

John “Klondike” Koehler

Director of Stage and Sound Production

HIS REAL NAME is John Koehler (pronounced: *Kayler*) but everyone calls him Klondike, which is a good handle for him. Tall like a spruce tree and wily like a Yukon gold miner, Klondike is a prospector for good audio. His philosophy of sound production is simple: “Get the equipment out of the way of the music.” Klondike talks thoughtfully and articulately, building sentences phrase by phrase, and they end up forming poetic ideas. Here he is talking about being a sound man: “You have to be willing to remain the man behind the curtain, creating this Rube Goldberg machine that somehow can take a moment of passion, a moment of insight from an artist, and deliver it through modulated columns of air, up to hundreds of feet away, to the ears and heart of a listener.”

Klondike grew up in Washington, D.C. and went to Trinity College where he and some friends formed the Outerspace Band. In 1973 the band was living in Lenox and weary of commuting to gigs in Boston, so they moved into a big, run-down rental in Wendell. There were 12



people living in the house. “It was basically a commune run on the income of a band,” says Klondike. When the Outerspace Band went on hiatus in 1977, he turned his attentions to his business, Klondike Sound Company, which eventually relocated to Greenfield in 1991.

Klondike got his first break as a sound man working at the New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1978. He parlayed the Jazz Fest job into work six weeks later at the Newport Jazz Festival, and he’s been doing sound production at festivals ever since. At this point Klondike is the head sound man at many of the most legendary roots-music festivals in America and has been for decades. Along with Jazz Fest and Newport Jazz, Klondike handles sound for the Newport Folk Festival, the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and Rhythm & Roots in Rhode Island, among others. As stage manager Greg Jones describes Klondike, “He is the high-water mark in festival production.”

He has been handling sound and staging at the Green River Festival since 1991. After 40 years of living in Wendell, Klondike currently resides in Greenfield.