

# SHA BUSINESS: A UNIQUE PROCESS

True to its formula-defying career development, Sha Na Na runs its business in a manner which does not fit into the music industry mold of group, manager, agent, business manager, et al. Basically, the organization is the group and Charlie Fain, whose role isn't really adequately defined by the titles of agent and business representative, but that's as close as one can come.

"It's really kind of strange," says Fain. "I don't think there's any other organization around where it's just the group, plus one. We are really 11 people working together. There is no one, outside of our attorney, that's working with us."

That means there is no external personal management at this time and, as Fain explains, "It seems apparent to all of us that there really isn't a total need for it. The group's been in the business so long, they pretty well know the ins and outs. Therefore, my position is overlapping into management in some areas. I just do whatever I can to be a general business representative and it seems to be working for us."

Fain feels the arrangement works best for them because of the advantage of direct communication. He explains, "They know that I bring all the information to them, then in turn they react. Because I am the person bringing that information, we've eliminated the unknown."

From that point, the business wheels turn by simple democratic process. Fain describes it as: "Major decisions are brought to a meeting amongst the 11 of us, and we talk about it and argue it or agree, and at the end of the meeting, hope-

fully we have a decision. When you leave, everyone knows where we're at." This process also means no one person has the final say, and Fain says that on major decisions "we like to think the decision would be unanimous."

One naturally wonders how Fain got involved in such a unique process. Originally running a booking agency in Milwaukee, he became acquainted with concert promotion through running the city-sponsored Summerfests. That led to the formation of the successful concert production company, Daydream, and the original dealings with Sha Na Na in 1972.

A friendship developed along with the business relationship, and Fain found himself helping the group out when they needed to pick up an extra date or two in the midwest to fill out a tour. In the meantime, Fain reached the point in his own career where success had afforded him the chance to take some time out for himself, so he sold his interest in Daydream and gave up Summerfest. The involvement with Sha Na Na had grown closer, to the point circa 1975 when the group truly needed his full time services,

and Fain was in a position to provide them. As he explains the move, "Touring had become so expensive—especially with a 10-piece group—that if the routing was not absolutely perfect, the group couldn't make money. They needed someone who could devote a tremendous amount of time to them so they could at least come off the road with a profit. As a result of that—me."

Actually, Fain's crucial role as agent makes sense when one considers that touring, up until the tv show, was Sha Na Na's career. And that career, in Fain's words "went through more  
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Above, Sha Na Na appear in the movie "Grease." At right, Charlie Fain: "We are really 11 people working together."



*SHANANA*

## WOODSTOCK TO PRIME TIME: A 10 YEAR ROCK ODYSSEY

Or how to leap the time, music, generation and media gaps in a single bound

By SUSAN PETERSON

One thing is clear after the remarkable across the board success of Sha Na Na's debut television series last year: They've got more than one thing to say.

Somewhere along the way in this group's 10-year history, the message has grown far beyond the '50s nostalgia craze which spawned such media exploits as Broadway's and now Hollywood's "Grease," "American Graffiti," "Happy Days," and "Laverne and Shirley," and a proliferation of locally successful '50s bands across the country which are kept in business by the continued public demand for nostalgia, sock hops and the like.

While this trend can be viewed as traceable to Sha Na Na's stunning success at 1969's Woodstock and aftermath, it is clear that with the leap to prime time tv, they have long ago outgrown their stepchildren. Simply put by saxophonist Lennie Baker, "With tv, we've gone way beyond that. You can't be nostalgic to a five-year-old kid."

That television has made this expansion possible became immediately clear to the group in a way which is not possible for most tv stars. Still actively touring, they can see their audience. Explains vocalist Johnny Contardo, "The first tour after the tv debut, we had the mothers and fathers taking their kids to see the show, grandma and grandpa came too. The audience has totally expanded and television has really done that for us." And bassist Chico Ryan adds, "Right now it's probably the only 'G' rated rock show in the world. That's what we are. We can play state fairs with three generations of people coming and enjoying the show."

In addition to an expanded audience, the opportunities for the group's future have also blossomed. With a weekly demonstration of the musical, acting, comedic and dancing talents of each of the 10 members, it is no wonder that opportunities are opening up for them. As vocalist Donny York puts it,

**"We've got one thing to say to youse: rock 'n' roll is here to stay."**

early Sha Na Na

**"We're not part of the record industry, we've always had our own industry. We're not just a musical act, we're a theatrical act. We have a hit single for a half hour for 16 million people every week."**

Screamin' Scott Simon

**"Come up here and say dat . . ."**

Bowzer

"I think Sha Na Na is becoming more of a known quantity, and there are probably more people willing to take risks with us now." Movies and other tv exposure have already happened, and the long awaited recording success seems at this point inevitable.

It is a far cry from 1969, when Sha Na Na sprang into existence on the campus of Columbia Univ. out of an a capella singing group called the Kingsmen, who only did a few '50s songs like "Little Darlin'" and "So In Love" because they worked well in harmony. Of that 12 man group, four of the originals are still with it—drummer Jocko Marcellino and vocalists Denny Greene, Scott "Santini" Powell and York. Eight of the current members have a tenure of more than seven years. And the two newest members, Ryan and guitarist Danny McBride, joined in 1973 and 1974, respectively.

Student enthusiasm for the little '50s material they did led to their first foray into theatrical rock, a campus concert aptly billed as the "Grease Ball," which was a smash success, and led to the followup "Grease Under the Stars," a gig at the then N.Y. music industry in-spot, Steve Paul's Scene, which netted their seventh gig: \$300 (and Marcellino claims the check

bounced) for a set at an outdoor festival called Woodstock. Their "At The Hop" made it into the movie and soundtrack, launching what was still 10 college students doing it as a summer and weekend job into what has become a long and very unusual climb to media stardom.

The original stage show which won the hearts of the '60s rock fans was in stark contrast to what was then in vogue—jeans-clad singer/songwriters or psychedelic bands playing introverted sets with at most a colored light show on a screen behind them. As the lanky, deep-voiced Jon "Bowzer" Bauman recalls it, "When you paid your money to go see a show, you weren't necessarily getting one, you were getting a reproduction of a record. We were giving people their money's worth as far as live entertainment."

The pace of the show was frantic: 45 minutes of non-stop music, choreographed, but with no dialog. Dialog only came about gradually, as a result of mikes not working or other stage show snafus and, finally in 1973, because of needed re-assessment and revitalization. At that point, the dance contest and street locale were added and the evolution from '50s rock nostalgia to a theatrical presentation became complete.

Along the way, each of the members made vital contributions—all were college graduates, and most had studied music and theater. The venues grew from Greenwich Village clubs to college campuses to private promotional situations. They played both the Fillmore East and West. In 1973-74 the nostalgia craze peaked, landing them in the pages of Life, Time and Newsweek.

For all of the spoof elements of the show, all agree with bassist Ryan that "The thing it's based on, fundamentally, is that we take the music very seriously, and we're as authentic as possible. We're really taking pains to get the original sounds so at that point it's very serious." The repertoire, until the tv show, was basically drawn from a general period from 1955 to the early '60s, but they are also in agreement that there is no

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