

# WHO IS FREDDIE GERSHON?

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Freddie Gershon began his career as an entertainment attorney armed with eight years of serious music study at The Juilliard School and The Art Student League plus integrity, respect for artists and sensitivity to cultural change. He was a magnet for aspiring talent and attracted and represented many who became prominent artists in the music field as well as inventive, creative talents in the film and theatre worlds.

Ultimately, Freddie became a film and theatre producer, a part owner and COO of a history making, highly successful entertainment company, an early proponent in protecting intellectual property and an active participant in some of the defining moments of contemporary pop culture and successes on the stage, screen and in music.

As an author, lecturer and music industry pioneer from the 1960s to today armed with a vast experience in media and communications, Freddie has utilized different perspectives and has an overview of the sociological/cultural shifts and climate in entertainment and communications. He understands “content” versus delivery of that “content” and has a reputation for being able to keep his finger on the pulse of change and to act accordingly. Hollywood mogul Lew Wasserman called him a *future scenarist*.

After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1964, Freddie began practicing at a music/theatrical law firm. “Freddie-the-Lawyer” was a young practitioner in New York for such emerging talents as film director Michael Ritchie (“Downhill Racer” and “The Candidate”), Ron Field (choreographer/director of “Cabaret,” “Zorba” and “Applause”), playwright Tom Eyen (“Dreamgirls”), composers Neil Sedaka, Marvin Hamlisch, Carole Bayer Sager, Lesley Gore and Shel Silverstein, and performing artists including Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Dr. Hook, Orleans, Jack Bruce, Phil Ochs, Chicago, Peter Allen and Bette Midler. He was also counsel to several theatrical projects including “House of Blue Leaves,” “Lorelei,” “Dirtiest Show In Town,” “Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat,” and “Women Behind Bars.”

In 1971 Freddie became counsel to The Robert Stigwood Group Ltd. on matters in the United States. During this time, The Robert Stigwood Group was establishing itself through its landmark “Superstar” concert tours and thereafter its London and Broadway production of “Jesus Christ Superstar.” They licensed for Americanization two Stigwood-controlled U.K. television properties: “All In The Family” and “Sanford and Son.” RSO subsequently produced a number of films for television during the heyday of the Movies of the Week including “The Entertainer,” with Jack Lemon, “Killer Bees” with Gloria Swanson, “Death Screem” with Raul Julia and the acclaimed series “Beacon Hill” (adapted from “Upstairs Downstairs”).

Robert Stigwood Group moved its focus more to the United States and Freddie became involved in film financing and distribution. His first film was "Tommy," featuring The Who, Eric Clapton, Tina Turner, Jack Nicholson, Ann-Margret and Elton John.

By 1976, Freddie structured and oversaw a reverse takeover of RSO's then publicly-traded parent U.K. Company and became President, Chief Operating Officer and a Partner in The Stigwood Group of Companies worldwide. He choreographed and implemented a tight global structure with facilities in London, Amsterdam, Sydney, Los Angeles and New York. RSO Records recorded The Bee Gees, Andy Gibb, Yvonne Elliman and Eric Clapton, and released film soundtracks including "Fame," "The Empire Strikes Back," "Bugsy Malone," "Saturday Night Fever," "Grease" and "Return of the Jedi."

Freddie oversaw the operations of the RSO Record and Film Divisions, the latter produced "Saturday Night Fever," co-produced "Grease," "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," "The Fan" and several others including a co-production with Rupert Murdoch of director Peter Weir's "Gallipoli," starring Mel Gibson. He and his wife Myrna traveled with the cast and crew to Egypt for this heralded film.

With the production of these films also came RSO's pioneering concept of cross-marketing films with motion picture soundtracks. "Grease" and "Saturday Night Fever" still rank as among the largest-selling soundtracks in motion picture history, selling 50 million double album copies in 1978/and 1979 alone, while also cross-pollinating and marketing the films thus escalating box office revenues through radio air play.

In addition to Records, Music Publishing, Artist Management, Television and Motion Pictures, RSO had a Theatre Division which (in London) produced "Hair," "Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," "Oh! Calcutta!", "Two Gentlemen From Verona," "Pippin," "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "Sweeney Todd". "Evita" was produced in London, New York and Australia.

In 1982, Freddie elected to take a short-lived sabbatical from active business, leaving his then position as Vice Chairman of The Stigwood Group to spend more time teaching, lecturing and writing. In 1983, however, he also arranged the financing for Allan Carr's production of "La Cage Aux Folles" on Broadway and became Carr's business partner in the Broadway and worldwide productions of "La Cage...The Musical."

