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The ADVOCATE
Greenwich Time

WEEK GOOD VIBES

FESTIVAL BRINGS
BACK SPIRIT OF THE
GRATEFUL DEAD



GOOD VIBES



Performing this week end at the Gathering of the Vibes will be, from left, Los Lobos, Bob Weir, Buddy Guy, George Clinton, Carlos Santana and the Grateful Dead and Don San. Orchestra, at top.

By Ray Hogan

5 ART VIBES

Today marks the 12th anniversary of Jerry Garcia's death. Not coincidentally, it's also the opening day of the 12th annual Gathering of the Vibes, a four-day music festival in Bridgeport's Seaside Park that will feature Bob Weir and Ratdog, Los Lobos, Buddy Guy, The Waitresses, Los Chappoos and The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, among others.

Gathering of the Vibes was born out of a way to keep Deadheads congregated after Garcia's death. The first event, called "Dedicated Heaven: A Gathering of the Imbs," was held

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at Purchase College. The past 11 festivals have been produced by Terrapin Presents, founded and run by Greenwich native Ken Hays. The festival returns to Seaside Park, where it was held in 1999 and 2000, after the completion of a multi-year park beautification project.

"We always planned on coming back to Seaside Park," Hays says. "In the fall of 2000, the city started a project where they invested nine million dollars into hydro-seeding eighty-eight acres of grass, which left us in a position where we couldn't park or camp ours for five or six years."

This year, Seaside Park, which PT Hamann hoped would be his legacy to Fairfield County

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Vibes

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residents, will provide a temporary home to four stages (including the Solar Beach Stage, which features solely Connecticut acts) that will host more than 50 acts beginning tonight. The event will culminate Sunday at 6:30 p.m. with legendary roots rockers Los Lobos, who formed in East Los Angeles in 1973.

"It started off as a gathering of friends and family, and it grew into something that included a

very large extended family," Hays says. "Most of the staff is from Fairfield County, so it's a welcome home party."

Hays, a Deadhead since his teenage years, says it was in Bridgeport during the 2000 festival while watching Weir and Ratdog that he realized he had accomplished his goal. "That was a monumental experience for me and for all of us," he says. "There was a sense of what we're doing here is legitimate enough for a lifetime achievement award winner and member of our favorite band. The weather was perfect,

the ability to look out over Long Island Sound, it all gelled. The Vibes 2000 is one I will never forget."

This year, Terrapin hosts three members of the Grateful Dead. In addition to Weir, Mickey Hart and Donna Jean Godchaux will perform with their respective bands.

For Godchaux, now Godchaux MacKay, the last year has been spent writing and recording with Donna Jean and the Tricksters, which includes members of the Zen Tricksters, the tristate area's most pre-eminent Grateful Dead interpreters (the band also records its own material). The Zen Tricksters have played at every Gathering of the Vibes.

"Over the years, it has become almost like a family," says Zen Tricksters (and DJ&T) singer-guitarist Jeff Mattson. "We see the same people working there every year, a lot of the same bands and a lot of the same people who come back to see the festival every year. There's a 'see ya again next year' vibe, which makes it a lot of fun."

Mattson remembers the first Purchase College weekend, which was meant as a way to bring together those who would usually be on The Grateful Dead's summer tour together. He remembers each headlining act being asked to play a song from the Dead repertoire.

Grateful Dead songs are no longer a requirement to be booked at the festival, but The Grateful Dead approach to music-making and willingness to provide fans a safe haven to follow their bliss remain cornerstones of the Gathering of the Vibes experience. Mattson saw his first Dead show in 1973 and put together what would become The Zen Tricksters in 1979. Almost 30 years later, he hasn't lost his appetite for the band's music. "They are great songs, well-written with great melodies," he says. "But I think you're missing the spirit

of the song if you're playing the same way every time. There was always something to see that was different there, which was the opportunity to stretch these songs out and put your own personality into it."

It's the spirit of adventure and improvisation that Hays and his staff look for in programing the talent each year.

"It's important to always bring in new, fresh creative blood musically or you become stagnant," says Hays. "At the same time, we know what our friends and family want to see on stage. They're very vocal about that and we appreciate because this truly is a grassroots up festival."

To that end, artists such as Los Lobos and Buddy Guy, who haven't played previous Gatherings, fit the bill in what the Terrapin staff is looking for musically. Other acts on the two main stages this weekend include Assembly of Dust, George Clinton and P-Funk, Dickey Betts and Great

Southern, Zero, Strangefolk and Martin Sexton. More than 20 local acts play the Solar Beach Stage (see sidebar).

For Hays, the drive and desire to put on a musical festival each year comes from the ability to re-create the joy he and his staff and friends experienced at countless Grateful Dead concerts.

"Every year is a unique challenge, and to see an empty field or park transformed into a sea of tents and dancing, smiling faces, that's what it's all about," Hays says. "And hopefully, we will cover our costs."

what: Gathering of the Vibes

where: Today-Sunday

when: Seaside Park, Bridgeport

price: \$65 for each day, \$150 for a weekend pass

contact: 226-8749 or visit www.gatheringofthevibes.com

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Local talent

■ King for a Day. The John Hickey Band. Fro. Rolla. Electric Hill.

This weekend's schedule at Jimmy's Seaside or the Acoustic Cafe?

Nope. These are five among more than 20 local acts that will be playing the Gathering of the Vibes' Solar Beach stage this weekend. Terrapin Presents, the festival's Norwalk-based producer, is not only bringing its summer jam-band festival back home, it's giving the homegrown a chance to show their stuff.

"It's an opportunity to do what we've always enjoyed doing, which is showcase up-and-coming artists," says Ken Hays, the festival's founder and producer. "We encourage everyone to go out and see live music because there's nothing like it. It can't be replicated in the studio. Live is where it's at... There's an amazing amount of talent in the state of Connecticut. I feel good about being able to showcase these artists having grown up and spent my whole life in Fairfield County."

For the Trumbull-based band Roamer, getting on the Vibes

stage was a goal that was set a few years ago. Singer-guitarist Tim Sather just didn't think it would happen this quickly.

"This is nothing short of a dream come true," he says. "It was a very big surprise when we found out. I think that it speaks to the time we've put in and the effort we've put in."

Roamer plays in a classic rock style sometimes reminiscent of The Band and early Allman Brothers Band with an emphasis on each song telling a story. The style was born in the days when the band served as accompaniment to Sather's singer-songwriter pursuits. In 2003, the musicianship began to take on a more democratic format and the group's name was an anagram for Return of AM Radio. After too many promoters botched the name, the group settled on Roamer. Earlier this year, it released its first disc "The Basker" (www.roamermusic.com).

Sather, whose brothers, Matt and John, play bass and guitar, believes the local exclusivity

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of the Solar Beach stage weekend points to the music scene that has been building around the Black-rock area of Bridgeport over the past few years.

"It's a testament to a group of people that worked hard over the past couple of years," he says. "There's just a nice group of 40 to 50 bands that work together, get along and very unselfishly tried

to create a scene with that thought in mind that we can create a vibe for a complete music scene in the area, we will all succeed together."

The Solar Beach schedule is available at www.gatheringofthevibes.com.

— Ray Hogan