

Neil Sedaka

Neil Sedaka (born March 13, 1939) is an American singer-songwriter and pianist. Since his music career began in 1957, he has sold millions of records worldwide and has written or co-written over 500 songs for himself and other artists, collaborating mostly with lyricists Howard "Howie" Greenfield and Phil Cody.

After a short-lived tenure as a founding member of the doo-wop group the Tokens, Sedaka achieved a string of hit singles over the late 1950s and early 1960s, including "Oh! Carol" (1959), "Calendar Girl" (1960), "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen" (1961) and "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" (1962). His popularity declined by the mid-1960s, but was revived in the mid-1970s, solidified by the 1975 US *Billboard* Hot 100 number ones "Laughter in the Rain" and "Bad Blood". Sedaka maintained a successful career as a songwriter, penning hits for other artists including "Stupid Cupid" (Connie Francis), "(Is This the Way to) Amarillo" (Tony Christie) and "Love Will Keep Us Together" (Captain & Tennille). He was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1983 and continues to perform, mounting mini-concerts on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Early life: Juilliard and the Brill Building

Sedaka was born in Brooklyn, New York. His father, Mordechai "Mac" Sedaka, was a taxi driver of Sephardi Jewish descent from Turkey. Sedaka's paternal grandparents came to the United States from Istanbul in 1910. Sedaka's mother, Eleanor (née Appel), was an Ashkenazi Jew of Polish and Russian descent. He grew up in Brighton Beach. His father's cousin, Rachel Gorman (née Cohen), daughter of Isaac Cohen and Calo Cohen (née Sedaca or Sedaka), was married to Morris Gorman (né Garmezano; paternal uncle to singer Eydie Gormé). Gormé's mother was of Lebanese Jewish descent.

Sedaka demonstrated musical aptitude in his second-grade choral class, and when his teacher sent a note home suggesting he take piano lessons, his mother took a part-time job in an Abraham & Straus department store for six months to pay for a second-hand upright. In 1947, he auditioned successfully for a piano scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music's Preparatory Division for Children, which he attended on Saturdays. His mother had wanted him to become a classical pianist like his contemporary Van Cliburn, and Sedaka continued to show fondness for (and capacity to play) classical music throughout his life.

At the same time, to his mother's dismay, Sedaka was discovering pop music; his mother eventually acquiesced when Sedaka received a five-figure royalty check for his hit "Calendar Girl" in 1961. When Sedaka was 13, a neighbor heard him playing and introduced him to her 16-year-old son, Howard Greenfield, an aspiring poet and lyricist. They became two of the Brill Building's composers.

Sedaka and Greenfield wrote songs together throughout much of their young lives. Before rock and roll became popular, Sedaka and Greenfield found inspiration from show tunes. When Sedaka became a major teen pop star, the pair continued writing hits for Sedaka and numerous other artists. When the Beatles and the British Invasion took American music in a different direction, Sedaka was left without a recording career. In the early 1970s, he decided a major change in his life was necessary and moved his family to Britain. Sedaka and Greenfield mutually agreed to

end their partnership with "Our Last Song Together". Sedaka began a new composing partnership with lyricist Phil Cody, from Pleasantville, New York.

Early career

Rise to fame with RCA Victor: the late 1950s

After graduating from Abraham Lincoln High School, Sedaka and some of his classmates formed a band called the Linc-Tones. The band had minor regional hits with songs like "While I Dream", "I Love My Baby", "Come Back, Joe", and "Don't Go", before Sedaka launched his solo career and left the group in 1957. The Linc-Tones, later renamed the Tokens near the end of Sedaka's tenure with the group, went on to have four top-40 hits of their own without Sedaka. Sedaka's first three solo singles, "Laura Lee", "Ring-a-Rockin'", and "Oh, Delilah!" failed to become hits (although "Ring-a-Rockin'" earned him the first of many appearances on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*), but they demonstrated his ability to perform as a solo singer, so RCA Victor signed him to a recording contract.

His first single for RCA Victor, "The Diary", was inspired by Connie Francis, one of Sedaka and Greenfield's most important clients, while the three were taking a temporary break during their idea-making for a new song. Francis was writing in her diary, Sedaka asked if he could read it, and Connie said no. After Little Anthony and the Imperials passed on the song, Sedaka recorded it himself, and his debut single hit the Top 15 on the Billboard Hot 100, peaking at No. 14 in 1958.