In the mid 1980's, Gershon escalated his involvement with Columbia Law School and its alumni activities and became a guest speaker on subjects relating to entertainment law, recording, publishing, and the representation of artists and motion picture packaging. In addition to Columbia, he guest lectured at Yale, Cardozo, Pepperdine, New York Law, Pace, The Juilliard School, Columbia University's School of Fine Arts and their Film School, The Fashion Institute of Technology and New York University. He sought to get recognition in law schools for intellectual property rights to be integrated into their curricula.

He also addressed law students on what he perceived as the emerging significance of intellectual property as a separate field of law in the context of digital technologies which were emerging... and which he also believed was under-appreciated by both the academic and business communities in terms of its significance.

Starting as early as the 1970's, Freddie founded and conducted the Practising Law Institute's ongoing legal education seminars in Entertainment Law and helped launch a federally-accredited and funded program to help the African-American community establish economic success through music and records. He also served as an adviser to George Balanchine (involved with a then-pioneering effort to memorialize ballet choreography on videotape) as well as to Lincoln Kirstein and also served as a member of the board of the School of American Ballet.

At the behest of Preston Robert Tisch, he joined the Development Committee for NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and has been on the advisory boards of Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and the Cardozo Entertainment Law Journal and served on the board of ArtsConnection.

Freddie has also been active in Columbia University's Center for Law, Media and the Arts, dedicated to helping individuals and corporations protect intellectual property and to educate and guide them in the commercial applications of their creative product. He remains an active benefactor and patron of the arts, focused particularly on grade schools and school programs which use the arts to enhance the education of students, hone reading skills, extend attention span and build collaboration and socialization skill sets for students in the inner city.

Freddie added best-selling author to his credits in 1986, when his novel, *Sweetie, Baby, Cookie, Honey*, was published by Hearst/Arbor House in hardcover and subsequently in paperback with worldwide sales of five hundred thousand copies in multiple languages.

Freddie and Allan Carr initiated "Goya...A Life In Song." The project was commissioned as a concept album for Placido Domingo, based on the legendary Spanish artist, Francisco Goya. The theme, "Till I Loved You," was recorded by Barbra Streisand, Gloria Estefan, Dionne Warwick and others and was successful throughout the world. Dionne Warwick sang in English with Domingo and he recorded it in Spanish ("Haste Amarte") with Gloria Estefan and with Seiko Matsuda for the Japanese markets and Simone for the Portuguese language markets.

After seven years of sabbatical in the late '80s, Freddie acquired and became Chairman and CEO of Music Theatre International (MTI), one of the largest, oldest licensing companies of dramatic stage rights to theatre musicals in the world which represents the dramatic performing rights to such classics as "West Side Story," "Fiddler on the Roof," "Meredith Willson's The Music Man," "Guys & Dolls," "Annie," "Les Miserables", all of the works of composer/lyricist Frank Loesser (its founder in 1952) as well as over 400 other titles, including a large part of the Stephen Sondheim oeuvres.

Each year, MTI licenses more than 60,000\* separate productions in the United States of America. It also licenses its titles in 68 other countries. MTI represents the rights to "Avenue Q,"

“Rent,” “Urinetown,” “Spring Awakening,” “Hairspray,” “Mary Poppins,” “Miss Saigon,” “The Wedding Singer,” “Legally Blonde,” “Fame,” “Godspell,” “Shrek,” “Pippin” and all the musicals written by Stephen Sondheim as composer/lyricist... (viz.: “Company,” “A Little Night Music” and “Sweeney Todd” among others) and the ‘50’s classics “Damn Yankees,” “Pajama Game” and “Kismet.” \*MTI’s catalogue of 400 musical titles also contains special versions including Broadway Junior musicals, (age appropriate and 60 minutes in length) and those characterized as RECREATIONAL THEATRE for Seniors and special needs individuals with handicaps, providing key changes, special rehearsal devices, and utilizing musical theater for both social and educational purposes allowing it to serve as a therapeutic tool.

May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012, marked the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Music Theatre International, which New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg officially proclaimed “Music Theatre International Day.”

Cameron Mackintosh became Freddie’s partner in MTI in the early 1990’s. Sir Cameron became the sole shareholder of MTI in 2018 and now serves as Co-chairman, with Freddie. Drew Cohen is President and CEO and is responsible for global activities in the Pacific Rim, Australasia and Europe with close to 100 employees.

