

We Had Fun and Nobody Died: Adventures of a Milwaukee Music Promoter

Amy T. Waldman

Peter Jest, Contributor

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We Had Fun and Nobody Died is Amy T. Waldman's adventure-filled biography of music promoter Peter Jest, who brought legendary rock and folk acts to Milwaukee.

Before he became well-known in the music industry, Jest was a prankster and an underachieving University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee student. But when he started booking shows, his life transformed. He became a club owner and one of Wisconsin's biggest booking agents, bringing acts including the Violent Femmes, John Prine, and Leonard Cohen to the Milwaukee Theatre and other venues across the state. He became trusted by artists in the know, including Arlo Guthrie: "A significant reason for Arlo's loyalty was Peter's grasp of the big picture."

"The average concertgoer sees an announcement, buys a ticket, shows up, enjoys themselves for an evening, and goes home," Waldman notes. "They don't think about everything that's happened to make that experience possible." People like Jest are the ones who make it happen, though, and Waldman's biography covers both the logistics of such work and backstage anecdotes. Jest talks about landing a 750-seat ballroom, but also recalls how Leon Redbone joked that Jägermeister was "fine Milwaukee water"; remembers amusing Iggy Pop by confessing to taking easy college courses to have access to university venues; and reflects on a standoff that he was forced to referee regarding which act would take the stage first. The excitement of booking Pearl Jam while they were still an unknown act comes through alongside nostalgic images of concert posters, ticket stubs, and backstage passes; quotes from local newspapers supply further context.

Reflecting decades of changes to the music business, *We Had Fun and Nobody Died* is a fascinating biography of a passionate promoter's work to transform Milwaukee's music scene.

JOSEPH S. PETE (July / August 2024)

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