

Celebrity Access Bio

Stephen Tarkanish is President, Founder, and C.E.O. of S.T.A.R.S. Productions (www.starsproductions.com), a New Jersey State licensed booking agency, management and marketing company specializing in event planning, promotion, and artist representation in the entertainment business. Stephen and his staff work with night clubs, universities, casinos, fairs, festivals, hotels, resorts, TV, radio, concerts, private corporate and special events worldwide. He has extensive experience in many facets of the entertainment industry, from the performance and production complexities to established entities in security, recording studios, sound systems, and lighting design as well as an award-winning video production company.

Stephen's education includes Julliard Prep, ECC, Manhattan School of Music, Rutgers University, and Harvard. He has a working knowledge of Russian and Chinese. During the 1970s, he was a trainer for EST, the Werner Erhard Seminar Training. Stephen began his musical career as a drummer/percussionist in the early sixties and touring was his main focus. If the act had its own drummer, Stephen kept working by playing mallets (vibraphone timpani, or Latin percussion). He was constantly working as a casino house drummer at the old Playboy Clubs, Sands, Riviera, MGM Grand, Tahoe, and when entertainers such as Tony Bennett came in and brought drummer Chuck Hughes, Steve would shift to another percussion instrument. He also played percussion with the Fifth Dimension (Hal Blaine), Lou Rawls, Frank Gorshin, the King Cousins, BJ Thomas, Diana Ross, Liza Minnelli, and Mel Torme, as well as drumming with Dizzy Gillespie, Fandango (with Joe Lynn Turner), Clark Terry, Airta, Willie Bobo, Bill Evans, Shirley Bassey, Manhattan Transfer, Jay & the Americans, Freddy Cole (Nat's Brother), Al Martino, and Don Ellis. Steve was endorsed by Ludwig, Tama, and then Pearl Drums, and was given the first Lynn Drum, the drum machine that reinvented the wheel of studio drumming. Stephen was also one of the original performers with the elite NJ Percussion Ensemble conducted by Ray Des Roches, recording and performing compositions by such 20th century composers as Charles Wuorinen, Carlos Chavez, as well as Edgar Varese.

Stephen was always playing, but that sense of financial stability was at times more powerful than the artist within himself. Sam Destefano, at the time the entertainment director of the Playboy Clubs, once quoted Stephen by saying, "No one is secure. It's how we handle insecurity." His co-existence of being a musician and music industry head came in handy when Stephen developed tinnitus (chronic ringing in the ears) and fell full force in the entertainment business. He was prepared. Stephen was always on top of the union guys, musicians, lawyers, agents, managers, producers, and anyone he could network with, digging the well before he was thirsty.

In 1980, he took a 40,000 square foot empty warehouse in New Jersey and constructed a joint venture to develop an entertainment complex that featured State-of-the-Art rehearsal, recording, video, and sound stage studios, as well as his booking and management agency. An airport was in his backyard and Stephen brought in via limo, flights, or whatever transportation requested whoever needed S.T.A.R.S. entertainment services: Joan Jett, Anthrax, Bill Cosby, Bon Jovi and his members, Stewart Copeland was there, the late, great Wendy O'Williams, the Plasmatics, rap's Fat Boys, Run DMC, Joe Pesci, Yngwie Malstein, Michael Brecker, the Uncle Floyd TV show, Southside Johnny, Rush, Franky Valli, J. Geils, Marshall Tucker, Cheap Trick, Roger Daltry, Biohazard, and John Denver.

It was a great idea. S.T.A.R.S. was averaging 200 bands a week, rehearsing and recording. The facility was jammin'. It was at this point that Stephen decided to upgrade and moved his offices to Newton, NJ in 1990. S.T.A.R.S. began doing business where Schanachie Records was located. Lou Reed was up in the area as well as Andy Wallace and so many industry guys. It made it a perfect entertainment environment, not to mention the place was one hour from NYC, had great restaurants, now has two airports, and on top of it all, the country in NJ! S.T.A.R.S. has remained in this location ever since and also maintains an office in Boulder, CO. This year S.T.A.R.S. will open up in Los Angeles, CA as well.

