in operating cuts.

It does not change anything at Conseco Fieldhouse. The Pacers continue to operate the venue. AEG Facilities continues to be a consultant. Promoters continue to do business with the team. Fans continue to attend games.

In fact, Rick Fuson, senior VP and executive director, Pacers Sports & Entertainment, ticked off some positive numbers amid all the clutter. Of 69 corporate suites at Conseco Fieldhouse, 60 are filled on a contractual basis, Fuson said. And they’ve had great success this year with rental suites, those not contracted. He said corporate sponsorships have held up well and he’s confident going forward.

The team reduced 2010 season ticket prices 15 percent on average and gave early bird renewals “43 for 42” and a payment plan, 10 payments of 10 percent of the amount due. “In the first month of renewals, we’re ahead of last year,” Fuson said.

Attendance this year, with 10 home games left, has averaged 13,700, up from “a tick over 12,000 last year” in the 18,000-seat arena, Fuson said.

Still, it has been reported, and he did not dispute, that Pacers Sports and Entertainment Corp. has lost \$30 million in the last year, including basketball operations.

“We run this building very efficiently - what we have continued to say is we are at absolute capacity. We are discussing the operating costs of this arena,” Fuson said.

A lifelong resident of Indianapolis who has been involved with the Pacer organization for 25 years, Fuson said the city is solution-oriented and upbeat.

“We have been forthcoming in our discussions with everyone that we as an organization are very comfortable with running the basketball team and financing the basketball team. We are not in a position, we feel, to fund the operating costs of the arena. This is a CIB-owned facility and therefore we are discussing opportunities and solutions as to where funding can come from to operate the building,” Fuson said.

The venue and team does generate \$8 million in taxes a year, including state income, sales and entertainment taxes, that help fund the bond, he added. Conseco Fieldhouse was built for \$185 million.

“If we don’t get there, we have to figure out how to survive on the revenue we do have and that could be very unpleasant,” Early said of discussions at this point. “Our Authority is running out of money now. We need solutions today. The legislature is in session until the end of April and we hope to get some assistance there. Ongoing sources like the governor, mayor’s office, city council, whatever, has to happen here in next few months or we have to make some difficult decisions about keeping the venues open.” — Linda Deckard

Interviewed for this story: Pat Early and Ann Lathrop, (317) 262-3400; Rick Fuson, (317) 917-2500

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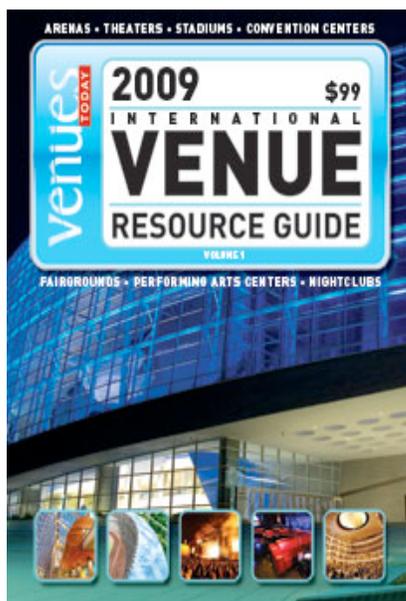
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DEALS

NEDERLANDER HOPES TO FILL THIS CIVIC ON ROCK 'N ROLL



The San Jose (Calif.) Civic Auditorium

The Bay Area has its share of mid-sized venues, but Nederlander Concerts COO Alex Hodges thinks his company's deal to produce concerts and special events at the San Jose Civic Auditorium could bring a whole new range of options to the



area.

The historic 80-year-old, 3,000-seat venue in the heart of downtown will help the company – whose Southern California venues include the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, the Santa Barbara Bowl, Anaheim’s Grove and Hollywood’s Pantages Theatre – get a solid foothold in Northern

California that could increase routing options.

With the diversity of its holdings in Southern California, Hodges said the addition of the San Jose Civic - owned by the city – allows the company to offer more cities when routing tours in the state. “Now we can say, ‘here’s a routing that can work for you, from San Jose to Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and maybe down to Orange County,’” he said. “It provides us with a full California routing. As an agent in the past, it was always a question of how many days you can get in California, because the major cities are so much more spread out than on the Eastern seaboard.”

Though it was a popular venue for rock acts from the Rolling Stones to the Allman Brothers Band in the 1970s and 80s, the Civic has not been as actively booked lately, but Hodges sees great potential in the wide-open floor that can accommodate general admission rock shows.

