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Weekly

FAIRFIELD
COUNTY

July 23 - 29, 2009

Feel the Vibes

Four Days of Peace, Love
and Music in Bridgeport

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**Three Days of Peace, Love and Music
in Bridgeport**

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COURTESY OF GATHERING OF THE VIBES

■ Vibes

A Multi-Headed Beast

Keller Williams actually has friends!

By Sean Corbett

Gathering of the Vibes Art & Music Festival

July 23-26, \$75 for single day, \$200 for the weekend. Seaside Park, Bridgeport. (203) 908-3030, www.gatheringofthevibes.com.

Headlining the third annual Gathering of the Vibes festival are the harmonizing heroes Crosby, Stills and Nash. Because of CSN and appearances from fellow Woodstock alums Bob Weir and Levon Helm (performing back-to-back Saturday night), this is 2009's most authoritative 40-year anniversary of Woodstock. It was then that CSN took the stage together for the first time together, at 3 a.m., for an acoustic set followed by an electric set with Neil Young. And it was there that the modern idea of a music festival was born, with thousands and thousands of people gathering in one spot with tents, coolers and the sole intention to hear lots of music.

Though the Vibes has been in action for 13 years in five other locations, its favorite home is Seaside Park. And now, thanks to its positive effect on the City of Bridgeport, you can attend the Vibes there every summer until at least 2012. This weekend takes some of the best acts from the last two years and adds the Levon Helm Band, moe., Guster, State Radio, CSN and more.

Look for peace prayers, Jerry Garcia memorials, drum circles, clean-up crews, wandering guys and girls dressed as fairies, freshly-made food, organic beer, face-painting, men on stilts and local arts and crafts.

The Vibes is a place and time for tents, friends, sun block, beer, art and nothing to stress about except where to put your blanket and chairs. Check your stresses at the park's Memorial Arch, park your car somewhere and take a weekend-long look how insanely perfect Seaside Park is for a music festival.

Fairfield County Weekly: What's the process been like, releasing Odd?

Keller Williams: We're definitely having a much more relaxed approach to releasing records these last few releases, as opposed to sending it to the press and distribution and things like this, and printing up massive copies. We're getting them to the people who really want them and not really worrying about the excess.

With the track "Grove of the Storm," you pull an odd sales pitch move and say on your Web site that you prefer the live version, which is the bonus track for that week.

I do, yeah. I recorded that pretty shortly after I'd written it. And with all these songs, I play so much live that — and I'm so always jonesin' to play new material — most everything gets played a lot live before I go into the studio. That's just my impatience, wanting to play new stuff. But finally, once the live version of "Grove of the Storm" got captured, it was totally different and it had that live feel and the slide [guitar], and it just had a lot more character. The studio version is cool because it's played on a baritone guitar. If you have the mix right on your stereo it sounds like there's a bass involved and I was really proud of myself for that.

With "Elephorse," which is awesome by the way, you say on your Web site that you gave yourself a writing assignment, to do a sci-fi bluegrass song. Do you do writing assignments often?

Thank you. And, oh yeah, I have to. Inspiration comes and it goes. And it seems like it came to me a lot easier in my younger years and now I have these wonderful, incredible, beautiful distractions that are my children. I try to put a lot of effort into them, though I'm usually chasing them around, playing guitar and singing. When the inspiration doesn't come like I need it to, I have to do the writing assignment thing. And the whole crazy album cover was inspired by that song.

Yes, it seems like this is going to be the most bad-ass yet.

[Laughs] Well, that's just me riding on my multi-headed beast in search of the elephorse. Which, of course, is a flying cross between an elephant and a horse. But of course you knew that. Yeah, I used Richard Biffle, who's an incredible artist and who's had a long history with the Grateful Dead and is really a genius when it comes to psychedelic weirdness. This was a little bit out of his realm, but he stepped up to the plate and I got something ... I had no idea, it was way beyond my expectations and I was so incredibly happy to see what he was doing [laughs]. It's definitely bizarre! It's odd, it goes along with the title, and that's what I was going for.



Williams' *Odd* is due out Aug. 12

every Wednesday. Each track comes with bonus material, like an exercise video or a song recorded at a show the night before. Williams' strong and sincere connection with his fans allows for them to determine the kind of material he releases each week.

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Starting off a Friday marathon of what will be some of the Vibes' best offerings — George Clinton, Deep Banana Blackout and moe. — is Keller Williams with Moseley, Droll and Sipe at 5:15 p.m. A supergroup of sorts, the band was hand-picked by the usually-solo Williams, with Keith Moseley (String Cheese Incident) on bass, Gibb Droll (Marc Broussard) on guitar and Jeff Sipe (Aquarium Rescue Unit) on drums.

