



mike leonard

## Wet Blanket Incidents No. 1 and No. 2

At some point it crossed my mind that in what looks to be the rainiest summer in Hoosier history, I come out as a wet blanket.

You know: wimp, wuss, party pooper, killjoy, stick-in-the-mud, drag, loser.

Here's the thing. Months ago, it was announced that the Grateful Dead would reunite and play five 50th anniversary concerts, including three in Chicago. I was a moderate Deadhead in my younger years and saw a good 12–15 shows over the years. But once band leader Jerry Garcia died in 1995, I closed the door on any desire to see the group in any incarnation again, reasoning that the band without Garcia would not be the Grateful Dead to my eyes and ears, and so I told friends trying to get tickets for Chicago to count me out.

Seeing the Dead without Garcia would be like seeing the Rolling Stones without Mick Jagger.

Which brings us to Wet Blanket Incident Number Two.

The Dead performed July 3–5 and the Stones played a July 4 concert at the fabled Indianapolis Motor Speedway, with Jagger, who was not dead at the time of the show or this writing. I not only didn't bother to get tickets, I turned down a friend's offer of VIP tickets and limousine transportation to and from Indianapolis. And the whole thing would have been free.

I did consider it for about a half-hour. In that time, I recalled my first Rolling Stones concert at the Indianapolis Convention Center during their famous 1972 tour. I remembered my mixed emotions at trying to balance myself standing on a cushioned theater-style chair, craning to see the group from the back of the hall and mostly being relegated to watching the two big screens

on either side of the stage — a new, high-tech development at the time.

“Why did I spend this money and fight this crowd to stand on my chair and watch video screens?” I wondered while watching “the world's greatest rock 'n' roll band.” I've been asking myself the very same question at stadium shows ever since.

So Mr. Wet Blanket passes on the Dead and the Stones without regret but eagerly goes down to Bloomington's Buskirk-Chumley Theater on July 8 to see the legendary rhythm and blues master, Booker T. Jones. He was so close I could watch his facial expressions and see him sweat.

The next night, I trucked down to The Players Pub to see Jeffrey Broussard & The Creole Cowboys, a zydeco band from Lafayette, Louisiana. The venue was so intimate and uncrowded that I could have scratched out a rhythm on the percussionist's rubboard or tickled a few of the ivories on Broussard's accordion as he strolled through the audience, playing the whole time.

As a music fan and as someone who has covered live music as a reporter most of his adult life, I've come to believe that the best shows, with a few exceptions, are in smaller venues, where a person can literally look the performers in the eyes and feel a connection with the artists and the music. I won't say I'll never see another stadium show again — I'm thinking about you, Bruce Springsteen — but if you want to call me a wet blanket, to quote the great philosopher Popeye: “I am what I am.”

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