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HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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212 songs and counting

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Shakedown Citi returns to Stone Church and helps
neighbors in need

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TEXT BODY:

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SUPPORTING LIVE MUSIC at an iconic local venue and
helping Windham County residents in need: that is what is taking
place at Stone Church on Saturday, Nov. 29.

A few days after Thanksgiving, local food shelves could
be bare, so New York-based Shakedown Citi — a Grateful Dead
tribute band — decided to do something.

11 The band is asking audience members to bring non-
12 perishable food items to the show to help replenish the local food
13 offerings at Foodworks, the food shelf at 141 Canal St.

14 The program of Groundworks Collaborative takes the
15 form of a free and welcoming neighborhood grocery store that
16 “serves as the area’s most heavily utilized food shelf program,”
17 according to Sarah Habeck, Foodworks coordinator, who called it
18 “uplifting and encouraging to see our community join together in
19 solidarity in this fight against hunger.”

20 The program provides high-quality supplemental food to
21 those in need, offering a variety of items including dairy
22 products, fresh produce, bread, and shelf-stable pantry items,
23 Habeck said.

24 In an email to *The Commons*, Stewart Goodbody, the
25 band’s communications director, who spent decades celebrating
26 Thanksgiving with her family in South Londonderry, wrote, “The
27 Grateful Dead built a community around generosity — around
28 showing up for one another. Our post-Thanksgiving show at
29 Stone Church feels like the perfect moment to honor that spirit
30 with a food drive.”

31 She continued, “As the lyric says, ‘Reach out your hand,
32 if your cup [be] empty, if your cup is full, may it be again.’ That’s
33 what this is all about: connection, gratitude, and giving back to
34 keep the circle flowing.

35 “It needs to be continuous — just because Thanksgiving
36 is over doesn’t mean the effort stops. Giving kindness, giving
37 love, and giving people specific items that they really need —
38 like food — is just like the music...it never stops.”

39 * * *

40 SHAKEDOWN CITI first met in the Shakedown Street
41 parking lot of Citi Field (New York) one afternoon in 2023 and
42 had the “instant lightning-in-a-bottle chemistry” that happens
43 once in a lifetime. They describe themselves in their publicity
44 materials as “seasoned, full-time musicians, singer-storytellers

45 and Grateful Dead nerds from New York City with a deep love
46 and passion for the Grateful Dead and all affiliated catalogues.”

47 Band members include: David Mendelsohn, bandleader
48 and founder, on vocals and guitar; Garrin Benfield on vocals and
49 guitar; Matt Zebroski on drums; Matt Lasurdo on bass and vocals;
50 and Mitch Marcus on keys, sax, and vocals.

51 *The Commons* caught up with Mendelsohn at his home
52 in Manhattan to talk about why this music is still so popular, how
53 to create a masterful set list, and what keeps him and his
54 bandmates performing up to 15 shows per month, year-round.
55 Here’s an excerpt of the conversation.

56 * * *

57 **Victoria Chertok:** Your band’s name, Shakedown Citi, is a
58 is a nod to the Grateful Dead song “Shakedown Street” and also
59 to the vending area in parking lots at shows. What is your band’s
60 origin story?

61 **David Mendelsohn:** Yeah, that is where our name comes
62 from. It wasn’t quite as serendipitous. I showed up in the parking
63 lot and found someone playing guitar and then drummer, Matt
64 [Zebroski] and I joined in. We had been going camping a lot
65 during Covid and when we’re camping, we were constantly
66 listening to Grateful Dead shows and thought how cool it would
67 be to play some Dead tunes.

68 Then, I got in touch with an old college friend Steve
69 Cohn, who played bass and who could probably play any
70 Grateful Dead song really well. We wound up doing a little show
71 locally in the Poconos, and that was fun.

72 Steve said, “I know this guy who’s the best Jerry Garcia
73 player I’ve ever met. His name is Garrin.” And we were like, “OK,
74 sure. Why not?” And then we found an amazing keyboard player.
75 So then the four of us played together and became Shakedown
76 Citi, and the rest is history.

77 **V.C.:** Is it true that the band never had one rehearsal?

78 **D.M.:** That’s right! We have never had a full band
79 rehearsal.

80 **V.C.:** The Grateful Dead just celebrated 60 years at
81 Golden Gate Park in San Francisco this past summer. There were
82 60,000 people in attendance at three sold-out shows. Why do
83 you think this music is still so popular 60 years later?

84 **D.M.:** It's great music and brilliant songwriting. In fact,
85 it's some of the best American songwriting that's ever been done.
86 It stands the test of time, and it's created a genuine subculture of
87 Deadheads.

88 This subculture that grew up around the Dead became
89 bigger than the music and became its own identity. And for a lot
90 of people there's this nostalgia, but you can find that with any
91 tribute act.

92 The community continues to exist and to grow. This
93 music lends itself to full-fledged improvisation and interpretation.
94 People experienced things throughout the last 60 years, and they
95 can close their eyes and put themselves right back there. That's
96 powerful.

