

## Music Manager More Interested in Boys Than Bands

Contributed by Lou Pearlman Writer  
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Take 5 with manager Lou Pearlman at an autograph session at Universal Studios in Los Angeles in 1999. Some of the band's members, along with other boy band members managed by Pearlman, now accuse the imprisoned impresario of exposing himself to them and showing them pornography. (Orlando Sentinel/ MCT/ Landov)

By RUSSELL GOLDMAN  
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Awaiting trial on bank fraud charges and accused of scamming thousands of senior citizens out of millions of dollars, Lou Pearlman, the pop-music impresario who founded the Backstreet Boys, now faces the prospect of life in a big house very different from the 15,000-square-foot mansion he once occupied outside Orlando, Fla.

Just what took place in that house -- complete with movie theater, video games, pool table, swimming pool and a planned bowling alley -- has become the focus of a series of very different allegations by young men who claim Pearlman acted inappropriately, molested them or sought to exchange sex for help with their careers.

In the November issue of Vanity Fair, Pearlman, for the first time publicly, is described by several former singers, aspiring singers and their parents as a lecher, who used the same deceptive charms to cop cheap feels off teenage boys as he did to allegedly bilk 1,400 investors out of more than \$300 million.

Pearlman has since denied the allegations from prison.

In the late '90s, just as the Backstreet Boys and 'NSync, Pearlman's biggest boy bands, hit it big in the United States, Pearlman was grooming a stable of youngsters to take their place. After auditioning, these kids, some as young as 13, were relocated to Orlando where they would regularly rehearse and spend their free time at Pearlman's home.

Another group of young men regularly at the house were a staff of personal assistants, some of whom told Vanity Fair they were promised jobs in bands in exchange for providing sexual favors to Pearlman.

While some boys and young men heard only rumors, others told Vanity Fair and ABCNews.com that Pearlman exposed himself to them, showed them pornography, took them to strip clubs, gave them sensual massages and openly propositioned them. They also said they saw other young people leaving Pearlman's bedroom late at night.

"Some guys joked about it. I remember [one singer] asking me, 'Have you let Lou b\*\*\* you yet?'" Steve Mooney told Vanity Fair. In his early 20s Mooney worked as Pearlman's personal assistant and lived in his home for two years in the hopes that he would be put into one of Pearlman's bands.

"I'll never forget this as long as I live," Mooney told the magazine one evening in 2000, when the members of the group O-Town were being selected. "He leaned back in his chair, in his white, terry-cloth robe and white underwear and spread his legs. And then he said, and these were his exact words, 'You're a smart boy. Figure it out.'"

While Mooney and some of the older band members accuse Pearlman of outwardly looking for sexual favors in lieu of advancing their careers, the younger boys remember Pearlman more as a "sleazy uncle."

Lou's house was a fun place to hang out," Tim Christofore, 24, told ABCNEWS.com. "There was a pool table and slot machines." Christofore moved to Florida from Minnesota at 13 as part of the band Take 5. Christofore recalls two incidents in which Pearlman exposed himself in front of him.

"There was one time where he answered the door naked," he said.

Another time Christofore and band mate Jeff "Clay" Goodell, then also 13, had fallen asleep at Pearlman's house. They woke up to Pearlman jumping into bed with them.

"He jumped into the bed in his towel," said Goodell, now 23 and a senior in college. "He rolled all over us and the towel fell off."

Goodell said that when he was 13 or 14, Pearlman took him and his brother Ryan, then 17 and also a member of Take 5, to a strip club.

"It was one of those days where we had gone through our normal routine and ended up hanging out together at Lou's," he said. "The strip club came up and we ended up going ? That was weird, but it wasn't happening all the time. My mom had a sense that things shouldn't be like this, 13-year-olds shouldn't be going out with adults and hanging out until midnight."

At the time, one parent of each of the five boys lived in a house with the boys on a rotating basis. Goodell said his mother didn't know about the strip club incident at the time.

On another night, a brother of one of the boys was injured in a car accident. His mother left for the hospital in Miami and dropped off the boys for the evening with Pearlman. Pearlman screened a Star Wars film, but the movie was interrupted with a pornographic video.

"Because we were minors there was always at least one parent at the house. That night was the only night I ever stayed at Lou's house," said Ryan Goodell, 27 and now a second year law school student in Los Angeles.

"We were watching Star Wars and all of a sudden a porno came on. It was literally 10 seconds and then it got turned off. We were all teenagers snickering and he made some excuse," Ryan said.

"Who knows what he was thinking. Was he trying to be the cool 'Big Poppa' uncle?" asked Ryan referring to the nickname Pearlman used for himself. "Or was he trying to get a sense of how we would react?"

Ryan said that despite the incident with the pornography and the strip club, he is skeptical of some of the stories he has heard.

"Maybe it's just that Pearlman was only willing to take that extra step with guys like Mooney who were older than 18, which is why I never saw it. But some of these guys always wanted to be in bands and never got into them and you have to question their motives ? If the things they say they saw happen are true, and they didn't say anything at the time, that is just wrong."

Many of the boys interviewed by Vanity Fair and ABC News said that Pearlman would often offer them massages that he said would "balance their aura" or "help build bigger muscles."

"The aura massage thing," said Christofore. "He always said he had a way to feel up on your arm or bicep so that when you curled your arm it would make your muscles look bigger. He was a weird, touchy guy and would sometimes rub kids' abs."

The boys from Take 5 resent Pearlman for other reasons, however. They said that when the Backstreet Boys and 'NSync, backed by their record companies, sued Pearlman to get out of their contracts and collect moneys owed them, Pearlman switched tactics in promoting Take 5. In an effort to keep the bands making him money, but not enough that the labels would support them in a protracted legal battle, the members said Pearlman never let them get too big and barely paid them after five years of extensive touring in Europe and Asia. They sued Pearlman before breaking up the band and leaving Florida.

None of the members of the Backstreet Boys or 'NSync would speak to ABC News or Vanity Fair.

Jane Carter, mother of Backstreet's Nick Carter and his brother Aaron, a solo act managed by Pearlman, however, spoke to the magazine.

"Certain things happened, and it almost destroyed our family. I tried to warn everyone. I tried to warn other mothers," she told Vanity Fair. "I tried to expose him for what he was years ago ? I hope you expose him, because the financial [scandal] is the least of his injustices."

That financial scandal landed Pearlman in prison in June. On the lam since the beginning of the year, Pearlman is accused of running a \$300 million pyramid investing scheme. His victims allegedly include retirees who entrusted their life savings to the smooth-talking Pearlman. He was picked up by federal agents on the resort island of Bali, Indonesia.

"Our case has nothing to do with those other allegations," Fletcher Peacock, Pearlman's court-appointed attorney, told ABC News. "Mr. Pearlman obviously denies all of the allegations."

Following the Vanity Fair article, Pearlman denied the allegations to Radaronline's Tyler Gray.

"I think Vanity un-Fair sought out anyone who had a lawsuit or grudge with me or my company to help make disparaging

remarks. They never sought any proof or checked for accuracy," Pearlman told Gray as reported in the New York Post.

"I've never owned a towel that could wrap all around me anyway," he said from his Orange County jail cell.

Pearlman is expected to be tried in March.

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