His second single, a novelty tune titled "I Go Ape", just missed the Top 40, peaking at No. 42 but it became a more successful single in the United Kingdom with a No. 9. The third single, "Crying My Heart Out for You", was a commercial failure, missing the Hot 100 entirely, peaking at No. 111 but it reached No. 6 on the pop charts in Italy. RCA Victor had lost money on "I Go Ape" and "Crying My Heart Out For You" and was ready to drop Sedaka from their label; Sedaka feared he was headed for one-hit wonder status. Sedaka and his manager, Al Nevins, persuaded the RCA executives to give him one more chance.

Sedaka then bought the three biggest hit singles of the time and listened to them repeatedly, studying the song structure, chord progressions, lyrics and harmonies before writing his next songs. "Oh! Carol" delivered Sedaka his first domestic Top 10 hit, reaching No. 9 on the Hot 100 in 1959 and going to No. 1 on the Italian pop charts in 1960, giving Sedaka his first No. 1 ranking. In the UK, the song spent a total of 17 weeks in the top 40, peaking at No. 3 (4 weeks). In addition, the B-side, "One Way Ticket", reached No. 1 on the pop charts in Japan. Sedaka had dated Carole King when he was still at high school, which gave him the idea to use her name in the song. Gerry Goffin – King's husband – took the tune, and wrote the playful response "Oh! Neil", which King recorded and released as an unsuccessful single the same year.

Big hits in the early 1960s

After establishing himself in 1958, Sedaka wrote many more hits from 1960 to 1962. His flow of Top 30 hits during this period included: "Stairway to Heaven" (No. 9, 1960); "You Mean Everything to Me" (No. 17, 1960); "Run, Samson, Run" (No. 27, 1960); "Calendar Girl" (No. 4, 1961; also reached No. 1 on the Japanese and Canadian pop charts); "Little Devil" (No. 11, 1961); "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen" (No. 6, 1961); his signature song, "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" (No. 1, two weeks: August 11 and 18, 1962); and "Next Door to an Angel" (No. 5, 1962). For several of

those songs, Sedaka was paired with Stan Applebaum and His Orchestra. Singles not making the Top 30 during this period included "Sweet Little You" (No. 59, 1961) and "King of Clowns" (No. 45, 1962). RCA Victor issued four LPs of his works in the United States and Great Britain during this period, and also produced *Scopitone* and *Cinebox* videos of "Calendar Girl" in 1961, "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" in 1962, and "The Dreamer" in 1963. His second LP was an album mostly of old standards. He made regular appearances on such TV programs as *American Bandstand* and *Shindig!* during this period.

Writing for other performers

Connie Francis

When Sedaka was not recording his own songs, he and Howard Greenfield were writing for other performers, most notably in their earliest days Connie Francis. Francis began searching for a new hit after her 1958 single "Who's Sorry Now?". She was introduced to Sedaka and Greenfield, who played every ballad they had written for her. Francis began writing in her diary while the two played the last of their songs. After they finished, Francis told them they wrote beautiful ballads but that they were too intellectual for the young generation. Greenfield suggested that they play a song they had written for the Shepherd Sisters. Sedaka protested that Francis would be insulted by being played such a puerile song, but Greenfield reminded him Francis had not accepted their other suggestions and they had nothing to lose. After Sedaka played "Stupid Cupid", Francis told them they had just played her new hit. Francis' rendition of the song reached No. 14 on the *Billboard* charts, while it topped the UK Singles Chart.

While Francis was writing in her diary, Sedaka asked her if he could read what she had written. As mentioned earlier, Francis said no. This inspired Sedaka to write "The Diary", his own first hit single. Sedaka and Greenfield wrote many of Connie Francis' hits, such as "Fallin'" and the "Theme from *Where the Boys Are*", the film in which she starred. This hit the Top 5 on the *Billboard* pop singles chart and Francis had several No. 1 singles. "Where the Boys Are" eventually became her signature song.

Jimmy Clanton

Sedaka and Greenfield also wrote some of Jimmy Clanton's hits, such as "Another Sleepless Night", "What Am I Gonna Do?" and "All the Words in the World". Sedaka himself recorded each of these three songs: "Another Sleepless Night" appears on his *Rock With Sedaka* debut album; "What Am I Gonna Do?" was the B-side of "Going Home to Mary Lou" and appeared on his 1961 album *Neil Sedaka Sings "Little Devil" and His Other Hits*; and "All the Words in the World" was recorded but was kept in the RCA Victor vaults until 1977, at the height of Sedaka's return to popularity, when it was released on the album *Neil Sedaka: The '50s and '60s*.

Session work

Sedaka also contributed some work as a session pianist during his heyday as a pop singer-songwriter. His piano playing is heard on "Dream Lover", Bobby Darin's 1959 hit.

