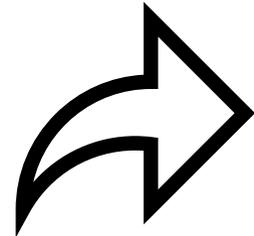
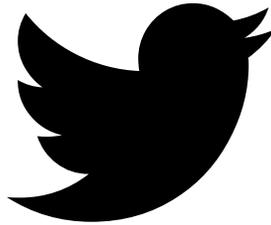
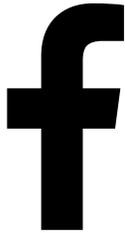


# CLAIRE ROTHMAN: SHE RULES THE FORUM

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I think everybody can hear me; I'm not exactly quiet. . . .I am the only woman in the United States who runs a major sports arena. I have a variety of duties. I book the building. I schedule the sports. The box office answers to me, all the staffing answers to me, and at night I get to play hostess. . . .

--Claire Rothman, in a speech.

It was the morning after the opening night of the Prince concerts, and the hostess at one of the "biggie" entertainment nights of the year was beaming as brightly as any neon light.

Claire Rothman, general manager and vice president of the Forum, arrived full of tidbits about her Forum guests: Elizabeth Taylor's ring was "the size of an ice cube. . . . I met her son Michael. He has eyes just like hers." The ring was such that Rothman decided to assign a Forum security guard to Taylor, who was sitting in the front row and wearing a curly black wig. . . . Barry Manilow, who wore earplugs during the concert, was chatting with the Nederlanders, as the father-and-son producers (Jimmy Sr. and Jr.) are known about town, and Rothman asked when Manilow might work the Forum again. When Manilow half-jokingly asked why she would make a pitch in front of the competition, Rothman replied, "I'm cuter," and laughed in the retelling. . . . Barbra Streisand, who had a new escort, barely said a word.

Olivia Newton-John, Tatum O'Neal and Jack Nicholson, who is a regular at Lakers basketball games, attended the Forum Club's preconcert party too, but it didn't take long for Rothman to get down to business. The business, after all, was the primary source of present pleasure--not only were the six nights of Prince selling out, but his T-shirts, sweat shirts and other purple-paraphernalia, of which the Forum gets a percentage of the sales, were being snapped up as fast as cold beer on a hot day at the ballgame.

A fast play on the calculator keys--the calculator is at her right hand, even closer than the telephone--and Rothman had what she wanted: Prince would be bringing in somewhere in the neighborhood of \$276,000 each performance.

Her morning-after lasted well into the night. From a 9:20 a.m. report to Forum President Lou Baumeister to the next-to-last number on the second night of Prince at 11:15 p.m., Rothman did not once step outside. Lunch as well as dinner were taken at the Forum Club, across the corridor from her compact, windowless office. Besides the current event, mostly seeing to last-minute tickets for entertainment (and sports) personalities, Rothman dealt with Chicago and the Firm--the acts to come--and did some business for the Los Angeles Forum teams too: the Lakers, Kings and, on a somewhat lesser level of priority, the soccer-playing Lasers. She arranged with Inglewood police to cut the security contingent for the Prince concerts in half--from 30 to 15, saving \$110 per man per night. "This is not a problem show. If there's no need, why spend the money?" She spent a good part of her time arranging for "comps" (complimentary tickets) and house-seat tickets. Like Forum owner Jerry Buss, she has 17 seats in her name to do with as she pleases.

Rothman's schedule is a juggling act--at Madison Square Garden, three or four people handle comparable duties--and sometimes the interests meld. Sports stars are rock fans, and rock stars are sports fans. That day she learned that the Kings, who were on the road, were miffed because they would miss the concert: Prince was closing the following Saturday night instead of Sunday afternoon as originally planned. "You're going to have a mighty unhappy team," a staff member said. Rothman shrugged; that was something she couldn't change.

The crunch came just before that night's concert began. Prince wanted to innovate. The star thought it would be dramatic before intermission ended to sing from behind the curtain with the house lights down. Rothman thought that would be unsafe, with fans rushing back to their seats in the dark as soon as they heard the voice; she knew fire officials would agree. She also had to prevail without offending. So with one of Prince's managers, she worked out a compromise whereby there would be half-lights and some visibility. Shortly after 9, Rothman stood in front of stage left with earphones that connected her to various security and staff around the arena. Nobody even tripped, but the fans seemed somewhat confused. "I knew it!" she grinned. "It fell like a dead *latke*(pancake)."

