

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER:

The love story behind Neil Diamond's beautiful noise

The woman who knows Neil Diamond best sits down with *The Weekly*.
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At a glance...

- Neil Diamond's music has been part of Australian life for generations, with *Hot August Night* becoming one of the country's biggest-selling albums.
- His wife Katie McNeil Diamond shared the story of their unlikely love, which began when she was hired to work with Neil and slowly blossomed into a marriage.
- Now, Neil's extraordinary life is being celebrated on stage in *A Beautiful Noise*, a musical that explores his career, relationships, mental health and enduring legacy.

It's a Saturday night, any time in the mid-to-late 1970s. Seven kids from two families, bathed and fed and in their PJs, playing Monopoly on the floor. Mum pours herself a Campari soda. Her best friend, our Aunty Jude, has an après-dinner Cointreau on the rocks. They crank up the stereo: Neil Diamond's 'Hot August Night', recorded live at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles in 1972. Dat-dat-de-dum. Dee-dee-de-dum-dah. Dee-dee-de-duum. We're all on our feet.

He gets to the line about the tree people and we kids have heard this album so many times, we shout it in unison – "Tree people, God bless you, I'm singing for you too."

The best disco in town is in our suburban lounge room – and millions like ours all around the country. There was a period, in the 1970s, when it was estimated that one in three Aussie households owned a copy of ‘Hot August Night’. It spent 29 consecutive weeks at number one.

Neil Diamond was the soundtrack to a generation of Aussie childhoods. And now ***A Beautiful Noise***, the musical that is the soundtrack to his own life, is making its way to Australia. One of the highlights of that life has been meeting his whip-smart, generous, warm-hearted third wife, Katie McNeil Diamond, who 20 years later, is happy to recount their inauspicious first meeting.

She was working in Los Angeles as an artists’ manager with Irving Azoff’s management company, one of the hottest in the business. Neil had just come onto their books and – tired of babysitting bands like Hanson and staying up all night with Guns N’ Roses – “and because I’d grown up with Neil’s music”, Katie asked if she could work with him. Irving suggested she put together a marketing plan for his next album (as executive producer for his 2009 concert documentary and live video release, *Neil Diamond: Hot August Night/NYC*), and pitch it to him herself.



“So I get a call from Irving’s office,” chuckles Katie, “and they say, ‘Your meeting with Neil is this afternoon, and there’s a car coming to pick you up.’”

The car took her to a private jet, parked on a runway. “There was one person on that plane and it was Neil. He was reading the paper, he wasn’t expecting me.” And he had zero interest in hearing her marketing plan.

“Irving threw me to the wolves to see how I would react,” explains Katie, and she reacted tenaciously. When she finally pitched it, Neil liked her plan, it gave him the first UK and US number one album of his career, and Neil and Katie have been working together ever since.

It wasn't love at first sight, however.

“We kind of fell in love slowly,” Neil once told Chrissie Iley for the *UK Telegraph*. “She wove her way into my heart and I think she's a great person... I realised that I was in love with her after a year or so. I still think she's a great person, I'm still in love with her.”

Katie (who had vowed never to date the talent) agrees. “It was very slowly. We were working together closely, spending a lot of time together. I went on tour, so we travelled around the world together. And I think there was just this mutual respect and admiration we had for each other. I loved spending time with him. He made me feel like the most intelligent and funny and wonderful person in the room whenever I was with him, and I think it was the other way around as well. So we grew into this mutual adoration. After a while, we just knew.”

It was almost five years later that Neil's mother, Rose, dropped a hint about wedding bells.

“She instigated it,” says Katie. “She adored me and I adored her. And we were visiting her one day, and she was one of these people who, if there was something on her mind, she'd be out with it. So she goes, ‘When are you guys getting married?’ And we hadn't even discussed it at that point, ever. I remember, he looked at me and he said, ‘Oh, I don't know if she would ever marry me.’ And I looked at him and I said, ‘I would marry you.’ Not long after that, we were engaged.”

They were married in April 2012. Katie was 42, Neil was 71, and Katie became stepmother to Neil's four children, Marjorie and Elyn (from his marriage to Jayne Posner) and Jesse and Micah (from his marriage to Marcia Murphey). There followed six years spent travelling, touring – they visited Australia and much of the rest of the world – and getting to know each other's families.

