

# The Man Behind the Boys

Contributed by Administrator  
Wednesday, 28 March 2001

By JIM SLOTEK -- Toronto Sun  
Lou Pearlman is a classic U.S. success story, the simple son of a rich aviation family, who saw an opportunity and exploited it.

He is, in short, the guy who created The Backstreet Boys and NSYNC in a blimp hanger in Orlando, Fla., and watched his bright ideas generate more than \$2 billion in sales.

Pearlman is a keynote speaker Friday at Canadian Music Week at the Harbour Castle.

"I just always wanted to be in the music business and the aviation business too," says Pearlman on the phone from Orlando. "When I was in a band in the late '70s, we called it Flyer."

It was a fateful booking in 1991 when a band called New Kids On The Block chartered a jet from his family's Queens, N.Y.-based firm. Curious how kids could afford a plane, he was told NKOTB grossed a billion dollars in records and merchandise.

Inspired, he set about becoming the man-who-created-boybands. He canvassed Smokey Robinson for tips about how the old Motown grooming system worked. He learned about harmony from his cousin Art Garfunkel.

The result was a production company, Transcontinental Records. "The idea was to create our own bootcamp, a finishing school with PR training, choreography, vocal lessons."

Sadly, the one blemish in this little Damon Runyon story is that when his boys hit platinum, lawyers got into the act. The Backstreet Boys sued over their contract, which saw him collecting as both producer and manager. And NSYNC sued for the right to switch record labels over Pearlman's objections.

"I was the only one believing in the project, so I stepped up to the plate and put my money where my mouth is," Pearlman says of his multi-million dollar investment. "Next thing you know problems happen. Why? 'Cause there's always that relative that's an attorney who takes a look at this thing and says 'Hey, he's getting paid from both ends! That's double dipping!' And I said, 'Why didn't you say that when I put up the money?'"

As he tells it, early on, he hired Johnny Wright (who's still NSYNC's manager) to handle both bands and avoid a conflict of interest. Wright, however, couldn't get financing to cover his end. "The banks laughed at him, so he came to me and asked if I'd mind funding the management too."

It's all water under the bridge, in any case. Both suits have been settled, and Pearlman continues to get a cut of all Backstreet and NSYNC records. "And that will be forever," he says.

In the meantime, Pearlman's boyband factory is pumping like the heart of a 14-year-old girl who's been kissed by NSYNC's Justin. What began in a hangar now happens in a new recording/producing facility on the outskirts of Orlando.

And wherever fashion and trends take the music business, he's got acts ready to go there (He predicts the death of R&B-based dance-boybands in favour of pop-rock, if not harder stuff. Another big trend? Bands playing their own instruments).

There's Marshall Dyllon, the country boyband he co-produces with Kenny Rogers. There's O-Town, the band that came from his hit TV series Making The Band, and LFO (who had the hit Summer Girls). "We have C-Note, a Latino group, and Lugo, a solo Latino artist who's 15. We have Phoenix Stone, who used to be a Backstreet Boy. We've got a hard rock guy named Brizz. We also have Innosense, our girls group. Originally, the youngest member of Innosense was Britney Spears."

He's also handling the careers of some old guys, including Rogers, The Monkees and KC & The Sunshine Band.

And this year, Pearlman's Transcontinental empire expands into the movies with Long Shot, a teen comedy with cameos from Britney Spears, Lance from NSYNC, KC and Kenny Rogers.

"I always go with the flow. I study the market, I'm out there, I meet with the fans. And based upon what I hear and see, I formulate around that."