

# U2

I love this group. No band was as close to me as U2. I had great, close relationships with The Who, the Stones and others, but what U2 did for me went far beyond the promoter-artist relationship. I'll get to that a little later.

In 1980, I was in New York hanging out in Frank Barsalona's office as I often did. Barbara Skydel, who worked for Frank, called me into her office.

"I want you to meet someone, Barry. This is Paul McGuinness. He manages an Irish group called U2 and they're going to be great." I said, "How ya doin' Paul? It'll be great to play you. Give me a call." I didn't know U2 from the Irish Rovers, but if Frank was behind them, so was I.

Not long after that, Paul calls and wants to play the boys in Denver, so I booked them into the Rainbow Music Hall on March 28, 1981. This was part of their "Boy" tour", which was in support of their album of the same name. Four mop-topped kids showed up: a lead singer, two guitars and a drummer. They were so young: 18, 19. They started off with "The Ocean", which was a slow, soft, haunting kind of song and I wasn't quite sure what I had booked. But, after they turned it loose with "Tick Tock" and "I Will Follow", I called Frank at his home.

"This fuckin' group is going to be the biggest group in the world, Frank. They're unbelievable."

They just knocked me out.

Their set list at The Rainbow:

1. *The Ocean*
2. *11 O'Clock Tick Tock*
3. *I Will Follow*
4. *I Fall Down*
5. *An Cat Dubh (The Black Cat)*
6. *Into The Heart*
7. *Touch*
8. *Another Time, Another Place*
9. *The Cry*
10. *The Electric Company / Yankee Doodle*
11. *Things To Make And Do*
12. *Stories For Boys*
13. *Boy-Girl/Let's Twist Again*
14. *Out of Control*
15. *Encore*
16. *A Day Without Me*
17. *Twilight*
18. *I Will Follow*

After the show, I went into the box office and grabbed four, \$50 bills and went into their trailer.

"Listen", I said, "You guys are amazing. I know how tough this is." I handed Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen the

money and said, "Please, go have a good meal on me. You deserve it." They never forgot that. And Bono never forgot seeing me, as I stepped outside the door and bought a U2 button off a guy for \$3. He'd never seen a promoter act that way, and I'd rarely acted that way about a band.

Jonathan King had a hit in 1965 called "Everyone's Gone To The Moon". He was doing a BBC music show from London called "Entertainment, U.S.A." and would check in with me now and then for my opinions on what was going on musically in the States. A few days after the U2 show he called and put me on the air.

"Hello Barry, have you seen anything new? Anything good?"

"I'll tell you, Jonathan, I saw a group from Dublin, Ireland that is going to be the biggest band in the world. They remind me of a young Who."

Well, U2 saw or heard what I said, so our love affair got off to a good start. I brought them back to the Rainbow a few months later, in May, 1981 and, the following year in Denver and Fort Collins.

We talked a lot in those early years. McGuinness and I and Bono and I. When I was booking them for the US Festival in 1983,

Bono called and asked me to change their days.

"Barry, you've got us playing on the day headlined by The Clash. We'd rather play on the second day, with Van Halen, because we don't want to be labeled as a punk act; we want to be known as a rock 'n roll act."

"No problem." I switched them. In fact, you can still see or hear on YouTube a clip of me introducing them to the US Festival. U2 was getting bigger and bigger and we got closer and closer.

During one of their 1981 stops, I had my associate Chuck Morris take the boys for some sightseeing and he took them to Red Rocks. Clayton remembers that they were blown away by its beauty and that they were all thinking that someday, they'd play there.

"Someday" came in 1983. McGuinness was in my Denver office and we're talking about playing Red Rocks.

"Barry, we want to film the show, but I don't know if we'll have the money to do it."

I asked, "Do you want a partner?"

Paul said, "Well, we might. What would the deal be?"

"Here's the deal, Paul: you tell me how much you need and you tell me how much I get. That's the deal." And that's how it worked. U2 and I were 50-50 partners. Later, Chris Blackwell from Island Records wanted in, so we made it three equal partners: "U2 At Red Rocks Associates".

But, it wasn't as simple as that. It never was in this business.

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1983, I'm flying back to Denver from the US Festival's country music day—I had to leave early to get back for U2's "Under A Blood Red Sky" concert and filming. As the plane approaches Denver, the weather's terrible! Thunderstorms, sleet, snow, hail, flooding, famine, pestilence, locusts—all kinds of shit. I'm thinking that there's no way U2's going to play in this weather. But, we always had a backup in case of weather.

When I got off the plane at the Denver airport, I ran to a payphone and called backstage at Red Rocks.

“What’s going on? Where’s the show been moved to?”

One of my employees hemmed and hawed and wouldn’t tell me what was going on. So, Paul McGuinness gets on the phone.

“Barry, they aren’t talking to you because I ordered them not to. We’re having the show here. We’ve got too much invested in the filming to not go on.”

I may have said something about me not allowing them to rain on my audience, blah, blah, blah. So, then Bono gets on the phone.

“Barry, I love you, but I just went on the radio and...

... Playing at the Golden Nugget was Frank Sinatra and Don Rickles. Sinatra had always been a hero to the band, so they asked me to get them into the show. No problem.

Rickles opens the show and does his routine and then he brings out Sinatra.

“Hey, Frank. Before you start, there are some people in the audience you really should meet. It’s a band called U2. They’re going to be very, very big.”

The spotlight shines on the band as they stand up.

Sinatra looks at them and tells Rickles, “Well, they may be getting big, but they sure as hell aren’t spending their money on clothes!”

Backstage after the show, Frank Sinatra was sweet as sugar and so gracious. He could not have been nicer. He sat and talked with U2 for over an hour, telling them about his days on the road with Buddy Rich and all about his career. It was a great night...