“We like the venue and the city is committed to renovation,” Hodges said about the impetus behind the deal, which comes after the City of San Jose invested \$13 million for renovations and upgrades of the building in 2007. Nederlander has a multiple year lease deal with Team San Jose for the Civic Auditorium, the terms of which were not released. In 2004, the non-profit Team San Jose was given a five-year contract with the city to manage the San Jose Convention Center, the Civic Auditorium and four other publicly-owned facilities.

Under the terms of the deal, Team San Jose was to receive a \$2 million-per-year subsidy from the city to offset losses, although a 2006 grand jury report found that the subsidy was closer to \$4 million per year. According to the report, Team San Jose’s first year operating the facilities brought in \$8.7 million, with a net loss of \$3.7 million. Team San Jose is projecting revenues of \$10.5 million for 2008/2009 fiscal year.

While Nederlander is partnering with Team San Jose to book and manage the building, Nederlander is also installing its own local team consisting of a talent buyer, marketing director, assistant, a general manager, an operations manager and a sponsorship/special events coordinator who will work with Team San Jose, which will head up the special events side of the building and work to fill its mid-sized seating range.

“The venue’s capacity is in the sweet spot that Nederlander excels in,” Hodges said, pointing to the Greek and Santa Barbara Bowl as midsized spaces that have developed excellent reputations thanks to solid booking and well-received makeovers.

Among the upgrades already completed or underway are: a new boiler, upgraded dressing rooms, upgraded restrooms, a reconfiguring of the food & beverage space, an expansion of the patio/terrace space available for concessions, new seats and a state-of-the-art sound, lighting and video package for which the bidding process is underway.

Because the Civic is a 52-weeks-a-year venue - unlike the seasonal Greek and Bowl - Hodges said he hopes to book 60-plus concerts a year in

addition to 100 or more special events. Hodges also sees the opportunity to do other events in Northern California at the adjacent Convention Center and HP Pavilion, which he expects Nederlander might start looking at for bigger shows in the future. "For years we've been doing occasional shows in the market," he said. "But we fell in love with the Civic and it gives us a chance to do more in the market and when you consider the college and HP ... our focus is to get in there and take the relationships we have and prove that the market hasn't been worked like it should be." – Gil Kaufman

Interviewed for this story: Alex Hodges, (323) 468-1730

ARENAS

BASSMASTER CLASSIC A GOOD CATCH FOR LOUISIANA VENUES

The 2009 Bassmaster Classic at CenturyTel Center, Bossier, La., broke the event's all-time attendance record.



General managers of both the Shreveport (La.) Convention Center and the CenturyTel Center, Bossier, La., visited the 2008 Bassmaster Classic at the Carolina First Center, Greenville, S.C., to determine if they wanted to bid on the event which would take place March 20, 21, and 22, 2009.

"We witnessed the attendance there," said Shreveport Convention Center General Manager Sam Voisin. "It looked like a great event." Both managers liked the event and decided to take it on in 2009. The 2008 event drew 67,500.

"What we didn't expect, though," said Mike Cera, manager of the CenturyTel Center, "was that we would triple that number in attendance. It was great."

In fact this 2009 attendance of 137,700 patrons surpassed the previous Bassmaster record of 82,600 established in 2003 at the Louisiana Superdome and New Orleans Arena. All five of the aforementioned facilities are managed by SMG.

The Bassmaster event, sponsored by Dick's Sporting Goods, sets up in two separate facilities. The Expo is normally held in a convention facility and the weigh-in is presented in an arena.

Voisin said the event took his entire 350,000-square-foot facility. There

were exhibits and displays on both tradeshow floors, in the ballrooms, in the concourses and in the meeting rooms. The Expo features the latest in fishing tackle, new boat models and engines and outdoor gear of every description, and scores of interactive activities and appearances by top professional anglers.

“They were everywhere,” Voisin said. “The only concern I had about the event was that the anglers might not catch any fish.”

But, they did catch plenty on the Red River that is located about two blocks from the convention center. They recorded the second highest weigh-in ever.

The arena was set up in an end-stage presentation. The anglers would come into the arena in their boats on a trailer pulled by a truck, one at a time. Each angler would unload on the stage. While the trucks made a circle on the arena floor, the anglers would go through the weigh-in. By the time the boats came back around, the weigh-in would be complete and the anglers would get back on his boat to exit the arena.

The presentations on Friday and Saturday took about 3.5 hours, said Cera. The Sunday presentation was shorter, because the number of anglers is reduced to 25 after Saturday. This year there were 51 anglers; normally it's 50.

“There was one woman,” Cera said. “This is the first year a woman has competed in the men's tournament. She was the winner of the women's bass tournament.”

