

For Hal Willner

He was born in Philadelphia in April '56
His father was a Holocaust survivor
and ran a delicatessen
Hal always spoke with pride about his dad.

He came to NYC in 1974
to go to NYU

Then began to mingle and inspire
100s upon 100s of musicians and composers

He loved the Creative Chaos
of a brilliant recording project

It's in his sequence of Tribute Albums
and CD projects, and benefits!

He began his 40 year career with
Saturday Night Live in 1980
Hal later said he got offers all the time to write a book
on the inside history of SNL, but turned them down.

He was married to Sheila Rogers
They had one son together

He was a friend of the Fugs
and Tuli Kupferberg too!

Hal did projects with Allen Ginsberg
who helped him defeat the demon of heroin
projects such as the May '96 **Ballad of the Skeletons**
w/ Lenny Kaye producing
They did a basic track and vocal

with Lenny on bass and Marc Ribot on guitar
David Mansfield on guitar

The era of "mailing around the ADAT"
for overdubs had long begun
so they forwarded an ADAT (digital 8-track tape)
to Philip Glass who laid down some piano
Then it was sent to Paul McCartney
who put on a bunch of stuff
including guitar, drums, an organ part & maracas

Then Hal Willner, known for his magic at the console,
mixed it all, and out came a miracle recording!

September 20, 1996 Hal Willner was on hand at the
St. Mark's Church to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Poetry Project.

Then came 1997 and Hal was helping Ginsberg set up his forthcoming
MTV Live Concert

I stayed at Allen's new loft on East 13th in February
I'd taken part in one of Willner's CD projects
to lay down poems of Edgar Allan Poe
(I set to music the sonnet "To Helen" & "The Haunted Palace"
from "The Fall of the House of Usher")

Haaaaaaal (Gregorian-type chant) followed immediately by
rhythmic: "Hal! Hal! Hal! Hal!" continuing, with voice above:

Ah Hal, you were the master of creative chaos
I remember that Diamanda Galas threw Chinese take-out
against the recording studio wall during the Poe sessions
to make a point.

After the sessions I headed for Ginsberg's loft
Hal Willner came over

to talk about the A.G. MTV Special scheduled for July 20
Allen said Bob Dylan had agreed to take part
Plus Philip Glass and Beck,
& he thought McCartney would join

Hal was set to produce it, but Ginsberg passed away in April
& the dream was not to be!!

The Dream was not to be.

Haaaaaaal (Gregorian-type chant) followed immediately by
rhythmic: "Hal! Hal! Hal! Hal!" continuing, with voice above:

Ah Hal, you were the master of creative chaos
but you created over 22 Live Tribute Events, over 11 Tribute Albums,
and 6 Spoken Word Recordings

Tuli Kupferberg suffered a stroke which left him nearly blind.
Tuli struggled to thrive and began a series of YouTube presentations
of song and commentary filmed by his close friend Thelma Blitz.

We were determined to organize a benefit, with Hal Willner, to raise money for Tuli's care.
It was held at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, in January 2010.

I learned that Hal Willner worked closely with an attorney named
Rachel Fox in setting up the benefits & tribute albums he produced

I remember how smoothly Hal & Rachel organized the benefit for Tuli Kupferberg
at St. Ann's Warehouse

Hal & Rachel Fox to the Rescue Hal & Rachel Fox to the Rescue
Hal Hal Hal Rachel Rachel Rachel
to the Rescue Rescue Rescue Rescue!!

Bap Bap Bap Bap
you got commitments from Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Thurston Moore

of Sonic Youth, The Fugs and others
and St. Ann's agreed to put it on!!
Bap Bap Bap Bap

It was a big success, a full audience, with The Fugs, Lou Reed, Laurie Anderson, Sonic Youth,
John Zorn, Philip Glass, Peter Stampfel, Lenny Kaye, Shilpa Ray and Jolie Holland doing
"Coming Down," plus John H. Hall, Gary Lucas, Jeffrey Lewis, The Voluptuous Horror
of Karen Black (singing "Slum Goddess,") and others, for 3 1/2 hours, at St. Ann's Warehouse

and Tuli made \$50,000 to pay for his care, after he was struck
blind by a stroke

Bap Bap Bap Bap!

Ahh, Hal, you were so proud of your dad
and while we were planning the benefit for Tuli Kupferberg
Hal flew down to Florida to visit his elderly father!

Ah Hal, Salt of the Creatrix! Boon of spontaneity!
Taken from us by the virus! So saddening, so maddening!
Haaaaaaal! Hal! Hal! Hal! Hal! Hal!
All hail All hail All hail All hail to Hal
Hal Willner Hal Willner Hal Willner Hal Willner

—Ed Sanders, April 2020