MTI represents the so-called “grand rights” in musicals. Gershon decided, however, to venture into the area of building an entity whose purpose was to value composers and publishers rights in a different fashion, using BDS (similar to digital voice recognition techniques) so that 9 million hours of air play in radio could be monitored representing “small performing rights.” In the fall of 1992, he became Co-chairman of and a principal of SESAC, a privately held small performing rights organization representing music publishers and songwriters to license and police their music for performance use in broadcast and non-broadcast exploitation in the United States of America. SESAC redefined the value of music and was a boutique licensing and collection facility for Neil Diamond, Bob Dylan and great television series such as Seinfeld. SESAC was sold to a division of Stephen Schwarzman’s Blackstone Group in 2017.

In 1994, Gershon conceived MTI’s Broadway KIDS/Broadway JR. introducing musical theatre in 30 and 60-minute versions of Broadway works to elementary and middle schools adapted for performance by students (author approved). These “Juniors” are re-thought with musical keys designed for age appropriate vocal range and materials abbreviated with cross-curricula guides to tie the musicals into their academic subjects and into the entire school community.

Since 1994, over 165,000 separate productions have taken place in America, involving 5,000,000 children of shows such as: “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” “Guys and Dolls,” “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Into the Woods,” “School House Rock,” “Once on this Island,” “Bugsy Malone,” “Meredith Willson’s The Music Man,” “Godspell,” “Annie” and others.

In 2012 Freddie received a Tony Honor for creating the Broadway Junior Collection. (Tony Honors are given annually for theatre accomplishments not eligible in established Tony Award categories.)

MTI is the exclusive worldwide secondary rights representative of the Disney Theatrical Productions for titles which have been performed on Broadway (“Beauty and the Beast,” “AIDA” and others). In addition, Disney Theatrical Productions and MTI have collaborated pursuant to a joint venture to build a new collection of young people’s musicals based on Disney titles which were originally cinematic experiences. As a result, MTI licenses: “The Jungle Book,” “101 Dalmatians,” “Cinderella,” “Beauty and the Beast JR.,” “High School Musical,” “Aladdin,” “Alice in Wonderland” and “Aristocrats,” among others, and continues to introduce new titles into the school markets serving grade schools in the United States as well as in the U.K. and Australia.

Culminating a life of business successes and legends, Freddie and his wife Myrna have expanded their activities as they embrace a philosophy of helping younger generations and more recently older generations with educational and cultural programs they are creating and sometimes funding. They are devising, through experiential learning and mentorships, and strategic alliances, inventive and engaging programs designed to provide others with the experiences and tools to better society through the arts.

Among the new and recent non-profit programs they are giving to others are:

— **THE FREDDIE G FELLOWS** are a group of eight teachers selected each year at the Broadway JR. Festivals. Freddie and Myrna bring the teachers to New York to participate in Master Classes with some of Broadway leading choreographers, directors, producers, actors and designers. Special receptions and dinners, teacher workshops on topics including musical styles, vocal techniques, marketing, “directing” Master Classes, backstage tours are some of the opportunities the honorees experience. Each of the teachers’ schools also receives \$5,000 from Freddie and Myrna to enhance their arts program.

— **THE KENNEDY CENTER/STEPHEN SONDHEIM INSPIRATIONAL TEACHER AWARDS** are \$10,000 annual grants named for Tony Award winning lyricist Stephen Sondheim which are given to “inspirational teachers” by The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The multiple grants are presented on Mr. Sondheim’s birthday, March 22, to teachers from kindergarten through college levels who are nominated through the Kennedy Center Web site. The grants are financed by Freddie and Myrna.

— **THE CORONA YOUTH MUSIC PROJECT** involves 300 local children and their families and teachers as part of a network of people to create social change and development for children with low or no resources. Based on a successful model used all over the world, Corona aspires to transform a Queens neighborhood by teaching music and empowering children to become agents of change. The Gershons underwrote the launch of the “Systema” program, which includes a camp to create a neighborhood children’s choir, while providing a safe, fun place for children to develop discipline, persistence and self-esteem through music, aimed at the children becoming productive valued members of society. The program culminates with the children performing a concert open to the entire community.

— **THE ARTSCONNECTION and THE SPECTRUM SCHOOL P94M** The Spectrum School is a New York City public school for children on the autism spectrum. ArtsConnection is a citywide, not-for-profit, arts-in-education organization. For ten years the musical theatre program has been made possible by ArtsConnection funded by Myrna and Freddie. The program contributes to students' acquisition of social skills, emotional literacy (the ability to identify and label emotions), builds verbal communication skills and highlights the hidden talents among the faculty and staff.

Freddie and Myrna live in New York City and have been married 48 years. And after nine wonder-filled years with Sherpa The Wonderdog, they now live with Sherp's fellow Tibetan buddy...MISTER BUDDY.

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