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Legendary rock promoter Don Kirshner dies

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Enlarge By Louis Lanzano, AP

Rock promoter Don Kirshner, who helped launch the careers of dozens of musical superstars, died Monday. He was 76.

By Oskar Garcia, Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Don Kirshner, a rock promoter and music publisher who helped garner hits for the make-believe groups [The Monkees](#) and [The Archies](#) and boosted the careers of [Billy Joel](#), [Neil Diamond](#) and the [Police](#), has died. He was 76.

Promoter [Jack Wishna](#), a close friend and business associate, told the Associated Press on Tuesday that Kirshner, whom *Time* magazine once dubbed "The Man with the Golden Ear," was in a hospital in Boca Raton being treated for an infection when he died on Monday.

"Donny Kirshner would take a kid off the street ... and turn him into Neil Diamond, Carole King, James Taylor, on and on," Wishna said. "I haven't spoken to anyone in the music business that Donny hasn't either discovered, promoted, or touched in some way."

"I've never seen anybody like this in my life," he said.

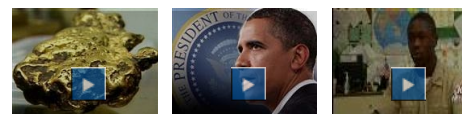
The Bronx-born Kirshner started off in the business as a songwriter, penning *My First Love* for [Bobby Darin](#). But he had more success in tapping songwriting talents like Diamond, King and [Neil Sedaka](#).

Kirshner's songwriters were tapped in the 1960s to create music for a group manufactured for TV — The Monkees. They became a huge sensation in both the TV and the rock world and had hits including *I'm a Believer*, which Diamond wrote.

Kirshner also was behind the music that made magic for The Archies, based off the comic strip characters, including the classic *Sugar Sugar*.

Don Kirshner's Rock Concert in 1972 gave national exposure to musicians including Joel and the Police. Kirshner also helped launch the careers of Prince, [The Eagles](#), [Lionel Richie](#) and [Ozzy Osborne](#). The show also boosted careers of comics including Billy Crystal, [Arsenio Hall](#) and [David Letterman](#).

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[Paul Shaffer](#), Letterman's musical director, used to give a deadpan performance during his imitation of Kirshner on *Saturday Night Live*. Shaffer and Kirshner worked together on the short-lived sitcom *A Year at the Top*, according to Shaffer's manager.

Pop singer [Tony Orlando](#), whom Kirshner hired for \$50 a week to record demos, said his mentor was like the [Thomas Edison](#) of music.

"Every dream I ever had as a kid, he was my genie," Orlando told AP.

Orlando said Kirshner was responsible for so many careers, "it would make your head spin."

"This was not just a song guy, this was a man who created the cornerstones of American pop music as we know it today," Orlando said. "Without Donny Kirshner, the music we know of today would not be the same. He was a game-changer, and I tell you that me and my family feel this tremendous loss for this man."

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

"He was a father to these people even though some of them were three or four years younger than him," Wishna said.

Wishna said Kirshner, who was honored by the Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 2007, was a pioneer who developed a system for singer-songwriters to share in the profits of selling music.

Howard Kramer, curatorial director at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, said Kirshner will be most remembered for "nurturing and developing an early, unprecedented amount of artists, mostly songwriters, and also a television pioneer for bringing live rock 'n' roll to television."

Kirshner also ran three labels, Dimension Records, Colgems Records and Kirshner Records.

Before he died, Kirshner was chief creative officer of Rockrena, a company launching this year to find and promote talent online.

Associated Press writer *Suzette Laboy* in Miami and Music Writer *Nekesa Mumbi Moody* in New York contributed to this report.

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[Chris the K](#) (6 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 10h ago

Never forget seeing Peter Gabriel on Rock Concert - Mr. Kirschner was nothing short of amazing. I hope his family gets some comfort from these posts. He was a great man.

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[lolly 714](#) (34 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 11h ago

Don, Thanks for making the world a more fun and entertaining place. Rest in Peace Pal

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[w_english](#) (12 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 15h ago

Not only did "Rock Concert" have musicians on...we also got a look at stand-up comics like Richard Prior and Steve Martin. Don knew talent. There's no doubt about that.

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[jamesreyes65](#) (7 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 8h ago

In memory of the man who discovered The Monkees, Billy Joel, The Police, & Neil Diamond. as well as the classic show that he created from 1973-1981 i love watching his program and the performers on the show are so memorable. Goo-bye Mr. Kirshner. & Thanks for the memories as well as the music.

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[thisoneguy](#) (41 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 8h ago

[Writestuff](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1h 47m ago

I got into many a different band thanks to his television show. Thank you, Don. God rest.

Back in our day, if you wanted to watch live music from good bands on TV (live shows, not two songs like on Ed Sullivan, or lip-synched songs like on American Bandstand), then this was your show.

RIP Don, and thanks.



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[Mountain Seer](#) (52 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 10h ago

A legend. He'll be missed! Man, I'm starting to feel old today. I'm seeing visions of rock stars rocking ...in chairs!

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[Writestuff](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 10h ago

I got into many a different band thanks to his television show. Thank you, Don. God rest.

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[toredown11](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 12h ago

Don was a very nice guy with a great sense of humor. I'm glad I got to meet him. I spent 30 years in the music industry and didn't even scratch what Don accomplished. My thoughts go out to his family.


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[JLee](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 13h ago

To the Ed Sullivan of Rock Music, RIP

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