

## MARS NEEDS GUITARS

**This report is not related to Mr. Jardin's doctoral research at Stanford.**

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A multi-city tour of rock concerts is proposed as a means to both intensify and focus support for space exploration and to raise money for space exploration research and development, particularly for Mars exploration missions. Many rock artists are genuinely interested in space exploration as is evident from their CDs, song titles, and performances. If several of these artists are brought together for a series of performances, the public relations benefit could be substantial as could be the fund-raising potential for specific Mars exploration projects or prize funds. The current popular interest in space exploration is sometimes paranoiacally misguided, but still provides a great opportunity to apply this approach to public relations for the space exploration community. This paper describes the type of shows that could be produced and discusses some quantitative aspects of the public relations and fund-raising benefits. Depending upon the calibre of rock artists involved, and the number of shows performed, the number of people reached through advertising and the news media would be in the range of one to ten million. The range of fund-raising potential is a strong function of many highly-variable parameters and could vary from a few thousand to a few million U.S. dollars.

### INTRODUCTION

There is vast interest in space exploration in popular culture which, if tapped into, could be used to remind the world that we can and should be going to Mars. One way to achieve this is to produce a series of space-theme rock concert events to attract coverage from the popular media and to possibly earn enough money to fund a small hitch-hiker payload mission in the process.

As will be shown, producing such shows is entirely feasible. In the next section, several bands are listed that would be good candidates to assume headlining roles in the production of a space theme event. Since these bands have demonstrated personal interest in the exploration of space, it is reasonable to consider the possibility that one or more of them would be willing to help with the production and promotion of the event. Rock bands are notorious for helping to promote benefit concerts for different organizations, so why not for the Mars Society?

A rock concert is proposed instead of any other type of event because of the huge infrastructure of news media already in place to cover and promote rock music. With many different music magazines (e.g. Rolling Stone, Spin, B.A.M.), music cable channels (e.g. MTV, VH-1), and television programs in addition to more general news media, such an intriguing event as a popular rock band headlining a Mars exploration theme tour would certainly generate some positive press. With a multi-city tour of concerts, not only could the message be conveyed that *Human exploration of Mars is possible now*, but a substantial amount of funding might be raised.

In the next section, some of the connections between popular culture and space exploration will be illuminated. This is followed by a description of the type of inspiring space theme event that might be produced. In the third section, an analysis of what is required to produce such a show is presented.

## **SPACE IN POPULAR CULTURE**

One can easily think of examples of popular culture's fascination with space. The first examples that come to mind might be the television shows: *Star Trek* (the original, *Next Generation*, *Voyager*, *Deep Space 9*), *Babylon 5*, *Third Rock from the Sun*, *The X-Files*, *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, *The Cape*, *Homeboys in Outer Space*, and others. Then there are the films (just a few of the more recent ones): *Contact*, *Independence Day*, *Mars Attacks*, *Apollo 13*, *Deep Impact*, *Armageddon*, *Species* (I & II), and many more.

It may not be as obvious as in the case of films and TV, but space exploration themes are also prevalent in music. To be convinced of this, just look around at any CD shop and take note of how many band titles, CD titles, song titles, and CD cover graphics are based on space themes. Or, try logging-on to your favorite on-line music service on the internet (e.g. <http://www.cdnow.com>) and searching for song or band titles with "space" or "Mars" in them. A short list of current bands that the author of this paper listens to that are directly or peripherally associated with space themes appears in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**ROCK ARTISTS IN SPACE**

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**WHY MARS NEEDS GUITARS**

Inspiration. Of course there's that pesky 99% perspiration required to actually get to Mars and back, but some inspiration among the masses is sorely needed right now or Mars will have to wait.

As illuminated in the previous section, popular culture is strongly influenced by visions of space exploration. The interest, excitement, technology, and even the capital—all the necessary ingredients—exist, but need to be put together. The trouble is that in spite of three decades of technological advancement beyond that required to take humans to the Moon and back, the public has been duped into believing that going to Mars is not possible right now. It has become a maddeningly vogue notion that there are more important demands on society's time and money than exploring space, and this is rarely ever questioned anymore.

