

Distinguished Alumni

Distinguished Alumnus Award - 2007

William E. Steinberg '68

You came to Cate as a junior from Palm Springs bringing a deep interest in music, including the blues. You encouraged your classmates to listen to and collect blues albums as you did, and were greatly impacted by Mississippi Fred McDowell's performance on the Mesa. You were lead singer in the rock and roll band "Dirt" and played for school dances at Marymount and other girls' schools. One of your favorite perks of these performances was not having to wear a coat and tie to the dance.

In addition to music, you brought a particular talent in baseball, earning two varsity letters as a shortstop. You contributed poetry to the Cate Review, and believe that some of your best poetry was written during your years at Cate; in recognition of your work, the faculty awarded you the Robert Frost Poetry Medal. Perhaps most importantly, the friendships you developed at Cate were, and remain, very important to you. You always enjoyed the camaraderie of Cate Life.

You continued your education at Bard College at the encouragement of Alan Brilliant, founder of Unicorn Press, a poetry publisher in Santa Barbara whom you met while at Cate. As a literature major, you honed your craft and learned you could bend poems into song lyrics. You also discovered that there existed a more receptive audience for songs than poems.

After college you returned to California to work for your father's table-grape company in the Coachella Valley, all the while writing songs. In the late 1970s you formed a band named "Billy Thermal." After showcasing in Los Angeles clubs, the band was signed to a recording contract by legendary producer Richard Perry. During this period, other singers discovered your songs, including "How Do I Make You," recorded by Linda Ronstadt. The song became a top-ten hit on the US pop charts and launched you as a songwriter. Soon thereafter, Pat Benatar and Rick Nelson recorded covers of your compositions.

In 1981, you teamed with Tom Kelly and wrote five #1 hit songs over a five-year period, becoming one of the most successful songwriting teams in the history of the music business. Your hits include: "Like A Virgin" for Madonna, "True Colors" for Cyndi Lauper, "Eternal Flame" for the Bangles, "Alone" for Heart, "So Emotional" for Whitney Houston and "I'll Stand By You" for the Pretenders. In 1996, you received a Grammy for writing and producing the song "Falling Into You" for Celine Dion.

You are currently working with a new song-writing partner, 25-year-old Josh Alexander, with whom you wrote and produced Jojo's "Too Little Too Late," which peaked at #3 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 2006.

In recognition of your creativity and achievements as a songwriter, the Cate School Alumni Association is proud to honor you, Billy Steinberg '68, as its distinguished alumnus for 2007.