



## PROFILE ON ROCK AGENTS: BABY-SITTERS TO THE STARS

*Pimps? Flesh-Peddlers? Sharks Who Feed in Troubled Waters?  
or are they Really Behind-The-Scenes Supermen?*

**W**hen The Byrds sang "So You Want To Be A Rock And Roll Star", they warned prospective musicians about selling their souls to record company executives, mere manufacturers of products of polyvinyl and cardboard. But ask any musician, and they'll tell you another line of that Byrds song was the important one: head downtown, find an agent, he won't let you down. The accompanying image of a sleazoid slickster in a doubleknit suit, chewing his eraser as an unwitting teenager signs on the dotted line also dies hard. Agents are peddlers of flesh, business mythology tells us. You gotta work. Agents find work. You don't have to like 'em. But try to play without one and see what happens.

Agents are also an unknown quantity to the typical fan of the arts. Authors have them, pay them 10% to sell their books. Magazine writers use them to strongarm their paychecks from cheapo rags. Actors struggle hard to be represented by the "right" agent. So do ex-Presidents, now cut off from the public kitty. Kissinger has Marvin "Jaws" Josephson. Nixon has Irving "Swiftly" Lazar. Lawyers grow up to be agents. So do editors, publishers, princes and pimps. Agents peddle flesh and take their cut from the top. The colder the better. Rock and Roll breeds 'em cold.

What does a rock agent do?

"There are signers, there are bookers and there is that rare agent who is a signer and a booker," says Chip Rachlin, co-head of International Creative Management's New York rock division. "Our function is to find bands, find work for a band at the right level and build on it. For a young act, like an Eric Carmen, we find compatible tours to help record sales. Eric played 40 dates with Sweet, then finished a tour with America. For The Beach Boys, I have to make sure they play with the right acts at the right level. Extreme financial demands have to be met because The Beach Boys make a major part of their revenue from touring. Aerosmith makes \$3 million from records and the same from touring. The Beach Boys make \$6 million but only \$1 million from records. They have to make enough money without eating up their markets. They played to 110,000 people in four

article by Michael Gross

months in New York alone last year. Now they are being developed internationally. Headliners sustain, but can always be built larger."

On Rachlin's wall, a gallery of gold and platinum records testify to the importance of the agent's role in creating a rock phenomenon. There is gold from Billy Joel, Boz Scaggs, Phoebe Snow, America, The Souther, Hillman Furay Band, Aerosmith and The Eagles, multiple gold and platinum from The Beach Boys and The Captain and Tennille. On the west coast, Rachlin's counterpart, Tom Ross, handles Fleetwood Mac, Linda Ronstadt and Olivia Newton-John. A sketch by Steve Stills and a poem from Jack Thibeu dominate one wall, and illustrate the dilemma of the rock and roll agent tagged with the reputation of his breed. The coke-snorting, no head, no backstage pass image of the typical rock agent runs counter to the stories Rachlin is telling, however; of Stills, sketching at 6 a.m. in The Watergate Hotel, his only company, Rachlin, and the quote, which reads in bold letters: "The Dull get laid/The Brilliant go home alone."

"I got turned on to rock music early," Rachlin muses, "got turned off by The Twist, back on again about the time of The Beatles. By 9th grade I was managing local bands, friends. I was the one who couldn't play an instrument. By the time I was 16 I ran my first show, The Critters at Summit High School, New Jersey. Nobody knew what they were doing then. Everybody was having a good time."

"As soon as the kids found out what they were doing, it became a drag. You know: bad acid, spare change, Woodstock? I got a swelled head, put some money together and ran a weeklong show in Indiana with Neil Diamond, Tommy James and The Shondells, Every Mother's Son, Mighty Mandala from Canada. Flew there first class, came back in coach. I had to beat it out of the state. The guy I purchased the acts from used classic agent moves to suck me in. After that was my freshman year at college."

