

POLLSTAR

The Concert Hotwire

2000
EDITION
2001



Executive Profile
Mike Kappus
ROSEBUD AGENCY

AGENCY

R O S T E R S

Mike Kappus The Rosebud Agency

The Rosebud Agency's Mike Kappus is a pioneer. "Rosebud has just become probably the world's first solar-powered booking agency," he said of his San Francisco-based company.

"One side of our roof – we're in about a 5,000-square-foot facility all on one floor – is covered in solar panels that provide energy. During the day, if you look at our power meter, it's running backwards," Mike said. "We're selling electricity to PG&E and by law they have to pay the same price for it as they charge you. So that's kind of fun."

If that's not unusual enough, there's more. "It was not done for economics," he said. "I didn't even look at the numbers of how many years it would take to pay back. It was just something I wanted to do." Additionally, the agency incorporates a thorough recycling program and appropriate waste is disposed in a compost bin located in Rosebud's garden.

Mike's dedication for the environment also includes driving Honda's new hybrid car that operates on gasoline and electricity, regularly riding a bike three miles to and from work, and contributing to a variety of environmental organizations. He also pointed out that he is a vegetarian – "partially for environmental reasons."

Mike's crusade isn't limited to Mother Nature, though. In fact, if it seems like he goes out of his way to help the planet, that's the tip of the iceberg in comparison to the service, support and devotion he maintains for his clients.

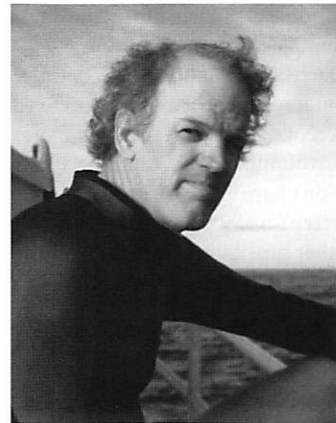
In operation as the Rosebud Agency for a quarter of a century, Mike has left an indelible mark on the concert scene, specifically in the

un-pop genres of blues, jazz and world music. Over the years, numerous performers have been rewarded with successful or revived careers thanks in part to Mike's ferocious representation: Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, George Thorogood, John Hiatt, Los Lobos, Robert Cray, John Hammond.

It's easy to understand why Mike's independent business, which also includes artist management, has thrived for so long. "It's always been the philosophy of this company to focus on a smaller number of artists, intentionally keep the roster small, in order to deliver the best service to everybody," he said, "not just the artists who are commercially happening at the time."

Mike is truly involved with his clients, going beyond the roles of manager and agent. While he is admittedly not a musician, he has executive produced around 20 records for a variety of artists over the years, with four winning Grammy awards and more than half receiving nominations.

Mike interpreted the sounds of music as his life's calling while studying at the University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire during the late '60s. "It was actually when I was 19 years old," he remembered. "I went to Minneapolis to see the Steve Miller Band and the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band at the Guthrie Theatre. ... I saw this show at the Guthrie and I was just knocked out at what a great experience music could be. And a few months later,



I started promoting shows with friends at the university."

With the "very irreverent organization" dubbed People's Choice, Mike and his friends promoted a few concerts at the university's venues, but mainly focused on having a good time. "I checked out the student concert committee," he said, "but here we were in the middle of the psychedelic era, which I was participating in, and they wanted to bring in classical and Top 40, which didn't fit with where my head was at."

What was the next step after promoting concerts in college?

From there, I ended up helping out some friends who were in bands and getting them shows for little community youth organizations, and promoted a few other shows. A partner and I converted an old skating rink into a club. Among various others, I promoted Ted Nugent in 1970 for \$1,000 at the State Theatre in Eau Claire.

I had some that were losers, and I'd lose my life savings and briefly be out of promoting. It was a little rocky at first because basically you're targeting a market that really wasn't supporting concerts. It was a very small market that wasn't used to having them.

I was buying talent from agencies in Minneapolis and Milwaukee. Then one of the agencies, TGC Productions, asked me to come join them as an agent in

Milwaukee. So I came down there and started taking what was basically an agency working primarily in Milwaukee and up through Green Bay and helped expand where they would book their regional artists. I also brought in talent, did some buying and selling of national talent to different buyers.

