

he and Dave handled publicity, and Dave wrote press releases and ad copy. Rather than rely entirely on the allocation ACG received from the Senate Finance Committee, Peter used his own money to bring bigger acts to campus, reserving the segregated fee funding for more esoteric acts, among them singer-songwriter-producer T-Bone Burnett and jazz composer Sun Ra and his Arkestra. Alternative Concert Group wasn't a group by any conventional definition of the term.

Early on, Peter had figured out that he needed a way to break into the concert business, and he'd reached out to Steve Mandelman. It had gotten him to where he was now. But his lackluster performance in the classroom didn't attract any attention from his professors, and the idea of sitting down with an academic adviser to talk about what he was doing never occurred to him. Had it, it's possible that Peter could have continued what he was doing with an independently designed cross-disciplinary major. Peter's work putting together shows combined elements of business, economics, sociology, psychology, and communications. His work with Dave showed his ability to collaborate and delegate tasks. The results were tangible. Peter was doing poorly in the classroom but he was excelling at getting an education.

In February of 1984, he brought T-Bone Burnett to the Wisconsin Room. In April, he put on three shows: guitarists Leo Kottke and Daryl Stuermer, and blues singer and guitarist John Hammond. In May, the Violent Femmes played the Ballroom again, this time with the correct



The Violent Femmes performing in the UWM Ballroom on May 2, 1984. Left: Gordon Gano (foreground) and Victor DeLorenzo (background). Right: Brian Ritchie.

PHOTOS BY SCOTT RUUD

THE ALTERNATIVE CONCERT GROUP  proudly presents

AN EXCLUSIVE MILWAUKEE CONCERT!

VIOLENT FEMMES "Hallowed Ground" Tour 84



THE VIOLENT FEMMES ALL AGES CONCERT
with Special Guest **COUCH FLAMBEAU**
TUESDAY, MAY 2, 1984 7:30 p.m. UWM Ballroom
Tickets Available At All 4  Northridge, Southridge
Oakland & North, Brookfield Square

And At:  1813 E. Locust
Milwaukee
414/332-0088

LIMIT 2 Per Person  (914)
For More Information Call 963-6666

ACG's second Violent Femmes show opened with Milwaukee-based punk rock band Couch Flambeau, who also opened Peter's show for the Replacements later that month.
COURTESY OF MILWAUKEEROCKPOSTERS.COM/RON FAIOLA



Peter holds a walkie-talkie side stage at the Oriental Theater for the March 29, 1985, Femmes' show.

Miller High Life Rock Series
and the Alternative Concert Group present

VIOLENT FEMMES

LIVE!

FRIDAY, MARCH 29 8 P.M.

ORIENTAL THEATRE

Tickets: Oriental Theatre, UWM Bookstore,
Radio Doctors, Mainstream

0849	SEC. ROW SEAT	ADM.	MAR 29, 1985	ADMIT ONE THIS DATE ONLY	2000	29	1	MILWAUKEE, WI	FRIDAY	8:00 PM	NO REFUND PRICE NO EXCHANGE	\$10.00	DOOR	SEC. ROW SEAT	ADM.	0849
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Sigmund Snopek (far left), Victor DeLorenzo (center), and Peter (second from right) on stage at the Oriental on March 29.


Maples noted that “the roster of acts . . . reflects Jest’s eclectic booking tastes,” singling out the contrast between Cervenka, Redbone, New York Voices, and “self-described Jewish-lesbian folk singer” Phranc. Peter had also been booking acts for Bastille Days, a French-themed weekend street festival that took place on the north end of downtown Milwaukee every July. In 1988, he’d booked the Band, which at that time included three of the five original members—Rick Danko, Levon Helm, and Garth Hudson.

On Thursday, the night before it opened to the general public, Shank Hall threw an invite-only party with a cash bar. Peter recorded the take, which was north of a thousand dollars. Friday was the first night the club was open to the public, and a capacity crowd paid four dollars a head to see Java. On Saturday night, the door take was double what it had been the night before, and the bar took in its biggest number yet. Counting Sunday’s free show, which also had a cash bar, the club was full on its first four nights.

Peter expected the weekdays to be slower, but as it turned out, capacity was dictated more by the popularity of an act than the day of the week. Reviews of the club itself were generally positive. The rowdy Shank Hall attendees Alderwoman McNamara-McGraw had predicted never materialized. Even the local music journalists, who’d seen plenty of venues come and go, were impressed. In his rave review of the New York Voices show, *Milwaukee Journal* jazz critic Mike Drew gave a shout-out to the new venue. “As now set up, the sound system and sight lines are perfect,” he wrote.