Stephen's list of clients is extensive and partially includes Goldman Sachs, the Taste of D.C., IBM, ESPN, Paramount, the NFL, PGA, Sony, Nascar, NBA, AT&T, the Superbowl, J.P. Morgan, Lucent Technologies, Merrill Lynch, and countless others. The artists he's worked with through the years reads like a "Who's Who" in the industry: Chris Rock; Eddie Murphy; Meatloaf; Guns n' Roses; Cindy Lauper; Earth, Wind, & Fire; Harry Connick; The Beach Boys; Weird Al; Bon Jovi; Deep Purple; Bill Cosby; Lauryn Hill; Hall & Oates; Sheryl Crow; Train; the Go-Go's; Jim Belushi; The NERDS, etc. In addition, he has a strong association with electronics genius Larry Hartke, founder of Hartke Systems. From Carnegie Hall to the White House, MTV, VH1, Bud True Music, A&E, The View, Miller, and Coors, Steve is seriously involved with all his clients. Be it through booking, recording, or performing, he's always building his relationships.

In addition to developing S.T.A.R.S, Steve has written various articles on the music business in trades nationwide and has lectured on the college circuit and for seminars worldwide. He is the former President of the now defunct ITAA (International Talent Agencies Association), the Conference of Personal Managers, is founder of the New Jersey Entertainment Agencies Association as well as the Garden State Music Seminar, and fully endorses the Philly Music Awards. He was also College Agent of the Year three times with NECAA, now called NACA (National Association of Campus Activities), of which he still remains very active, and also held the same title four times with the ACUI (Association of College Unions International). Furthermore, Stephen serves as an expert witness in the entertainment industry. His last involvement was a case involving a major class action and derivative securities case that resulted from false disclosures under the securities laws. He and his company have been interviewed by the NY Times, LA Weekly, Philly Enquirer, Pollstar, Performance (feature cover, 1991), Billboard, Variety, Downbeat, and dozens of papers and trades internationally, and he has appeared on television and radio both in the United States and abroad. Presently, Stephen maintains his dedication to the involvements of S.T.A.R.S. Productions.

Celebrity Access Question & Answer

First concert attended and year

Judy Garland, Carnegie Hall, 1962

First concert worked and year

1967 WABC-AM Radio's sponsored event "Big Break" at the Hilton in NYC with the Blues Magoos.

First industry job

My first industry job was as a drummer in the New York metropolitan area: Sub pit drummer at Radio City.....Clubs in Greenwich Village and Club Cheetah, New York City.....Sessions at Decca Records, Atlantic and CBS Studios, and at Hot Dog Beach in East Hampton, Long Island with another band that just happened to be The Young Rascals. Eddie Brigati remains a close friend to this day. I'll never forget Greenwood Lake, New York with Rhinoceros.

Career highlights

John Coltrane letting me sit in as a kid at the Clifton, NJ Tap Room before the place opened.....Working at the MGM in Las Vegas.....Hanging with Hendrix at Electric Lady Land.....Playing in a band and working with the legendary Andy Wallace.....Watching the kids' faces light up at Eastside High School when we brought in Run DMC for an assembly period at the request of Principle Joe Clark, whom Morgan Freeman portrayed in the movie "Stand By Me".....Having the love, respect, and support of the late, great Bill Graham.....Becoming a member of the Aviation Hall of Fame Sky Challenger's Society.....Developing S.T.A.R.S. Productions..... Meeting and marrying Judy Bolanowski, formerly of the Pittsburgh Ballet.

Career disappointments

An intellectual property dispute with Jimmy Buffett's attorneys; to quote Jeanne-Marie Roland, "It would have cost me more trouble to escape injustice than it does to submit to it." Losing my audition with Bruce Springsteen (but I still love him anyway).