Jeff Franklin, President of American Talent International, tells a similar story. "When I was 15 years old I started booking bands in Dayton Ohio. High School bands, college bands, bar bands. I'd make \$5 a night and I'd make \$10 a night. I came to New York in 1967 and went to work." Franklin started at Action Talents, booking bubblegum music acts for three years. "One night they'd be The Ohio Express," Franklin laughed, "then they'd be The Lemon Pipers, then The 1910 Fruitgum Company. It was always the same group of studio musicians and they didn't draw, but there was a need, a void, and bubblegum was filler, a necessity. Everyone knew what was going on."

Probably not the kids, but artful artifice is all part of the game or, as one music executive yelled, jokingly, stating the image problem all agents face succinctly: "What perverse and twisted youth produced Jeff Franklin? Did he rifle purses at sock hops? Now don't get me wrong, I like him. Some of my best friends are thieves."

"I went to work buying talent for colleges. A year and a half later, I met Herb Spar. He got me into Bill Graham's organization, The Millard Agency. Herb got sick, so the first six months I was an agent. I had to run the company. Our clients were Paul Butterfield, It's A Beautiful Day, Boz Scaggs and Santana. We booked Janis Joplin's last tour which she never did. We worked above the Fillmore, get it? Millard Fillmore. "It was a shoestring operation. I went to work there to be around Graham and Frank Barsalona and learn the business. Bill was a great teacher. I didn't work directly for him which is why I have a good relationship with him."

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"There was one night at The Fillmore when Bill was announcing upcoming shows, and a voice came out of the balcony. Graham got furious and said 'Come down here, shmuck. Come out of the darkness and into the light. I dare you. Meet me in the lobby mister.' There were 65 security guards averaging 260 lbs. in the lobby. There were *some* meetings between Graham and Frank Barsalona, the head of Premier Talent, then and now the biggest agency for hard rock. I will go on record as saying Frank is the single best agent in the business. I'll also go on record as saying ICM is the best agency. Herb and I moved there after The Fillmores closed."

Around the same time, the early '70s, Jeff Franklin began to get involved in hard rock—the field where Barsalona stood unchallenged. "We got involved with The Four Seasons, a lot of black music, Rod Stewart and The Faces and Savoy Brown," Franklin recalled. In 1970, he and two partners bought Action Talents and turned it into a public

company. Later that year, Franklin bought out his partners. They would return again in 1971 and be gone forever by 1973. In the meantime, Franklin was creating a new agency force in the rock biz. It was a rocky road to travel.

"I liked rock as a business. We got involved with big acts like Rod and Three Dog Night, into festivals and the first real rock and roll packaging, and very involved in the record business representing Neal Bogart in the creation of Casablanca Records." Some say it was agents who made the business large and unwieldy and ultimately less artistic and populist. When Graham closed The Fillmore, he pointed to the innovation of packaging; sending acts out together, as a major reason for the move. But Franklin retorts, "Graham closed The Fillmore because he wanted to close it. He owned a record company, a management firm *and an agency!* The business was bound to become high-priced. Rock bands went from using two tin cans and a microphone to sophisticated sound systems which required three forty-foot tractor-trailers to carry."

As American Talent (ATI) began, in competition with Premier Talent and The William Morris Agency, to develop a network of promoters across the country, an understanding of markets and a roster of touring acts, Chip Rachlin was following Herb Spar to the International Famous Agency which soon afterwards merged with Creative Management Associates to form International Creative Management (ICM) (under the aforementioned Marvin Josephson) in 1974, catapulting Spar to head Contemporary Music agent and ICM into the top ranks of rock agencies. Working for Spar, Rachlin went to L.A., "and almost lost it all. There's a bunch of teeny weeny barracudas out there, but they travel in packs. Schemers and scammers. I was having trouble tying my own shoes. All I wanted to do was go to work. At least in New York all you have to watch for are *large* sharks."