Then I had disagreements when my employer was displeased with how much I was making in spite of working on straight commission and no salary. When he tried to revise my deal, I decided to leave and return to my last year of college. I had originally only intended to stay a few weeks and get the hang of the business and finish my last year of college anyway.

As I was packing up, two of the company's top three artists came to me and said, "Instead of leaving, you could manage us." I ended up taking on those two bands for management and going to another agency to see if they would book them. That company ended up wanting me to work for them. So I started out pretty early with managing artists and booking at the same time. I've never pursued an artist for management, though. They have always come to us.

That second agency was Contemporary Talent, which was also booking most of the talent for Summerfest in Milwaukee. So I ended up gaining experience there and managing a stage at Summerfest. In addition to standard agency and management duties, I booked several clubs exclusively, including bringing in all the national talent to two clubs in Milwaukee.

We did a lot of different things, but these two things in particular connected me with national touring artists more. And I established a lot of relationships there that went on in the future, like booking Muddy Waters, who later became a client, as well as Mose Allison, John Lee Hooker, Willie Dixon, John Hammond. We booked basically anybody in blues and jazz who played clubs.



PICTURED at Australia's Great Barrier Reef in 1994, Mike enjoys another of his passions.

Not only did you get an early start managing and booking, but you also landed in blues and jazz at a young age.

When I was in Eau Claire, I had seen a band called Short Stuff. It was the first time I had seen a straight blues band. I had been knocked out before by Jeff Beck and Led Zeppelin and others – not realizing they were playing Willie Dixon songs – but this band played more authentic blues and it really connected with me. They ended up being one of the bands I began booking in Milwaukee just a few months later.

I started working with some blues artists there. With close proximity to Chicago, there were a lot of great blues artists around. They had a name but it really wasn't a popular realm of music at the time. And I think they were hungry for anybody who would treat them right. They had been ripped off pretty consistently, so just starting to provide work for them and be reliable – the deals didn't change, they didn't get burned or anything – I started connecting well with that realm.

And I worked with a lot of jazz artists there, too – Grover Washington, Stanley Turrentine.

In some cases, like Mose Allison, John Lee Hooker and Eddie Harris, I would offer them dates but it would be hard for them to accept them unless they had more surrounding dates. And they either didn't have agents or their agents weren't really that aware of the other possibilities in the Midwest. So I would start expanding the circle. Instead of booking the artists for one club, I'd start arranging dates for them through the Midwest, and that grew.

When did you make the move from Milwaukee to San Francisco?

I was looking to go somewhere else, be in a metropolitan area that had more happening, I guess. And I expressed this to Eddie Harris, who actually wanted to have me work for him exclusively or start something that he would back. I ended up connecting with the agency that was booking him on the West Coast, which was the Keystone Music Agency, an outgrowth of the Keystone Korner nightclub in San Francisco.

I'd gotten an offer to move to San Francisco and did that in May of '76 to join this agency. I was managing John Hiatt at the time and still booking national talent into another Milwaukee club. Unfortunately Keystone went out of business a few months after I got here. I went to work one day and the phone lines were cut because the bills had not been paid. My salary hadn't been paid, either.

I came home and picked up the phone and started making calls on behalf of Eddie Harris and John Hiatt. I also called up Michael Bloomfield, who was doing dates through Keystone. I spoke with him for about 45 minutes and he said, "You're the most logical agent I've ever spoken to. I'll do all my work with you." So I signed up Michael Bloomfield and then Anthony Braxton, who is a very avant-garde jazz artist that company was handling.

Those were the four initial clients of Rosebud. And then I soon added John Lee Hooker and Mose Allison. They each had managers that were doing a little bit of their booking, but it ended up that I did the majority of the booking on John Lee Hooker east of Colorado, which later grew into worldwide, which later grew into management. And Mose Allison also grew from booking isolated dates to national representation.

What was your goal when you decided to open Rosebud?