Foreign-language recordings

Sedaka was very popular in Italy. Many of his English-language records were released there and proved quite successful, especially "Crying My Heart Out for You" (Italian No. 6, 1959) and "Oh! Carol" (Italian No. 1, 1960).

In 1961, Sedaka began to record some of his hits in Italian, starting with "Esagerata" and "Un giorno inutile", local versions of "Little Devil" and "I Must Be Dreaming", respectively. Other recordings were to follow, such as "Tu non lo sai" ("Breaking Up Is Hard to Do"), "Il re dei pagliacci" ("King of Clowns"), "I tuoi capricci" ("Look Inside Your Heart"), and "La terza luna" ("Waiting For Never"). "La terza luna" reached No. 1 on the Italian pop charts in April 1963. *Cinebox* videos exist for "La terza luna" and "I tuoi capricci". Sedaka's Italian diction was impressive; his recordings in Italian had very little American accent. RCA Victor's Italiana branch distributed his records in Italy and released three compilation LPs of Sedaka's Italian recordings.

Sedaka also recorded an album in Yiddish (*Brighton Beach Memories – Neil Sedaka Sings Yiddish*), several songs in Spanish including "Mi Vecinita" ("Next Door to an Angel"), a handful of songs in German, and one single apiece in Hebrew, Japanese, and Canadian French. His English-language recordings were also quite popular internationally; "One-Way Ticket to the Blues" and "Calendar Girl" reached No. 1 on the Japanese pop charts in 1959 and 1961. He also enjoyed popularity in Latin America for his Spanish-language recordings. Many of these were pressed onto 78 rpm discs.

Sedaka stated in 2020 that he was talked into focusing on the international markets because Elvis Presley, the biggest rock star in America, never toured overseas (largely because of Colonel Tom Parker's desire to avoid immigration officials), and because his publishers and managers considered it a much lower risk for a new performer to not face American audiences that knew him.

Mid-1960s

The year 1962 was one of the most important of Sedaka's career, with "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do" reaching No. 1 and "Next Door to an Angel" reaching No. 5. After this his popularity began to wane and his 1963 singles enjoyed only moderate success: "Alice In Wonderland" (No. 17), "Let's Go Steady Again" (No. 26), "The Dreamer" (No. 47), and "Bad Girl" (No. 33). "Bad Girl" was Sedaka's last Top 40 hit in the U.S. until 1974.

In 1964 Sedaka's career began a sharp decline, hastened by The Beatles' arrival on the radio and TV, and the rest of the so-called British Invasion. When describing the Beatles' effect on his career in the mid-1960s, Sedaka put it brusquely: "The Beatles—not good!" He would later describe it in 2023: "after five years of hits... the bottom fell out." From 1964 to 1966, only three of his singles cracked the Hot 100: "Sunny" (No. 86, 1964), "The World through a Tear" (No. 76, 1965), and "The Answer to My Prayer" (No. 89, 1965). His other singles from this era—"The Closest Thing To Heaven", "I Hope He Breaks Your Heart", "Let The People Talk", "The Answer Lies Within" and "We Can Make It If We Try"—all missed the Hot 100, the same fate since Sedaka's third U.S. single for RCA Victor, and became commercial failures.

To make matters worse, RCA Victor refused to release his new recording, "It Hurts to Be in Love", because he had not recorded at their own studios, as stipulated by his contract. Sedaka attempted another recording of this song in RCA's studios, but the results were unsatisfactory. Howard Greenfield and Helen Miller, the song's co-writers, offered it instead to Gene Pitney. Pitney took the existing musical track, replacing Sedaka's lead vocal track with his own. Everything else was Sedaka, including his own arrangement and backing vocals, piano-playing, and usual female backup singers. Pitney ended up with a No. 7 hit for himself and his record label, Musicor, in 1964.

For the remainder of his tenure with RCA Victor, Sedaka never fully recovered from the effects of Beatlemania, the loss of "It Hurts to Be in Love" to Pitney, or the failure of his recordings. RCA decided not to renew his contract when it expired in 1966, leaving Sedaka without a recording label. He went into retirement as a performing artist.^[12]

Although Sedaka's stature as a recording artist was at a low ebb in the late 1960s, he was able to maintain his career through songwriting. Because his publisher, Aldon Music, was acquired by Screen Gems, two of his songs were recorded by The Monkees. Other hits Sedaka wrote in this period included The Cyrkle's versions of "We Had a Good Thing Goin'" and "Workin' On a Groovy Thing"; a Top 40 R&B hit for Patti Drew in 1968; and a Top 20 pop hit for The 5th Dimension in 1969. Also, "Make the Music Play" was included on Frankie Valli's charting album *Timeless*.

