


Beachwood Buzz

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Music Industry Veteran Rocks New Stages

By June Scharf

The music industry has experienced some tectonic shifts over the past two decades, and Beachwood resident Howard Perl has lived through all the reverberations. As a producer, manager and promoter of many musical acts over the years, he and his roster of international artists were forced to adjust to the industry's biggest game changer, the use of sharable digital tracks.

Touring emerged as the profit center, so Howard revamped his business model and shifted his efforts to live performances. Within that endeavor, he carved out a niche for himself supporting "heritage acts" that don't have current hits but had chart toppers years ago. Some of those who have relied on his expertise include Jose Feliciano, Lou Gramm, Eddie Money, Shalamar, Chubby Checker and Alexander O'Neal.

Most recently, the 45-year-old's high energy, intensity and ability to withstand a crushing schedule created an appetite for something new and markedly different from anything he'd ever done in the past. He is collaborating on the creation of a docu-musical for the stage, covering the true story of '70s music group, The Carpenters.

Enter Helen Welch, a world-renowned performer and a Grammy nominee from England. Howard refers to her as the "English version of Idina Menzel." He says she was the perfect person to assume the voice of Karen Carpenter in the show called "Superstar: The Songs, The Stories, The Carpenters." Think "Beautiful," the Carole King musical.

The show features more than 20 of The Carpenters' timeless classics and is set to be staged for a single performance at Playhouse Square's Ohio Theater, on March 31 at 3:30 p.m. It has been previously workshopped at other theaters and he hopes to have the show travel around the country.

"If I've got another hoorah in me, this is the one," he explains from his local office, which is covered from floor to ceiling with framed photos of himself and a range of celebrities.

He says the show will appeal to the baby boomer audience, which will be taken back in time when

they hear their favorite songs and become swept up in the intriguing backstory.

"I didn't know how influential The Carpenters were, how many hit songs they had, or how big they were around the world until I dug into this project. They were secretly one of the best-selling acts in the 1970s."

Howard met Welch through a mutual connection, Jon Guggenheim, an award-winning audio engineer, with whom Howard had worked for almost 20 years.

It's hard to capture all that Howard does in a week, with his hand still in artists' shows that are staged three to four times per week. So when people ask him, "What do you do?" he could reply, "What don't I do?" He credits his extreme ability to multi-task and his highly organized style with keeping his life (and those he professionally manages) in order.

To exist in the music business as it currently operates, he says the key is to be versatile. He notes that those who failed to adapt to modern-day realities have suffered

greatly. "Ninety percent of the people who were in the business 10 years are no longer in it today."

"If I've got another hoorah in me, this is the one."

~ Howard Perl, describing the launch of "Superstar: The Songs, The Stories, The Carpenters."

The 1991 Orange High School graduate has been a lifelong risk taker, something that can be traced back to what might be termed as his checkered educational past. He perceived teachers as making him do things he didn't want to do, and as the class clown, he spent "more time in the school office than in any other room," as long as he wasn't "playing hooky."

He attended Ashland University to stay close to home where he had weekend DJ'ing and radio show engagements. He graduated with a B.S.B.A. in Marketing. Years later, he earned a Master's in Management and Public Relations from John Carroll University.

As a child, his initial exposure to entrepreneurialism was with his family's printing business, Perlmutter Printing. The company, which was sold over 20 years ago, was the largest printer in Ohio. His childhood dream, however, was to perform and, armed with dreams of magic, he became a magician named "Howdini," (echoing Harry Houdini). But he only had a few tricks up his sleeve, so he took his precocious ambition over to radio, which was a relatively accessible medium. He started interning at WGCL 98.5 (now WNCX) over the summer before 6th grade, he reports.

How? He's a solid self-marketer and talked a great game. He was able to catch a bus to a Van Aken RTA station and rode the train downtown. Around the same time, he convinced the owner of Camp Robin Hood overnight camp in New Hampshire to create a camp radio station that he developed and managed. Drawing on this experience, he

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Howard Perl at Camp Robin Hood's Radio Station.



Howard Perl in his office.

broadcasted a closed-circuit radio show during the school year to his classmates and peers directly from his bedroom in Pepper Pike.

Not long after, at his cousin's bar mitzvah, he met Terry Macklin, a popular DJ in the '80s, and opportunity presented itself.

"I thought, wait a minute, time out, I broadcast music from my bedroom, but you can actually play records at parties for people? This is cool! I wasn't shy, so I said to Terry, I'm no longer going to watch The Muppet Show on Saturday nights. Instead, my mom is going to drive me wherever you are, drop me off and I'll help you out."

Macklin accepted the proposal and helped him understand the dynamics of a party: how you build excitement and energy, but also how you can kill it.

By 15, Howard's own DJ and booking agency was in full swing with his mom taking calls for him while he was in school. She scheduled bookings for bar/bat mitzvahs, weddings and corporate events, which eventually grew to keep him busy nearly every weekend throughout his high school years. He re-invested much of his earnings to purchase more music and equipment, and to ramp up his marketing.

Through his radio years, he had built a relationship with the owner of The Reel Thing studio in Cleveland. The business traditionally closed at 4 PM and the overhead was fixed, so Howard persuaded him to open the doors after hours and allow him to produce a record for his high school senior project. His project ended up selling an unlikely 2,000 copies, raising industry eyebrows and earning front-page coverage in *The Plain Dealer*.