I developed a philosophy based on being different than other companies where – and I think this is very common – booking agencies will say, "This is a great opportunity," "This is an artist we can make money with," "This is an artist who's in tune with the times or the trends." And they add that artist. Then there's another and another and so on, and there's a point at which the artists don't get the attention that they initially thought they were going to get prior to all of these other artists being added.

So that was a conscious decision from the beginning. And we turn down hundreds of artists every year and fiercely maintain a small roster. With a larger staff, we've added a number of artists, especially over the last few years, but we continue to turn a lot down. I've just felt like it's really not fair to add anybody new if we aren't confident we'll take care of our current artists as well as we'd like, as well as they're expecting.

With most other businesses, they just increase the manufacturing and pump out more computers or whatever. But in the case of a personal service organization like

a booking agency or a management company, you can't maintain the same level of personal service when you continue to add more artists. You can't just add another machine that pumps out more of the product. The product here, a service organization, is your time and dedication to the artists' needs. And I think that what happens in a lot of agencies is that they can't pass up certain opportunities and they keep adding and adding, and the little guys end up not getting the service they were hoping to get.

Your clients seem to focus on a touring career. How do you select which artists to work with?

First of all, we want to be moved by the artists' music. Then we need to feel we can work together successfully, that their goals are realistic and that we can be good for each other. Touring is really important and we feel the artists we represent are all great performers

Carol Scott



MIKE HANGS OUT with client Muddy Waters in 1980.

whose talent and music is timeless, so there will always be an audience for them. They aren't basing their careers on a current trend or a current popular sound or look. Commercial tastes are fickle but, fortunately, there is a considerable audience for artists of lasting quality regardless of current chart success.

I think it's an amazing time in music. I started at the same time as many of the major promoters, agents and managers in America who got into the business in the late '60s and early '70s. At that time, you were going from pop music and The Beatles to The Beatles getting heavier to Cream and Led Zeppelin and the psychedelic era. And it seemed like there was one hip style of music and then it would be replaced by another hip style of music. Now there's so many people becoming aware of African music and Brazilian music and Cuban music and different music from Europe in addition to the English bands. This is a great time for music as so many different styles are appreciated and available simultaneously.

John Lee Hooker has been a client almost as long as you've been around as Rosebud. How did that relationship develop?

It was a bizarre start because John Lee at the time wasn't being represented well, and he wasn't handling his career as best he could, either. I had booked him for a show at a Milwaukee club and called up the day before to double check whether he needed an airport pickup or if he was being taken care of by local friends. He seemed entirely unaware of the gig. He had just come back from a serious visit to the dentist and was not about to go anywhere.

So my first contact with John Lee was him canceling a gig on a one-day notice. Amazingly, it turned around to the point where we've now had a relationship on an exclusive basis for 24 years.

As with several other artists, I went from booking them in one club in Milwaukee to booking the Midwest and most of the country for them. And then when Rosebud started, I reaffirmed that relationship and booked him for a long time and handled a lot of manage-

ment tasks in the absence of a manager.

But the blues market was so minimal, I didn't really see that there was much I could do for him that would justify the extra percentage I would take as a manager. So for years, I passed on that when he asked me.

What was your role in John Lee Hooker's album *The Healer*?

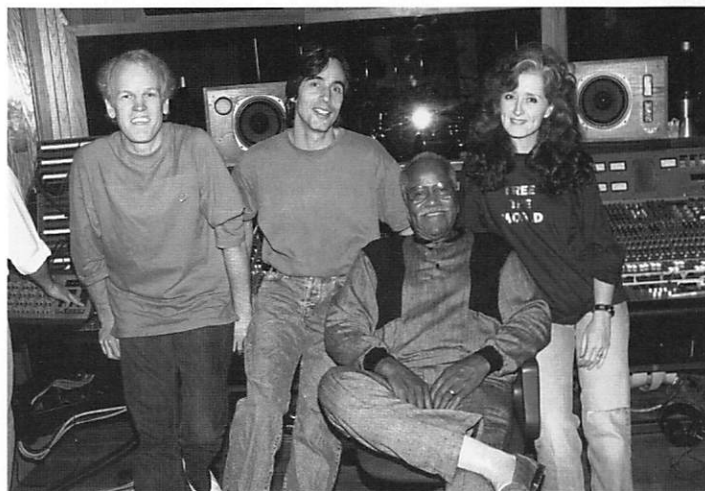
Van Morrison and John had been friends since before I knew either of them. Van had been talking to John about trying to produce a record for him, so John asked if I would talk to him about this and I did but it didn't pan out at the time. This is 1983.

