

Frank Barsalona

By Dave Marsh and Jon Landau

When Frank Barsalona began his career as an agent (he'd had a brief career as a yodeler as a teen), rock & roll was, to use his expression, "lower than the rodeo," the absolute bottom rung of showbiz. Because of the contempt in which rock and R&B were held, young artists were hoodwinked with promises of big-time movie, television, or nightclub careers, weaned from the music that had made them famous, and then discarded.

Frank, who represented the Beatles among others at the old GAC agency, began Premier Talent with a small group of artists – Mitch Ryder, the Who, and Herman's Hermits – and a simple premise: He respected the music and the artists who made it. He wouldn't try to create performers suitable for showbiz. (Premier Talent not only never represented its artists for film work; it never opened a Hollywood office.) Instead, Frank was determined to create a version of show business suitable for such performers.

He first labored to stabilize the fly-by-night concert-promoting business itself, identifying the venues and agents where the transformation of rock from entertainment underbelly to an unparalleled world of its own could take place. The result became a truly professional environment in which the music prospered both financially and creatively.

Frank's vision became real for several reasons. The most important was that rock music was coming into its own. Among Frank's early clients were bands like



the Who and the Yardbirds, who played major roles in redefining the music. For bands like these, a fifteen-minute spot in a package show wasn't enough. At the same time, the rock-ballroom circuit was developing, and with it a new breed of promoter closely associated with Premier, such as Bill Graham in San Francisco, Don Law in Boston, Larry Magid in Philadelphia, Aaron Russo in Chicago, Barry Fey in Denver, Alex Cooley in Atlanta, and Steve Wolf and Jim Rismiller in Los Angeles, to name a few. With Frank's endless support and encouragement, these and other excellent promoters created new environments, venues, and working conditions for rock artists, which allowed them to play at their best and be treated with the respect they deserved.

Frank Barsalona uniquely understood how to bring together these performers and promoters, as well as key figures from the record companies, and knit them into a community. There was nothing Frank enjoyed more than sitting after a show at the old Boston Tea Party or the Fillmore East with the artist, manager, promoter, record-company folks, and assorted others, talking about the future. Through it all, he pioneered even more beneficial arrangements for the artists he represented and brought his sense of fairness and ethics to a world that needed them.

Those who drew closer to Premier benefited in other ways. It was a remarkably nurturing environment, partly because Frank himself played such an avuncular mentoring role with artists like Pete Townshend of the Who and Peter Wolf of the J. Geils Band, as well as countless managers, record execs,

► The founder of Premier Talent, Staten Island native Frank Barsalona, taking a break from his very busy schedule, June 1978