97 **V.C.:** You play professionally in three bands.

98 **D.M.:** I perform, sing, play guitar in three bands. But
99 more than that, I also run all three as the tour manager. I handle a
100 lot of the post-production stuff, too, and I work with a great
101 marketing team.

102 There's Shakedown Citi, which plays Grateful Dead;
103 there's Yacht Lobsters, which plays hits of the '70s and early '80s.
104 And then we have the money maker: a wedding and event band,
105 the Love Revival Orchestra.

106 **V.C.:** I heard that Trey Anastasio of Phish joined the Love
107 Revival Orchestra recently to play one song at his daughter's
108 wedding in Vermont. What was that like?

109 **D.M.:** Yes, that was definitely a very special moment! I
110 can confirm that Trey Anastasio did sit in with the Love Revival
111 Orchestra — featuring members of Shakedown Citi — on Nov. 1
112 at the West Mountain Inn in Arlington in celebration of his
113 daughter Isabelle's wedding to Guerrilla Toss bassist Zach
114 Llewellyn.

115 He joined the band to sing and play guitar on the Velvet
116 Underground song “Rock ‘n’ Roll” and also wrote and performed
117 a song with his daughter, Eliza, with lyrics that featured only
118 letters of the names of the bride and groom.

119 Trey was an absolutely perfect gentleman, one of the
120 nicest guys I’ve ever met who was constantly thanking the band
121 for “letting him sit in.”

122 Shakedown Citi performed the songs “Shakedown Street”
123 and “Roses are Free” by Ween, as a special gift to the bride.

124 **V.C.:** Very cool!

125 Switching gears, where did you grow up and what was
126 your first instrument?

127 **D.M.:** I grew up in Dix Hills, New York, an hour from
128 New York City. I started playing guitar when I was 10 and took
129 piano lessons when I was younger. I started listening to music,
130 and I think MTV had just started, which was kind of a cool thing.

131 I’d always liked listening to music, and listening to
132 classic rock, which at that time was just called “rock.”

133 **V.C.:** Who were some of your early music influences?

134 **D.M.:** My biggest influences was the Beatles. Pink Floyd
135 was huge for me. The Who was probably the first band I was an
136 absolute fanatic about. Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, and that
137 kind of lent itself to growing into the Grateful Dead.

138 **V.C.:** This is your second time playing at the Stone
139 Church. What is it about this venue that you are looking forward
140 to?

141 **D.M.:** We played Stone Church once, and I thought it
142 was going to be a cool room. It’s an amazing venue with great
143 acoustics. It’s got this big pipe organ running through the whole
144 thing. So I would definitely rank it as a really special venue with
145 a really special community, so we’re super excited to return.

146 Our show is on the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend.
147 It’s a great thing to do if you have family visiting. We’re also
148 setting up a food drive, which is a great thing to do around

149 Thanksgiving time to acknowledge the less fortunate. So it's
150 gonna be a great show at an amazing venue, for a good cause.

151 **V.C.:** How do you put dream set lists together?

152 **D.M.:** I am extremely passionate about set lists, and it's
153 one of the things that really drew me to the Grateful Dead. I
154 loved that they would play three shows in a row and not repeat
155 one single song. I loved segues and the way they go from one
156 song into another. I loved how they revisit songs, and I'm
157 basically a kid in the candy store putting together the set list.

158 We're up to a 212-song repertoire now. And I find that so
159 exciting, because I think at this point we keep them all in
160 rotation. We're curating the set list so that it's just, in my opinion,
161 all great songs that encompass all the great eras.

162 We're from New York City, so 212 is our area code. So
163 we did a thing in October and we're actually in the midst of it
164 right now, where we're going to play all 212 songs over the
165 course of the month. I think we're at 156, and we have two more
166 shows to go.

167 **V.C.:** Wow! So you don't try to copy Grateful Dead
168 shows per se?

169 **D.M.:** Right. The band is really passionate about all the
170 catalogues. So our brand isn't just copying the Grateful Dead,
171 and it's certainly not just to play the same 40 or 50 songs that are
172 fan favorites.

173 * * *

174 Shakedown Citi takes the stage at Stone Church, 210
175 Main St., Brattleboro on Saturday, Nov. 29 at 8 p.m. Doors open
176 at 7 p.m.

177 The band will hold a food drive to help Windham
178 County neighbors in need, so please bring non-perishable food
179 items to donate to Foodworks of Brattleboro.

180 For tickets and more information, visit
181 stonechurchvt.com and shakedownciti.com.

182 For more information about Foodworks, visit
183 groundworksvt.org/programs/foodworks/.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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184 **VICTORIA CHERTOK** is a contributing writer to *The*
185 *Commons* and *The Keene Sentinel*. Since 2017, she has
186 published more than 200 arts and entertainment features,
187 interviews, and columns in both newspapers, as well as in the
188 *Brattleboro Reformer*.

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