**SHAKING UP SHANGHAI**

**A new concert series is giving Chinese music fans a rare taste of Boston rock** By Joan Anderman, Globe Staff **//** 6/17/2002

Maybe it was prophetic when Adam Lewis named his company the Planetary Group. Last month the cofounder and president of the Boston-based music promotion and publicity firm accompanied the little-known college-rock band Missing Joe on a trip to China; it was the first in a series of collaborative US - China concerts that takes Boston bands to perform in Shanghai.

Despite the fact that the last major Communist power on the planet is not known as a hotbed of rock 'n' roll, the shows were an unqualified success. As a result, Lewis returned to Shanghai last week with Star64, which played three nights at the ARK Live House, a 600-capacity venue comparable to Boston's Paradise Rock Club. Next month he'll make the trip with the local pop band Entrain. ''In this business you always get approached with left-field ideas,'' says Lewis. ''And usually you get to the point where you realize it just isn't going to happen. But I stuck with this one. It was a real leap of faith.''

And a real heap of paperwork. Lewis was approached with the idea of bringing Western music to China last October by Shanghai-based Kelly Wilkes Events, a group of American entrepreneurs that includes former Planetary Group employee Adam Wilkes. ''It's a very political process,'' says Lewis. ''First we submitted the bands' music, lyrics, and a video to a government agency, and then had to submit a formal application, which takes anywhere from four to six weeks. Once that's approved they issue a permit, which is basically an invitation, saying you're allowed to perform in this country. Then we take that to the Chinese consulate in New York and apply for work visas, another fairly long process. Oh, before that there's passports. How many 23-year-old rock musicians have passports? My office is now expert at filling out forms. It seemed like too great an opportunity to pass up.''

The shows are part of the Heineken Music Heaven Concert Series, sponsored by the beer company, Japan Airlines, and the Shanghai Center, a housing development for expatriates. Each night a different Chinese band plays the opening slot; one of Missing Joe's openers, a female artist named Sasha, played sugary pop tunes and R&B cover songs, common fare in the local scene. Judging from audience reaction, the sight and sound of American rock groups playing original songs takes a bit of getting used to.

''In the beginning they acted kind of reserved,'' says Matt Rafal, lead singer of Missing Joe, whose Shanghai dates were the band's first shows outside the United States. ''I met one guy who said the only other Western group he'd seen was Wham! in the '80s. We had to work to get them out of their shells - you know, `Put your hands in the air!' and stuff like that. One of the promoters taught us a Chinese phrase which means, `Down your drink.' We used it a lot, and it helped.''

Lewis and his colleagues are tapping a potentially rich vein by establishing a US-China music pipeline. A fourth Missing Joe show had to be added at the last minute to accommodate audience demand, part of an appetite for all things Western that's growing as fast as Shanghai, whose population of 14 million rarely gets the opportunity to see an American rock band.

''It's hard to make the economics work, and it's so labor-intensive,'' says Lewis. ''There are some acts coming through on a stadium /arena level [Fatboy Slim played here last year], but it's still risky. Permits can be pulled at any moment. But the scene is developing. The sound and lights at the ARK were top production, all in-house.''

Three Shanghai newspapers ran large feature stories about Missing Joe, and the band did a handful of radio and television interviews. Heineken widely distributed a free sampler CD, and now there's talk of a regional tour later in the year. Unfortunately, though, there were no Missing Joe CDs for sale at the shows, or anywhere else in the country.

''Bringing commercial goods through customs? Not fun,'' says Lewis. ''Plus, intellectual property in China isn't all that valued. When you can buy U2's `Joshua Tree' for 50 cents American, who's gonna spend 10 or 15 dollars on a Missing Joe CD? But there were all these teenagers dressed in Western clothes who were having photos taken with the band, getting autographs. It seems like they really want this.''