

NEIL SEDAKA

The history of Rock N' Roll would be incomplete without the innumerable contributions of Neil Sedaka. For over fifty years, Neil has written, performed, produced, and inspired countless songs, and his canon of compositions will continue to stand the test of time.

Neil Sedaka was born on March 13, 1939. Neil's interest in music began at the young age of four, when he would listen to *The Make-Believe Ballroom*. But, it was not Rock and Roll, but Classical music that would shape Neil into the musician he is today. By the time he was eight years old, he had already begun his intensive classical piano training at the prestigious Julliard School of Music. At 16, Arthur Rubenstein voted Neil as one of the best New York High School pianists. Though Neil considered pursuing a Doctorate in music, Neil's next choice became his chosen vocation.

Eager to gain acceptance from his peers at Abraham Lincoln High School, Neil began performing Rock N Roll outside of his classical training. At this time, he would form the Doo-Wop group *The Tokens*, in which they would record two singles that would go on to be regional hits. But, it was his introduction to his young neighbor Howard Greenfield, by Greenfield's mother, that began one of the most prolific songwriting partnerships of the last half century that sold forty million records between 1959-1963.

Sedaka and Greenfield became one of the original creators of the "Brill Building" sound in the late fifties and early sixties when they were the first to sign with Don Kirshner and Al Nevins at Aldon Music. Aldon Music would go on to sign Neil Diamond, Carole King, and Paul Simon among many others, and they became the center of the pop world.

Sedaka catapulted into stardom after Connie Francis recorded his "Stupid Cupid." She then sang the theme song Neil and Howard had written for the 1960 MGM spring break classic, *Where the Boys Are*, which would be her biggest hit. Rhythm and blues stars Clyde McPhatter and LaVern Baker also scored hits with his songs. As a result of these hits, Sedaka was able to sign a contract with RCA as a writer and performer of his own material. Sedaka soon recorded chart toppers "The Diary," "Oh! Carol," "Stairway to Heaven," "Calendar Girl," "Little Devil," "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen," "Next Door To An Angel," and "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," songs that have become a part of peoples' lives and can instantly take listeners back to special moments. His music became distinguished for a unique recording style involving multi-tracking his own voice to achieve a rich sound. This was merely the first act in a career that has not ceased to evolve and entertain.

In 1964, the direction of American music changed drastically when The Beatles launched The British Invasion. It became very hard for most male solo artists to continue to pursue their career in music. Due to his many talents as a songwriter, Neil was able to prevail, writing hit songs for such artists including Frank Sinatra (*The Hungry Years*),

Elvis Presley (Solitaire), Tom Jones ("Puppet Man"), The Monkees (When Love Comes Knocking At Your Door), and The Fifth Dimension (Workin' on a Groovy Thing).

Neil's journey continued in the UK with the release of his album "Emergence" in 1972. This was the first step of redefining himself as a solo artist. It was Elton John who decided to sign Neil to his up and coming record label Rocket Records and begin to re-introduce Neil to American audiences. The two albums he recorded for the Rocket label, *Sedaka's Back* in 1974 and *The Hungry Years* in 1975, both became top selling albums around the world. His comeback was further heralded by two of his songs co-written with Phil Cody, "Bad Blood" and the quintessential "Laughter in the Rain," both reaching the #1 position on the music charts. In Rolling Stone Magazine, Sedaka was hailed as "the new phenomenon." The song "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" was re-released as a ballad in 1975, and made music history when it reached #1 on the charts, becoming the first song recorded in two different versions by the same artist to reach the Number One. During this time, Sedaka also helped to launch the career of the Captain and Tennille with their version of his "Love Will Keep Us Together," which won a Grammy Award for Record of the Year for this worldwide, number one hit.

The accolades showered on Neil Sedaka have been numerous. Among the honors he has received, Sedaka has been inducted into the Songwriter's Hall of Fame, has had a street named after him in his hometown of Brooklyn, and was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

With a career spanning six decades, a rare feat in the entertainment world, Sedaka never ceases to amaze. He shows no signs of slowing down. Neil has appeared on FOX's hit Television show *American Idol*, as a guest judge – in which Clay Aiken would perform Neil's *Solitaire*, which saw an inevitable release, reaching #4 on the Hot 100 Singles chart, and was one of the Top Selling Singles of 2004.

On June 10 2004, he received the Sammy Cahn Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Popular Music / Songwriters Hall of Fame at the organization's 35th annual induction and awards ceremony in New York. Named for the former President of the Songwriters Hall of Fame, this award is given to individuals in recognition of their outstanding achievements in furthering the successes of songwriters.

In 2006, Neil concluded a 10 city tour of the United Kingdom, where he filmed a Live Concert at London's Royal Albert Hall for PBS (which was released as *Neil Sedaka: The Show Goes On – Live at the Royal Albert Hall*). During this historical evening, Neil was presented with The Guinness Award for his song "(Is This the Way to) Amarillo", as the best selling single of the 21st century in the UK, a song that was originally performed by Tony Christie over thirty-five years ago.

On April 24, 2007, Neil released "The Definitive Collection", a career-spanning retrospective released in honor of his 50th Anniversary in show business. "The Definitive Collection" debuted at #22 on the Billboard Chart, marking the first time Neil has appeared on the chart since 1980.

On October 26, 2007, Neil was honored with a tribute at Avery Fisher Hall at New York's Lincoln Center. "Neil Sedaka: 50 Years of Hits", a benefit for The Elton John AIDS Foundation, showcased Neil's songs, with performances by Connie Francis, Dion, Paul Shaffer, Natalie Cole, Clay Aiken, Renee Olstead, and Captain and Tennille. The evening was hosted by Cousin Brucie Morrow and David Foster. Sir Elton John and Barry Manilow sent video tributes in their absence.

Neil has returned to his classical roots, composing his first symphonic piece "Joie De Vivre". "Joie De Vivre" saw its world premiere with The Kansas City Symphony Orchestra in 2007. Neil's recent Australian Symphony Tour in 2008 featured "Joie De Vivre" as its centerpiece.

Sedaka has been married for forty-five years to his wife, Leba, and they have two children: daughter Dara is a recording artist and vocalist for television and radio commercials, and son Marc is a successful screenwriter in Los Angeles. He and his wife, Samantha, made Neil a grandfather, for the first time in 2003 with the birth of twins, Amanda and Charlotte, and for the second in 2005 with the birth of Michael Emerson.

In addition to his extensive tour schedule, Neil has just completed "Waking Up is Hard to Do". Inspired by his grandchildren, "Waking Up is Hard to Do" is a collection of Neil Sedaka Hits that have been reinvented as children's songs, and is set for release on January 6, 2009 from Razor and Tie. "Waking Up is Hard to Do" was a family collaboration, in which Neil's son Marc adapted four of his father's classic songs, and Neil's five year old grand-daughters made their recording debut as his backup vocalists.

Neil is currently completing a collection of new songs, including his first ever salsa song, produced by Grammy Award Winner David Foster. All of these ventures will no doubt add to his legend – that of a consummate musician, an extraordinary vocalist, and an ageless songwriting talent.