“I have the best woman in the world,” Neil told *The Telegraph* at the time, “and I'm taking good care of our relationship. I'm making sure it's going to last forever.”

Then, in 2018, Neil announced he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and would retire from touring.

“It is with great reluctance and disappointment that I announce my retirement from concert touring,” he said. “I have been so honoured to bring my shows to the public for the past 50 years.”



Parkinson's disease is an incurable neurological disorder. Symptoms include tremors, stiffness and difficulty balancing, walking and coordinating movement.

"Parkinson's is a really challenging disease," says Katie. "It affects all people differently and it's a neurodegenerative disease, so it gets worse over time. But fortunately, it's moving really slow for Neil. So while he has a lot of challenges – everything is more difficult – he's in good spirits, and he works hard at his wellbeing."



Along with physical therapy, Katie says, "he listens to a lot of his music, we sing karaoke in the house, and we have a lot of visitors. We have our families and the grandkids constantly coming out and there's just a lot of activity to keep him occupied and happy. And we live in such a beautiful place."

The Diamonds live on a ranch in the Colorado high country with a menagerie of rescue animals, which Katie cares for and which currently includes six horses, three donkeys and four dogs.

Neil told Anthony Mason at CBS, back in 2023, that "somehow, a calm has moved in... and things have gotten very quiet, as quiet as this recording studio. And I like it. I find that I like myself better. I'm easier on people. I'm easier on myself. And the beat goes on, and it will go on long after I'm gone."

It was after Neil was diagnosed with Parkinson's that the beat moved on to *A Beautiful Noise*.

“He had wanted to do a musical for many years,” says Katie. “He loved musical theatre. He would listen to theatre songs and show tunes, and had, for many years, jotted down ideas. Even though he’d never known what the concept was going to be, he’d always known it would be called *A Beautiful Noise*.”

“Then, when he retired from touring, the question was, now what are we going to do? So we said, ‘All right, let’s finally do this musical.’”

Neil called on an old friend, Bob Gaudio, who had been a member of ’60s doo-wop group The Four Seasons and creator of the musical *Jersey Boys*.

He brought in producer Ken Davenport and writer Anthony McCarten. And while the plot was always going to follow the story of Neil’s life, Anthony suggested the device of psychoanalytic sessions, which would carry the audience between eras, themes and meanings.

“Neil has always been open about therapy and about how it’s helped him,” explains Katie, “so he loved the idea. One of the themes throughout the show is that Neil did struggle with some depression, even at the height of his career, and he went to therapy and he’s never been shy about it ... He had some hard times and some great times, but it was all those things together that brought him to where he is.”

The first time Neil saw the musical performed on stage, he was speechless, Katie remembers. “Then he just said to everybody that was there, ‘Thank you, thank you. This is everything.’ He loves the show.”

And audiences love it for both its honesty and its score, which weaves Neil’s classic hits through the weft of his life.



As someone who also grew up to a Neil Diamond soundtrack, Katie still ponders what it is about her husband's music that continues to engage audiences around the world.

"Some of it is his vulnerability," she says, "and I think that speaks to people, whether the song is about loneliness or love.

"Some of the songs, honestly, I don't think they make a lot of sense. Look at the words of 'Holly Holy'. How do you understand it by looking at the lyrics? But when you hear that song with the music, you know exactly what it means. And don't ask me about 'Sweet Caroline', because who knows? That song is a phenomenon.

"I don't know what it is, but it is such a magical thing that Neil's music brings so many people together across the world."

A Beautiful Noise is currently playing at Melbourne's Princess Theatre and moves on to the Lyric Theatre in Sydney on 14 November.



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Samantha Trenoweth is the News & Features Editor at *The Australian Women's Weekly*. For more than 30 years, she has written books and contributed to newspapers, magazines and anthologies on everything from politics, food and feminism to rock & roll. At *The Weekly*, she's walked dusty backroads and the corridors of power to share the stories of the most inspiring women in Australia and the issues that affect their lives.

The Neil Diamond Musical "A Beautiful Noise": A Fan's Review -

<https://www.neildiamondcentral.com/a-beautiful-noise-the-neil-diamond-musical>

Hot August Night –

<https://www.neildiamondcentral.com/hot-august-night-1972>