
SOUNDBYTE: Frank Sinatra made a man out of me . . . in rock and pop most males play girls or boys. -- Bono

JAMES HENKE, ROCK CRITIC WHO CALLED U2 "THE NEXT BIG THING," HAS DIED

Rolling Stone Editor, Curator for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame a U2 Fan from Beginning to End *July 09, 2019* by Scott Calhoun



James Henke at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Contributed by the RRHOF.

James Henke, whom U2 gave a ride in their van to their gymnasium gig in [Coventry, England](#), in November 1980, would a few months later be the first to bring U2 to U.S. fans in the pages of *Rolling Stone* in his 1981 profile "[U2: Here Comes the 'Next Big Thing.'](#)" For many years after, Henke cheered on U2 as music editor for *Rolling Stone* and then as chief curator of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Henke, whom Bono credits as inspiring him to write one of U2's greatest hits, "Pride (In The Name Of Love)," died of [complications from dementia](#) July 8, 2019, at age 65.

At the request of Bono in the early 1980s, Henke sent him books he thought would be of interest. After reading the Martin Luther King Jr. biography *Let The Trumpet Sound*, Bono wrote the lyrics for "Pride (In The Name Of Love)" for U2's *The Unforgettable Fire*. In later years at concerts, Bono would thank Henke when he was in the audience and U2 played the song.

U2's longtime manager Paul McGuinness, upon hearing of Henke's death, remembered him fondly. "Jim wrote the first piece in *Rolling Stone* about U2 after seeing them in England in 1980. He said they would be big," McGuinness said. "He went on to write many important pieces about the band over the years. He was a real newspaper man as well and had once worked for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. It was totally appropriate that he became the first curator of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum when it was established in Cleveland. He was an important critic and a very good man."

Henke, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, and graduate in journalism from Ohio Wesleyan University, worked 16 years at *Rolling Stone*, writing reviews and major stories about U2, including the 1983 band profile "[Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#)" and a 1988 profile of The Edge, "[On The Outside With The Edge](#)." As music editor, he gave the nod to U2 as *Rolling Stone's* choice for "Band of the '80s," putting them on their first cover in 1985.



While at the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum](#), where Henke worked from its opening in 1995 until he retired in 2012, he developed its permanent collection and special exhibits to include important items from U2's career, ranging from the first U2 T-shirt made by Larry Mullen Jr., to Bono's handwritten lyrics for "Bad," to the ZooTV Tour Trabants and the American flag-lined jacket Bono wore for U2's halftime performance at the 2002 Super Bowl.

Many U2 fans remember Henke's major exhibition at the Rock Hall "[In the Name of Love: Two Decades of U2](#)," which ran from February through September 2003.

Henke and the Rock Hall invited @U2 to host the "[U2 Fan Celebration](#)" event that summer in conjunction with the special exhibit.

Matt McGee, founder of @U2, said, "Some of my most special memories as a U2 fan happened at the events we did over the years at the Rock Hall, and all of those were made possible because Jim and his crew took a chance on @U2 in 2003. Fan sites weren't really mainstream and considered an important part of the music scene at that point, but they still invited us to co-host their international U2 fan celebration. It changed our world and trajectory. It was unforgettable. God bless him and his family."

Sherry Lawrence, @U2 staff writer, wrote about seeing the exhibit [when it first opened](#), and now recalls how Henke, in 2003, was "much like his writing: serious and focused." Sherry guessed Bono must have enjoyed playing against Henke's style at the opening of the exhibit, because "during Jim's remarks Bono sent his calling card: a bagpiper. The music echoed through the ground floor and as the piper came up the escalator, Jim's face turned beet-red from being interrupted. After the bagpiper stopped and read his declaration from U2, Jim's demeanor shifted but he remained stoic at the podium as he tried to finish. I believe it was the reaction the band wanted: to get him to loosen up a little!"

Henke continued after 2003 connecting U2 fans to the band's music, work and influence. He spoke with @U2 for the [25th anniversary of U2's War](#), which Henke thought was U2's first great album and whose 1983 tour was one of his favorites.

At the [U2 Conference](#) in 2009 and 2013, Henke gave keynote presentations on, respectively, his history of writing about U2 for *Rolling Stone* and curating their artifacts for the Rock Hall.



James Henke presenting at the U2 Conference 2013. Ayaz Asif/U2 Conference.

Tim Neufeld, @U2 staff writer, [wrote about Henke's presentation](#) at the 2013 conference, noticing how "Henke appeared charming and sentimental, reflecting on the demise of journalism and the recording industry and pondering his part in the ascension of the greatest music group on the planet. Attendees could hear a sense of personal satisfaction countered by a measured sadness as he referenced new trends of social media, indie music labels and fleeting loyalties. Delightful, compelling and nostalgic, this statesman of a former era referred to U2, multiple times, as 'the last rock band.' And for his part, Henke's role in the promotion of U2 has indeed been a big thing."

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