

# Trod Nossel Studios

by Tarn Granucci, editor

*This is the second of our stories about the evolution and history of music in our humble town of Wallingford. Joe Pajor, a lifetime resident, told the story of Doo-Wop and Rock 'n Roll in our last issue and has stepped up once again. This story has to do with that period, but it is a very unique and intriguing story of something most Wallingfordonians are unaware of, a recording studio called Trod Nossel. I imagine most people in our town will be somewhat amazed by the range of celebrities who frequented this special place and the fact that it still exists here all these years later.*

by Joe Pajor

Growing up in Wallingford as a teenager in the 60s, I took pride in knowing the Oakdale Theater put our town on the national map. Every time a guest such as Jack Benny would tell Johnny Carson on the Tonight Show they would be appearing at the Oakdale Theater in Wallingford, Connecticut, I thought, "Well now the viewing public has heard of Wallingford."

Unbeknownst to me until this past year, there has long been another Wallingford institution that gave Wallingford just as much visibility in the music world. The Trod Nossel Recording Studios from the mid-60s to present day has served as a recording studio and an exclusive

musicians' club for a who's who in the music and celebrity world.

I only became aware of Trod Nossel last year. Someone mentioned there was a recording studio on a side street near the train tracks that was utilized by many famous rock bands. Thanks to Google, my jaw dropped when I read the Trod Nossel history, and that it had been around since the mid-60s.

My curiosity was piqued, not only to discover more about this studio, but how it had escaped my Wallingford history radar all these years. That started this investigative journey which amazed me as to what had been going on at this George Street studio.

I had to first drive down to Trod Nossel on 10 George Street, off South Cherry Street, and cast my eyes on this landmark. Surely, this building must convey all its history's grandeur. Instead, what I saw was an unassuming non-descript blue building. I had a hard time reconciling this building's appearance with the many celebrities and well known musical performers who walked through its door. I again reviewed the list of those who recorded here. In this quiet building, the likes of Aztec Two Step, Ben E King, Cub Koda, Donovan, Fleetwood Mac, The Five Satins, Joe Cocker, Marianne Faithful, R Kelly, Steppenwolf, The Chiffons, The Raspberries, Michael Bolton and

over 50 other nationally known acts have recorded here in addition to hundreds of regional bands. Add to those recording artists, celebrities such Henry Winkler, George Burns, Glen Beck, and Susan Sarandon have recorded promotion spots right here in Wallingford.

So how did this institution fly under my curiosity radar all these years? As I asked all my Wallingford relatives and Lyman Hall classmates, the overwhelming majority claimed no knowledge of this landmark. I spent the next few months learning about Trod Nossel. To begin this curiosity journey, Darlene Cavalier, Trod Nossel's current executive director, graciously welcomed me to spend an evening with her and Trod Nossel's current main engineer, Justin Watson, to share the incredible Trod Nossel story.

In the early 60's, a Hamden based oral dental surgeon, Dr. Thomas J. Cavalier (later known as Thomas 'Doc' Cavalier, and more affectionately, simply, 'Doc') and his wife, Gail, enjoyed going to local night spots such as the Sleigh House in Hamden and House Of Zodiac in West Haven, CT, to hear local bands. Doc was generally a music lover, an organist and accordion player; an avid lover of crooners and blues fan but soon he became hooked on the new sound of rock n roll. One of the bands Doc and Gail enjoyed following was a group known as the Shags. As in

all relationships, there is an initial moment of introduction that on occasion change ones' lives forever.

For Doc, that moment was at the Jewish Community Center in downtown New Haven where he was a fitness member. He routinely interacted with one of the Center's employees, John Tangredi. John's stage name was John Stanton as the drummer with The Shags. Combining their following of the Shags with this new-found relationship was soon to be the precursor to quite a legacy. To provide further incentive, Doc and Gail's daughter, CherylAnn, also had a huge crush on John. All the ingredients for kismet were present.

All this led to frequent Shags' interactions. According to Shags co-founder, Tommy Violante, the Shags approached Doc to become their business manager. This was at a time when Doc was a full time oral dental surgeon, with no musical management experience whatsoever, but was financially sound. At the time, the Shags were managed by Sam Goldman who also was managing The Five Satins. The Shags had parted company with Sam over what direction their music should take. Doc was intrigued by this offer but decided to enter the world of rock 'n roll music as a hobby and financial backer while still maintaining his oral surgery practice in Hamden.

Little did anyone realize that the decision to become





the Shags’ manager would lead to placing Doc and Wallingford center stage on the national and international music and recording landscape. Fast forward to a recent Sirius XM interview with Andrew Loog Oldham, the original manager and producer of The Rolling Stones, who said “Life at the Trod Nossel Studios’ lot was like being in an “American movie.” In article after article to this day, Trod Nossel is referenced as one of the longest continuous running recording studios of its kind in the world.

In the early 1960s Trod Nossel’s current George Street building was occupied by microphone manufacturer, Synchron. As Doc Cavalier began his learning curve as the Shags business manager, he reached out to Synchron to ask if they could record songs for the Shags. He was told yes, but Synchron had to scramble to create a studio on their premises since they had none when they committed to Doc to be a recording studio. Previously, Doc took bands to Manhattan to record.

