

Music mentor knew art of finding talent

4:07 PM Saturday Jan 29, 2011

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Don Kirshner
Rock promoter, music publisher
Died aged 76

Without Donny Kirshner, the music we know of today would not be the same. He was a game-changer. Tony Orlando Don Kirshner helped garner hits for the make-believe 1960s groups the Monkees and the Archies. He also boosted the careers of Billy Joel, Neil Diamond and the Police.



Don Kirshner. Photo / AP

Promoter Jack Wishna, a close friend and business associate, said *Time* magazine once dubbed Kirshner "the man with the golden ear".

"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."

Bronx-born Kirshner started off in the business as a songwriter, penning My First Love for Bobby Darin. But he had more success tapping into songwriting talents such as 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 was also behind the music that made magic for the Archies, based on the comic-strip characters, including the classic Sugar Sugar.

The television music variety show *Don Kirshner's Rock*



Rock promoter Kirshner dies in Florida at age 76



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Concert, which premiered in 1972 and ran for a decade, gave national exposure to musicians including Joel and the Police.

Kirshner also helped to 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.

Pop singer Tony Orlando, whom Kirshner hired for US\$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. He was responsible for so many careers.

"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."

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."

Kirshner, who was honoured 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 would 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". AP

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