Best business decision

At the time I felt it was not a decision; I had no choice but to give up playing the drums, again, due to tinnitus. Ignorance is if you did not wear hearing protection 30 years ago; stupidity is if you do not wear hearing protection today. So I made the ultimate choice, giving it my all, moving, shifting gears as a player to the music business. It definitely became the best decision I ever made. From looking down from the stage to looking up at the stage, your peripheral vision increases dramatically. Realizing what it feels like to be up there as a player in all situations and combining that with the knowledge of this business, your edge is enormous. When working with many bands, the first thing I do is "join the band" and know how to keep my position very clear and always remember that the secret to management is like bullfighting – knowing when the hell to get out of the way!

Best advice received

Sitting back and reflecting on the teachings, lessons, mistakes, and criticisms through life and how fortunate I've been to have been surrounded by great people, here's some brief words of wisdom thoughtful folks have given to me throughout the years. Rudy Giuliani once said to me, "Don't assume a damn thing." Harvey Mackey: "Always use your head to get your foot in the door and remember no isn't an answer, it's a question." It's well known that a shark keeps moving; when it stops, it dies. I've taken this fact and realized success is not a destination, it's a constant journey. I have an Aunt Anna and I've always said (jokingly) that if you mess with me I'm going to call my Aunt. Some people get it and some don't, but isn't that true about advice? She told me health is wealth. What good are we to anyone without our health?

Egos...are you a rockstar or are you an artist? Is that your ego or self confidence? Egos have destroyed more businesses than bullets. Jerry Love of Famous Music Publishing once told me, "This music business has become the business of music." So if it doesn't make dollars it doesn't make sense. To translate Sun Tzu from "The Art of War," remember, if it accords with advantage, then act. If it does not accord with advantage, stop. Finally, from Ken Kragen, "Always be honest, completely honest, not absolutely honest because that can hurt people's feelings."

Best advice to offer

There were four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. An important job had to be done and Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it and that Somebody would do it. But Nobody realized that Everybody thought Somebody would do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done. Bottom line: Just do it and don't pass the blame.

Most memorable industry experience

If there is one thing we can never lose, it's our fond memories. No one can take them from us and we can always share them with others. This is a very difficult question! Looking at something that literally puts chills up my spine, two events come to mind. First, shortly after my dear friend Harry Chapin had passed, Tom (his brother) and I did a children's charity event. We put Harry's original band back together and Tom took Harry's place, fronting the act for this performance. When the band played "Taxi", it was flawless and it hit me like a brick. Jim Chapin, their father and one of my old drum teachers, and I watched the show together. I melted with emotion that I'll never forget. Secondly, I remember seeing Santana in 1969 perform at the Fillmore East and Bill Graham telling me to "Check these guys out."

What friends would be surprised to hear about you

I love dogs and have always and will always be connected to the world of dogs. Currently, I am fulfilling a lifelong ambition in studying and trying to understand as much as I can about Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and love reading in general. My wife and I are diehard NBA fans. We go to as many Nets and Knicks games as we can, and I will surely miss Michael Jordan's playing for the rest of my life. Judy may know more about the players than I do, but after all these years, I'm the one who ended up being a wannabe basketball player. I sold my high performance racing boat, a Scarab Panther, to return to my passion of sailing. I've spent much time sailing throughout all of the Caribbean.

Office paraphernalia

John Lennon's original artwork of the lyrics "Drive My Car"..... A Detroit Pistons' basketball autographed by the team.....the first bass drum foot pedal invented by Bill Ludwig, Sr.; the date on it was the patent number.....a great backstage pass collection.....military memorabilia.....I'm a hoarder, maybe I'll have a garage sale.

If I wasn't doing this I would be...

Running a no-kill animal shelter.

Industry Mentors

Dr. Robert Luthmann; Charlie Penta for giving me my first gig; Sammy Boyd, a true superagent; Sandy Linzer, please sell me your mold.