

Last Updated: Thursday, 21 October, 2004, 16:31 GMT 17:31 UK

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Band Aid: Pop's global mission

Some of today's biggest pop and rock stars are getting together for a new version of the Band Aid Christmas charity single - 20 years after the UK's top names of the 1980s recorded the original.

The 1960s and 70s era when musicians preached peace and love and dreamed of changing the world had been swallowed by realism and excess.

Instead of peace and love, the 1980s British music scene brought hairspray, yachts and a golden era of global success.

By 1984, British acts like Duran Duran, Wham! and Spandau Ballet were among the most famous pop stars in the world.

And Bob Geldof was a washed-up post-punk singer with the Boomtown Rats, who had not had a top 20 hit for four years.

But his life, the outlooks of his fellow singers - and the lives of thousands of people on a different continent - were about to change.

On 23 October 1984, BBC journalist Michael Buerk appeared on the evening news reporting from the scene of a biblical famine in Ethiopia.

Ambitious

Geldof was immediately spurred into action. He thought about writing a song with the Boomtown Rats to make money - but realised their fortunes were on the wane and knew it would not work.

That night, Midge Ure, singer with electro-pop pioneers Ultravox, appeared on music TV show The Tube - presented by Geldof's girlfriend Paula Yates.

Ure was in Yates' dressing room after the show while she was talking to Geldof on the phone. She passed it to Ure, who was asked to work with Geldof on a more ambitious charity single.

Ure almost told Geldof he was too busy. But he agreed.

He told BBC Three documentary Band Aid, The Song that Rocked the World: "Little did we know that conversation was going to change ours and thousands of other lives forever."

The pair set about writing a song, with Geldof coming up with a downbeat verse tune and Ure writing the lighter chorus on a keyboard in his



The Band Aid single made £8m to help the starving in Ethiopia

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kitchen. The result was Do They Know It's Christmas?.



Bob Geldof has become a well-known global campaigner

Geldof also wrote a wish list of the top stars of the day he wanted to take part and got on the phone, using his now-famous abrasive persuasion, littered with guilt and swearwords, to get them to agree.

The British mid-1980s pop scene, with its big hair and gaudy tunes, is now ridiculed - but UK artists then accounted for a third of US record sales, compared with 5% today.

And most of the biggest names took part, with the list including Phil Collins, Sting, Boy George and a U2 who had just had their first top 10 hit.

Spandau Ballet guitarist Gary Kemp was even collared while standing in the window of an antiques shop near Geldof's home in Chelsea, London.

Geldof applied his persuasion techniques to his record label and record shops, all of whom agreed to give 100% of the takings to charity.



A recording studio donated 24 hours to record and mix the song - processes that can take weeks.

On the allotted day, Sunday 25 November, Geldof and Ure greeted perhaps the highest concentration of British music superstars ever assembled in one place.

“ There was a sense after a while that we were there for other people ”

Bono

Accounts differ about whether the egos were left at the door, but an atmosphere of solidarity and purpose is fondly remembered by most.

U2 singer Bono told the BBC Three documentary: "There was a sense after a while that we were there for other people - people we may never meet or know, but we were here for them."

Enemies

Boy George made a late entrance after being harangued down the phone in New York by Geldof, who ordered him to get on Concorde.

George finally arrived in the early evening, and the first person he met was Duran Duran singer Simon Le Bon.

"We'd been sworn enemies for many years, but we ended up putting our arms around each other and posing for the press," he said.

With time not on their side, there were frantic deliberations about who would sing which part, and even what the tune and words should be.

'Bitterly selfish'

Bono did not want to sing the line: "Well tonight thank God it's them instead of you."

"It seemed like the most bitterly selfish line, and I think maybe it was the truth of it that unnerved me," he said. "I almost didn't want to admit to it."

But he relented and the footage of him singing the line still sends a shiver down the spine.



Michael Buerk's report opened the eyes of millions

Meanwhile, the stars hanging around for the group chorus finale were having a better time, with Status Quo saying everyone was "going bananas" on drugs.

Record-breaking

Ure spent the night mixing the song, which had to be sent to the pressing plant first thing in the morning if it was to be released in time for Christmas.

On the Monday morning, Geldof took a tape of the song to BBC Radio 1, beginning what was to be its airwave saturation over the four weeks until Christmas.

Its masterminds had hoped to sell 100,000 copies - but it went on to sell more than 3.5 million in the UK and was number one in 12 other countries.

Not only was it the biggest-ever selling UK single at the time, raising £8m, but it set the sights of stars like Geldof, Bono and Sting on a global mission and proved that musicians could make a difference.

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