



NJ Profile

John Scher

THROUGH the early years of concerts at the Capitol Theatre in Passaic and at colleges and halls around the state, John Scher was often referred to as the boy wonder promoter. Now, at 34, an age when most people are coming into their own professionally, Scher is a longtime veteran of the New Jersey concert scene and one of the most influential people in an industry where a popular touring band earns as much as \$25 million a year.

Because of the glamorous, high profile nature of the entertainment business, Scher is someone whom politicians want on their side and who is routinely courted by managers, music industry executives, bankers and people who think they deserve the best seat in the house. Before Senator Bill Bradley decided to enter the Democratic primary for the first time, he visited Scher. When the anti-scalping bill was passed, Governor Thomas Kean invited Scher to be at the press conference.

As founder and head of Monarch Entertainment Bureau Inc., a Montclair-based company that grossed \$17 million in 1983 with 35 full-time employees and 100 part-timers, Scher promotes concerts throughout the Northeast and is also involved in personal and tour management and video. In coming years one of his goals is to build a huge outdoor amphitheater.

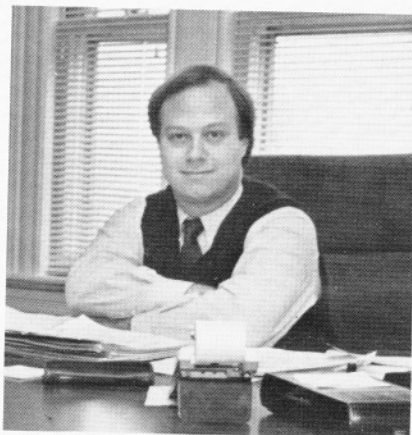
Born in Newark and raised in West Orange, Scher wasn't fond of school, but his first taste of the business came as a high school student. While going through the Yellow Pages to find help in booking an act for the junior prom, he came across a company called Monarch Entertainment, owned by Otto Sternberg. Although Sternberg was involved with mostly vaudeville and big band acts, he helped young Scher book the Chiffons. Ironically, they never showed up.

Through college at Long Island University, Scher stayed in touch with Sternberg, finally convincing him to promote shows that would appeal to

young people. Their first event, the initial showing of The Beatles "Magical Mystery Tour" movie and a "Rhinoceros" concert at the now defunct Embassy Theatre in Orange in August 1969, lost \$1,000.

"In the beginning, the company was based on my own experience as a teenager feeling that there wasn't any alternative to New York City shows," says Scher. "Between parking, gas and tolls, it added \$8 to \$10 to the price of a ticket. An enormous market was just waiting to be tapped."

At first, Scher was amazed at how simple it was to book an act and contends, "people were paying me a fee for something they could have done just as easily themselves. As shows got more technically difficult and acts became more elusive, bands hired Harvard lawyers and Wharton Business School types to represent them. I knew I had to become more sophisticated to grow along with the industry."



Another major stepping stone was developing a good relationship with a bank. Monarch's cash flow suffered because Ticketron counted receipts at some 100 outlets before it paid him. Until Monarch began grossing around \$1 million, Scher had trouble getting loans because banks didn't seem to trust rock music and the concert business. Now, banks love him.

After a couple of years of college bookings, Scher decided a New Jersey base was needed for bands that were on the Northeast concert circuit. Months of research led him to an old, 3,000-seat, rundown theater in the heart of Passaic. The Capitol, which he modeled after the way legendary promoter Bill Graham ran the Fillmore East in New York, was rented at first and purchased in late 1972.

Scher's idea to make hospitality a priority and hire a backstage chef was ahead of its time, and the Capitol soon turned from launching pad to goldmine. By making it a comfortable environment for bands and crews who were weary of fast food, travel, indifferent service and the sterility of arenas and stadiums, superstars such

as The Who, The Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen played the Capitol and enhanced its reputation. Today, the Capitol is often used as a live concert studio for M-TV. The popular cable music channel and Monarch co-produce shows that are taped there.

But success in what is often labeled a cut-throat business has meant rocky times as well. In 1980, Scher, along with another promoter, were accused of violating federal antitrust laws in upstate New York. "Promoting, like sports, is a business with a territorial caste," explains Scher. "Agents were always trying to press you into an unrealistic competitive situation. They would tell you a competitor was offering \$10,000 for an act that you just paid \$9,000. It was pretty dirty at times and we just decided not to do business that way. I found out the hard way that you can't agree to do that."

Anyone who has ever seen Scher announce upcoming events at one of his shows can see he enjoys the spotlight. The case, in which he pleaded no contest, left him embarrassed and bitter about the judicial system. It also cost him a \$10,000 fine and \$400,000 in legal fees. He claims he's still not sure why the government spent over \$1 million prosecuting him, tried the case in New Jersey and fought the no contest plea to the end. He calls his sentence, 300 hours of community service at Integrity House, a drug rehabilitation clinic, "fair and a very positive experience. I was on a terrible whirlwind, 12-hour days, six days a week," he says. "It forced me to slow down and help people not quite as fortunate as me. I also found out who my friends really are."

With the ordeal over, Scher is again optimistic. Recent months have found him coproducing the Jackson's three record-setting dates at Giants Stadium, a 13th Anniversary Show at the Capitol to benefit the Newark Christmas Fund and more. Because the concert business has leveled off, he plans to concentrate more on video and expects that in ten years, 50 per cent of Monarch's business will be related to television.

Asked to mention a couple of highlights along the way, he's animated again, asking "how many is a couple?" The Who at the Capitol. Englishtown. Crosby, Still, Nash and Young at Roosevelt Stadium the night Richard Nixon resigned. Opening the Byrne Arena. His enthusiasm subsides when he realizes there may be too many highlights to go through in one sitting and that he'll need his tiring vocal chords for the rest of the day's meetings and deal-making. ■

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