

SPOTLIGHT

By Helen Marketti

Pop Culture and the Hippies

Steve Presser to give talk at Music Box



During the late 60s and early 70s, hippies were not only concentrated in California. They were sprinkled everywhere in the United States. One of Ohio's main cities where they congregated was in Cleveland, more specifically, The Coventry neighborhood.

Steve Presser who is the owner of the novelty and nostalgia store, Big Fun in the Coventry area will be engaging in a "Q and A" at the Music Box Supper Club in Cleveland for those interested in the hippie culture and looking to escape cabin fever on Wednesday, April 25 at 7:00 pm.

"I would say I have an eclectic taste in music," said Steve. "When I was younger, it was obviously classic rock like The Stones, The Beatles, Tommy James and The Shondells and Simon and Garfunkel. When I went to college, I became interested in reggae, new wave and punk. I like nearly every genre of music."

Steve's career path has taken several interesting twists and turns. "I attended the University of Michigan and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Pre-Med but I never went to med school. I went out to California after college to attend graduate school at Berkley. At

that point, California was not my thing so I moved back to Cleveland. I started working with people who had developmental disabilities and I loved it. I did that for a couple of years. THEN I totally switched gears, started wearing a suit and tie every day and worked as a stock broker for seven years at Paine Webber," he remembers. "It was 1990 that I initially opened up a pop up shop of Big Fun while we did renovations. We opened Big Fun on April Fool's Day in 1991. So the big joke was I went from stock to schlock! (laughs) What people embrace when they were younger, they want to recapture when they become adults. Nostalgia never goes out of style."

Steve is often asked to give talks about a variety of topics ranging from trending toys, days gone by or thoughts on any topic ranging from soup to nuts and that could be quite literally.

"I give talks all the time. I work the library circuit and gave a dozen talks last year. I sometimes talk about the history of toys, the evolution of Mom and Pop stores, independent storeowners and pop culture. We discuss how things have changed over the years," explains Steve. "I am also enamored with the whole hippie philosophy. Everyone talks about free love. While that was part of it, I am more interested in the music, the styles, the independent thought and social activism. I find it fascinating. I grew up in the University Heights and Coventry area of Cleveland. The area was a hot spot for the Bohemian Hippie district. 1967 through 1970 were magical years. Working at Big Fun I am a collector of history so that time period is of interest."

He continues, "It was a time period of great social consciousness and the greatest time for music. The Music Box Supper Club contacted me and asked if I would talk about the hippies and that generation. It will be set up as a Q and A. I can talk at nauseam on a great many topics!" (laughs) "Coventry has always been one of the cool, hip neighborhoods. It now has competition such as Tremont and

Ohio City but Coventry has always been the leader, a welcoming neighborhood."

When asked what he hopes the audience will take away from the discussion, Steve said, "I hope they understand that these are definitely different times. There are many memories. I am sharing stories and thoughts from that time from my own interpretation. There were many small businesses around then, today not so much. Rent goes through the roof and sales go down. There isn't the infinity of love and loyalty that places used to have. Sadly, the next generation is more of a disposable generation and they are not collecting or showing much of an interest. Many factors change the landscape of the way things once were. It's important to preserve what we can."

www.musicboxcle.com

*Writer's Update: After nearly 30 years of being in business, Steve Presser recently announced that Big Fun will be closing its doors at the end of May. "After recently going through some personal losses of close friends, you begin to reevaluate where you are in life. It is time close to Big Fun and move on to another chapter."

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