*In a way, this particular job, and what it represents, is a fantasy come true, but I really, really didn't know what my fantasy was until I was alone, back in 1967 when I had a rebirth. And that was an emergence from a divorce . . . .*

Fortuitously, it was also the period of the emergence of the gargantuan, year-round, air-conditioned-and-sealed arenas that were being built in conjunction with the expansion of the National Hockey League. Philadelphia's Spectrum in September, 1967; three months later, the Forum, and the following February, the new Madison Square Garden. To make the buildings pay for themselves, entertainment acts were needed to fill up the empty nights. And that's where people like Rothman came in.

She is still somewhat of an oddity--a nice, open, middle-class, middle-aged woman in the midst of the heat and glitter and youth-worshipping *macho* of sports and rock. Yet she was in at the beginning, and is considered by her peers to be among the best. "Many building managers will not meet artists in their entire lives," says Larry Vallon, a vice president at Universal Amphitheatre. "In Claire's case, artists go out of their way to meet her. She has an incredible reputation in the industry."

Rothman knows the music--she first heard it when her children were teen-agers in the '60s--but more important, she knows her audiences, and "which acts will be bubble-gummy and which will appeal to women. . . ." She knows what heavy metal is all about too. "I listen to the Top 40 in my car, but when I want to commune with myself I listen to the classics--Beethoven, Bach; I love opera. I like the music from the ballets; I find it very soothing."

Her "rebirth" began back home in Philadelphia as a bookkeeper at the Spectrum. Today, after a decade at the Forum, she is on a first-name basis with such as Linda Ronstadt, Neil Diamond and Lionel Richie (they know *her* name), draws good seats in restaurants and is a member of that network of high-profile, powerfully placed women in Los Angeles, one to a profession, who belong to the most-low-profile club (under 100 members), calling itself the Women's Trusteeship.

Rothman, 56, married straight out of high school and skipped college, a matter she's still sensitive about, and worked in her husband's hotel-and-hospital-supply business. She raised two children--Barry, a neurophysiologist at the University of California in San Francisco, and Karen, executive vice president in charge of foreign distribution for Empire Films International in Hollywood--and has two grandsons.

"We had all the major hotels and hospitals in Philadelphia and Atlantic City as our customers," she said recently in an interview. "I was in the finance end. I handled the records, I oversaw the controller, so I had all that business background. I was married for 20 years and I worked all the time. I had a feeling for big numbers. In a household, you think of an electric bill--\$10, \$12--but at the Spectrum, it was \$75,000 a year for heating the building. It wasn't so mind-boggling for me because my husband had a big business, a multifaceted business."

"My mom's family by nature was always extremely matriarchal," says Karen. "The 'men' were all women--her grandmother, her mother, her mother's sisters--all extremely self-sufficient."

In the business world, Rothman collected what she calls her "male mentors"--male friends, quickly disabusing the notion there was any romance involved.

Her first mentors were at the Spectrum. Ten days after her arrival she became office manager, and 18 months after that, business manager. The Spectrum went into bankruptcy in early 1968. Rothman helped ease them out of the financial hole. "We paid 100 cents on the dollar," she says with pride. "We made the building a success. My theory was, if you waited for an event that would pay the mortgage and all the costs, you would never have anything in the building. My feeling was whatever you could put in the building that you wouldn't lose on, that you came out ahead on, was that much less than you'd go in the hole with."

She also learned an important lesson, the value of a promoter who knows the area, and made an exclusive arrangement with a local promoter to place all the shows, the first such arrangement in the nation. (At the Forum, she works with several.) At first, she hired George Wein, who did the old Newport (R.I.) Jazz Festival, for a summer series, "because the summer is dead. George became our partner for a summer series that was critically

successful--and financially unsuccessful. We did Blood, Sweat & Tears at the time. George did weekend shows, and Philadelphia is an area where people migrate out of town on weekends and go to Atlantic City, 60 miles away. I wasn't all that experienced yet, either."

So she found someone who was doing shows at the University of Pennsylvania and the convention center and had a club downtown called the Electric Factory.

There were also little touches that performers--like Frank Sinatra--noticed. Sinatra likes orange, and Rothman saw to it that when he did a benefit show for Democratic presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey in 1968, his dressing room was done up in orange. (At the Forum, one of her little touches is that instead of uniforms, male and female security people wear tailored sports jackets.

"Smart as a whip--always," says KROQ owner Ken Roberts of Rothman, who has known her from the days when he was associated with Sinatra. "Today, if I was to go back into concert promotion or the entertainment business, the first person I'd ask to go with me would be Claire Rothman. She has the best rapport (with promoters, managers) of any building manager in the country."

