

Death Claims The Man Who Brought The Beatles To US

BY HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK — Misty-eyed music promoter Sid Bernstein, who booked such top acts as Jimi Hendrix, Judy Garland and the Rolling Stones and hit the highest heights when he master-minded the Beatles' historic concerts at Shea Stadium and Carnegie Hall, died Wednesday at age 95.

Bernstein's daughter, Casey Deutsch, said he died in his sleep at a hospital. She cited no illness and said he died of natural causes.

For decades, the squat, floppy-haired Bernstein excelled like few others at being everywhere and knowing everybody. He worked with Garland, Duke Ellington and Ray Charles, promoted Dion, Bobby Darin and Chubby Checker and managed Esy Morales, the Rascals and Ornette Coleman. He was an early backer of ABBA, setting up the Swedish group's first American appearances. He was behind one of the first rock benefit shows, the 1970 "Winter Festival for Peace" at Madison Square Garden, which featured Hendrix and Peter, Paul and Mary. And he helped revive Tony Bennett's career with a 1962 show at Carnegie Hall.

A master of schmooze and schmaltz in an industry that never quits, Bernstein also had a studious side that led to his biggest break. He took a course on Western civilization at the New School for Social Research that required students to read a British newspaper once a week. It was 1963, and the Beatles were just catching on in their native country.

"This was the right time to be reading an English newspaper," he explained in a 2001 interview with the music publication NY Rock Confidential. "So here I am reading little stories about this group from Liverpool that is causing a lot of 'hysteria.' By the end of the course, I was so Beatle-ized by what I read, even though I did not hear a note, I said, 'gotta get 'em.'"

As Bernstein recalled, he couldn't get his agency interested in the group, so he handled the job himself. He tracked down Beatles manager Brian Epstein and convinced him that he could line up a gig at Carnegie Hall. The Beatles were still unknown in the U.S., and the price was cheap — \$6,500 for two shows, a fraction of what Garland might have commanded. The promoter used his own money to pay Epstein, while officials at the classy Carnegie, where no rock stars had been permitted, apparently thought they had taken on a folk quartet. (The story has varied over the years.) The timing was perfect. By February 1964, Beatlemania had crossed over to the States, and the band was set to play on "The Ed Sullivan Show" just three days before the Carnegie concerts, guaranteeing maximum attention at minimum cost.

Once the Beatles hit, Bernstein was primed to get the bands that followed. He arranged shows for the Stones, the Animals and other British groups, while saving his biggest dreams for the Beatles. Everything for Bernstein was the latest and the greatest, but his word was never more golden than in 1965, when he landed the group at Shea Stadium, the idea given to him by a ticket

manager at Carnegie Hall.

It was rock's first major stadium concert and its all-time primal scream. With about 55,000 fans losing their voices and their minds on an August night, the show broke box-office records and likely some sound barriers. *The New York Times* described the scene as meeting the "classic Greek meaning of the word pandemonium — the region of all demons."

Only a satellite broadcast from the moon could have topped it.

The Beatles played again

at Shea in 1966 but turned down \$1 million from Bernstein to return in 1967 and never worked with him again, although he remained friendly with individual members after their breakup.

Obsessed with getting the band back together, he proposed \$100 million in 1976 for a concert. John Lennon, in a 1980 *Playboy* interview, dismissed Bernstein's offer as "a commercial for Sid Bernstein, written with Jewish schmaltz and show biz and tears, dropping on one

knee, like Al Jolson."

Like so many in the music business, Bernstein was the hustling son of Jewish immigrants, born on Manhattan's Upper East Side, raised in Harlem and hooked on sound and rhythm. He sneaked into the Apollo Theater as a boy, booked local acts in high school and, while studying journalism at Columbia University, ran a ballroom in Brooklyn that featured such Latino stars as Morales, Tito Puente and Marcelino Guera.

Bernstein was connected

to all kinds of music, getting Charles, the Drifters and Bo Diddley for a show at the Brooklyn Paramount Theatre; rounding up Mississippi John Hurt, Doc Watson and Tom Paxton for a folk festival at Carnegie Hall; arranging a jazz concert that featured Ellington, Louis Armstrong and John Coltrane.

Over the past 20 years, Bernstein's best client became himself. He wrote two memoirs, "It's Sid Bernstein Calling" and "Not Just the Beatles," gave frequent talks about his life and even

recorded an album of duets. At age 90, he started a Twitter account, sending regards to Ben Stiller and Lenny Kravitz, reporting on his lunch at the 2nd Avenue Deli and catching up with Beatles fans.

"Twitterland!" he called out in one post. "Let's all have a productive week. I have a few very interesting projects in the works and I'll reveal them very soon."

Bernstein and his wife, Geraldine Bernstein, were married for more than 40 years. They had six children.

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Tony Bennett To Attend March On Washington

NEW YORK (AP) — Tony Bennett plans to travel to the nation's capital to pay tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. as the March on Washington marks its 50th year.

Bennett, who marched with the civil rights leader in Selma, Ala., in 1965, is scheduled to perform as part of Saturday's festivities commemorating the historic march and King's "I Have A Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

The entertainer said Thursday he wants to honor King's humanitarian message, but will also be in Washington as part of the Voices Against Violence campaign that is pushing for gun limits.

The Rev. Al Sharpton is holding an event on Saturday with King's son, Martin Luther King III. And President Barack Obama will speak on the actual anniversary day Wednesday.