After graduating from Ashland, he returned to on-air radio stations, including Jammin' 92.3 FM (Cleveland), Y-105 (Mansfield) and CD-106 (Youngstown). As he recalls, there was a lot of schlep-ping in those days and not a lot of sleeping. At the same time, he started RealWorld Entertainment Corporation, a music production and management company with partner Lee Mars, a member of popular band Nine Inch Nails. He reports that they succeeded in recording national acts in Cleveland, including: Jeffrey Osbourne, Regina Belle, Bruce Hornsby, Zhane, Silk, R. Kelly, Montell Jordan, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan and many others.

One of their first projects, the single "Hey Man, Nice Shot" by Filter, was featured in the movie *Cable Guy* and soon achieved the

industry's ultimate prize – being certified "gold" by the Recording Industry Association of America. "This put us on the map," he states.

Eventually the partners' success outgrew Cleveland. Lee moved to New York and Howard dropped everything and moved to L.A. to manage artists. He handled their entire careers, serving as the liaison between them and their outside worlds: "I was the offensive line to the quarterback."

During this time, he bought two Golden Retrievers, Barney and Bailey, who proved to be two key role players in his life. He had grown up with dogs and wanted his own, but he suddenly was hit with the thought, "Oh my god, I'm a father! What do I do now?"

These canine entries in his life overlapped with what portended to be a simultaneous shift from the music life. The moment occurred in 1999 when his assistant told him about Napster, the music-sharing website, and that proved to be the beginning of the end of the music industry as everyone knew it. Music started being shared – for free. No need to buy the cd. Royalties started dropping right away. "My eyes opened up," he reports.

By this time, he had spent enough time in the industry to be appointed a lifetime member of the National Academy of Record-

ing Arts and Sciences. This means he votes on Grammy Award winners. He also has attended 22 Grammy Award ceremonies.

Reflecting on his work, he says the key to anyone's success is recognizing an opportunity and then having the means to act upon it.

Reflecting on his work, he says the key to anyone's success is recognizing an opportunity and then having the means to act upon it. That's what happened with his dogs, which were often at the office running around. He saw an opportunity and decided to turn them into clients.

"They (the dogs) loved what they did. They always showed up on time. They never talked back. And I kept a larger commission," he joked. "What a match made in heaven."

He transformed their lives by having them coached to be animal actors with the help of a professional animal trainer. They were cast in feature films (*Air Buddies*, *Get Shorty* and *Be Cool*) and commercials (*Milk Bone*, *Dent-A-Bone* and *Target*).

But as life would have it, a bump in the road appeared when the lady Howard was dating stepped out of his world. She had been watching his dogs when he traveled, and with her absence, he needed to find supervision for them. He searched throughout L.A. "like a worried mother," touring facilities and interviewing many people. He was "flabbergasted" by what he witnessed and wasn't comfortable with any of them.

"I felt like a lunatic, but my babies deserved something better than a prison cell while I was out having fun or doing business."

With an entrepreneurial spirit and type-A personality, he forged ahead. To date, he has launched about 10 businesses,



Howard Perl with his chief canine officer, Barkley.

some successful and some not, he reports. With this background, he says he thought about his pet problem, then wrote a 400-page business plan after interviewing numerous knowledgeable people and visiting more than 200 boarding facilities.

Ultimately, what emerged was The Barkley Pet Hotel and Day Spa, which opened in 2007. Located in Orange Village, it was marketed as a Club Med for pets with lots of daily activities and posh rooms with amenities. The operation, launched with the help of some prestigious local silent partners, combines Howard's business acumen, creativity and love for pets.

Thirteen years ago, Howard added a chief canine officer and mascot in the form of another Golden Retriever, Barkley, who appears in the business's advertising, is repped by Howard, and has been featured in films and commercials.

Next, he opened a Barkley facility in L.A., with celebrities such as Paris Hilton, Brittany Spears, Michael Phelps and Nikki Sixx often appearing in the lobby with their dogs. Two more Barkleys are scheduled to open in Mumbai, India due to interest generated by international media coverage, including TMZ, the online celebrity chronicler.

Another outlet for his passion surrounding pets and performances has been organizing charity concerts at the Hard Rock Rocksino for animal rescue causes. He calls his concert series, "Rock and Roll to the Rescue."

"This is the best of both worlds – I can help animals and I can stage shows."

Chubby Checker appeared in 2015, and in 2016, another show, "Money for the Animals," featured rock legend Eddie Money. Both benefitted Rescue Village in Geauga County.

When speaking of Barkley, Howard's "best friend forever," it appears that this furry creature is the element in his life that has

captured his heart the most. He has taken Barkley to events all across the country.

"He has done more things than some humans have." That includes running the bases at an Indians game to swimming laps in a pool with Michael Phelps.

One might wonder why he changed his name to Perl from Perlmuter. He says that the latter was frequently mispronounced and misspelled. Plus, his long-time friends always called him "Perl," so he just let that stick. "Ultimately, it offers a better ring and some (much needed) privacy."

His entrepreneurial instincts have often proven correct, and when he layers this with his willingness to take chances, he has a proven formula that has propelled him throughout his career. Howard's own pets, along with many of his canine customers, have certainly benefited along the way, too.



Helen Welch, who Howard refers to her as the "English version of Idina Menzel, stars in Superstar: The Songs. The Stories. The Carpenters." Howard says, "Think Beautiful, the Carole King musical."

"Superstar: The Songs.
The Stories.
The Carpenters."

Playhouse Square's
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Sunday, March 31
3:30 pm

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