

## MUSIC

# Sedaka Brings Classics To Westbury

By Iris Wiener

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Neil Sedaka speaks in the same way that he sings – nostalgically, with a melody reminiscent of a time when music was important. During a phone interview he purrs, in this euphonious voice of his, about the craft that he has so beautifully honed, one that has been entrancing people for over four decades. Sedaka's timeless standards have helped change the face of popular music. With countless hit singles, platinum and gold records, he is recognized as one of rock and pop music's legendary pioneers. If you're over the age of 15 you have undoubtedly found yourself humming to the tune of "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," or "Calendar Girl," songs that permeate film, television, and commercials to this day.

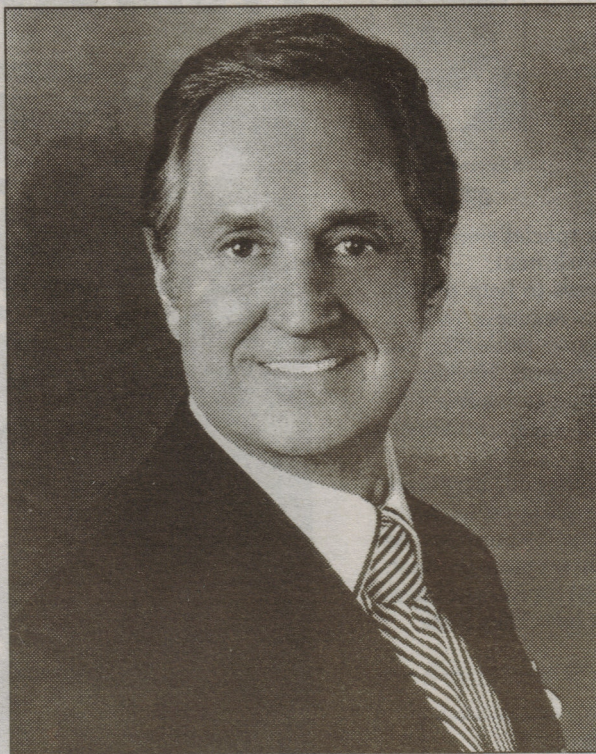
Sedaka first recorded in high school with his doo-wop group, The Tokens. In 1958 his career was catapulted into stardom after Connie Francis recorded his song entitled "Stupid Cupid." Other Sedaka hits include "Solitaire," "Laughter in the Rain," "Love Will Keep Us Together," "Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen," and "Oh! Carol," most, if not all of which, will be featured in Sedaka's performance tonight at North Fork Theatre at Westbury. The versatile author of more than 1,000 songs spoke with The Long Islander about his fruitful career, his current tour, and his latest goal: Broadway!

**In 2004 you came out to North Fork Theatre at Westbury, and now you're returning with special guest comedian Freddie Roman. What is it about Long Island that keeps bringing you back?**

I grew up in Brooklyn, and I find that the audiences are very receptive. They've been following my career for many years, and many of them grew up with my music. I spend a lot of time on the Island, mostly in the Hamptons with friends, so it's like "old home" week.

**How has the music business changed from when you first started performing and recording over 40 years ago?**

Oh my goodness! When I started performing the equipment was very simple. We used to have to record three songs within three hours. Now you have the luxury of going into the studio for many days, and you can do one part at a time, the violins first, the horns the following day, the strings the following day, the voices ... you



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— NEIL SADAKA,

**With such an enormous career behind and ahead of you, are you able to describe some of the highlights that have been the most meaningful?**

I've had so many highlights. I have my own street sign – Sedaka Street in Brooklyn. I've gotten the Songwriter's Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award. I have songs that I wrote many years ago that were hits this year and last year. I had "Solitaire," which Clay Aiken performed, and a very big hit in England called "Amarillo," which shows that a good song is always a good song no matter how old it is. That's very exciting when that happens. And there's the play that's just come out called *Breaking Up Is Hard To Do*, that has all Neil Sedaka songs in it. It's an original musical comedy. We opened in Albany. I saw the opening two weeks ago, and it got

**In 2003 you were a guest judge on *American Idol*. How do you feel about the state of reality television and its effect on music and the performing arts?**

I think there are too many reality shows now. *American Idol* is one of the originals and it still remains one of the best ones. And I think it has brought back good music to young people. People are hearing songs from the 60s, 70s, 80s ... I watch it every week. I'm addicted to it, I even TiVo it when I'm not at home! I was very honored that they asked me to be a celebrity judge that time.

**So tell us the truth, were you up all night voting for Carrie or Bo?**

(Laughing) I think Bo was more versatile, he was more flexible in his styles, but Carrie is a great singer as well. I was a fan of both Bo and Carrie. Both are very different, very American, very musical, great voices.

**Your fans' devotion is unique to that any of other artist's. How do you keep that love and admiration alive?**

I'm a very down-to-earth person. A lot of people say that they feel that they know me through the years, it's like I went to school with them, or I was one of their neighbors. My image is not untouchable, I'm one of them, and I think that makes for my success as well. I'm a family man, I really have never used gimmicks or funny clothes or funny lights, it's just me, a regular person, singing and playing my songs, and the image is very reachable, very approachable.

**Over the years you must have come up with some songs that you loved and some that you hated and wished you could never hear again. What were they?**

I'm very proud, I would never finish a song unless I really loved it. My top two are "Laughter in the Rain," because it was responsible for a big comeback for me, and maybe "Calendar Girl."

**After all these years in the spotlight, what are some things that people would be surprised to find out about you?**

That I can ski, and that I go swimming every day. That I'm a good grandpa ... Maybe that I'm a classical pianist, I stud-



really have the luxury of taking your time. Also, the music has changed quite a bit. When I started it was mostly melodic, happy songs, songs you can sing, songs you remember. But I'm happy to say that I think it's going back to that.

### **Has music lost some of its integrity?**

When I performed in the '50s the music was the most important thing. Today it's packaging, merchandising, you need a couple million dollars behind you. I notice that the music of today is forgettable. We were very serious about our songs. We were more sincere, more spontaneous, more sensitive to the music and lyrics. I think if you wanted to re-record some of those early ones it would be really difficult because we were very spontaneous and it sounded like a live performance. Today they seem a little too pre-conceived and worked on.

...the opening two weeks ago, and it got great reviews. It's very exciting, I waited all my life to get a musical comedy with my songs.

### **Do you have any plans to bring it to Broadway so that your fans on Long Island can enjoy it?**

Yes, we hope that it will. It's a work in progress. We're going to do regional theaters, and hopefully in the near future, when the time is right, we will bring it to Broadway. It's not a jukebox show, which is great for me. It actually sounds like some of these songs were written for the show. Actually there are a few songs nobody has ever really heard, they're buried in old albums of mine, but I'm very proud of them. I call them the hidden treasures. It's a very cute story about the Catskill Mountains. It has nothing to do with my life, but it's very cute.

ied for 12 years at the Juilliard School. Oh, and I hate waiting in traffic, bumper to bumper! That shows that I'm a New Yorker for sure. I hate slow elevators. I have no patience!

### **What can your Long Island fans expect from your concert at North Fork Theatre at Westbury?**

Just me having a good time. I have great pride in my songs, a guy at my age to have this voice is very unusual, it's holding well. It's A to Z. The old hits, some news songs, some classical pieces. If you haven't seen me before, you'll be surprised at the versatility.

*Tickets to Sedaka's performance at North Fork Theatre at Westbury can be purchased on-line at [www.musicfair.com](http://www.musicfair.com), by calling Ticketmaster at 631-888-9000, or by visiting the box office.*