Later on, Carlos Santana kept showing up at John's gigs and called me up and said, "If John Lee makes another album, I really want to be a part of it." Then George Thorogood, who I had represented for about 10 years, called and made the same request as Carlos. He had always included a John Lee Hooker song on every record and loved John Lee.

And I thought, "I know that Bonnie Raitt loves John Lee, Los Lobos really likes him, and John had been very helpful in exposing Robert Cray across the country. These people would appreciate the concept of working with John Lee, too." And I really wasn't picturing a major commercial endeavor, just creating a project for these people to collaborate with John Lee as they wanted to do and as a tribute.

So I came up with the idea of a record that would have John collaborating with these friends that were so eager to collaborate, as well as doing some tracks – and this part is overlooked a lot of the time – that were more acoustic-oriented because so many of the blues fans had always longed for John Lee in a more stripped-down acoustic sound.

I paid all the bills and gathered all the musicians. Since I'm not a musician, I felt there needed to be



Henry Diltz

THE 1991 RECORDING SESSIONS for Pops Staples' album *Peace To The Neighborhood*, which Mike executive produced, included a track featuring and co-produced by Bonnie Raitt and Jackson Browne.

somebody that knew the musical side of it better to coordinate in the studio. Roy Rogers had been lead guitarist in John Lee's band at the time and John trusted him. So I brought Roy Rogers in as a producer and made *The Healer*.

When we were finished, I tried to sell it; however, all but the small blues labels passed on it. I felt with major distribution the CD could have great potential. After almost two years trying to sell it, we ended up with one deal for Europe and a deal for the rest of the world with Chameleon, which had Capitol distribution.

In the end, it was a great success. A record that couldn't find a buyer ended up selling a few million copies. I put a tremendous amount of work into every aspect of that project and those that followed.

Ultimately, I think it helped labels realize that not only could Stevie Ray Vaughan sell and a young African American artist like Robert Cray could sell – even to a contemporary rock market – but someone way beyond the age of most contemporary artists shouldn't be disregarded.

We got great press, VH1 and contemporary rock radio airplay and reached a whole new audience for John Lee and this music.

Another great achievement must have been organizing George Thorogood's 50/50 tour.

I'm very proud of the 50/50 tour with George Thorogood. In 1980, a guy working with him came up with the idea of George doing a tour hitting all 50 states in 50 consecutive nights. So George came to me with this little challenge and we met the challenge.

The Rolling Stones' 1980 tour had just started. We did Philadelphia with them, Buffalo, San Diego and San Francisco, and then started his 50/50 tour in Hawaii. They flew to Hawaii, then to Alaska and then into Oregon where he had his Checker waiting – just like the cab but straight from the factory. And the band drove the entire rest of America together in one car.

We routed it so we managed to hit all the states, one night each, while averaging less than 250 miles a night. But in order to do that, it took a great deal of planning and we had to hit cities whether they were typical touring spots or not.

I had been booking George for several years and had sellouts everywhere. I was accustomed to calling up your standard touring



NAMED BY THE San Francisco Chronicle as one of 1988's top musical events, the marriage of Mike and Saori Asaba draws a few familiar faces. L-R: John Lee Hooker guitarist Mike Osborn, best man John Lee Hooker, Richard Cousins of the Robert Cray Band, Aaron Neville, Saori, Mike, Robert Cray and John Hammond.

cities and everybody saying, "Well, great. What date can we book him?" I wasn't thinking about the off-the-beaten-path Mandan, North Dakotas, and everything else, but I had to bring them into the picture in order to hit every state without going too far out of the way. Remember: They're driving in a car and not able to sleep in a bus while they travel. So I call somebody in Mandan and they say, "I've never heard of George Thorogood, and we don't do anything on Tuesdays." And I say, "Well, one way or another, we're going to make a deal." And we did.

