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## Berklee Transitions to Online/Remote Learning on March 23

Classes and midterms will continue on campus through March 13. Students are asked to depart Berklee residence halls by March 18 and return home until further notice. Full details: [berklee.edu/covid19](https://berklee.edu/covid19)

□ Campus Alert



## David Rosenthal '81: Music director and keyboardist for the Piano Man for 23 Years and counting

By *Curtis Killian*

During a recent artist residency at his alma mater, David Rosenthal '81, Billy Joel's music director and keyboardist since 1993, described his prodigious career as "a fun and exciting journey." He wasn't exaggerating.

On the most recent leg of that odyssey, Rosenthal is booked for indefinite sold-out shows with Billy Joel in a first-of-its-kind residency at Madison Square Garden. Thus far there have been 26 monthly engagements at the fabled venue, which Rosenthal says will continue as long as there is a demand. "It's just remarkable, the enthusiasm of the New York fans for Billy," Rosenthal says. "Worldwide he has that incredible appeal, but particularly in New York he has that home advantage." Notably, Joel and Rosenthal will also play at Fenway Park in August for the third summer in a row, and Joel's sold-out debut gig at Wembley Stadium in September.

Of his role as music director and the unique arena residency, Rosenthal notes, "It's a lot of preparedness. No two shows with him are identical." The arena residency offers Joel the chance to perform his lesser-known tunes in addition to the hits fans expect. In preparation, Rosenthal says he has keyboard sounds programmed for about 85 songs.



David Rosenthal '81

Rosenthal arrived at Berklee during the late 1970s as a classically trained pianist. He formed a band with fellow student Steve Vai '79, a collaboration that has continued throughout their careers and is

documented on several albums. “Everybody knew he was a great player,” Rosenthal says of Vai. “We played a lot of different things, and I believe it was Steve’s tape of our band that got [him his] audition with Frank Zappa. He’s a remarkable talent and [we] have remained great friends.” That relationship and others were an added benefit to Rosenthal from his Berklee years.

Rosenthal’s first venture after graduating was a successful audition to replace keyboardist Don Airey in guitarist Richie Blackmore’s band Rainbow. It extended through two world tours and two albums, and was followed by tours with Little Steven, Cindi Lauper, Robert Palmer, and Enrique Iglesias as well as studio work with an array of artists.

In addition to these gigs and his long-term work with Joel, Rosenthal has manned the keyboards with progressive stalwarts Happy the Man, orchestrated a concerto for Yngwie Malmsteen, and done synth programming for Bruce Springsteen.

During a recent Berklee visit hosted by the Electronic Production and Design Department and the Office of Alumni Affairs, Rosenthal gave clinics on designing and playing a touring keyboard rig, the application of Apple’s Main Stage, and the role of the music director. “It’s fascinating, I’m on the cutting edge of technology now, but every piece of gear I use now did not exist while I was at Berklee,” he says. “But what I was fortunate to receive in my education here was all the concepts of how things work, and that enabled me to adapt to whatever technologies came along after I left.

“I really love doing all types of projects [stylistically and musically], but [also enjoy] projects as synth programmer, orchestrator or producer,” Rosenthal says. “There are a lot of things I’ve been fortunate to do throughout all of my career, so far it’s been a good run.”

*Curtis Killian is a web content producer for Berklee’s Office of Alumni Affairs.*

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