



How Bernie Gudvi Has Helped Musicians Navigate the Pandemic

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Over the course of a career that dates back to 1977, legendary business manager Bernie Gudvi has handled the wealth and finances of some of the world's top musical acts — including current clients Katy Perry, Michael McDonald, Richard Marx, Counting Crows and George Thorogood.

But in addition to counseling his clients through triumphs and failures — and more recently guiding them through the consequences and bureaucracy of the disruptive COVID-19 crisis — Gudvi has given back to his community through his charitable work. For these endeavors, and for his brilliant career, Gudvi will receive this year's Variety Business Managers Elite honoree award at a virtual breakfast celebration on Nov. 13.

Throughout that career, Gudvi has entwined his life with that of his clients, experiencing their generosity and their excesses; he has driven miles to personally deliver their vintage Corvettes, ridden on their tour buses, as well as seen and heard many things he cannot repeat.

But nothing could have prepared Gudvi for the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which brought the live concert business to a screeching halt in March. Although streaming revenue has increased substantially in recent years, touring is still the lifeblood for most established music artists in the post-compact disc world, supporting not only them, but also a large contingent of musicians, roadies, stylists and personal assistants.

When the pandemic hit, Gudvi and his team sprang into action, working virtually around the clock to review client cash flow and expenses, and sort through government red tape to secure Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans to keep as many of their support staff employed as possible.

“Most of my clients did not lay anybody off initially, because they didn't know where this was going, and getting some of the government's assistance was helpful in maintaining the staff,” Gudvi says. “But as more time has gone on, and we say that we're not going back to touring any

time soon, then we've had to take a hard look at the retainers and the staff and reduce them or cut them out pretty much completely."

Gudvi's early years prepared him for challenging times. He was born in 1947 to Polish Holocaust survivors living in a displaced persons' camp in Germany. A few months later, the family moved to Paris, where his father had relatives, and spent the next decade rebuilding their lives. When he was 10, the family moved again, this time to Los Angeles.

Gudvi got his first taste of his future career as a 17-year-old student at Fairfax High School, when he got a part-time job working for a Beverly Hills business management firm, Julius Lefkowitz & Co., which shared many clients with the William Morris Agency.

"I was the office boy running errands ... going to celebrities' homes and going to studios to get signatures, to drop packages off [and] that sort of thing," he says. "I found that really interesting."

But before Gudvi could pursue his newfound passion, he had to contend with the Vietnam War. To avoid being drafted by the Army, he signed up for the U.S. Air Force. That didn't keep Gudvi away the action, however: he wound up doing a 12-month stint at Pleiku Air Base in Central Vietnam in '67 and '68, as the war went into high gear with the Tet Offensive.

Returning to Los Angeles at the conclusion of his four-year hitch, he earned a B.S. in accounting from Cal State Long Beach, then landed a job with Big Eight accounting firm Touche Ross (now known as Deloitte).

After earning his CPA certificate, Gudvi — by now in his mid 20s — joined a business management firm with a high concentration of music clients and became attuned to their unique needs.

"I found that my clients who are musicians and songwriters have very deep souls, so to speak, [but] they're not overly tuned to the world of

business,” says Gudvi, whose first major client was the band Styx, at the time a hard-working touring act without a major hit.

“Musicians, when they become successful, or even in the process of becoming successful, initiate a business right off the bat,” Gudvi explains. “They’ve got road crew, they’ve got workers’ comp insurance, they’ve got travel insurance. [Whereas] an actor, an athlete, they’re primarily getting a paycheck to do a movie or to do a TV show or to go to play a ballgame.”

Gudvi has also been active in nonprofit organizations, serving on the boards of the National Veterans Foundation and Media Arts in Public Schools. His involvement in the NRV began when a client, the late drummer Keith Knudsen, put together a benefit show for the org at the Hollywood Bowl in 1987, reuniting his band the Doobie Brothers. Gudvi continues to serve as a consultant to the NRV, handling their accounting and bookkeeping pro bono.

As the years have progressed, Gudvi’s business has gone through some changes. After Tom Petty died in 2017, he went from handling him as a client to handling his estate. The next year, Gudvi’s firm GSO, which he co-founded in 1989, was absorbed by NKSFB.

“They’re a good bunch of guys,” says Gudvi of his corporate partners. “I think we do very well. It’s like any big corporation and big business: as long as everybody produces what they’re supposed to be producing, they leave you alone.”