Williams' successful career has been built on self-indulgence. Normally, he's on stage alone, playing every instrument in every song. Using advanced looping pedals, he builds each song in layers, gradually weaving the instruments into the mix. You'll see him playing guitar, but you'll also hear the bass and drums he played minutes ago. It's a wild and hilarious ride.

When Keller Williams plays with a band, it's rare. And with this particular band, you get one of the tightest acts on the Vibes bill. Their album *Live* (mainly Williams' songs) was released last year after a 70-show tour together and is an excellent introduction to top-tier jam music for anyone who hasn't made the plunge. Nothing but praise has been raining on this band and, as Williams reiterates in this *Weekly* exclusive interview, they really should be playing together all the time. This summer, however, brings only one show.

Williams is gradually releasing his next record (*Odd*, due out Aug. 12) on his Web site, one 99-cent track at a time.

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I think you've entered Meat Loaf territory.
At least in album art. And that's probably where it stops. Well, hopefully I haven't gone there yet. I'm pretty sure that nothing I've ever written compares to ... that.

You say "Warning" reminds you a little of Bill Murray singing the Star Wars theme song as Nick Winters on SNL. You apologized a little, but what's wrong with that?

Well, I'd said I was going for a Sinatra-type thing, but I didn't want people to read that thinking they're gonna get me seriously trying to sound like Frank Sinatra. There were alternative takes that were drastically more tongue-in-cheek, which were more lounge singer-esque.

You mean, like the "Drive My Car" bonus track? Which I thought was cool, you guys partying on New Year's Eve and then deciding it's time to record a song.

Yeah I take having fun very, very seriously. In my line of work, if I'm not having fun then it could really suck. And it's important for me to genuinely have fun, because I can't really fake it like I want to sometimes.

You're on your huge Guitar Shop Tour now, with each stage lined with guitar walls. You've really outdone yourself with this.

Oh, thank you. It's a fun concept I've been tossing around ever since I started collecting guitars. It's a joy for me just to go around and be able to pick up one of 22 guitars. I have a makeshift cash register/work station area, as if I'm going to fix a guitar like they do in the guitar stores. And instead I stand there and play slide, instead of sitting. Standing with a guitar and playing slide, I can't seem to do. Sitting is not the same thing for me. It's the same way with drums, when I started bringing out a drum set. I figured I could play drums so much easier with my hands, instead of incorporating my feet. Plus I need to use my feet to actually hit the loop pedal. So I've started having kick drums that I hit with mallets with my hands and looping and stuff. And I also just started using a sampler, where it's pre-recorded and so I'm actually playing it, but with my fingers triggering the samples.

Yeah, you're frantic up there. And I mean frantic, but not without the mellow.

That's funny! Thank you, I appreciate that very much. And it's just — ideas pop in sometimes at the wrong times and I have to act on them.

Moving forward, when I heard your work with Moseley, Droll and Sipe it sounded like everybody gets really freed up when playing together. What is your approach is to letting others layer your songs with you? But I don't mean to be asking what's it like to play in a band...

Oh, no, that's a totally legitimate question for me. My whole world is revolved around the solo act. But first and foremost, I have just huge amounts of respect for each member of the group, in their own right. Jeff Sipe is probably



Do not miss Friday's performance by Keith Moseley, Gibb Droll, Williams and Jeff Sipe (L to R)

the best drummer in the world. As far as rounded, all-style drummers, I just think Sipe is premier and will be remembered long after he's gone. And Keith Moseley is a solid in-the-pocket bass player, not flashy and he and I are really good friends. Our families go on vacations. And Gib Droll, I've always had incredible respect for him. I met him 20 years ago, when I opened for him and his band when they were playing all these crazy places.

And it's cool how you say it frees up the players. This project, according to Gibb, is really the first in a long time where he's actually able to be himself and to play the type of guitar that he loves playing the most. All of us are freed up. Obviously I am because it's my material, my vision. But there's definitely a freeing aspect to this group. And the triple disc we put out (*Live*), I feel, is some of the best music that I've ever released. It's different — some songs are old, with this new life breathed into them. I really, honestly wish that I could do every gig with that band. But I just can't seem to pull that off as reality. I've always wanted to be in band with hand-picked guys that really can deal with my weirdness, musically.

And now you're just doing one show all summer with them.