On a 1965 episode of the quiz show *I've Got a Secret*, Sedaka's secret was that he was to represent the United States at the 1966 Tchaikovsky classical piano competition in Moscow. Unaware of Sedaka's secret, panelist Henry Morgan challenged Sedaka with the fact that the Soviet bureaucracy had outlawed rock 'n' roll music, and that any Western music young Russians wanted had to be smuggled into the country. Once Sedaka's secret had been revealed, he impressed the show's panelists with his performance of Frederic Chopin's "Fantaisie Impromptu". Morgan's warning turned out to be prescient, however: despite Sedaka's classical roots, his "other" life as a pop star spurred the Soviet Union to disqualify him from entering the competition.

Sedaka also made an appearance in the 1968 movie *Playgirl Killer*, where he performed a song called "The Waterbug".

Struggles of the late 1960s to early 1970s

Australia years

Sedaka worked to revive his solo career in the early 1970s. Despite his waning chart appeal in the US in the late 1960s, he remained very popular as a concert attraction, notably in the UK and Australia. In 2010, as a guest on Australian disc jockey Bob Rogers' radio show, he thanked Rogers and Australian music fans for standing by him during that challenging time: "You know, Bob, in my lean years—I called them 'The Hungry Years'—it was Bob Rogers and Australia who welcomed me." Sedaka made several trips to Australia to play cabaret dates, and his commercial comeback began when the single "Star-Crossed Lovers" became a major hit there. The song went to No. 1 nationally in April 1969—giving Sedaka his first charting single anywhere in four years. It also came in at No. 5 in *Go-Set* magazine's list of the Top 40 Australian singles of 1969. Later that year, with the support of Festival Records, he recorded a new LP of original material entitled *Workin' on a Groovy Thing* (released in the United Kingdom as *Sounds of Sedaka*) at Festival Studios in Sydney. It was co-produced by Festival staff producer Pat Aulton, with arrangements by John Farrar (who later achieved international fame for his work with Olivia Newton-John) and backing by Australian session musicians including guitarist Jimmy Doyle (Ayers Rock) and noted jazz musician-composer John Sangster. One of the tracks from the album, "Wheeling, West Virginia", reached No. 20 in Australia in early 1970. The album is also notable because it was Sedaka's first album to include collaborations with writers other than long-time lyricist Howard Greenfield; the title track featured lyrics by Roger Atkins and four other songs were co-written with Carole Bayer Sager.

Emergence and Solitaire

In 1971, Sedaka reunited with RCA and released the *Emergence* album. Singles from that album included "I'm A Song (Sing Me)", "Silent Movies", "Superbird", and "Rosemary Blue". Good friend and New York music impresario Don Kirshner attempted to make the U.S. release of "Emergence" a comeback for Sedaka, but the album and single releases had no appreciable success, and RCA showed little interest in promoting the album. After the failure of "Emergence" in the US market, Sedaka left New York and moved to the UK.

In 1972, Sedaka embarked on a successful British tour and was introduced by Harvey Lisberg to the four future members of 10cc (best known to American audiences for "I'm Not in Love" and "The Things We Do for Love") with whom he recorded the *Solitaire* album at their Strawberry Studios in Stockport issued by RCA in 1972. As well as the title track, "Solitaire", which was successfully covered by Andy Williams (UK Top 5 singles chart) and the Carpenters (US Top 20), it included two UK Top 40 singles, one of which ("Beautiful You") also charted briefly in America, Sedaka's first US chart appearance in ten years. "Solitaire" was the first collaboration between Sedaka and Phil Cody, whom Sedaka felt was an ideal lyricist for writing music in the singer-songwriter period; Sedaka and Cody "clicked" as songwriters and began a prolonged collaboration between the two. Sedaka took a different approach to songwriting with Cody compared to Greenfield, with whom he was arguing frequently near the end of their collaboration; whereas he allowed Greenfield in the studio during recording, he met with Cody off-site to write songs. Cody did not consider Sedaka to be a personal friend; he mainly saw his work with Sedaka as a work project to bring the singer into the modern era.

