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Obituary

# Sumi Jenner

Rock manager for a musical revolution

**Jonathan Fenby**

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[The Guardian](#)

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When the singer Billy Bragg first toured Japan, he gave the music executives there quite a surprise. Not only was his manager a woman, Sumi Nishihata Jenner, but she spoke Japanese and preferred Dunkin' Donuts to breakfast in a Japanese restaurant.

Sumi, who has died aged 70, was born in Canada, the daughter of immigrants from Japan. During the second world war, she and her family were taken from their home in Vancouver and interned in the mountains of British Columbia. After the fighting ended, they tried farming beet in Alberta, before ending up in Montreal. From there, she travelled to Europe in the mid-1960s, telling her mother she was going for a holiday, but ending up in London in 1966, meeting an economics lecturer, Peter Jenner, at the home of Dr Sam Hutt (the country-and-western singer Hank Wangford) and marrying him that same year. Peter's father, an Anglican priest, was not best pleased when the wedding took place in a register office and the bride turned up in a snazzy black and white trouser suit.

With their partner Andrew King and his wife Wendy, the Jenners took a core role in launching new bands playing fresh forms of music in the cultural revolution of the mid-1960s, including Pink Floyd and psychedelia at such establishments as the UFO Club in London's Tottenham Court Road. It could be a hand-to-mouth existence - the cash Sumi and Wendy took for the tea and coffee they served at gigs in Notting Hill Gate raised as much as the entrance money. The Floyd went on to other managers, as did Marc Bolan and T Rex. But a string of innovators followed, including Ian Dury, Roy Harper, the Broughtons, Wangford himself, Kevin Ayers and the Clash.

The headquarters of their company, Blackhill Enterprises, could be chaotic, but Sumi was always a still,

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self-possessed centre, getting things done, witty and observant, her eyes twinkling as she reached into one of her collection of hand-embroidered bags to fish out morsels of home-made cake and other sustenance. A fine cook, she was keen on the Harrods food hall and a denizen of the London cab trade.

After Blackhill Enterprises disintegrated in the early 1980s, Sumi and her husband set up Sincere Management - slogan, "The cheque's in the post." She was, Peter would say, the power behind the throne as they managed such artists as Bragg, Eddi Reader and Robyn Hitchcock. A no-nonsense administrator, she leavened her efficiency with quips and smiles. She was a great nurturer of others, though she could dismiss the few people she thought little of with an elegant stiletto. She was a treasured friend to many inside and outside the music business, and a devoted mother.

Sumi had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1987. She beat that, but then suffered a number of other cancers, which she handled with great bravery. While in hospital last month, she woke to find Prince William, who was doing work experience, sitting by her bed. He commiserated with her on having cancer. "Well, I've had 18 years' experience," she replied in characteristic vein.

She is survived by Peter and their children, Kaya and Mushi.

· Sumi Nishihata Jenner, rock manager, born September 25 1935; died December 15 2005

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