Running a club and promoting shows in larger venues at the same time meant learning to juggle in a way Peter hadn’t before. Though Bob was Peter’s 50 percent partner in the business, he wasn’t involved in its day-to-day operations. On nights when Peter had something going on at the club and a show he’d promoted somewhere else, he had to choose between the two.


Sometimes it was the club, sometimes it was the show. On Sunday, November 26, 1989, singer-songwriter Syd Straw—who’d been a member of the Golden Palominos and was now touring behind her first solo album, *Surprise*—was playing Shank. Meanwhile, at Green Bay’s Riverside Ballroom, the LA-based punk-flavored Red Hot Chili Peppers, who’d been touring all year behind their new release *Mother’s Milk*, were performing the fiftieth show of their tour. On Monday, they’d knock off their fifty-first


&


—present—

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

Sunday, Nov. 26th • 7 p.m. Show



**Plus A Special Opening
Act To Be Announced**

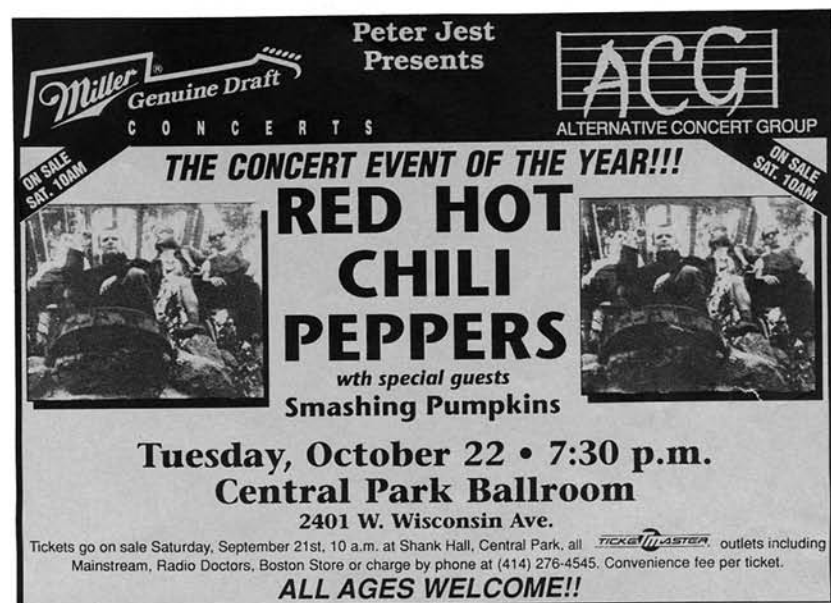
• ALL AGES •
Cash Bar with proper I.D.

RIVERSIDE BALLROOM
115 Newhall (corner Newhall & Main) Green Bay

Tickets available at Riverside Ballroom and all
Ticketron/Teletron outlets.



Peter and Jack Koshick teamed up to bring the Red Hot Chili Peppers to Green Bay the weekend after Thanksgiving in 1989.



At this 1991 Red Hot Chili Peppers show at the Central Park Ballroom, Pearl Jam opened for special guests Smashing Pumpkins, but the band was so unknown that it wasn't even mentioned on the flyer.



In 1992, when the members of Spinal Tap played their second show in Milwaukee, they held a press conference at Shank Hall before performing at the Riverside Theater.

COURTESY OF RON FAIOLA

Randy reached out to Peter and asked if he'd consider coming to work for him. The job would basically entail doing what Peter was already doing, but with a guaranteed salary and benefits. He just had to consider how working for Cellar Door would affect his ability to book acts for Shank Hall and how, if at all, it would impact ACG.

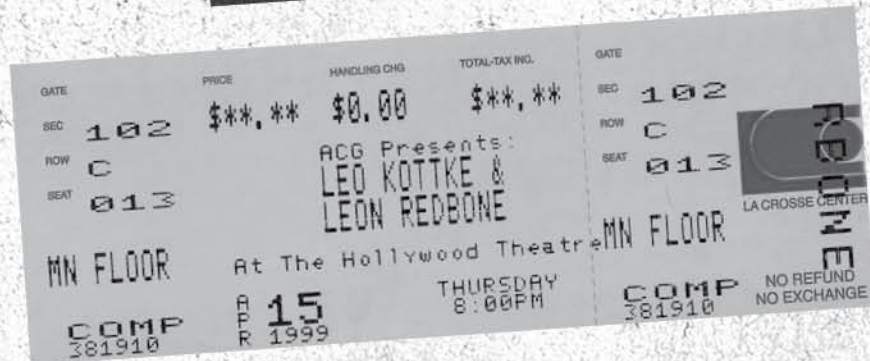
Peter and Randy set up a formal interview for October 25, 1991. It started out on a somber note, one that had nothing to do with matters at hand. Bill Graham, the pioneering San Francisco-based promoter who, among other things, had put together The Band's *Last Waltz* concert and documentary, had been killed in a helicopter crash in Sonoma County. Peter had seen the news; Randy hadn't. They spent the first part of their conversation remembering one of the giants of their industry before moving on to the matter of Peter's employment.