Those with the technological background to know better don't subscribe to the pessimism and are ready to go, but there aren't enough scientists and engineers to pay for the exploration of Mars. It's everyone else who needs to be reminded that our destiny awaits us on the red planet. The time for unconventional approaches to public enlightenment has arrived. There are 5 billion screaming fans waiting for a good show. This is why Mars Needs Guitars.

## **THE CONCEPT**

Since inspiration is the goal of Mars Needs Guitars, the event itself must be inspired much more so than a typical rock concert. The space theme should permeate every aspect of the event. In this section, one possible incarnation of a Mars theme concert is described.

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*Mars Needs Guitars* is not a frivolous concept. In fact, a similar event to the one described below came very close to happening as a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Apollo 11 show called *The Moon Rocks!*. The theater, financing, decorations, advertising arrangements, ticketing, and supporting artists were all lined up, but signing a headline band for the specific dates on or near the anniversary was not possible. Although that event did not happen, the experience gained in

planning *The Moon Rocks!* demonstrated that producing this type of event is feasible.

The show concept outline is as follows:

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Theater decorated according to Mars theme, and filled with displays and demonstrations of how to get to Mars.

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Many video screens around the theater showing rapid clips of space exploration images (space cartoons, Apollo footage, Pathfinder images, space films, etc.).

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A space-art gallery will also be set up in the theater. [For *The Moon Rocks!*, NASA-commissioned artist Andreas Nottebohm was scheduled to display his work.]

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Space theme trinkets, t-shirts, posters, etc. are for sale throughout the theater.

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Space theme music playing before and after the show, and during intermission.

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The bar is serving such inspiring cocktails and drinks as: Rocket-fuel (vodka & Red-bull), Mars-tini, Sex-on-the-dust, the Red-eye, Marsen beer (Märzen-style beer), Hubble-Vision, Moonshine, Apollo Ale, etc.

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Comedian Master of Ceremonies performs 20-minute opening set. [The comedian that had been scheduled to do *The Moon Rocks!* Was known for doing Star Trek impersonations.]

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Modern dance performance of Tom Ruud's Mobile, a slow dance involving one male dancer and two ballerinas performed to music from the *2001: A Space Odyssey* soundtrack and evoking visions of weightlessness: One giant pirouette for mankind!

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Intermission

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An appeal by a spokesperson of the Mars Society for people to get involved in the drive to go to Mars.

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A short warm-up set by the Comedian M.C.

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Spectacular introduction of the headline band and 1.5 hour show [Visuals and effects made to look like sunrise from Mars orbit. Mock-up of Mars lander descends to stage]

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Post-show party.

Conveying the excitement envisioned for a *Mars Needs Guitars* show in a short conference paper may be an exercise in futility, so the reader is invited to allow his imagination to wander a little in what follows. Below is a stream-of-consciousness exposition of what one might be thinking and experiencing while at *Mars Needs Guitars*...

### **THE PRODUCTION**

Producing a rock concert can, in some instances, be more difficult than rocket science because of the uncertainty involved. However, as in an engineering project, with careful planning, the show can go on.

From experience gained with the aforementioned *The Moon Rocks!* show, the steps involved in

producing a 300 - 3000 seat show are as follows:

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Hire a concert promoter to contact agents, band managers, and for advice on all aspects of the show.

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Create a rough initial budget.

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Find a band that is interested in the show and available at the appropriate dates (be flexible!).

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Make arrangements to rent a theater.

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Solicit sponsors

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Finalize show dates and get contracts signed.

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Create a detailed revised budget.

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Make advertising plans

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Produce theater decorations, show posters, T-shirts, etc.

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Take care of miscellaneous production details (insurance, box office, security, back-stage catering, etc.)

When finished, a show budget might appear similar to the following example from a proposed 3000-seat theater show:

**Table 2**  
**EXAMPLE BUDGET**

So, \$9500.00 for one show... not bad! Well, not so fast. The \$9500.00 estimate is for 2000 tickets sold. If the show sells out at 3000 tickets, then the net proceeds would be nearly \$30,000! However, if only 1000 tickets sell, then the producer is in-the-hole nearly \$9000.00. While this risk is acceptable for commercial event producers, clearly some risk management would be necessary for an organization like the Mars Society.

