



A funny thing happened on the way to this interview. Gary Richards, founder of Hard Events, a Live Nation subsidiary, talked to us and then immediately resigned from the company.

As this interview went to press, he was in flux. Rumors were rampant that he was on his way to a prominent position at LiveStyle, the descendent of SFX Entertainment, but Richards "went dark," like Jack Bauer. Please enjoy this interview for what it is: the story of a promoter in transition.

Gary Richards, in the lead-up to the 10th anniversary of his Hard Summer electronic music festival, hit the media circuit. Not only did he visit radio stations throughout California, he provided extensive interviews to Variety, Los Angeles Times, a cover story for L.A. Weekly and, obviously, Pollstar.

Richards is, first and foremost, an artist who, as Destructo, built a career working with fellow musicians like Depeche Mode, White Zombie, and Major Lazer. He's credited for bringing artists/friends

like Skrillex and Justice to the mainstream. He still plays between 40 and 60 shows every year including a residency at Draï's in Las Vegas.

As Gary Richards, the music exec, he began his career promoting shows at clubs and abandoned warehouses in Los Angeles, notably an early-Sunday morning gig called The Sermon and an event called Electric Daisy Carnival. While his late brother Steven managed Slipknot, Gary grew his Southern California festival, Hard Summer, into a massive event with more than 100 acts that took place as this interview went to print, featuring Snoop Dogg's performance of his 1993 album DoggyStyle. Meanwhile, Richards was one of the first promoters to create a cruise, Holy Ship!, and added events to his portfolio like Hard Australia, Hard Hawaii, Day of the Dead

and the recently completed Hard Red Rocks along with numerous club and theatre shows.

Hard Summer continues to grow, having moved from Pomona Fairplex in 2015 to the Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, Calif., last summer, to Glen Helen Amphitheatre in San Bernardino this year.

In 2012, Live Nation took a majority stake in Hard Events and, soon after, Insomniac. Richards and Insomniac founder Pasquale Rotella went to court in 2015 over the name of Rotella's flagship event, Electric Daisy Carnival. All parties agreed that Richards invented the name, and put on the first events, and then verbally agreed to allow Rotella to use the moniker in 1997. Things got ugly when Rotella trademarked it. There was also a recent controversy regarding whether artists who play one

of the festivals (Hard Summer vs. EDC) are banned from playing the other.

Meanwhile, Hard Events has been in the news because of overdoses at the last festivals: two fatalities at 2015's Hard Summer and three fatalities last year.

Can you run through a bit of your history?

I went to high school in L.A., moved to Washington, D.C., and then, in the late '80s / early '90s, I started going to these warehouse parties. I really got involved in the music and started my own after-hours event called The Sermon, which is the first event I ever promoted. I started at 5 a.m. on a Sunday.

First time we did it, we had maybe three people show up; a lot of smoke filled the room so it looked like somebody was there. Then 20, then 40, then 80, then all of a sudden we've got a line around the block at 6 in the morning.

So we flipped to Midnight Mass. We tried to do a midnight show. We had a great concept but really couldn't get enough people so I partnered with a guy named Mr. Koolaid, who was doing Double-Hit Mickey, and we did the Mickey's Holy Water Adventure. We [did it at Wild Rivers waterpark in Irvine], and that led to the Electric Daisy Carnival that we did two years in a row, and then at the end of '92 on New Year's Eve I did something called RaveAmerica. That was at Knott's Berry Farm. We sold about 17,000 tickets.

At that point I felt like this music was getting commercialized and it really wasn't what I signed up for, so I thought, "I'll go into the record business" and leave these kinds of concerts behind.

So, from '93 to about 2006, I was making electronic records with Rick Rubin and working with XL Recordings. Then 2006 comes around and basically no-

body buys records anymore and no one buys electronic records for sure. So I thought, well, maybe I'll go back to what I did originally, which was DJ. I mean, I deejayed all the way through but started deejaying more seriously and started to do concerts again because maybe people will buy a ticket; they were definitely not buying the record.

I started Hard on New Year's Eve again because it was my birthday. That first one I had Justice, Peaches, Steve Aoki, and 2 Live Crew, and here we are, 10 years later, and it's thriving.

It's a couple weeks before the fest: what are you doing? What's the chores? What are your hours?

Right now, everything is just planning straight-up for Hard Summer, the 10-year anniversary, and just getting all the venue details right, set times, staging, what's happening with the artist. Things are always changing. We're dealing with stuff like Mobb Deep and everything that happened with Prodigy. Just trying to put all the pieces of the puzzle together so when the show happens it's incredible.

What about the shift to Glen Helen Amphitheatre?