Return to success in the mid-1970s

Newfound success

A year later he reconvened with the Strawberry team, who had by then charted with their own debut *10cc* album, to record *The Tra-La Days Are Over* for MGM Records, which started the second phase of his career and included his original version of the hit song "Love Will Keep Us Together" (also a US No. 1 hit two years later for Captain & Tennille). This album also marked the effective end of his writing partnership with Greenfield, commemorated by the track "Our Last Song Together" (later the last hit song for Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods, whose version hit No. 95). They reunited, however, and composed together again, before Greenfield's death in 1986. From 1974 onward, Sedaka's records were issued in Europe and around the world on the Polydor label. His first album of new material with Polydor was *Laughter in the Rain* (1974).

Career with The Rocket Record Company

Elton John and Sedaka met at a party in London in 1973. When John learned Sedaka had no American record label, he suggested Sedaka sign with his Rocket Record Company, Limited, and Sedaka accepted the proposition. When John visited Sedaka at his London apartment, they discussed plans for relaunching his career in the United States.

John said he had "always been a Sedaka fan anyway". He went on to say:

So the basic plan was as simple as finding out what he wanted to have on his album – which turned out to be a compilation from his British albums. It had been

like Elvis coming up and giving us the chance to release his records. We couldn't believe our luck.

Sedaka's Back the U.S. album charts with the release of *Sedaka's Back*, a compilation of songs from three albums he had already recorded in the UK—namely "Solitaire", "The Tra-La Days Are Over", and "Laughter in the Rain". It was only the second Sedaka album ever to chart in the U.S. Sedaka was known principally as a singles artist up to that point in his career; his only other American charting album was *Neil Sedaka Sings His Greatest Hits*, a compilation of his early singles. Although the single was released in the autumn of 1974 and was very slow in building in sales and at radio, eventually Sedaka found himself once again topping the *Billboard* Hot 100 singles chart (February 1, 1975) with "Laughter in the Rain". It was Sedaka's second No. 1 single thus far at that point in his career (after 1962's original version of "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do") and solidly reestablished Sedaka's popularity in America. Sedaka followed the success of "Laughter in the Rain" with a more politically motivated song, "The Immigrant", inspired by the songwriters' parents and by John Lennon, then facing immigration issues at the time. "The Immigrant" reached number 22 but topped the easy listening charts.

Writing for artists of the 1970s

In late 1972, producer Stig Anderson approached Sedaka to write the lyrics for a single by a new Swedish pop quartet then known as Björn & Benny, Agnetha & Anni-Frid. Sedaka agreed, on the condition he liked the song. Anderson, who had co-written the Swedish original with lyricist Björn Ulvaeus and composer Benny Andersson, intended to enter "Ring Ring" in the 1973 Eurovision Song Contest and believed with strong English lyrics it had the potential to become an international hit. He sent a tape of the song together with a rough translation to Sedaka, who within days returned original lyrics, co-written with Phil Cody. The song was entered into the Swedish Eurovision selections on February 10, 1973, but placed third. The band, renamed ABBA, made "Ring Ring" the title track of their first album, released on March 26, 1973. The single, credited to Andersson, Ulvaeus, Anderson, Sedaka and Cody, reached number 1 in Sweden and Belgium, and charted in the top 5 in at least four other countries. Sedaka later said that ABBA's "songwriting and production are in a class by themselves."

Sedaka and Greenfield co-wrote "Love Will Keep Us Together", a No. 1 hit for Captain & Tennille and the biggest hit for the entire year of 1975. Toni Tennille paid tribute to Sedaka's welcome return to music business success with her ad lib of "Sedaka is back" in the outro while she was laying down her own backing vocals for the track. "Captain" Daryl Dragon and Toni also recorded a Spanish-language version of the song the same year that cracked the top half of *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart ("Por Amor Viviremos", US pop No. 49).

Overnight Success/The Hungry Years

In late 1975, Sedaka's most successful year of his career continued as he earned yet more chart success with the release of his second Rocket Records album, *The Hungry Years*. This album was an American edition of Sedaka's British Polydor album *Overnight Success*. The first single, "Bad Blood", hit No. 1 on the *Billboard* 100 and stayed there for three weeks (October 11, 18 and 25, 1975), was certified Gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), and was the most commercially successful individual single of his career. Elton John provided uncredited backing vocals for "Bad Blood". Despite their later falling out that resulted

in Sedaka moving from Elton's Rocket Records to Elektra, Sedaka has credited John as being responsible for his successful return to the U.S. pop music scene. John has stated, "I only appear on the records of people I really know or like."

Another highlight from *The Hungry Years* was Sedaka's new version of "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do". His 1962 original, a No. 1 hit single, was upbeat; the remake was a slow ballad, which Sedaka had arranged for Lenny Welch five years prior.^[34] Sedaka's version hit No. 8 on the Hot 100 in early 1976, making him the only artist to ever record an entirely reinterpreted version of a song where both versions reached the Billboard Top 10. (Welch's version had reached No. 34.) The 1976 ballad version also hit No. 1 on Billboard's Adult Contemporary chart.