About 6,500 people came into the arena for Friday's weigh-in. There were about 9,300 on both Saturday and Sunday.

Even though the arena was responsible for only the presentations, they were busy all week long, Cera said. The arena was media central. On Tuesday, media from across the country came into the facility, conducted their interviews and communicated with their companies.

“We did the food catering to them for breakfast, lunch and dinner,” Cera said.

Then, in the parking lot of the arena, they ran a shuttle service for those parking and riding to the marina. The shuttle service ran for 17 hours a day, starting at 5 p.m. The boat launch was at 7 a.m. every morning.

Cera said they did have some snack stands in the parking lot as well. They served coffee and quick breakfast items in the morning and drinks, water and snacks later in the day.

Interviewed for this story: Mike Cera, (318) 747-2501; Sam Voisin, (318) 841-4000

POLITICS **OC FAIRGROUNDS HOSTS OBAMA TOWN HALL**

President Barack Obama told an enthusiastic crowd of supporters gathered at the Orange County Fairgrounds in Costa Mesa, Calif., “You sent us to Washington to bring change. I can't do it without you. I hope you're ready to get to work.” (White House Press Pool Photo)



COSTA MESA, Calif. — President Barack Obama made his first visit to Southern California on Wednesday, hosting a town hall meeting at the Orange County Fairgrounds here. Fairgrounds officials had just slightly over 48 hours to convert one of the fair's two exhibit halls into a presidential platform where Obama tried to sell voters on his stimulus package and took questions from the audience.

"We found out we were going to host the event just before the public did, so from the day we found out, we've been in non-stop work mode," said OC Fair Manager Steve Beazley. "There are so many agencies involved in trying to pull something like this together, and it's really important to have a centralized communication structure so that everyone is on the same page."

Beazley said many of the duties were handled by the White House's own staff. The White House Press Pools handled all media credential requests, managing a work area for credentialed journalists and a special Ovations-catered area for traveling reporters who frequently cover the President. The White House's Guest Services division handled VIP requests, while the Public Relations team helped create the basic design of the staging. Even the singing of the National Anthem, the Invocation and the President's introduction were all local leaders chosen by the White House.

The Secret Service was the lead agency on security, working in conjunction with the Orange County Sheriff's Department and the Costa Mesa Police Department. All attendees had to pass through a metal detector and have their items hand searched by plainclothes officers, as well as sniffed by bomb-detecting dogs.

About 1,000 tickets were given out for the Wednesday event, and Beazley said hundreds of people had camped out overnight to be first in line Tuesday morning to get a chance to see the President's speech. The White House also reserved tickets for local congressional representatives and California's own Lt. Governor John Garamendi.

"A large portion of people who waited in line got turned away simply because there just weren't enough tickets," he said. "Right before they started handing off tickets, a White House official went to the midpoint in the line and told the folks they weren't going to make it inside. I'm sure they weren't happy to hear the news."

Beazley said one of the reasons for the low attendance was the choice of

the town hall meeting space – a small exhibit hall typically used for consumer trade shows and exhibitions during the summer fair. Beazley said the President’s team opted for the hall over the much larger Pacific Amphitheatre so that the event would have a more intimate feel.

“He wanted to hold a town hall meeting, so that meant he needed to be able to answer questions from the audience and interact,” Beazley said.
– Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: Steve Beazley, (714) 708-1500

HOTTickets

HOT TICKETS is a weekly summary of the top acts and ticket sales as reported to VT PULSE. Following are the top 20 concerts and events, the top 5 in each seating capacity category, which took place since Feb. 24, 2009.