When the interview was over, Peter had a new job and a new title: alternative talent buyer. Shank Hall would run as it always had. Alternative Concert Group would go into an extended period of hibernation, lasting as long as he was employed by Cellar Door. Peter would have the opportunity not only to work closely with one of his local heroes, but also to be part of an organization with a national reach. Even if ACG never came out of dormancy, it would be worth it.



Peter's backstage pass to Spinal Tap's show at the Riverside ostensibly granted him "No Access."

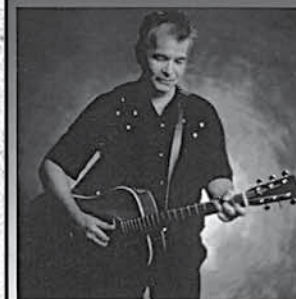
Leo Kottke and Leon Redbone performed together at venues around Wisconsin, including Madison's Barrymore Theater.



Who won the toss for this show on the 1999 series of dates is lost to history, but having Peter flip a coin to see who would open the shows Leon and Leo played together was serious business. PHOTO BY ELLY GRISWOLD



Two Sold Out Shows in Wisconsin



Legendary Singer, Songwriter

JOHN PRINE

with
very special guest

LEON REDBONE!



Friday, March 26, 2004

Madison Civic Center

&

Saturday, March 27, 2004

Riverside Theatre • Milwaukee

Leon Redbone occasionally opened for John Prine on tours in Wisconsin.

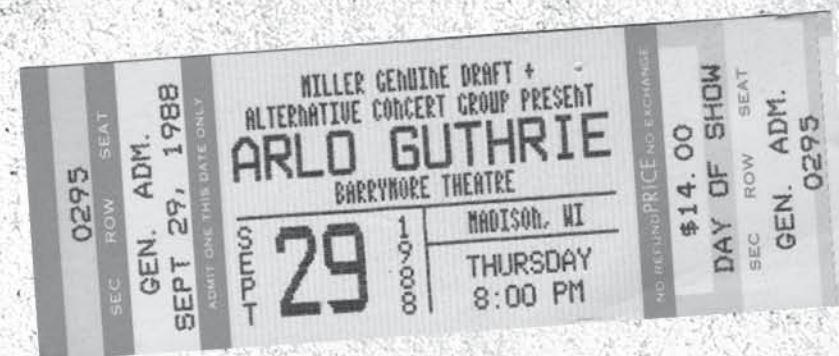
Of course, to Arlo, Peter was just another promoter with whom his booking agent had negotiated a date. But the date went well enough that they did it again in 1987. Peter brought him to Madison's Barrymore Theater in 1988 and the Riverside Ballroom in Green Bay the following year. Shortly after two more Wisconsin Arlo shows were announced in 1990, Peter got a phone call from a stranger who identified himself as Mark Nerenhausen. "I'm the new executive director at Oshkosh's Grand Opera House," he said, "and I see you're bringing Arlo Guthrie to Madison. I think he'd play very well in Oshkosh."

In the days following that conversation, Peter began researching other small markets in Wisconsin and discovering, in the process, beautiful old working theaters and other concert venues around the state. When Arlo's booking agent called to let Peter know what dates Arlo had available in 1991, ACG made offers for four. Arlo ended up playing shows in Milwaukee's Avalon Theater, the Barrymore in Madison, Oshkosh's Grand Opera House, and the Sentry Theater at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