A couple weeks ago, I guess, Live Nation decided it made more sense. The good news is that Live Nation operates that venue and it's done a million shows there where it's used the park adjacent as well. So my main guy, Ford Englerth, who's been running the event for pretty much the last five years, is way more familiar with that location than the [Auto Club Speedway]. It may seem like, oh, we're shifting at the last second but it's a location they've done thousands of shows in.

You've been gradually, deliberately increasing attendance each year. How does the amphitheatre play into it?

Well, it's just one stage of six. You're removing a lot of the seats. You've got that grass. But the key to the venue, the reason why it works for Hard Summer, is that it has 100 acres of park, San Bernardino County Park, next door. And it's got grass and a waterpark and camping. So there are five other areas for stages adjacent to the amph.

How much camping will there be?

I think we will probably have 5,000 people camping, same as last year.

Unlike most promoters, you're not just a promoter. How much of your life is spent under the rooftop of Hard Events?

It's all one thing. Being a concert promoter, for me, and being in a studio with artists who are playing my shows, and deejaying at other festivals with artists who are playing my shows all work together.

So, it's all the same thing. I don't really view it as, when I'm in the studio, I'm not repping Hard as a concert promoter. I feel I'm still doing A&R because I'm actually in the studios seeing what the artists are actually doing. Same thing when I'm deejaying at other festivals. What other promoter gets to go to all the other festivals and see who does well and who doesn't do well, who's bringing the crowd? It all just helps me become a complete package.

And I think that when I'm promoting my shows, I think the artists are having a better time because I know what they're looking for.

That being said, as a promoter, what is it that you're doing outside of straightforward festival/cruise promotion?

I DJ as Destructo. I go into studios and make music. I played Vegas on Saturday. My next show is Red Rocks. I've played from Jakarta to Paris to Perth to Manchester to Ibiza to Tokyo. I've

gotten to see the world and see what's going on out there with this music. But, purposely, as I get closer to Hard Summer, I back it down. I'm here, I'm focused.

What are some of the newer aspects of the festival that you are dedicating time to?

I guess it's mostly the production. Just making the experience better at the event. Trying to make things smoother to run. But a lot of that has to do with my team. I'm not in the trenches, building the fences, placing the stages. I have my team. I let them put their expertise into it. But Hard has really been solely focused on the music and just giving a little more to it. A little more comfort; a few more amenities than just the raging music all the time.

How many people are on your team?

There are only three people who work in my office but, when the festival's going, there are hundreds. Independent contractors.

Ford Englerth, director of production for Live Nation, was put on the job at the beginning in 2012. He was also head of production at Live Nation for the past umpteen years. He's kind of starting his own business now but he's been in charge and he really rallies all the people from security to

staging to traffic management. They all report to him and they have tons of meetings. But he's kind of the boss of that area.

Has there been any update regarding renewing the contract with Live Nation?

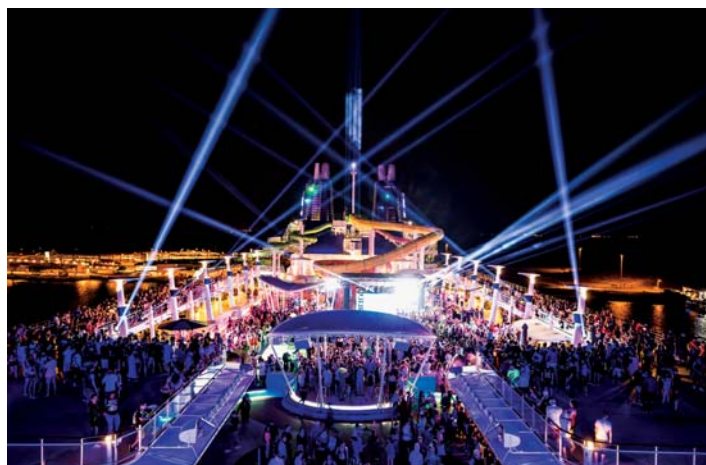
I think at this point, it's still the same. It's just crush the 10-year anniversary and then see what happens next.

What kind of contracts / deals would you have with vendors such as food & bev or security?

I think it goes by show and it goes by venue. There really are no long-term contracts. We have different people in different departments but they go and hire those vendors and it's always up for a discussion about who we're going to use. We kind of have our preferred vendors but then venues have that as well. We don't have any real multiyear contracts but I've worked with some people since the beginning of Hard 10 years ago. I always try to take care of the people who took care of me.

What is an unnecessary expense? What stuff do you toss in to add to the environment at your own expense?

We definitely have a swimming pool. This year we're going to have a beach. Like I said, we have a waterpark in the camp-



ing area. We have water features. I know it's hot at that time and my idea the past few years has been to get 'em wet. Most people, when they come there, they're wearing a bathing suit and not much clothing. We have these things you walk through that, for lack of a better term, are almost like a car wash for humans. Things like that.

