"WAS BILL GRAHAM 'NICE'?"

That's the question people would often ask when they learned that I worked for Bill.

Well, it's complicated.

I started working at Bill Graham Presents in January of 1978 as a production assistant. My desk was in the middle of the concert booking department, not far from Bill's office. The walls used to rattle when Bill would be screaming at someone (usually an agent) on the telephone. That's a sound to which any employee at BGP quickly become accustomed.

By that fall, Bill's secretary had quit, and I was asked to move into her position. I'll never forget the first time Bill screamed into the telephone when I was sitting there, right outside the glass window that opened between Bill's office and my desk. He had been on a minutes-long tirade, and then literally THREW the phone down onto its cradle. Without a beat, he looked up at me and winked. I don't think Bill's blood pressure had risen one iota, although I suspect the person on the other end of the line needed a cold drink when it was over.

Bottom line: Bill was a great actor. He had moves. He knew how to intimidate. He knew just how to slowly begin to remove his wristwatch in such a way that the person he was staring down would become very afraid of this madman and back off. He'd puff up his chest and bound through a crowded aisle of rabid music fans in such a way that no one would dare interrupt him. He loved old movies, especially with John Garfield, James Cagney and the like, and I believe he learned many of his moves from actors of that genre.

After surviving a harrowing childhood, Bill wrapped his arms around life and embraced it for all he was worth. He had boundless energy, tremendous intellectual curiosity, and an unlimited imagination. He was aware of what was going on in the world – he read the newspapers daily, and magazines like *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report* every week. An avid sports fan, Bill could discuss game strategy for hours on end. He was shrewd and had an uncanny way of sizing people up. Not a lot got past him in the course of a day.

Bill had a great deal of compassion for those who suffered or struggled, especially children. He believed that all children were entitled to a good education and exposure to the arts. Thus, when he learned in the mid-70's that San Francisco's schools were going to cut extracurricular activities due to fiscal cutbacks, he responded by organizing an all-day benefit at Kezar Stadium entitled "S.N.A.C.K. Sunday" (Students Need Activities, Culture and Kicks), which raised funds for after-school events. A decade later, when Bill became horrified at the crack drug epidemic in New York City, he initiated and presented "Crack-Down," a two-day event that raised funds for the New York City Board of Education for the development of substance abuse program materials.

Those were only two among the countless benefit events that Bill produced over the years, ranging from causes such as the *United Farm Workers* and *Lighthouse For the Blind*, to extravaganzas like *Live Aid* and entire tours on behalf of *Amnesty International*.

But Bill liked it most when he actually SAW the results of his philanthropic efforts. He spoke of a benefit he produced early on in his career for a local school that needed a bus. Later, when he saw that bus on the street, he knew that he had accomplished something. Many times, he came to the aid of his employees when someone needed help. His door was always open, and he believed in helping those who were unable to find help through

other resources. When an employee at Bill Graham Presents gave birth to a child with a birth defect, Bill immediately asked, "What can I do to help?" Several years later, he was able to help get that child into a special school, which improved her life immeasurably.

But was Bill nice?

"Nice" is too anemic a word to describe Bill Graham. Bill Graham was passionate.

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