

Monday Musings: Marsha Stern

By Ellen Lempert-Grossman - Jul 6, 2019 12:52pm



(L. to R.) Bobby Vibeatti, Marsha Stern, Robbie Leslie, Sharon White, and Tony Smith at the Sirius XM town hall event.

Not sure how many of you know my good buddy Marsha Stern, who has been a lighting designer for many years and also works as the special projects support person for Acclaim Lighting. But what a lot of people might not know is that her first career was in the music biz. She grew up in North Miami, saying she was born on Miami Beach. On September 1, 1976, she moved to New York City to be in the music biz, aspiring to be a songwriter and producer. Her first job in NYC was producing radio jingles, then she moved to the

Howard Bloom Organization, where she was a publicist for musicians including TK Records bands such as KC and The Sunshine Band and The Ritchie Family, the first artists she repped that had a press party at Studio 54. She also worked on ZZ Top's *Worldwide Texas Tour*, and her role as a publicist led her into the New York City club scene.

At the same time, her best friend, her soul mate, Roy Thode was one of the DJs at Studio 54, starting in the fall of 1978 when he did Thursday and Sunday nights....these were the Steve and Ian years at Studio 54, and Stern became a part of the family there.

A documentary came out last year: *Studio 54: The Documentary*. Stern was consulted by the producer and music supervisor on the the sound track (the documentary music supervisor Liz Gallacher won an award for this film for Best Music Supervision - Documentary, from the Music Supervisors Guild).



Stern dancing with Randy Jones of The Village People at Studio 54 circa 1980.

Stern's friend Roy Thode died in May 1982, and she inherited his master reels that he had recorded live over the years. She began archiving and digitizing the tapes about 15 years ago, and this led to Sirius XM, which gave her time to do some specials via Geronimo, the program director for Sirius, who is also an EDM specialist. Robbie Leslie has a show on Sirius on the Studio 54 channel, and he has featured Thode's work on his show, and with Stern, produced two six-hour specials for Sirius, which feature full-evening performances recorded live in the 70s and early 80s by Thode at various clubs.

"I am now a radio personality," says Stern, with a laugh. "The history of the disco era is a passion of mine. Ultimately, it influenced so much of what's happening today." April 26, 2019 was the 42nd anniversary of the opening of Studio 54, and there was a town hall event recorded live in front of a radio audience and played later on the Sirius XM Studio 54 channel this spring. Stern was the moderator and the panelists were legendary DJs: Robbie Leslie, Tony Smith (who also has a Sirius Radio show), Bobby Vibeatti, and Sharon White, all from that era.

Stern eventually got to lighting but isn't sure how: "I began pushing buttons and doing lights at a club in NYC. Like pasta on a wall, lighting was what stuck," she says. By 1980, she began doing lights at New York, New York, another NYC club, which she considers her first professional lighting job. As for lighting at Studio 54, the rig was by Paul Marantz and Jules Fisher, with Bobby DaSilva, the lighting director of note in the Steve and Ian years. But that is another story for another day.