But we have some amusement rides and different food trucks. Kind of the standard fare for festivals. We don't have, like, some 500-foot snake that breathes fire and all that stuff. My vision for Hard is to always let the performer have the stage, not take away from that, and let them have a canvas to paint their own painting. I think a lot of times fireworks and things like that can distract from the performance.

And that's the feedback you get from the artists?

Yeah, it's the feedback I get from the artists and it's been my own opinion from the beginning. I felt like I never want to impose what I think on the show. That's why I'm booking my artists.

When I'm on the stage I'll do my thing but when I'm booking, say, Dog Blood for example, I trust Skrillex and Boys Noize 100 percent. They're my brothers and when they're on stage I want them to have the stage and do what they want to do.

I don't want to influence what they're doing; I just want to enhance it. If they want to do kabuki drops, I'll make sure they've got the right roof. If they want to do less video and more lighting, then we'll tailor the stage to that.

Anybody you're particularly looking forward to?

Well, definitely Snoop. I'm a huge Dr. Dre / Snoop Dogg / N.W.A fan. Going to high school in L.A., to have Snoop doing *DoggieStyle*? When *The Chronic* came out it said on the back,

"Look out for Snoop's debut album" and they were saying how it was the most anticipated rap record to ever come out. To have them play that full album is pretty major in my book.

But we've got all the U.K. hip-hop with Skepta, JME, Ghetts, Dave, AJ Tracey, which we've never really had at Hard. I'm looking forward to that. Plus the usual suspects – Snake, Justice – they've been there for me since the beginning so it's been 10 years now. A-Trak as well. Same thing.

What about set times? Is it still a big hassle?

It's always a big problem, especially in electronic music, but I fight the good fight. I think it's always important to build things a certain way. I try to go on what I think is fair and what sells the event, and who I like personally. Then it turns into a fight about who sells more tickets. But there are a lot of acts that sell tickets that I don't book because I don't think it fits what I do. I could just go alphabetical but why are they fighting so hard? Why is every agent making my life a misery because they want their act higher on the bill for Holy Ship or Hard?

It's because it's important and people look at our events, and that's how they figure out what these artists are worth at other events. Certain artists have offered to pay me money to be in the No. 1 spot or to move above somebody, and they'll give me money back. I don't play that game but when it happened to me I was, like, wow, this real estate is really fucking important! I don't look at it so deeply as how it affects billing at other festivals. But all these artists, that's their whole game because they can't really go into your system and say, "pull the history!" That's my thing! "Pull the sales history!" None of these fuckers are selling tickets!"

You know, you and I had this conversation. You said none of the Top 100 tours had one person in it that was EDM. So, OK! Fuck all you guys! Come on man, let's be lucky that, when we're all together, we get these big numbers and it's about everyone. Let's support each other and help each other. That's always been my theory since Day One. You take one of these guys, cool. You take two of these guys, cool. But you take 30 or 40 of them and you put it together and all of a sudden you have 30,000, 40,000 people and, boom, as a unit we're rolling! But then everybody fights amongst each other and it's kind of unnecessary. I try to be the guy who can keep it all together and I figure out ways to get everyone to play ball with everyone, somehow, and everyone's a little pissy but at the end of the day they get onstage and the show goes off and everyone's happy.

Neither night on Hard Summer has Destructo as the headliner, so that's leading by example.

Well, I'd never do that. Lead by example. I want to have a good show as a performer but, for Hard especially, I feel it's more important for the other people to shine. I'll always get a "this guy wants to be ahead of me." It's all good. My goal is for the other artists to shine. Always.

Speaking about no EDM acts on the Top 100 chart, any thoughts?

I dunno. I assume that they just do weekends, they don't do weekdays. They don't tour in buses. They play a lot of shows where the numbers aren't reported. They play festivals. I don't really know. I find it hard to believe but a lot of people aren't touring. Calvin Harris isn't touring. Skrillex isn't touring. Diplo's out there. I can't imagine Diplo's not up there. Maybe he's playing Vegas, playing places that aren't

reporting. I'm not sure. It's a shocking revelation.

Could it be, also, that EDM artists tend to be at clubs, parties, swimming pools – soft-ticket venues?

I've always looked at Hard Summer as a music festival but it's also a club and a party. So, when you're in a band, and you're playing a concert, and you report to *Pollstar*, you're playing in a hard venue with hard tickets and they're coming to see you because you're in Death Grips or fuckin' Stone Sour. You're going to the venue to see Corey Taylor's thing.

