**Prince of Promotions** - **Boston Tab -** 09/15/1998
Interview w/ Adam Lewis, Founder, Planetary Group
**//** By Ken Capobianco

**THE ARTS** - Boston is without a doubt one of the toughest markets in the country in which to establish an independent firm to book, market and promote rock ‘n’ roll bands. Sure, there are tons of clubs and hundreds of local acts and the area is a prime market for national and international acts to tour. You’d think that would make for many options and a boatload of opportunities to develop a small, attentive company.

But it doesn’t work that way. With those opportunities come stiff competition , especially for music promoters who have historically worked in the shadow of the Don Law Company.

Over the last five years, Adam Lewis, booker for Great Northeast Productions and president and founder of the Planetary Group, a marketing and promotion firm, has been bucking the odds and making a go at it.

Lewis has been a critical component of the rock music scene, as he balances two hats at once. For the Planetary Group, which he started in 1993, he helps bands in all facets of marketing and promotion, including advertising, creating graphics, getting radio play, getting club bookings, and making sure the products are in stores. The company has been a great facilitator for hundreds of local acts and has established itself as a viable alternative for national artists as well.

For Great Northeast, Lewis helps book shows and develop upcoming musical artists. And, oh yeah, make too.

Lewis moved to Boston at the end of 1992 after working a number of gigs, including being road manager for the band Alien Sex Fiend. He began as an agent for Concert Ideas, a Woodstock, N.Y.-based company that booked shows on college campuses. Lewis was based in Allston and was basically the one-man New England branch of the company.

“It was brutal,” he says from the South End offices of Great Northeast the Planetary Group. “In the college circuit there’s no loyalty, so every six months there’s new students who have no idea who you are and what you’ve done, so there was a lot of dinners of macaroni and cheese in those days.”

He began taking on local bands, including Angry Salad, which he now manages, and helped get them signed with Sire Records. His company then moved into the space with Great Northeast and he and Great Northeast’s owner, Dave Werlin, realized that some kind of partnership would be beneficial for both. In 1995, Lewis shed the Concert Ideas affiliation and formed Planetary Group with his partner, Chris Davies, and established himself as a booking agent with Great Northeast.

“I realized the kind of business I envisioned the Planetary Group would be managing Angry Salad,” Lewis says. “They needed a booking agent, merchandise design and radio promotion and I saw how everything tied together and we work a sort of one-stop place for bands.”

Lewis says that he has a practical perspective as a booking agent for both the Planetary Group and Greta Northeast in Boston, a city whose music has long been controlled by the Don Law Company, which this past summer was purchased by the mega-production firm SFX.

“We try to do the best that we can and develop talent,” Lewis explains. “We can’t lose sleep worrying about bands working with others. If bands want to work with us, a smaller company that can be focused on them, well, they know we’re here. I’m not naïve enough to think that we’re competition to Don Law. We’re an alternative. You fight the fights you can win and do what you can.”

Over the last three years, Great Northeast has produced Phish’s summer blowout shows in Vermont and this year’s crowd reached a phenomenal 60,000.

“That show was great and a lot of work,” says Lewis, “but it was Phish’s gift to their fans and we are a part of that.”

But things have not always worked out as well.

“ Well, the core of what we do, both at Great Northeast and especially at the Planetary Group, is work with baby acts and try to develop them,” he says. “That’s not easy and so there are a lot of nights when clubs are empty and you lose money. But that’s part of the process. We try to make a commitment and really pay attention to the needs of both local and national acts and there isn’t always an immediate payoff. It takes time.”

Lewis, who is in his 30s and who works upwards of 70 hours a week, says that despite the arduous nature of establishing and cementing the Planetary Group’s and Great Northeast’s reputation, there are benefits.

“ Bottom line is that you do this because you love the music and you are always trying to recapture how is felt when you were 12 and putting the first vinyl record on in your bedroom,” he explains. “That’s what gets you through the day. And also either being on the side of the stage at the Middle East or staring at 60.000 Phish heads and seeing the joy on the faces of fans and seeing the connection between the act and fans, well, that’s gratifying and it makes it all worthwhile.”
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