

Venues

TODAY



Every Day They're Shufflin'

Party rock the dance floor with the 2012 Hall of Headlines Winners





HOT NIGHTS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

by LINDA DECKARD

Neil Diamond's 40th anniversary, five-show reprise of his hit album "Hot August Night" at the Greek Theatre, Los Angeles, set records and strengthened relationships to a degree mostly unheard of, even in this company town.

Diamond created a special show, different from the arena and stadium dates on his world tour, and pegged the entire outing around the milestone event.

The album was remixed and rereleased by Universal Music Enterprises as a deluxe edition of "Hot August Night," the live album that documented Diamond's 10 sold-out nights at the amphitheater in 1972. And Diamond taped all five anniversary shows, the future disposition of which will immortalize the Greek again.

The shows sold out in minutes, but booking the shows...that took decades.

Alex Hodges, CEO of Nederlander Concerts, who has had a stellar career and many honors in this industry, ranks booking Diamond's August return as a 10 or 11 on a scale of 1-10. "It's as high as you can get," he declared when interviewed for this tribute as winner of the 2012 *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines Award for Bookings.

"It was such a legendary group of performances 40 years ago," Hodges said. "He's been to the Greek even after that, and he broke financial box office records that held up until he broke his own record at the Greek this year. This was fun across the board."

Hodges had been "in discussions" with Diamond's management about a redo of "Hot August Night" for 20 years (Hodges' two stints with Nederlander ran from 1988-1994 and 2002 to present), but ultimately Diamond determined the timing was not right.

Katie McNeil, Diamond's wife and manager, recalls running into Hodges at the City of Hope event honoring Diamond's manager Irving Azoff in 2011 at Universal Studios. "It was funny; he just right then and there pitched it on the spot," she recalled. "It just seemed like the right time. Alex's enthusiasm for it definitely made a difference."

In the end, Diamond performed five shows at the Greek, Aug. 11, 16, 18, 23, and 25, which grossed \$3,402,885 from 28,460 tickets. Tickets were priced \$49-\$250.



Rena Wasserman, manager of the Greek, remembers the early visits and productions meetings well. Twice before Hodges came back to the Greek, Diamond visited the venue, looked around, and nothing happened, Wasserman recalled. Then, a year ago, shortly before an Adele concert, "Neil shows up with one other person, not a manager. I happened to be in early that Sunday afternoon, and my security person said, 'Hey, I think Neil Diamond is here.'" Wasserman gave him a tour and showed him the Greek's schedule and invited him to Adele, which was the next day.

"Alex was working on this deal forever and we're thinking, 'it isn't happening, is it?'" When it finally did, Wasserman kicked it into gear, giving Diamond and his staff of 15 a two-hour tour.

"I became a fan — total, head over heels in love with this artist," Wasserman said. "He cared about the experience of every fan in that building from sound to sightlines. It was unbelievable."

After the show, Wasserman received a huge flower arrangement and handwritten note from Diamond, another aspect that made this whole experience unique. "I don't think I've ever had such a nice note from an artist in 43 years in this business," she said.

It read, in part: "Dear Rena, Was this series of shows at the Greek a thrill or what!!! I'll never forget it or your help in making it happen... These things get around and take the show itself to a higher level. If the people at the Greek are extending themselves that much, we on stage have to reflect that commitment in the quality of the show. Thank you for setting the bar so high."

Diamond topped off a stellar and legendary performance by "giving the building a tiny bit of credit for the quality of his show, that's amazing. He is detail oriented. He sees it all," Wasserman said.

"I had to pinch myself," Hodges said of the moment the date was finally confirmed. "And going on sale, I had to pinch myself. Getting close to the dates, loading in on the eighth of August, I had to pinch myself. On the first night, I joked with his team that I'm pinching myself again. And it was fine."

It may never be topped as a legendary moment but, then again, Hodges points out that Diamond recorded another album at the venue — "Love at the Greek" — in 1976.



BOOKINGS

Above: A video production bathes the stagehouse at the Greek during Neil Diamond's performance of "Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show."