But when you're coming to see me, you're going to a club, part of that is for the vodka sodas, there's girls. It's just not a straight concert. Maybe a lot of those venues are clubs; they don't report. I'm playing some place that's, like, a warehouse that was converted into a who-knows-what. Then people know they need to go there on a Friday. And one Friday it's me, one Friday it's Claude VonStroke, one Friday it's Boys Noize. Friday becomes the night for that sound.

I've never ever done a proper "tour" tour. My brothers in Slipknot, they get in the bus and they map it out. Like, how far can you drive to the next city with all this shit? I could play in Hong Kong and then play in L.A. the next day. Slipknot ain't doing that! They have to slowboat their shit. Or they have stages in different continents. It's a whole different ballgame.

So let's bounce over to Holy Ship, where it began and where it stands.

I had gone on a cruise in 1997 from Miami to the Bahamas, with 400 techno freaks from Germany. It was one of the best times I've had in my life. I just loved it so much and thought that if I could ever emulate this, I would.



It just so happened that Hard got going and I thought, hey, well, maybe I can try and do a cruise. I partnered up with the Bowery Presents guys and Cloud 9. They had done some dabbling in cruises.

So, in 2012, I booked Fatboy Slim, Skrillex, Diplo – I remember going to Skrillex and Diplo and before I could get past the second sentence they were, like, “We’re in!”

We didn’t lose money, but we didn’t make money. We kind of broke even but I marketed it around the world. I took out ads, little ones, in Berlin, South Korea, Seoul. Paris. It got two or three people from each of those places all to come together. A lot of people from Australia and New Zealand, and when they got on the boat and saw what we were doing, it just really took off.

I made a video. I asked Tommy Lee if he would come down to Marina Del Rey and do a spoof in a boat with me, like we’re on Holy Ship but we’re actually on a row boat. And he did it.

I don’t think people understood what we were trying to do because we were kind of making

a joke that this was obviously not the boat we were going on.

But once we did the cruise I was able to film it and show people what it was, and that’s when it took off.

In a closed environment like this, are the artists comfortable?

Yeah! That’s the beauty of the whole thing. That’s what makes it. We’ve gotten better boats now where, if you’re an artist, you can get away but if you want to get in the mix, you go get in the mix. You can have your cake and eat it too. But the whole point of going is to mingle with the crowd. It’s fun and the fans are respectful. They’re not there to bug you.

You have said that the focus on the ship is the sound, not the lights and production.

Yeah. Sound. Because you want the sound to be perfect and you’re on a cruise ship in the middle of the ocean. It’s already amazing.

Are the stages built or do you use what’s there?

The way that we’ve done it is we build a stage on the dock and then we crane it on. We switched ships last year so it was a little more challenging, but we try to build our own stage on the main deck and then utilize most of the stuff the ship already has. But one stage we usually build ourselves.

Where does everything stand with Pasquale Rotella?

Maybe that’s a question to ask him. I think that’s the best thing to say at this point. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: I don’t block artists from playing his events. I would never do that. We’re all in the same company. I want to just push my agenda forward but that’s more of a question for him.

Regarding drug usage, ODs, etc., what will be done? What can be done?

I was at every meeting for the task force for large-scale events for the County of Los Angeles and pretty much all the recommendations are things we’ve been doing for years and years.

It really comes down to personal responsibility. There’s only so much we can do as concert promoters to prevent a Tic-Tac to come into an event of 80,000 to 100,000 people. People have to not put things in their bodies that they don’t know what it is. Then there’d be no problem.

I think it’s sad and unfortunate but it’s not the music’s fault that’s doing this. It’s a much larger problem than just a music festival. I was just reading in the paper that there’s a professor at USC who was caught doing drugs with his students. It’s a societal problem; it’s not specific to a music festival. To me, as an artist, DJ and concert producer, I can’t solve the world’s drug problems. It’s much bigger than us. It’s unfortunate but it’s the truth.

Also, a terrorist attack could happen anywhere in public and not just a concert in Manchester – it could be a high school football game or a shopping mall.

Yeah, it’s a sad time we’re living in. I’m very aware of my surroundings and what’s going on. I don’t know if it’s built into me from doing events but when I’m on a plane I’m looking at people, or at airports. It sucks. That’s the world we’re living in. There’s these crazy people who want to do bad things to innocent people. It’s just horrible.

You could be surfing and get bit by a shark. You could be walking down the street and get hit by lightning. Shit happens. It’s sad to say but it’s not Ariana Grande’s fault, it’s not Live Nation’s fault. It’s just some crazy motherfucker who did what he did. You just need to try and do what you can to make things better and try to limit damage if you can. But if somebody is going to come running into a crowded place with a backpack full of explosives, there’s not a lot you can do.

The world can’t stop because of crazy people. Concerts can’t stop because somebody does something stupid. *Joe Reinartz* ✨