Risk management may be accomplished in several ways. The ideal situation is that the headline act agrees to do the show as a benefit to the Mars Society, and therefore agrees to accept payment as a percent of net profit. Such arrangements may sometimes be made with theater owners too. Another way to minimize or remove financial risk altogether is to generate more

sponsorship. Most rock concerts are sponsored by beer companies or other large consumer product companies. Since it is in the best interests of companies like Boeing and Lockheed-Martin to have strong public support for large space missions, they might also make ideal sponsors.

Yet another method for minimizing financial risk is through sales of peripheral, but lucrative items such as T-shirts and posters. The sale of just 500 T-shirts for a net profit of \$10.00 per shirt (\$5.00 wholesale cost, sold @ \$15.00 each) generates another \$5000.00. While total elimination of financial risk is difficult to achieve, with proper planning and use of the ideas outlined above, financial risk need not be a show-stopper.

## **THE MESSAGE**

Produce an interesting and newsworthy show that combines popular culture with an appeal for Mars exploration, and the press will come. If some of the larger national and international media pick up the story, potentially millions of people can be reached. For example, the Nielsen ratings show that during a recent airing of a repeat cartoon show on MTV, nearly three million viewers tuned in. Typically, MTV will run news segments during show breaks several times a day for about a week. That's a lot of people to reach with a Martian message.

There is also the potential for receiving coverage from the national and international news media (e.g. CNN, MSNBC), local and national newspapers, magazines (e.g. Rolling Stone, Spin, Details) and radio programs. Large national newspapers such as The New York Times or USA Today have circulations over one million, and the larger national music magazines have circulations of over one hundred thousand.

Even without the benefit of media coverage, at the very least, each show with seating for between 300 and 3000 people in a major metropolitan area will reach tens of thousands of people through local radio and print advertisements, and possibly as many as one million. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, the local newspaper has a circulation of over half a million.

## CONCLUSION

The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first manned lunar landing is now less than a year away, yet the first Mars landing still seems to be decades away. Depressingly, the public is preoccupied with news about divorced silicone-filled actresses, congress-shootin' lunatics, and public officials with lipstick on their zippers. As the years progress, we will unfortunately have plenty of interesting tales of depravity, but there will only be one first-Mars-landing. That story has yet to be written.

It is time to try some unconventional approaches to raising awareness of the need to explore Mars. An idea has been proposed in this paper for producing a series of space rock concert events in an effort to reach a large number of people and to potentially raise some of the money to fund Mars research missions. It has been argued that by producing a show with enough interesting qualities, coverage by national media sources could take the Mars message to millions of people.

### OTHER SPACE-INSPIRED RECORDS

Frank Black, *Frank Black*, 4AD/Elektra, 1993.

Pixies, *Bossanova*, 4AD/Elektra, 1990.

They Might Be Giants, *Why Does the Sun Shine? (The Sun is a Mass of Incandescent Gas)*, Elektra/A.D.A., 1993.

Love and Rockets, *Earth, Sun, Moon*, Big Time/RCA, 1987.

Space Hog, *Resident Alien*, Elektra Entertainment, 1995.

Man Or Astro-Man?, *Experiment Zero*, Touch & Go Records, 1996 (many other space

recordings too).

Mars Needs Women, *Sparking Ray Gun*, WEA/Sire/Discovery/Antone's

Brian Eno, *Apollo — Atmospheres & Soundtracks*, EG Records, 1983.

Foo Fighters, *Foo Fighters*, Roswell Records, 1995.

Hoodoo Gurus, *Mars Needs Guitars!*, Big Time Records/EMI, 1985.

Various Artists, *Songs in the Key of X: Music from and Inspired by the X-Files*, Warner Bros., 1996.

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## REFERENCES

1.

Frank Black, *Teenager of the Year*, 4AD/Elektra/Virgin, 1994.

2.

Frank Black, *The Cult of Ray*, American Recordings, 1996.

3.

Pixies, *Trompe Le Monde*, 4AD/Elektra, 1991.

4.

Love and Rockets, *Express*, Beggars Banquet, 1985.

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