THE GARDEN GROWS A VARIETY OF HITS, DOMINATES 5-10K

| 15,001 or More Seats | 10,001-15,000 Seats | 5,001-10,000 Seats | 5,000 or Less Seats |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>1) Coldplay Gross Sales: \$4,850,986; Venue: AcerArena, Sydney, Australia; Attendance: 59,392; Ticket Range: \$92.41-\$72.60; Promoter: Chugg Entertainment; Dates: March 11-14; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p>2) Pac-10 Tournament Men’s Basketball Gross Sales: \$3,082,614; Venue: Staples Center Arena, Los Angeles; Attendance: 61,727; Ticket Range: \$80-\$40; Promoter: Pac-10; Dates: March 11-15; No. of Shows: 5</p> <p>3) Billy Joel & Elton John Gross Sales: \$2,049,955; Venue: Philips Arena, Atlanta; Attendance: 18,908; Ticket Range: \$181-\$55.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 14; No. of Shows: 1</p> | <p>1) Kings of Leon Gross Sales: \$689,611; Venue: Brisbane (Australia) Entertainment Centre; Attendance: 11,974; Ticket Range: \$57.59; Promoter: The Frontier Touring Company; Dates: March 16; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p>2) Atlantic 10 Men’s Basketball Championships Gross Sales: \$639,273; Venue: Atlantic City (N.J.) Boardwalk Hall; Attendance: 28,783; Ticket Range: \$65-\$15; Promoter: Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority; Dates: March 11-14; No. of Shows: 6</p> <p>3) Nickelback Gross Sales: \$618,730; Venue: i wireless Center, Moline, Ill.; Attendance: 10,877; Ticket Range: \$65-\$45; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 15; No. of Shows: 1</p> | <p>1) Van Morrison Gross Sales: \$1,864,340; Venue: The WaMu Theater at Madison Square Garden, New York; Attendance: 10,668; Ticket Range: \$350-\$90; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: Feb. 27-28; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>2) Grease Gross Sales: \$608,458; Venue: Tucson (Ariz.) Convention Center; Attendance: 13,164; Ticket Range: \$68-\$25; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: Feb. 24-March 1; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>3) Celtic Woman Gross Sales: \$545,566; Venue: Radio City Music Hall, New York; Attendance: 9,625; Ticket Range: \$73.50-\$43.50; Promoter: Madstone Productions, MSG Entertainment; Dates: March 13-14; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>4) Simply Red</p> | <p>1) Cher Gross Sales: \$3,756,913; Venue: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas; Attendance: 25,730; Ticket Range: \$250-\$95; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: March 3-4, 7-8, 10-11, 14-15 ; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p>2) Van Morrison Gross Sales: \$1,002,970; Venue: Beacon Theatre, New York; Attendance: 4,700; Ticket Range: \$350-\$90; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: March 3-4; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>3) Paul Simon Gross Sales: \$843,310; Venue: Beacon Theatre, New York ; Attendance: 5,570; Ticket Range: \$260-\$75; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: March 13-14; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p>4) Grease</p> |

4) Britney Spears
Gross Sales: \$1,536,801; Venue: **Philips Arena, Atlanta**; Attendance: 18,522; Ticket Range: \$129-\$39.50; Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: March 5; No. of Shows: 1

5) Fleetwood Mac
Gross Sales: \$1,476,642; Venue: **Allstate Arena, Rosemont, Ill.**; Attendance: 13,712; Ticket Range: \$149.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 5; No. of Shows: 1

4) Bryan Adams
Gross Sales: \$424,451; Venue: **John Labatt Centre, London, Ontario**; Attendance: 6,566; Ticket Range: \$69.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 14; No. of Shows: 1

5) Motley Crue
Gross Sales: \$329,974; Venue: **Bi-Lo Center, Greenville, S.C.**; Attendance: 8,116; Ticket Range: \$95-\$22.95; Promoter: Live Nation, In-house; Dates: Feb. 25; No. of Shows: 1

Gross Sales: \$377,960; Venue: **Radio City Music Hall, New York**; Attendance: 5,961; Ticket Range: \$69.50-\$49.50; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: March 15; No. of Shows: 1

5) Bill Maher & Ann Coulter, Speaker Series 2009
Gross Sales: \$337,927; Venue: **Radio City Music Hall, New York**; Attendance: 6,013; Ticket Range: \$95-\$22.25; Promoter: MSG Entertainment; Dates: March 9; No. of Shows: 1

Gross Sales: \$842,150; Venue: **San Diego Civic Theatre**; Attendance: 16,103; Ticket Range: \$82-\$20; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: March 3-8; No. of Shows: 8

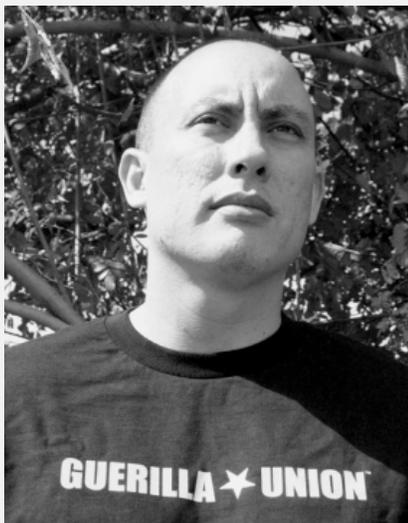
5) Rent
Gross Sales: \$764,706; Venue: **San Diego Civic Theatre**; Attendance: 14,775; Ticket Range: \$82-\$20; Promoter: Nederlander; Dates: March 10-15; No. of Shows: 8

Compiled by Rob Ocampo and Riley Camarillo. To submit reports, e-mail HotTickets@venuestoday.com or fax to (714) 378-0040.