After setting everything up perfectly, we still had seven cancellations that had to be rebooked to work equally well in the routing. That was quite a feat. Not only all 50 states in 50 consecutive nights, they also squeezed in Washington, D.C., in the same 50 days. He did a show in Baltimore, came off the stage, jumped in a waiting car and went down to the Warner Theatre in D.C. and did two shows that night. It was quite a project to put together.

How do you have your staff organized?

Basically we split the company into three teams: agent team, management team and support team. All agents here handle all artists and we split responsibility by territory. Tom Chauncey is the agent team leader and he specializes in Europe bookings and major East Coast promoters. He's been here about 15 years. He had worked at Bill Graham Presents and was managing Wire Train, but needed a steady job and he started answering phones for about \$6.50 an hour. He's made a great contribution over the years in leading the team, helping expand the roster and putting a greater emphasis on our pursuit of the fine arts realm.

Chris Goldsmith was a partner at Falk & Morrow. We had known each other a bit and our artists worked well together. He actually works out of his home. He's from San Diego, lived here for sometime and then wanted to go back. I didn't want to lose him as an agent, so we've got it hooked up so when a call comes in for Chris, it gets transferred to his house without anybody necessarily even knowing he's not on the other side of the office.

John Lochen, who's been here about eight years, was a club booker in Chicago, and the people

at Jam recommended him to us. John handles a lot of territory in the middle section of America and has been doing great, especially in fine arts.

Tom Gold had been running an agency here in San Francisco and we've known him for a long time. He actually was named blues agent of the year in May at the W.C. Handy Awards. I worked out a deal for Tom to come here and he brought along Coco Montoya and Tommy Castro, and his assistant, Shayne O'Brien, who we're now training to do some booking here.

What about the management and support staff?

On the management side, we have Doug Smith, who worked at HEAR Music and has promoted concerts under Smith & Bowker for over 10 years in the North Bay. Scott Houston, who is in a local band, 100 Watt Smile, has been a really good addition to our staff. Becky Johnson, who worked with Chris Goldsmith at Falk & Morrow, moved here and worked here for four years. As with Chris Goldsmith, she has telecommuted from San Diego the past few years. And Shan Wickramasinghe, just out of McGill University in Montreal, is off to a great start.

On the support team, we've got Terri DeSalvo, who's been here about eight years. She used to be at Rainbow Records. My wife, Saori, actually does our Web work. She created and maintains the Web site, and does all the computer work. Tammie Hirsch has actually been here twice over the years and is our trusty bookkeeper. Dave Matevia handles contracts and promotion. Then there are three agent assistants: Julie Harshberger, who's been a great help as Tom Chauncey's assistant and to the company; Jay Roe, who plays in a band called Peg and has done some booking work for them and others; and Nicholas Lynam comes from managing a band rehearsal space here and working for Amazon.

We have 17 people total, so once again, it all goes back to focusing on the artists and giving them as much service as possible. We feel that's a very significant staff for our short roster.

At the end of the day, what makes Rosebud different?

Most agencies and most businesses, in general, feel a need to pursue all appropriate profit opportunities, but we frequently pass on artists who make more and pursue artists that move us more.

While years ago there was controversy about U.S. agencies booking in Europe, we've been booking Europe and other international territories for over 20 years. We've helped build many artists worldwide from early in their careers. Our Web site, www.rosebudus.com, is one of the most comprehensive and active of any agency, with weekly itinerary updates, thorough background and news on the artists and their CDs, and online access to artist riders and promotional materials for buyers.

We feel we've developed fine arts for our artists more than any other agency, short of those that work solely in the field. Some current packages include another Newport Jazz Festival tour in conjunction with George Wein, a BeauSoleil 25th anniversary package with special guests and the W.C. Handy All Stars packaging the best in blues and soul.

What's on the horizon for Rosebud?

In 2001 we'll have new CDs from J.J. Cale, BeauSoleil, David Lindley, Marcia Ball, John Hammond, Robert Cray, The Blind Boys of Alabama with special guests, and Loudon Wainwright III, who just landed a role on a new Fox/DreamWorks TV series. Our recent years have continued to break records and next year, our 25th anniversary, has great potential as well. ★