After the Spectrum came under new ownership, Rothman spent 18 months at Wild Kingdom in Orlando, Fla., then went on to the Cleveland Coliseum. She got there before the building--20 miles from Cleveland, 22 miles from Akron--went up, and stayed 14 months. Jack Kent Cooke, the Forum's previous owner, had asked her to come out here for an interview.

*Fourteen of the dreariest months of my life. I was involved with every possible thing: What would the colors be, what would the graphics be, what should the ushers wear, what would the janitors need to know, where would you buy tickets? We were trying to impress the people that this was an ideal spot, out in the middle of nowhere.*

*Elton John's manager came out, a man I still do business with, and I showed him this very large mudhole. I tried to be smart, told him what it was going to be like, how elegant, and he looked at me, and said, "Are you crazy? That's a mudhole! . . ." We had a fabulous opening. We tied up the interstate in both directions because nobody could get off to park.*

She is the consummate saleswoman as well as innovator, whether it's handling negotiations or booking the house. Who plays the Forum, Rothman says, is "a combination of stirring the pot and what falls under the transom." While that ratio for entertainment events is about 30-70, she must first plan the home games for her teams with the National Basketball Assn., the National Hockey League and the Major Indoor Soccer League before filling in the blanks.

"It's conversations," she said of how she determines who'll play the Forum. "I could be talking to Tom Ross at CAA (Creative Artists Agency), or Jerry (Buss), who's crazy about Culture Club and asks, 'What do you think?' I will talk

to our promoter, Avalon: 'Gee, Bri (Brian Murphy, president), I think we ought to talk to Ken Kragen and see if we can't do Kenny Rogers for New Year's Eve'--that's one of the best New Year's Eve shows. Then I talk to Ken, and Ken says, 'We'll do it with Dolly (Parton)' and it's so-much money. So I made that happen."

Sometimes it's a juggling act. For instance, Prince. Rothman had originally scheduled a tennis tournament for that week in February, but when that fell out, she called Jerry Farngoli, one of the singer's managers, and they were able to reset the tour to accommodate the Forum. Despite competition from such as Pacific Amphitheatre, Universal Amphitheatre and Irvine Meadows, the 18,000-plus-seat Forum is still considered one of the best places to play. One of her early-on innovations--moving the location of exit doors to comply with fire laws--sacrificed 54 seats but logistically made it possible do larger-scale concert shows.

In 1975, her freshman year at the Forum, she initiated the so-called "controlled spontaneous response" mechanism. "We were doing the Eagles," Murphy recalls, "and after four or five nights the band was angry because the kids couldn't stand up and come forward. Obviously, you couldn't clog all the aisles; it would get the fire marshal crazy. So Claire came up with an idea: 'What if we give the *appearance* of people coming forward--if we restrict those coming down to the first six rows?' So at the appropriate moment the security walked down six rows and stood *there*. After a while the kids got the idea. We use it still. . . ."

As for her juggling of team dates and entertainment nights, Murphy notes: "Claire is amazing with her calendar of dates. I think she understands the playoff schedules of those two leagues better than the commissioners."

"She knows better than the act what they'll do," Roberts says. "When Duran Duran came out last year on tour, they wanted to play only one date. She said, play three dates. They said no, they didn't know whether they would sell. She was able to quietly reserve an extra night, and so they put two shows on and sold out both nights in an hour and a half."

"The key to Claire," says Tom Hewlitt, president of Concerts West, "is her ability to roll with the punches, to somehow get through all the crazy personalities of this industry and make everyone feel important."

The key to Rothman also is that she never stops planning--and dreaming. "The more things you have in a building, the more you create a charisma, you make a place where things are happening. Then the fact that it also costs more money is immaterial."

She's quietly working to have the Grammys televised from the Forum next year, and has held out some dates. "It's right in the middle of the (basketball) season, but it would be just like the dates we held out for Prince. Isn't there something magical about producing the awards show for what you do, in the place that you do it?"

She's thinking of Luciano Pavarotti to appear sometime this summer, "because that's when the Center Terrace seats are sold for the coming season, and it's always nice to have something terrific right at the beginning to show

them 'that's what you're getting.' And I'd like to do it with a big orchestra, put red drapes around, and maybe even tables on the floor with cocktail service.

"Beethoven's Ninth down on the basketball floor is an old dream, and it's not anywhere but in the fantasy realm. . . ."

Or is it?