In New York, Franklin was struggling to create a powerful agency, and gaining a mild reputation as a shark in the process. ATI went through some bad times, but together with Neal Bogart (whose Casablanca label almost went under after spending too much money promoting a flop Johnny Carson album), Franklin pulled the company out of the muck. "We've been Broadway producers, movie producers and movie agents," he says proudly. "People knock you when you're down, which ATI was after some Broadway. When people said ATI wouldn't make it, I got the energy and the company pulled through. ATI is still here today. We're a concert rock agency first and foremost. I stand up for my acts and I stand up for my promoters. I have the accomplished feeling

that comes with delivering to an artist properly, not seeing an artist get ripped, not seeing promoters get ripped; developing a team.

"Now we represent superstars. Joni Mitchell is the most important female artist in the world today, an intellect that works 24 hours a day, writing plays and television scores, painting, writing and recording her music. She tours, and the kids sit in shock because she reproduces herself on stage. That's one area.

"Kiss have absolutely the best visual stage act in the business. They are the new superstars." And Kiss, like Peter Frampton, Rush, Bob Seger and countless other acts, became stars as a result of live albums that adequately captured their stage shows. "That means they are so good in person something's being missed in the studio," Franklin says. And it's a punch in the face to mere technology. Barnum and Bailey live on.

For Rachlin, a protégé relationship was the push to the top. When Herb Spar died, Rachlin and two other agents were elevated in rank. "It took three of us to fill Herb's shoes. He was that good. For the last six months I've been getting used to my job."

Rachlin works with 13 agents all together. Franklin works with "fullback" Wally Meyerowitz and a small staff of agents. Rachlin represents James Taylor, Jeff Beck, Elvin Bishop, Bachman Turner Overdrive, The Band, The Carpenters, Graham Central Station, Jefferson Starship, The Kinks and many, many more. Franklin's roster in-

cludes Z.Z. Top, Blue Oyster Cult, Joni, Neil Young, and many more. At the time of these interviews, The Eagles were in the process of pogo-sticking between the two, providing an object lesson on the tenuous nature of representation.

"The Eagles were originally with Premier," Franklin recalled, "and I went to Irving Azoff, their manager, when ATI was in trouble and said 'I want Joe Walsh' another of his clients, who now plays guitar with The Eagles.

"Azoff said I had to take it all: Walsh, Dan Fogelberg and The Eagles. All or nothing." Franklin took it all, and though Fogelberg left, The Eagles stayed clients for a year and a half, growing into superstardom. "One day Azoff and his acts left for no reason," Franklin sighed. They went to Rachlin and ICM, where they signed contracts, as all ICM acts do. "The legal status of The Eagles is something I don't care to go into," Rachlin laughed heartily.

Where did they go? Back to ATI and Franklin. But in the meantime, both men had gained insight into the character of Irv "everybody's-talking-'bout-the-new-kid-in-town" Azoff, 1976's supermanager. "Azoff and I were in Tampa with The Eagles and he decided to wreck my hotel room," Franklin said, "and afterwards I stole his telephone. He had me arrested. Played it like he didn't know me." Another time, Rachlin was driving behind The Eagles' manager, when Azoff dropped his electronic gate in front of Chip's car. "I did \$1500

damage to the gate," Rachlin crowed. Rock and Roll hootchie koo.

