



Greg Doherty 2010

LIVIN' ON A PROMISE

by DAVE BROOKS

It's one thing to make a promise — it's another thing to keep your word. When legendary rock singer Jon Bon Jovi promised to play a free concert for Philadelphia if the city's Arena Football League team ever won the championship, most took his offer at face value.

Fast-forward to July 2008, and in front of 17,000 fans at the New Orleans Arena, the Philadelphia Soul did the unexpected, holding off a late San Jose SaberCats surge to win ArenaBowl XXII with a final score of 59-56.

One would expect a free concert to be eminent, but that's where things start to get complicated. The following season the Arena Football League indefinitely suspended their season, filed for bankruptcy and eventually reconstituted under new ownership. Jon Bon Jovi went on to divest himself from the team, get selected into the New Jersey Hall of Fame and launch a successful tour going into its second leg with the help of Creative Artists Agency and AEG Live.

End of story, right? Not exactly. A promise is a promise and according to Bon Jovi's tour manager Paul Korzillius, the rocker was waiting for the perfect opportunity to play the free concert for Philadelphia.

"We knew we would be routing a few shows through Philadelphia, so we decided to have the free concert coincide with our two dates at the arena," he said.

The free concert was held on March 23 at the Wells Fargo Center (then the Wachovia Center), sandwiched in between two sold-out paid concerts at the building. Tickets were provided free to Soul season-ticket holders, and an additional allotment were given away over WMMR radio.

"Jon actually made the announcement on the Preston and Steve Show and the radio station worked with us to market the giveaway and create a system for distributing the limited number of tickets," Korzillius said.

Fewer than 1,000 tickets were distributed for the free show, but the entire concert was broadcast live on WMMR and their website WMMR.com. Bon Jovi played a shortened set, although he did work through his biggest hits.

"For over an hour, during the afternoon drive at 5 p.m., everyone enjoyed a free concert from Bon Jovi," said Ike Richman,



VP of Public Relations for Comcast-Spectacor which operates and owns the Wells Fargo Center.

"It was really easy for us because the stage was already set, the seating was already configured and everything was ready to go. It was just making sure we got tickets processed through WMMR.com — very similar to how we would do a concert sale," Richman said. "I think the fans really appreciated Jon's gesture. Jon is a great guy. He made a commitment, lived up to his word and over-delivered. No one thought he would get up there and play as

many songs as he did, especially when he was going to perform three hours later that night, but he over-delivered and gave everybody one heck of a good show."

Bon Jovi performed the concert in a Philadelphia Soul Jersey with his entire band.

"I first came down here in 1983 before I did my first album to do some radio IDs," he told the audience during the concert. "I was supposed to stay a couple of hours. A couple days later, I went back to New Jersey without my wallet and a smile from ear to ear."

Bon Jovi said it was the station manager at WMMR who first gave him a chance and put his album into rotation.

"A beautiful relationship was built upon that day, from the bars on South Street, to little theatres and then opening act status at the Spectrum," before headlining at the Wells Fargo Center, he said. After buying the Philadelphia Soul, "I would sit in one of those boxes and just live and breathe and die with this football team. We've been through a lot together."

And, it's not the only "charity" gig Bon Jovi played this year. On Oct. 15, Bon Jovi played a free concert in Orange Beach, Ala., to raise awareness and spirits for those impacted by the massive Deep Water Horizon oil spill. Country singer Brad Paisley followed up two days later with his own free concert, which coincided with the Thunder on the Gulf Boat Races.

And Bon Jovi will be back in Philadelphia on March 2, 2011, for a show at the Wells Fargo Center that's part of a larger AEG Live tour that includes multiple dates at Consol Energy Center in Pittsburgh, Air Canada Centre in Toronto, Bell Centre in Montreal, Madison Square Garden in New York and the United Center in Chicago.



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