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Don Kirshner, Music Impresario and TV Producer, Dies at 76

Jan 18, 2011 04:39 PM ET 2 Comments by [Robyn Ross](#)



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Don Kirshner

Don Kirshner, who provided one of the early hip outlets for pop and rock music on television, has died. He was 76.

The music impresario and television producer died Monday of heart failure in Boca Raton, Fla., promoter Jack Wishna told [The Associated Press](#) on Tuesday.

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He was the man behind and the host of the syndicated [Don Kirshner's Rock Concert](#), which premiered in 1973 and ran until 1981. In many

markets, it served as late-night programming, and boosted the careers of [Billy Joel](#) and the [Police](#), as well as comics [Billy Crystal](#), [Arsenio Hall](#) and [David Letterman](#). It also featured [Prince](#), the [Eagles](#) and [Lionel Richie](#) among many others.

The show — which turned out to be a precursor to MTV — had quite the eclectic mix of music. The one constant was Kirshner's strikingly monotone delivery as he introduced the acts. It became enough of an iconic part of pop culture that [Paul Shaffer](#) imitated him during the early days of [Saturday Night Live](#).

In 1958, Kirshner co-founded Aldon Music where he landed some of the top songwriting teams of the day, including [Carole King](#) and Gerry Goffin. Their songs were recorded by the [Drifters](#), the [Shirelles](#) and [Bobby Vee](#).

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Kirshner and co-founder Al Nevins sold Aldon to Screen Gems/Columbia in 1963, and Kirshner eventually became the company's president.

Once called the "Man With the Golden Ear" by Time magazine, he also facilitated the TV success of the [Monkees](#).

Wishna called Kirshner a mentor who knew the art of discovering talent and cared about the artists he worked with.

Kirshner — who ran three record labels — most recently was chief creative officer of Rockrena, a company just starting this year to find and promote talent online.

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