Yeah, so the Gathering of the Vibes gig is really super special for me, because I just love, love, love, love playing with these guys. The music that we make, there's this wavelength, same page-type thing that we get on as a band. This is kind of a one-off; we haven't played together since January. We're going to rehearse the day before and that day as well, so we're definitely going to have it together, everybody's going to know what they're doing, but there's a certain excitement and energy, like, this is it. I love the new site [for the Vibes], too, how it's breezy and right on the water. Ken [Hayes] does a great job pulling it together and I'm very grateful to be on the bill. I can only hope that he continues to have me.

I hope it doesn't fill your head with too much hot air when I say your band is going to be a major highlight of the weekend.

Well, it definitely is for me. I'm just over-the-top excited about it. This week I plan on picking up the electric guitar and playing only that for the whole week. It's definitely a completely different thing from my solo shows. There's no looping, I'm focusing on playing rhythm and a little bit of lead, and really just trying to be part of a band and do my part of getting the vision across of what we're doing. And I know I'm going to be in the moment the whole time. I just hope it doesn't rain on us. I mean, it can rain. But hopefully not on us. [laughs].

Are you going to jam with anyone else over the course of the weekend?

Some of the jam stuff is advance, like we're going to have a special guest that's sitting in with us. Of course I'm going to leave that as a surprise. A lot of the festival stuff is like, 'Hey, man, come on up!' And that's where the beauty arises.

Why do you like the Grateful Dead?

I was turned onto the Dead at 17 years old, when I was just really starting to get into the guitar. At the time, I was into everything. It was one of those very sponge-like moments when I was absorbing everything that I possibly could. I was playing a lot of acoustic. When I was turned onto their acoustic record, and really just listening to that and listening to Jerry's phrasing and then diving into it more and getting into their improvisations, you know? And then I started going to college, getting around other people who were into the same thing, and started experimenting and listening to it even deeper and getting into it that way. And then going to the shows, after listening to the music, and really discovering that whole vibe, I was probably 18, and that was a whole different thing. Unrelated to the music was the whole parking lot family vibe. I was kind of taken under the wing of some older folks that had been doing it for years. It was something that was completely new for me. I was playing Dead songs in the parking lot of my first show in '87. And then, relating to these people who I met in the parking lot, and going to do shows and seeing these types of people that I remembered from the parking lot and relating to them on a personal level, I think that's kind of what helped me get along in this business. I like the Grateful Dead because it's more than just music, it's a community, it's a family, it's music with a deeper meaning. And to have it come full circle and to be able to be on stage with some of the band members, you know, it's really a thrill for me. It elevates my love for the whole scene, all the music and the whole atmosphere that the Grateful Dead has created and contributed to over the years.

Reverb Nation

Guster leads other bands on the road of eco-touring

By Jackson Connor

Having established themselves in the late '90s as one of alternative rock's most unique acts, Guster is back in the studio recording what they expect to be their best album yet. With a summer schedule consisting of nothing but music festivals, late-night recording sessions and nature hikes, the band is moving at its own pace.

I caught up with the band's out-of-breath guitarist, singer and environmental activist, Adam Gardner, as he hiked the hills of Denver before playing the Mile High Music Festival. Gardner has become accustomed to multi-tasking in the past year, balancing fatherhood with a growing non-profit organization and, of course, his band. With an album in the works and babies on the brain, Guster is getting ready for yet another new experience, this year's Gathering of the Vibes.

Fairfield County Weekly: What are the benefits to playing a festival rather than a solo/ headlining show?

Adam Gardner: We love playing festivals because you get to play in front of a new crowd; you play with a number of bands and have the opportunity to perform in front of their fans. It takes on a whole other energy, one that a headlining show doesn't have. This is really perfect for us because we need the time to finish the record, and also we're all new dads, so we want to be home with our families.

Guster is one of the younger bands set to perform at the Vibes. Do you think the audience will receive you well?

Yeah, well, I hope so [laughs]. Although generally speaking our audience is younger, it's not at all unusual for our younger fans' parents to also like our music. I see it as a multi-generational thing. Our music is so influenced by music of the '60s and '70s that a lot of older folks who enjoy bands like the Beatles, the Beach Boys, the Rolling Stones and the Talking Heads end up liking our music because those are the bands we love as well.



Guster: Their ecological commitment doesn't exclude them from wasteful use of plastic cups

In addition to being a full-time member of Guster, you also run a non-profit organization called Reverb that helps touring bands and fans reduce their carbon footprint. How have you been able to help festivals and tours be more environmentally friendly?

Reverb has been a non-profit for five years. We help bands on tour be more eco-friendly by sourcing sustainably produced bio-diesel for their buses and trucks, calculating their carbon footprints and reducing them, making their shows carbon neutral by powering them with wind power and then making sure waste management is happening in a responsible way. We also work with the fans as well to reduce their carbon footprint.