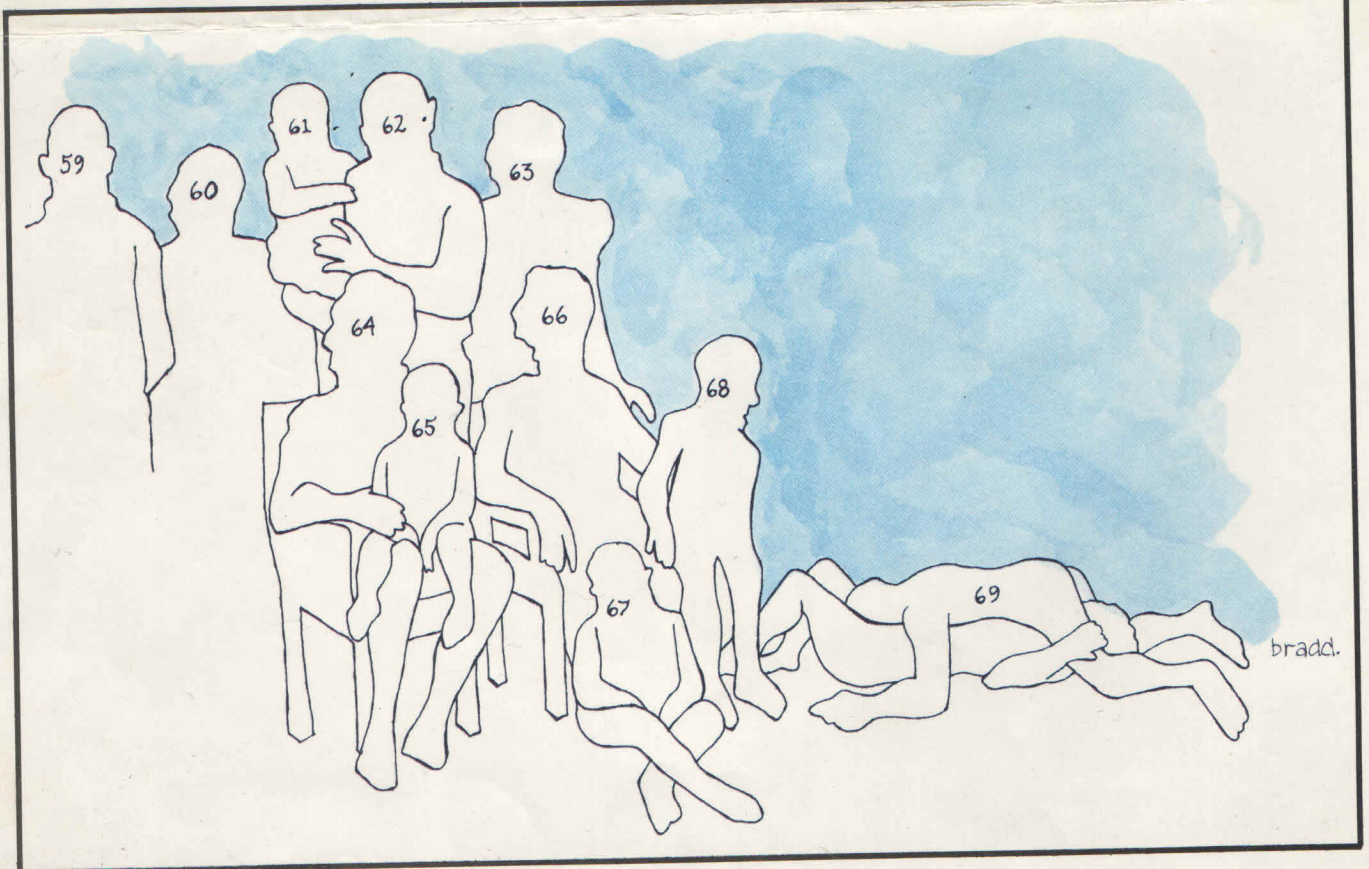
All in a day's work.

Even as they do deals worth hundreds of thousands, plan with their acts, "make sure people who should get through to see the band do and those that shouldn't don't no matter what color backstage pass they are wearing," protect acts from promoters "forced to steal to make a living", and look for groups with strong management, record deals and merchandising ability, agents are often so close to the stars that the glamour touches them, and they like that as much as the wheeling and dealing.

There was the night Rachlin walked into Dan Tanas, a restaurant on the border of Hollywood and Beverly Hills favored by the L.A. music scene, and joined Azoff, Glen Frey and Don Henley of The Eagles, Gordon Lightfoot and others, turning the room into a party, drawing two girls away from the same agent who'd sold Chip his Indiana festival fiasco. "I considered it my moral obligation to shoot the wind from his sails. He ended up in the kitchen with his nose in the oven trying to look burnt out."