Steppin' Out

Later in 1976, Sedaka released a third and final album with Elton John's label The Rocket Record Company, *Steppin' Out*. The first single, "Love in the Shadows," was an uncharacteristically solid rock song featuring a scorching guitar solo. While it peaked at No. 16 on the Hot 100, it was the first of his three "comeback" albums' debut singles not to hit No. 1—or even the Top 10. The second single was the album's title track, once again featuring Elton on uncredited backing vocals. While it cracked the Top 40 (peaking at No. 36), it also marked the beginning of a slowdown in Sedaka's music sales and radio play, not unlike what he experienced in 1964 when The Beatles and the British Invasion arrived.

Sedaka subsequently left Rocket and signed with Elektra Records.

Sedaka met John again several times after his departure from Rocket, and he described their meetings as "cordial, but cold". The ice eventually thawed, however, and in the foreword to Sedaka's 2013 biography, John wrote of their friendship in glowing and positive terms.

Late 1970s

Transition from Rocket to Elektra

Sedaka recorded four albums for Elektra Records: *A Song* (which produced the adult contemporary hits "Alone at Last" and a recording of "Amarillo"), *All You Need Is the Music*, *In the Pocket* and *Neil Sedaka Now*. The only top-40 pop hit to emerge from the Elektra records, as well as Sedaka's last to date, was "Should've Never Let You Go", a duet between Sedaka and his daughter Dara, which had appeared on *In the Pocket* in 1980.

Reissue of RCA-era recordings

Throughout the 1970s, Sedaka's former record company, RCA, reissued his 1960s-era songs on compilation LPs on the RCA Victor and RCA Camden labels. Sedaka released a final album of new material with RCA, consisting of a live concert he gave in Sydney. The album was released on the RCA International label in Australia and Europe as *Neil Sedaka On Stage* in 1974.

1980s and 1990s

Mac Sedaka, Neil's father, died on June 6, 1981, of metastatic colon cancer; Neil was at his bedside singing his father's favorite song, Sedaka's 1965 song "Pictures From The Past", when his father briefly awoke from his coma before his death. Sedaka re-recorded the song that same year.

Sedaka left Elektra and signed with Curb Records. Sedaka recorded two albums on the Curb label – *Come See About Me*, a covers album, in 1983 and *The Good Times* in 1986. Neither of these albums fared well on the charts or in terms of sales, with only modest success for the singles that were released from them (another duet with Dara, a cover of "Your Precious Love", reached the adult contemporary charts); Sedaka left Curb in 1986.

Other successes

American singer-songwriter Ben Folds credited Sedaka on his *iTunes Originals* album as an inspiration for his own song-publishing career. When Folds heard that Sedaka had a song published by the age of 13, Folds set a similar goal, despite the fact that Sedaka did not actually publish until he was 16.

In 1985, songs composed by Sedaka were adapted for the Japanese anime television series *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam*. These included the two opening themes "Zeta-Toki wo Koete" (based on Sedaka's "Better Days Are Coming") and "Mizu no Hoshi e Ai wo Komete" (originally in English as "For Us to Decide", but the English version was never recorded), as well as the end theme "Hoshizora no Believe" (based on Sedaka's "Bad and Beautiful"). Due to copyright restrictions, the songs were replaced for the North American DVD, as well as for Japanese online releases of the series until 2017.

In 1994, Sedaka provided the voice for Neil Moussaka, a parody of himself in Food Rocks, an attraction at Epcot from 1994 to 2006.

A musical comedy based on the songs of Sedaka, *Breaking Up Is Hard to Do*, was written in 2005 by Erik Jackson and Ben H. Winters; it is now under license to Theatrical Rights Worldwide.

A biographical musical, *Laughter in the Rain*, produced by Bill Kenwright and Laurie Mansfield and starring Wayne Smith as Sedaka, had its world premiere at the Churchill Theatre in the London borough of Bromley on March 4, 2010. Sedaka attended the opening and joined the cast onstage for an impromptu curtain call of the title song.

Into the 21st century

Sedaka was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1983, has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and was an October 2006 inductee of the Long Island Music Hall of Fame. On November 15, 2013, Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters in Los Angeles gave him their Art Gilmore Career Achievement Award at a luncheon in his honor.