What bands at this year's Vibes have you helped stay eco-friendly?

We work with members of the Grateful Dead when they tour and we're working with Crosby, Stills and Nash as well. We also work with Phish, Coldplay, the Fray, Dave Matthews and a number of other touring bands. It started with me calling friends and now it's grown to where artists that we don't know have reached out to us. We even did Jack Johnson's world tour last year.

You guys are setting out on a brief tour this fall to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of your breakthrough album, Lost And Gone Forever. What made you want to revisit that album and play it live in its entirety?

Time just flies by and to realize that it's the 10-year anniversary of our third album, *Lost And Gone Forever*, is crazy. It's one of the fans' favorite albums and it also marks a special point in time for us, too, where we went from being completely indie to being able to work with Steve Lillywhite, who produced U2, Dave Matthews, Peter Gabriel and a number of other amazing artists. We're going to play the album from start to finish, have some special guests, and it's going to be really fun.

Are you going to record a live CD from any of these dates?

I hope so. There's a number of things we're talking about, now that we've announced the dates and most of them have already sold out.

How has the writing process changed over a career that's spanned almost two decades?

For the most part, all four of us write the songs in a room together. Sometimes someone will come in with a riff or an idea and other times it will just spontaneously erupt and we'll develop it together. All the songs go through an extremely lengthy and democratic process. It's actually probably more socialistic [laughs].

Has fatherhood affected the material?

We're not writing songs about being dads all the time [laughs]. I'm sure in more subtle ways it has affected the writing process.

When can we expect the new Guster album?

We're probably 75 percent done. We have an album's worth of material but we're continuing to create. We're still exploding with ideas, so why not keep going? Because we've taken some time off, we want to make sure this is by far the best album we've done. ■

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Long Time Coming

Norwalk's P.J. Pacifico has built a career that's landed him an opening slot at the Vibes

By Wendy Logan

PJ. Pacifico is beaming like a triple-A ball player who's just told he's being brought up from the minors as a designated hitter for the Yankees. He shakes his head, still in mild disbelief.

"It's so cool," he says. "I never thought I'd get it. It was such a long shot with all the competition."

Competition indeed. What Pacifico, a Norwalk-based singer/songwriter, had been coveting — along with about 5,000 other hopefuls — was the opening slot at Gathering of the Vibes, the area's largest annual music festival. Sweetening the pot, this year's headliner is one of Pacifico's biggest musical influences: Crosby, Stills and Nash.

"I grew up listening to them and watching Woodstock videos. I've watched *Long Time Comin'* — a musical and visual retrospective of the trio — "countless times," says Pacifico. "When I was in my 20s, traveling and touring through Europe, they were on my headphones constantly."

Independent artists vying for the gig submitted samples to festival organizers through Sonicbids.com, an online resource for musicians, last winter. Only one would be selected.

"I had only ever gotten one job through Sonicbids, years ago," says Pacifico, "and while it was a good gig, I had been considering dropping my membership; it was just another website, y'know? You have to pay for it and there are so many of them out there. But Vibes was only accepting demos through them and it only cost \$10 to submit, so I figured, 'It's Vibes! Why not?'"

Dreamers, take heed.

In early May, while Pacifico sat in the offices of Viper Records in Manhattan, the independent label that has just released his second CD (*Always and Everywhere*, available through most major download sites), the phone rang. It was Kevin O'Brien, marketing director for Gathering of the Vibes, looking for P.J. Pacifico. The songwriter's heart skipped a beat.

"We chatted for a bit and he told me I'd be opening the festival, performing on the Green Vibes Stage, the smaller, side stage, and I was thrilled. 'How cool is this?!' I thought. We hung up and he immediately called back. 'P.J., I'm sorry, I made a mistake,' he said."

WTF?

"'You're playing on the Mainstage.' I went from 'This is awesome!' to 'Holy shit!'"

"We listened to and reviewed thousands of band submissions, which was ridiculously challenging,"



PROMOTIONAL PHOTO

At a youthful 36, P.J. Pacifico is finding his pure passion for music paying off

says Ken Hays, the founder and executive director of Gathering of the Vibes. "Ultimately, P.J.'s voice sealed the deal. When we heard him sing — an incredibly inspiring and soulful voice — we knew we had the right guy."

