

# Neil Diamond Explains Why He Didn't Want His Music In 'Pulp Fiction' -- At First

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Jason LaVeris/FilmMagic

The Johnny Mercer Award is the highest honour bestowed by the Songwriters Hall of Fame. This year, there would seem no more apt recipient than Neil Diamond, the consummate hit-maker, who at 77 continues to connect generations through his resonant storytelling. Diamond recently announced his retirement from touring after being diagnosed with Parkinson's. But in one of his first interviews since the announcement, he tells *Billboard* he already has a new project in the works at Capitol, and reflects on some of the hits on which his legacy stands.

## **How does it feel to be receiving the SHOF's Johnny Mercer Award at this time in your career?**

I love it, and I love Johnny Mercer and am so happy the award is named after him. And just to be part of the festivities and be there with the other wonderful writers -- it doesn't get any better than that.

## **You've come off a triumphant 50th anniversary tour, and it would seem you've left no stones unturned on the road. Does it feel that way to you?**

I haven't made any sense of getting off the road yet, I'm still getting used to it. It's going to be different for me. I've been doing it for such a long time and it kind of gets into your bones because it's an exciting place to be. But life goes on, and we want to make the most of what time we have. I still have a lot of music in me and I want to express it.

## **What was it about touring that was so magnetic for you?**

It's always been an adventure. A different place, a different part of the world, things you haven't seen to explore. They all come flying by when you're on the road. I think it's a great experience and I've had the best time learning and experiencing, and doing my thing and showing my songs off. I've done it for a long time, and I hope I can still do it but that remains to be seen.

## **Are there things that excite you about not being on the road?**

Yes, I'm here in Los Angeles, and I'm writing songs. That's what I do, and that's what my focus is now.

**And speaking of songs, let's talk about some of them. I think we have to start with 'Sweet Caroline.'**

That song was like a lucky gift that I got. It came to me when I needed it desperately. I was about to go hungry, I had a new baby, all kinds of things that had counted on this record, which I had just an hour to do it. In those days you used to record three songs in three hours and I only had two songs and it was the day before the session, so I knew I had to write one more song -- that's very important to know. It was in Memphis, Tenn., I was in a hotel and that beautiful girl came to me. It saved me, it saved my career -- and I love 'Caroline.'

**Were you surprised at the success of the song then, and are you still surprised at the joy it brings so many people of all ages?**

You never know with a song. I never knew with "Sweet Caroline" it would become such a beloved song. To me, I was just writing a song because I had a chance to do it. But so much of creativity is filling in empty spaces. I had an empty space on my dance card and "Sweet Caroline" came up, and saved me from a fate worse than death, which would've been working as a civilian somewhere.

**'Girl You'll Be A Woman Soon' is an interesting one. A hit for you in 1967, and then it took on a whole different dimension with the Urge Overkill cover in *Pulp Fiction* nearly 30 years later.**

At the point on my career I wrote it, my audience was teenage girls, and the song came out of that context. I wrote it while I was on a Dick Clark *Where the Action Is* tour; the audience sparked it. And then when Quentin Tarantino a few years later came around and wanted to use it for *Pulp Fiction*, I turned him down because I had a promise to myself I wouldn't use any of my songs for drug references or even smoking cigarettes.

**So you knew what the scene was all about?**

I got a script, and I read it and I thought it was wonderful, but it didn't fit into the guidelines I had set for myself. And then I spoke to a good friend about it, my friend Dave Rosner, who was my publisher, and he explained Quentin Tarantino was a bonafide star of the future and I should take it as a serious picture and so OK, I gave it a chance and it was a wonderful recording of that song by Urge Overkill and that scene was a standout in the movie and the song fit right in.

**The autobiographical 'Brooklyn Roads' is a special song for you.**

'Brooklyn Roads' is a marker in my career. There's before 'Brooklyn Roads' and after 'Brooklyn Roads.' Before 'Brooklyn Roads' I was the guy who was trying to reinvent 'Cherry, Cherry' again and again, and not doing a very good job. And after 'Brooklyn Roads' my whole story, my whole life became a place that I could write about in my songs and my life became the songs. So 'Brooklyn Roads' is a major turning point for me.

**Throughout your career, but particularly with your recent announcement, there's been such an outpouring of love from your fans. Have you been able to wrap your arms around it?**

Well, I'm a little numb from it. I appreciate all of the attention and all of the love being pointed in my direction. I've never really experienced anything like that. A standing ovation is not in the same category. I love the fact that I can still do it, that I still love doing it, and I want to keep on doing it for as long as I can.