THE BEAT

Q&A

CHANG WEISBERG, PRESIDENT OF GUERRILLA UNION



Since 2000, promoter Chang Weisberg has been promoting some of the biggest hip-hop festivals in the world through his Pomona, Calif.-based Guerilla Union firm. His three biggest shows on 2007 Rock the Bells tour grossed \$9.7 million, according to Venue's Today's own Hot Tickets report.

This year he is spearheading two festivals and managing a U.S. club tour for rappers Nas and Talib Kweli. Dave Brooks from *Venues Today* recently caught up with Weisberg to discuss the state of live hip-hop music in 2009.

Venues Today: Knowing that this interview was coming up, I pulled up the first Rock the Bells movie and watched the scene where you guys try to cajole ODB out of his hotel room. How have you evolved from that concert in 2004 to where you are now?

Chang Weisberg: That show was the first Rock the Bells Festival. We had been doing Rock The Bells in clubs up until that point, and since then, Rock The Bells has become the world's market share leader in terms of quality hip-hop. We've

gone global.

VT: In what sense? Have you booked international dates?

CW: Yes. We're now in Prague, Amsterdam, London and Paris and soon will be going to Japan and Australia. It's a pretty fulfilling thing for us and for the artists who will use it as a touring platform.

VT: You've helped reunite acts like Rage Against the Machine, Wu Tang Clan and Pharcyde for past Rock the Bells festivals. How difficult has it become to keep reuniting acts for these high profile

events?

CW: It's very difficult. I tell my friends that there are more people doing brain surgery than there are reuniting the Wu Tang Clan. Getting Pharcyde back together was a process that started 10 years ago when I knew some of the members. It meant keeping tabs and keeping up with relationships.

VT: Will Rock the Bells make a 2009 run?

CW: Yes, definitely.

VT: Any hints on headliners?

CW: I can't drop any headliner names yet, but I can guarantee that it will be a once in a lifetime show, that's for sure.

VT: You've recently announced a tour with rappers Nas and Talib Kweli called The Jones Experience. What is the concept?

CW: Currently, there are not enough hip-hop shows happening to support the genre. If you open up the L.A. Weekly and look at the House of Blues calendar, there might be one or two urban shows per month at the club level, and it's even less at the theater level, and even less at the arena level. So being the producer of two major hip-hop festivals, I still don't have nearly the amount of stage time or events to satisfy the number of artists who want to expose their creativity. The Jones Experience was the perfect example of our ability to use Rock the Bells on the weekend as an anchor, and still have Nas and Kweli support their music throughout the week leading up to their anchor dates on Rock the Bells. We plan to use that festival to create a routing for dozens of potential club and theater-sized shows.

VT: Why do you think hip-hop music is having a hard time getting these dates?

CW: Because today, popular rap music is not the product of built-up touring bases. It's based upon affiliation, studio records with certain producers; maybe if you got shot nine times, you'll become really popular. A lot of acts have not built up their fan base by hitting the road and cultivating their fans from that perspective.

VT: No one wants to talk about it, but there's also a sense that a lot of the live music industry doesn't want to touch these guys.

CW: There is a stigma out there, and that's where we have our greatest advantage. Guerilla Union has been dealing with this type of music for so many years and we've had success not just selling tickets, but having the acts show up, be on time and not having any major incidents with lawsuits or fights. If we won't work with an act, then you're damn sure Live Nation or AEG won't want to put their neck on the line.

VT: You've had a longtime partnership with SanDisk for both festivals. Do your sponsors ever get nervous about the volatility and sometime unpredictability of the messages in rap?

CW: Well, the entire sponsorship market has tightened up because of the economy. It hasn't really been an issue for "rap music" because we've proven over time that our demographics are exactly what they're looking for. An urban demographic with men and women ages 18-24 are very sought after.

VT: How are tickets sales being impacted?

CW: Great shows will be good and good shows will be average, and if you have an average show, don't even put it on sale. If it's not exciting and not special, then the show won't do well. But Paid Dues this year is already 40 percent ahead of where we were the previous three years.

VT: What do you think about the proposed Live Nation/Ticketmaster merger?

CW: Because I work with both, it's a very interesting situation. I think it's something everyone needs to be aware of. Any time there's a potential monopoly, consumers get concerned. There are a lot of things that could be good about the merger, and there are a lot of things that could be bad. Consolidation could be good in terms of eliminating fees and being more honest about ticketing availability. — Dave Brooks

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