Pacifico's rich and resonant voice can be described as a fusion of James Taylor and the aforementioned Graham Nash, his style evocative of Jackson Brown, Jason Mraz and Matthew Sweet. He's been making some headway in the industry of late, sharing the stage with Lynyrd Skynyrd, Hank Williams, Jr., Dar Williams and the Wailers to name a few. Viper Records has hired Shore Fire Media to handle dedicated P.R. for him. He's established a national touring schedule. He's got radio stations from as far as Colorado playing his single, "Jackbone." The track features Sean Kelly of the renowned touring band The Samples singing high harmonies.

At 36, things are finally falling into place for the singer, who says the key to his success is the relentless pursuit of and pure passion for what he does. "I make music. I just have to do it. And I not only enjoy touring, I have a drive to tour, which is really important."

As for his idols, Crosby, Stills and Nash, the tiniest tinge of regret surfaces for Pacifico: While he is elated to bookend the festival, with the legendary group closing the Vibes on Sunday, he won't be able to see their performance. He'll be leaving immediately following a late gig on Saturday night in Norwalk to head to another on Nantucket.

"Like I said, it's what I do, but..." He pauses, shakes his head once again and, with a bittersweet smile, adds, "I just wanted to shake Graham's hand."

Vibes Schedule

Thursday 23

Main Stage

P.J. Pacifico: soulful pop songwriter (see pg. 16). 5:30 p.m.
Donna Jean Godchaux Band: jam rock. 7:15 p.m.
Dark Star Orchestra: Grateful Dead tribute. 9 p.m.
The Machine: Pink Floyd tribute. 1:30 a.m.

Green Vibes Stage

Steal Your Face: Americana jam rock. 11 a.m.
Matt Turk & the Hobo Caravan: acoustic folk/rock. 12:45 p.m.
Reckoning: jam covers. 2:30 p.m.
These United States: psychedelic folk/rock. 4:15 p.m.
Jennie Arnau: rock/Americana. 6 p.m.



Friday 24

Main Stage

King for a Day: blues rock. Noon.
Strangefolk: lyrical jam rock. 1:45 p.m.
J.J. Grey & Mofro: southern rock/blues/funk. 3:30 p.m.
Keller Williams with Moseley, Droll and Sipe: jam band playing Williams tunes (see pg. 13). 5:15 p.m.
George Clinton & P-Funk: true funk. 7 p.m.
Deep Banana Blackout: CT-based funk/jam band. 8:45 p.m.
moe.: jam rock. 10:30 p.m.
Lettuce: funk/jazz/soul. 1:30 a.m.

Green Vibes Stage

Tao Rodriguez-Seeger: acoustic folk rock. 11 a.m.
Klyph Black and Rumor Has it: blues/rock. 12:45 p.m.
Cornmeal: bluegrass jam band. 2:30 p.m.
Big Moon: alt rock/grunge. 4:15 p.m.
Chris Barron: acoustic, lead singer of the Spin Doctors. 6 p.m.

Saturday 25

Main Stage

Moonalice: jam rock/Jefferson Starship. 11 a.m.
Ryan Montbleau Band: acoustic pop rock. 12:30 p.m.

Assembly of Dust: country/blues/R&B. 2 p.m.
Max Creek: blues/jazz jam. 3:45 p.m.
State Radio: pop rock/reggae. 5:30 p.m.
Guster: pop rock (see pg. 15). 7 p.m.
Levon Helm Band: southern rock/blues/the Band. 8:45 p.m.
Bob Weir & Ratdog: blues/jazz/rock/Grateful Dead. 10:30 p.m.
Perpetual Groove: jam rock. 1:30 a.m.

Green Vibes Stage

Band Together: fundraising rock. 11 a.m.
Tom Crowley & the Speakers: indie powerpop. 12:45 p.m.
Jaimoe's Jassz Band: jazz/blues/R&B. 2:30 p.m.
The Queen Killing Kings: piano-based fantasy rock. 4:15 p.m.
Pimps of Joy Time: soul/funk/pop. 6 p.m.
David Gans: singer/songwriter, from Grateful Dead Hour. 7:45 p.m.

Sunday 26

Main Stage

The World Peace Prayer: (not a band) peace prayer. 11 a.m.
Harlem Gospel Choir: high-energy gospel. 11:20 a.m.
John Brown's Body: progressive reggae. 12:45 p.m.
Grace Potter & the Nocturnals: pop jazz w/ female lead. 2:30 p.m.
Buddy Guy: blues guitar legend. 4:15 p.m.
Crosby, Stills and Nash: harmonizing heroes. 6 p.m.

Green Vibes Stage

Blues & Lasers: blues/rock. 12 p.m.
Daria Musk: pop rock. 1:45 p.m.
McLovins: jam band. 3:30 p.m.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GATHERING OF THE VIBES