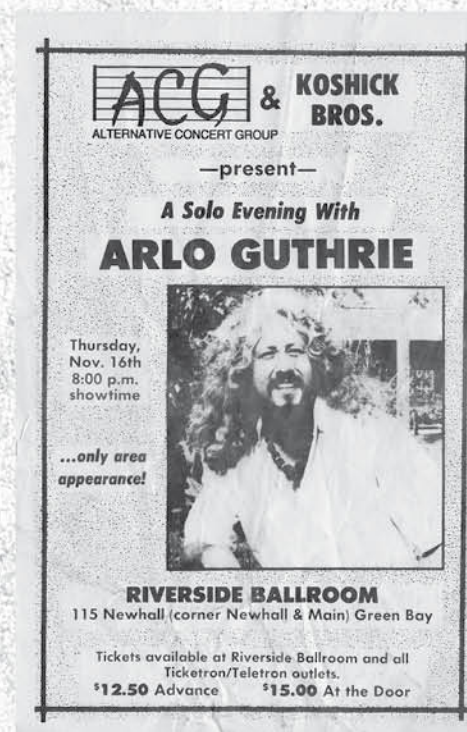
Nerenhausen had been right. The September 21, 1991, show at the opera house was a sellout. Three decades later, Nerenhausen can still conjure up that night in his mind. "I remember [Arlo] playing 'Can't Help Falling in Love with You' and the audience singing along," he said. "Of course, his comments about Pete Seeger were also a great part of the show, . . . hearing that firsthand connection with a music legend like that. It says a lot that after presenting hundreds of shows in venues around the country, the magic of that evening sticks with me."

In 1994, Peter booked Arlo at Shank Hall, the Grand Theater in Wausau, the Capitol Civic Centre in Manitowoc, the Viterbo College of Fine Arts in La Crosse, the Grand Opera House in Oshkosh, and the Schofield Auditorium in Eau Claire. Over the course of thirty-eight years, Peter probably booked about a hundred shows with Arlo. In that time, he brought the musician to venues including the Meyer Theater in Green Bay; the Peterson Auditorium in Ishpeming, Michigan; the Hollywood Theater in La Crosse; the South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center and Pabst Theater in Milwaukee; and the State Theatre in Eau Claire.

It might have been Peter's habit of staying out of the way. It might have been that he wasn't much older than Arlo's son, Abe. There's no question



Ten days before bringing the Red Hot Chili Peppers to Green Bay's Riverside Ballroom, Peter and Jack Koshick brought Arlo Guthrie to the same venue.



This pass dates back to 2006, when Arlo toured celebrating his fortieth anniversary as a touring musician.

Peter, Karen, and Peter's mother watched the show from the fifth row. It wasn't entirely unheard of for Peter to watch a show from the front of the house, but it was a new experience to be approached by strangers before the start, during intermission, and after the show had ended.

People walked right up to Peter and thanked him for making the show happen. The gratitude continued rolling in for a couple of weeks after the show. A neighbor rang his doorbell to tell him how much they'd appreciated the show. Two people sent handwritten notes addressed to Peter at Shank Hall. One arrived after the show. The other, from a woman who described herself as "having reached an age even higher than Mr. Cohen's," arrived two days before. In it, she told Peter of a concert Cohen had played in Norway in the 1970s, where she was born and raised:

I invited my then-teen-age niece to join me for the event. It became a most unusual evening. Police entered the stage, interrupting the performance, telling us that everyone had to leave because of some threat (a bomb). Nobody moved. Not until Mr. Cohen announced that he would continue the concert outdoors. And there, in the mellow light of that summer evening, the generous Mr. Cohen found a grassy knoll where he played his guitar and sang (without a microphone) for all of us who stayed. Over the many years since then, Leonard Cohen often gives concerts in Norway, where he is extremely popular. My niece always goes to these well-attended events. (I, on the other hand, having settled here in our area, have not had those opportunities.) So I now consider myself fortunate to attend next week's concert.