American Idol

In May 2003, near the end of the second season of the Fox TV series *American Idol*, Sedaka appeared as a guest judge and mentor to the five remaining finalists. Third-place finalist Kimberley Locke sang the Sedaka/Greenfield composition "Theme from *Where the Boys Are*".

Season 2 runner-up Clay Aiken chose Sedaka's 1972 song "Solitaire" for his performance. As Aiken explained to the studio and TV audiences, host Ryan Seacrest, and the four regular judges, "Solitaire" had long been one of his mother's all-time favorite songs. When she learned that Sedaka was going to be a guest judge

and that the finalists would be singing Sedaka's songs, she begged Clay to sing "Solitaire". The performance was uniformly given extraordinarily high praise by the judges. Sedaka told Aiken that he officially passed ownership of the performance of "Solitaire" to Clay, offering to record and produce a single of the song or an entire CD with him.

Although it did not appear on his debut CD itself, Aiken recorded and added "Solitaire" as the B-side to the single "The Way", whose sales were faltering. "Solitaire" was quickly moved to the A-side, and radio airplay and single and download sales responded immediately. "Solitaire" hit No. 1 on the *Billboard* Hot Singles Sales chart and was, in fact, the top-selling single for all of 2004. It also hit the Top 5 on *Billboard's* Hot 100. Sedaka was invited back to *American Idol* to celebrate the success of "Solitaire" several times, as it continued to reach new milestones. Since then, Aiken has mined the Sedaka songbook again, recording a cover of probably Sedaka's best-known song, "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do", on the "deluxe version" of his 2010 CD release, *Tried and True*.

Amarillo – Guinness World Record

On a business trip to New York in mid-1971, Harvey Lisberg, who was a longtime fan of Sedaka, asked Don Kirshner if he'd written anything new. Kirshner took Lisberg to a small room with a piano where Sedaka was already seated, and he tapped out a few songs. One of these was the Sedaka/Greenfield composition "(Is This the Way to) Amarillo?" which Lisberg loved and placed with his artist Tony Christie who recorded and released it in 1971. The song did relatively well on the UK Singles Chart, reaching the Top 20.

Sedaka released the song in the U.S. in 1977 as the shortened "Amarillo", but it was only a mid-chart entry, peaking just shy of the Top 40.

When interviewed for an "extras" feature for a DVD set of a concert filmed in London on April 7, 2006 (see below), Sedaka jokingly said that he had heard that Christie had retired and was "golfing in Spain." The sudden revival of "Amarillo" summoned Christie back to the UK for an unexpected return to fame. In early 2006, the song received new life yet again when a dance beat was added and the lyrics were revised to become a novelty hit, released as "Is This the Way to the (England) World Cup?", to mark the appearance of the England football team at that summer's FIFA World Cup finals.

On April 7, 2006, Sedaka was appearing at the Royal Albert Hall and filming for the aforementioned CD/DVD package, when he was interrupted mid-concert by a gentleman who walked onstage from the wings. The planned scenario was that Sedaka was to begin performing "Amarillo", and after one verse, the audience was to be surprised by the appearance of Christie for an eventual duet. At the interruption, a confused Sedaka asked, "What is this?" The interloper was a representative from Guinness World Records, and he was there to present Sedaka with an award from *Guinness World Records: British Hit Singles and Albums* for composing "(Is This the Way to) Amarillo?", the most successful UK single of the 21st century (up to that date). After the presentation, Sedaka proceeded into "Amarillo", Christie entered onstage to an eruption of cheers from the audience, and after the successful duet performance, the two men walked offstage together, triumphantly arm in arm, as the first half of Sedaka's concert came to a close.

New recording contract, new chart success

Since Sedaka had lost his recording contract in the mid-1980s, he had used his own business, Neil Sedaka Music, to finance the recording, production, and distribution of new CDs and repackaging of his existing catalog of music. Because of ongoing disputes with RCA Records over the ownership of Sedaka's original late 1950s/early 1960s hits, in 1991, Sedaka re-recorded those early recordings.

In early 2007, Sedaka signed his first recording contract in nearly two decades with Razor and Tie Records, a small-but-growing, New York-based independent label with a talent roster that also includes Joan Baez, Vanessa Carlton, Foreigner, Joe Jackson, and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The first release was *The Definitive Collection*, a life-spanning compilation of his hits, along with outtakes and songs previously released but unavailable in CD or download format. It debuted in the Top 25 on *Billboard's* Top 200 Albums chart in May 2007, one of the highest-charting albums of his entire career. It also includes "It Hurts to Be in Love", Sedaka's version of the Gene Pitney hit.