Or the day Franklin arrived in Tokyo with Neil Young, and Young signed autographs as his own equipment man while Jeff hancocked "Taj Mahal", or the nights of "pie-throwing with Joe Walsh, room-wrecking with Ron Wood, looping a Lear Jet flying from Clemson, South Carolina to Lexington, Kentucky

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on a dare from Rod Stewart. Anything crazy that could happen has happened," Franklin smiled like a canary-fed cat, "or will."

Rachlin recalls the night The Beach Boys played London's Crystal Palace. During a three-hour technical delay and rainstorm, the crowd held out, occasionally amused by the likes of Keith Moon capsizing a motorboat in the pond in front of the stage. "After three hours, The Beach Boys finally came on and the sun came out. Melanie came out and it started to rain again. Elton John played too, and one of The Beach Boys asked me 'Who's the little faggot in the green suit?'"

Sometimes a decision by an artist will precipitate a crisis for the agent, but to Franklin, it's worth it, especially for acts like Mitchell and Young. "She runs things the way she feels best. If you are a solo artist like Joni Mitchell and you're not comfortable about what is going on around you, musically, then you can't perform properly. An uncomfortable woman at the focal point of an 18,000-seat building can't perform properly. Same with Neil. So we put him in a small building. There's more intimacy for his music. They are both geniuses. I was looking for a 24 to 30 age range in the audiences and we got 14 to 40. Neil, Joni, Rod Stewart: they're entities unto themselves, worldwide stars."

"Unfortunately, there are no prerequisites for this job," Jimmy Optner, one of ATI's agents says. "A background in psychology would be appropriate." Now in his third year of agenting, Optner has gained responsibility for several acts, a number of national promoters, and the entire West Coast, a job that keeps him in his office until 9 p.m. every evening. You are only Rookie of the Year once," he says. "You should meet some of the space cadets I have to contend with. I tell them, 'Clean, wash and burn my phone number,' but they don't listen."

Nobody listens except the kids and the agents. Franklin once procured 10,000 lbs. of chicken feathers to drop from the ceiling at a Rod Stewart show. "They never let us drop them, but we had the feathers! And then there was Pocono Raceway, which brings up stories of crawling in the mud and praying."

Praying?

"Yeah, that the act would get onstage, because we had a percentage."

Strange things spook acts. They're like horses that way. They need the right care and feeding, and once again, that's where agents come in. Take the food rider attached to the standard con-

tract for an appearance by America: "A variety pack of Kellogg's cereal, 25 lbs. of clean ice, 50 12 oz. paper cups, 50 12 oz. styrofoam cups, a case of Coke, a dozen 7-Up, 1 gallon milk, 2 gallons red wine, a fifth of Jose Cuervo Gold Tequila, hot water for tea and 38 tea bags, instant coffee, sugar, cream, honey, 2 dozen fresh lemons, assorted cheese, 3 cases Heinekin, 2 cases Diet Pepsi, assorted nuts, 2 corkscrews, 2 can openers, a dozen cloth towels and soap, all canned and bottled refreshments to be chilled prior to the band's arrival."

That's just the *snacks!* The rider specifies a different menu for each day on the road. Saturday's dinner is a good example. Every promoter provides this meal for the band and crew: a 19 oz. broiled steak, baked potato, asparagus, broccoli, dinner rolls, butter, sour cream, Hollandaise sauce, 3 in 1 sauce, A-1 sauce, Worcestershire sauce, ketchup and salad, consisting of fresh lettuce (iceberg or romaine); mushrooms, tomatoes, cheese (sharp cheddar and Monterey Jack), celery and alfalfa sprouts ("For those who like to graze," Rachlin chuckles.), two bottles each of Italian, Thousand Islands and Blue Cheese dressing, a gallon of chocolate milk, a gallon of whole homogenized; cake (caramel butterscotch or chocolate), ice cream (chocolate and rocky road), pie (apple or peach cobbler). And that's just *Saturday!*

Back downtown, the agents are toiling, booking dates, extorting support from record companies, holding artists' hands, looking for a fill-in date between Sheboygan and Sioux Falls, so the guitarist won't flip out in the Holiday Inn. For agents, like rock stars, the road goes on forever. ●