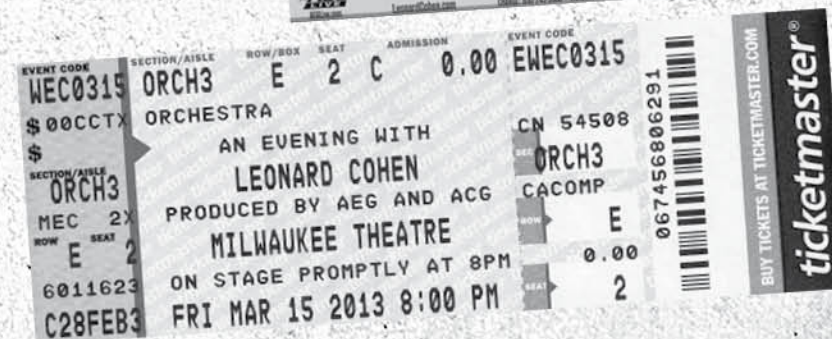
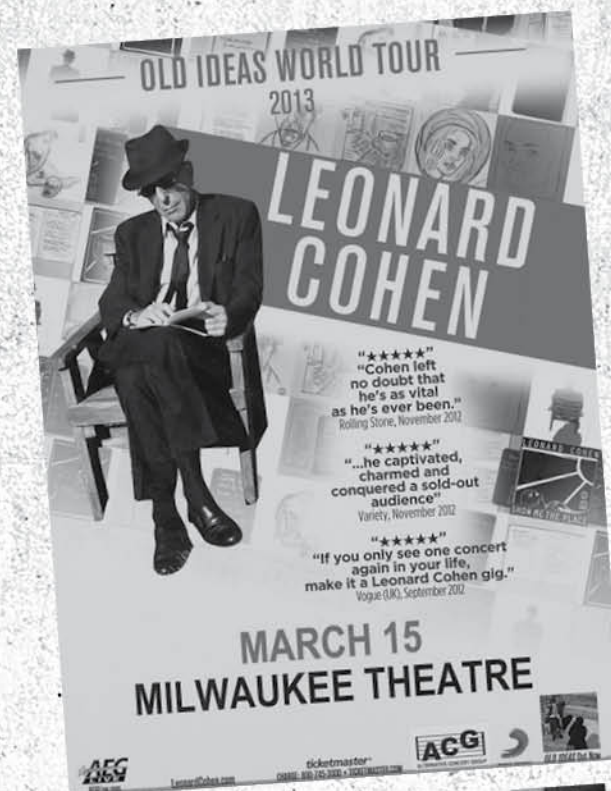
Her niece, she added, was flying in from Norway to attend the show with her.

On the Cohen forum, a fan wrote that the Milwaukee show "was magic. Every seat was filled. Everyone in the audience treated it as sacred, yet jubilant. I have never seen Leonard so connected and jovial at the same time."

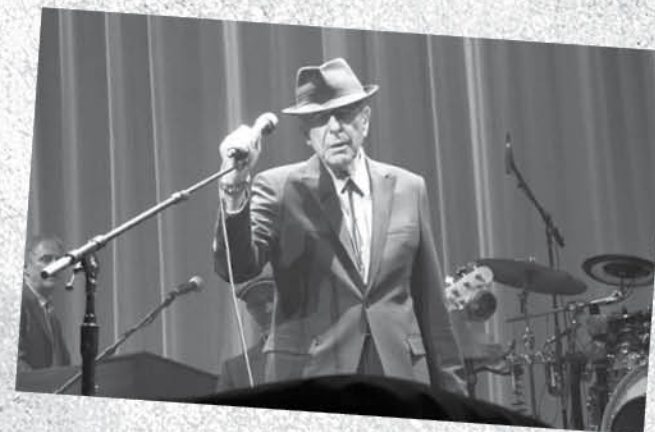
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Peter wanted more of that magic, and he had some ideas about where to look for it. He was in regular contact with Steve Martin—not the

Peter's framed copy of the poster advertising his Leonard Cohen show hangs on the wall of his home office.



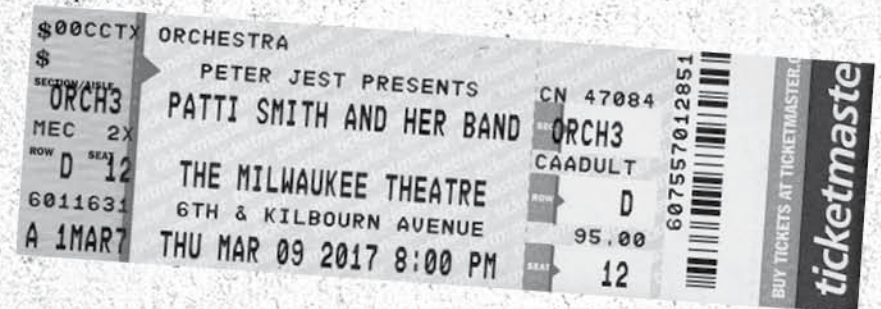
Leonard Cohen on stage at the Milwaukee Theatre on March 15, 2013. PHOTO FROM THE ESTATE OF ART ELKON



The phrase "Peter Jett proudly presents" at the top of this promotional Patti Smith poster reveals how special the show was to him.



Patti Smith on stage at the Milwaukee Theatre. PADDY FINERAN / PADDYWILLSHOOTYOU



After the show, Smith's tour manager presented Peter with the set list, autographed by the band.