Waking Up Is Hard to Do was Sedaka's next release with Razor and Tie, hitting the albums chart in May 2009. The CD was a children's album that used the melodies of many of Sedaka's best-known songs but changed the lyrics to fit the everyday lives of babies and toddlers, along with their parents, grandparents, babysitters, and other caregivers. The CD title is an example. Lastly, *The Music of My Life* entered the albums chart in February 2010 and comprised almost all new material. "Right or Wrong", co-written with original music partner Howard Greenfield, was done in traditional street-corner, layered doo-wop vocal harmonies with Sedaka overlaying his own voice to achieve the effect for which he was well known in his "early" heyday of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The final track, "You", has been previously released, but was remastered for this project and is one of several titles dedicated to his wife and career guide of over 50 years, Leba.

A concert performance on October 26, 2007, at the Lincoln Center in New York City paid homage to the 50th anniversary of Sedaka's debut in show business. Music impresario (and producer for *The Music of My Life* track "Do You Remember?") David Foster served as emcee. Other guests included The Captain and Tennille; Natalie Cole; Connie Francis; recording legend and decades-long Sedaka friend and former manager Don Kirshner; and new *Solitaire* "owner" Clay Aiken, among many others. Also in 2007, Donny Osmond released a CD, *Love Songs of the '70s*, which included a cover of Sedaka's 1975 No. 1 hit "Laughter in the Rain".

During his 2008 Australian tour, Sedaka premiered a new classical orchestral composition entitled "Joie de Vivre" (Joy of Life). Sedaka also toured the Philippines for his May 17, 2008, concert at the Araneta Coliseum.

On September 11, 2010, Sedaka performed to a TV audience at the Hyde Park, London, venue of the "Proms in the Park" for the BBC.

In early 2011, Sedaka recorded two duets ("Brighton" and "The Immigrant") with singer Jim Van Slyke for Van Slyke's Neil Sedaka tribute album, *The Sedaka Sessions*. LML Records released this album in August 2011.

In 2010, Sedaka duetted with West End (London) and Broadway theatre legend Elaine Paige, on their cover of "Make It With You", from Ms. Paige's UK CD release *Elaine Paige and Friends*. The track was originally a No. 1 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 pop charts for the soft-rock group Bread in 1970. In 2014, Sedaka duetted with Engelbert Humperdinck. The pair recorded the title song from Sedaka's 1975

album *The Hungry Years*. The track is from Engelbert's UK/USA CD release *Engelbert Calling*.

Also in 2014, Sedaka duetted with up-and-coming Nashville star Mary Sarah (Gross) on Connie Francis' classic, "Theme from *Where the Boys Are*", on her all-duets CD *Bridges*. Mary Sarah was also a Season 10 (spring 2016) contestant on NBC's *The Voice*, and once again relied on Sedaka's "Where the Boys Are" for her blind audition. She turned all four chairs around, and ultimately placed seventh in the competition. In 2015, Sedaka duetted on his No. 1 hit from 1974 to 1975, "Laughter in the Rain", with Steve Tyrell, on Tyrell's 2015 album *That Lovin' Feeling*. In 2014, BBC Four broadcast the documentary, *Neil Sedaka: King of Song*, telling the story of the two distinct periods of success in his career.

On February 1, 2016, Sedaka performed to a sold-out audience in The Villages. Then, on August 12, 2016, Sedaka released his new acoustic album, *I Do It for Applause*, which includes 11 new tracks and a bonus of his first symphony that was debuted in Australia in 2008, "Joie de Vivre (Joy of Life)"; the recording features the London Philharmonia Orchestra.

In April 2020, Sedaka launched a series of free mini-concerts, released through his social media channels, as a method of entertaining his fans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each daily concert features three songs from Sedaka's discography. Sedaka paused the series in December due to contracting COVID-19 himself, but resumed on a reduced schedule January 4, 2021, after recovering with no symptoms.

Personal life

Sedaka attended Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, from which he graduated at the age of 17 in 1956.

He married Leba Strassberg in 1962. The couple have a daughter (Dara) and a son (Marc). Dara is a recording artist and vocalist for television and radio commercials who sang the female part on the Sedaka Billboard Top 20 hit duet, "Should've Never Let You Go" from 1980, and "Angel Queen" on the *Queen Millennia* soundtrack. Marc is a Los Angeles-based screenwriter who has three children with his wife, Samantha.

Sedaka's nephew-in-law, by marriage, is CNN Politics political writer, Harry Enten.

Sedaka underwent a procedure to remove a benign skin tumor from his nose in March 2021.