

George Michael

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I had many encounters with George Michael. A very talented but troubled young man.

I had gone right off the music industry, virtually folded my UK Records label, which had been perhaps the most successful British independent label of the 70s, but my friend Dick Asher persuaded me that I should use my knowledge of music part time as well as doing my new chosen career, TV, writing and so on. In the early 80s I was consultant to CBS Records - essentially to the global boss Dick Asher and his boss Walter Yetnikoff. The man who ran Columbia, one of the labels, was Al Teller. My main function was to convey enthusiasm for great music between countries and even between executives. I travelled a lot, doing TV shows like Top of the Pops and Entertainment USA, so was in a great position to spread the word about talent.

I remember one of my pieces of advice which Dick said accounted for the huge success of CBS that decade was to prioritise a new album by a faded young ex star from years earlier who nobody at the company believed in and all felt was a has been. Michael Jackson.

Because of my insistence Dick over ruled all his executives and ordered them to work on the album.

One day in the early 80s, sitting over coffee with Al, he played me a new demo by a band he had just signed on a label deal called The Beastie Boys. That is a smash, I said. It was called Fight For Your Right To Party. We had been discussing Wham, who I was never keen on musically. Al was not a fan either. They would probably never break in America, he said. Tell you what, I replied. Everyone in London says George Michael is really talented. If I get them to break The Beastie Boys in Britain, will you break George in the USA? Deal, said Al. I knew the UK guys would be delighted but also knew that anybody could break Fight For Your Right - and I was proved correct. Al kept his word and made George and Wham a priority and they broke America, slightly later than the UK (1983 or 1984?) but still huge.

I met George a few times around then; he was with a little company called Innervision and released through Epic where my friend Andy Stephens plugged his tracks (and later managed him).

I was also well aware that George, like myself, was a criminal. It was illegal in the 70s and 80s to be homosexual if your chosen partner was under 21. But quite a few music and entertainment people were gay and we all chose to ignore that stupid law. Why should two people who fell in love but were under 21 be sent to prison? Anybody not believing this must watch the film Victim.

I assume that now George is dead the False Allegations Industry will kick in and hundreds will claim he abused them. I doubt it true but that is the way the law is these days.

My most interesting encounter with George was when I was producing The Brits in 1991. George was booked to appear but cancelled at the very last moment, pretending illness, throwing the rehearsals into chaos as his performance had been a key element of the show. I booked, instead, EMF and their current hit Unbelievable (they were great). George suddenly decided he was well enough to come and collect one of his silly awards in person. As we stood side stage (my brother will vouch this - he was with us) I tore George to shreds. I said to him that this kind of behaviour was unforgivable. Fame did it. Thoughtless - for all those workers who had to scrap sets, sound checks and other elements. Thoughtless for fans. Thoughtless for everyone except his selfish self. How he had changed from the nice kid I had met ten years before. Andy (my brother) could not believe how appalling I was to him. He then had to go on stage, smiling, and accept his award. I then wrote him an even stiffer letter and sent it to both his label and management (not just the bosses - everyone) ripping him to pieces for being a selfish diva. He was furious and complained vehemently. I had berated the label and manager for not having sufficient control over their artistes (George had been officially and legally contracted to appear).

We met a few times after that - and got on fine (the incident was never again referred to by either of us). I suspect he knew I had been right. I was never a normal producer - I had provoked ire from Sinéad O'Connor a year earlier when she had decided not to pick up her award in person and I had played, instead, a long video of one of her rival nominees Whitney Houston.

Like myself, George had later problems with his sexuality, like myself provoked by police incitement and, like myself, is now technically a criminal although media appear to have ignored his convictions. He was also very talented but his

demons, especially drugs, destroyed him.

But most of all I blame society which loves building people up and then dragging them down.

Why is George dead at 53?

Because of police and media, I reckon.

Join the club.