Soon, Doc Cavalier became owner of the building and decided to call his new acquisition, Trod Nossel Studios. Darlene Cavalier, Doc’s daughter, and current Trod Nossel Executive Director, stated her father told everyone the name meant a tree of many branches in Scandinavian. Doc would state that Trod Nossel had many distinct branches like a tree since its mission was not only be just a recording studio, but also served as a booking agency, music and record producer, and artist management agency. However, there appears to be no such Scandinavian term as Trod Nossel. But for the litany of musicians who praise Doc Cavalier and Trod Nossel, there is clear consensus that Trod Nossel was a tree of strength and flexibility, its roots anchored by Doc’s integrity, compassion, discipline, and belief that everyone has not yet reached their potential. Doc also used the pen name Trod Nossel for songs he composed. But in either case, the brand

“Trod Nossel” is recognized throughout the music recording universe.

Initially, Trod Nossel was the recording studio of choice for Connecticut bands such as The Shags and Bram Rigg Set. The Wild-weeds, another Connecticut band lead by Al Anderson (NRBQ, Trisha Yearwood, etc.) who Doc also managed and produced, recorded their hit 45 “No Good to Cry” there in the late 60’s. I loved listening to “No Good to Cry” on local rock n roll radio stations during my youth and was ecstatic to see the song on the “rate the record” American Bandstand segment. I think it got a 90, since it had a good beat and easy to dance to. But at the time, I had no knowledge that the song had been recorded in Wallingford.

Beau Segal, son of Ben Segal, the founder of Oakdale Theater, and then owner of the Oakdale, created a band called Bram Rigg Set which recorded at Trod Nossel. Eventually, Bram Rigg Set combined with the Shags to form the group known as Pulse and managed by Doc. Pulse found itself as the opening act for Paul Revere and The Raiders, Chad and Jeremy, and the Byrds at the Oakdale Theater, for Simon and Garfunkel, Danny Thomas, and the Critters at the Bushnell Theater, the



Recent recording session with Billy Joel’s guys, left to right: Tommy Byrnes, guitarist; Chuck Burgi, drummer; Alex Shillo (country/rock artist, for whom the band was playing for his new release; Darlene Cavalier; Andy Cichon, bassist; Justin Watson, head Trod Nossel engineer.

Righteous Brothers at the Kennedy Stadium in Bridgeport, Leslie Gore, Chubby Checker at Yale’s Woolsey Hall, and the Young Rascals and Peter & Gordon at the New Haven Arena. The gamble to bring Doc on as the Shag’s manager years back was paying big dividends. But

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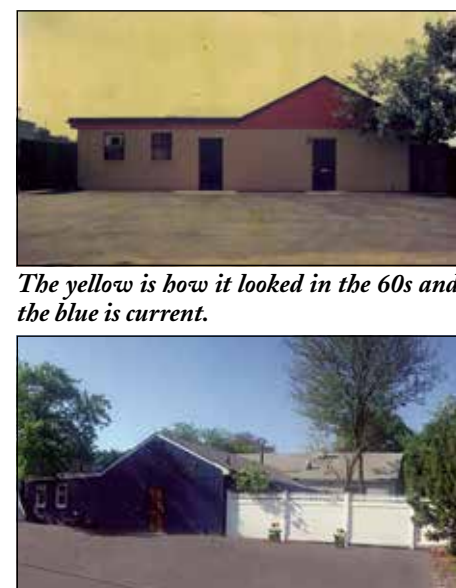
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*The yellow is how it looked in the 60s and the blue is current.*

there was so much more to come in Doc's legacy.

The Oakdale Theater connection soon led to Trod Nossel becoming the go-to recording studio for Oakdale performers such as actors, George Burns and Robert Goulet. While appearing at the Oakdale Theater, if there was a need for any kind of recording activity, Trod Nossel was the place to go. They would sometimes record their radio spots to promote their shows, or just come to the "musicians' living room" to hang out. Doc Cavalier and the Trod Nossel brand were getting recognition in the northeast. Then another relationship developed which would help bring Doc and Trod Nossel a national and international awareness.

It was an encounter with Andrew Loog Oldham, the then manager / producer of The Rolling Stones, that helped propel the name and quality of Trod Nossel as a recording studio. Andrew would eventually be inducted into the Rock N Roll Hall of Fame in 2014, but back in the 60's he was an energetic manager in his early 20's. Andrew had already taken charge of the Rolling Stones' budding career and is credited with creating their bad boys' image and forcing them to write songs (of which Andrew would be co-writer, such as, "As Tears Go By").

Trod Nossel found itself as the studio venue of choice not only for its



*Tommy Violante (The Shags), Darlene Cavalier, Andrew Oldham circa 2009.*

quality relating to music record production, but for Doc's personality, zest for life, and positive force and guidance to young insecure recording artists. He was known for being supportive and nurturing with any musician who asked for his help. Trod Nossel doors were always open and there were stories of young artists showing up at 3:00 a.m. unannounced. It was Doc's personality and human relations skills that drew so many to Trod Nossel. Many artists claim to this day that Doc believed in them, turned their lives around, and/or gave them skills that served them for the rest of their lives.

Doc was an innovator, and thus Trod Nossel was one of the first commercial studios to invite a live audience into the studio for live performances (and simultaneous recording.) In the 1970's, Doc initiated the Trod Nossel Concert Series for over 5 years. In cooperation with WPLR, a New Haven FM radio station, Trod Nossel would produce and host live concerts simultaneously broadcast on WPLR for 23 very well-known rock n roll groups of that era. WPLR would promote on-air tickets to a private concert. Anywhere from forty to a hundred lucky winners found themselves crowded in the Trod Nossel recording studio. Here, literally standing face to

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face with Fleetwood Mac, Chick Corea, or Steppenwolf, in a 50 foot by 50 foot space, those lucky ticket winners would witness a full concert.

I was fortunate enough to listen to some of the Fleetwood Mac and Steppenwolf WPLR/Trod Nossel Concert Series recordings, still pristine. I was in awe to hear Stevie Nicks sing Rhiannon and Landslide, to hear every word so clearly and to think she sang it here in this Wallingford studio, right in this very spot, with this equipment and on this microphone. The next time you drive down South Cherry Street and pass by George Street, try to envision that the following groups held concerts at Trod Nossel which were simultaneously broadcast live on WPLR back in the 1970's: *Fleetwood Mac, Tom Rush, Steppenwolf, Jonathan Edwards, Beau Brummels, Orleans, Aztec 2-Step, Eric Carmen, Chic Corea, Taj Mahal, Southside Johnny, Foghat, Ellen McIlwaine, Larry Coryell, Barnaby Bye, 38 Special, Pretty Things, David Bromberg, Ozark Mountain Daredevils, Roger McGuinn, Les Dudek, Starcastle, and Duke & The Drivers.*

Doc continued to "go with the flow" as rock n roll evolved to include the punk, such as Roger C. Reale, and other sounds, like the 70s soul, blues with Nelsen Adelard, and even big band rock and swing with the very popular B Willie Smith Band, 80s metal/rock with Howard Jeffrey (formerly with The Crayons), and 80s, 90s with "Smokin' In The Boys' Room" rock legend, Cub Koda, all under

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Trod Nossel Artists management.

Doc passed away on January 1, 2005. Doc's musicians' legacy is easy to find in the tributes that were posted online in his memory. He was a man who told everyone to look at today as "Day One," an opportunity to leave the past behind and seize control of your life from this day on. Many of the tributes cited that he not only did his focused-on music production recording but as equally the spiritual side of life. Many claimed Doc "saved their life," "saved their marriage," "saved their house from foreclosure," "helped reconcile their relationships," and the list goes on. In Andrew Loog Oldham's first book, "Stoned," he outlines the day he made the call from a hotel room, strung out on "God knows what," to Doc to reconnect. He swears he was an hour away from death and Doc saved his life. While many wrote of his compassion, mentorship and spiritually, the same musicians wrote of his goal driven taskmaster skills that got the best from every musician, coining Trod Nossel by some as "rock and roll boot camp."

At some point, Doc became a stickler for no tolerance for drugs. There were signs at the entrance to Trod Nossel that read, "If you are taking or carrying drugs, go away." He enforced that policy. His focus was to push each musician through a mix of compassion and discipline and there was no place for drugs in his world. "Seize the day. Don't waste the day." As one reads the musicians' written remembrances following his death, there are so many common repeating words/phrases from over 40 musicians. These words paint a mosaic of such a well-respected and admired man. As you read these words, you can't help but get a vision of this man's lasting legacy: "friend", "mentor", "instilled confidence", "taught self-awareness", "taught you to fight for what you believe in", "don't start trouble but if you see it or are being treated unfairly, fight back with everything you have" "taught you to believe in yourself", "nurturing", "caring", "loving", "made

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*Rob, Tom, and Darlene Cavalier*

you feel like you were the center of it all", "kindness", "comfortable in his own skin, and that made others comfortable around him", "greatest contribution was the stability and safety he brought to music profession", "Doc taught me to look someone in the eye", "how to communicate", "how to

be ethical", and "confront".

Trod Nossel is now managed by three of Doc's children, Darlene serving as Executive Director, along with Tom and Rob Cavalier. The studio continues to draw both national and local artists. Tommy Cavalier, Jr., who runs Miracle Concerts (originally started in 1970 by Doc to promote his own acts and others) is principal for TNA Artist, Alex Shillo, as well as long-time agent for Michael DelGuidice (Billy Joel Bandmember and front man for his own band, Big Shot), while Darlene acts as his personal and business manager. Mike recently wrote the theme song for Kevin James' sitcom, "Kevin Can Wait," and has made appearances on the show which is now in its second season.

I am so excited to spread the word about another Wallingford treasure, Trod Nossel. I come away from this total investigative experience truly amazed at such a well-known and respected Wallingford institution.

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