

Fountains of Wayne cofounder Adam Schlesinger dies from COVID-19

Lynne Margolis - April 1, 2020

Adam Schlesinger, the Grammy- and Emmy-winning songwriter and musician best known for his work with Fountains of Wayne and as a prolific film and TV composer, died Wednesday at age 52 from COVID-19, his lawyer announced. Schlesinger had been hospitalized in upstate New York, and news came early Monday that he was breathing on a ventilator. Though Schlesinger's family told *Billboard* his condition was improving, he passed away Wednesday afternoon. He is survived by two daughters.

A gifted pop songwriter with an ear for incredibly catchy melodies and hook-laden lyrics, Schlesinger was best known as cowriter of the Grammy-nominated song "Stacy's Mom," Fountains of Wayne's biggest hit, and for penning the Oscar- and Golden-Globe-nominated theme song for "That Thing You Do!," the 1996 film that marked Tom Hanks' directorial debut. Schlesinger also was a member of the bands Ivy and Tinted Windows, the latter with Smashing Pumpkins' James Iha, Hanson's Taylor Hanson and Cheap Trick's Bun E. Carlos. A 10-time Emmy nominee, Schlesinger won one for his work on the TV show *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, for which he was executive music producer, and two for cowriting songs featured in Tony Awards shows. He also earned a Grammy Award for Best Comedy Album his work on *A Colbert Christmas: The Greatest Gift of All!* He and co-composer David Javerbaum earned Tony nominations for their work on the stage version of the John Waters film *Cry-Baby*.

Schlesinger had recently collaborated with actor and comedian Sarah Silverman on the score for an off-Broadway musical, *The Bedwetter*, which

was slated to open this spring. On Twitter, Fran Drescher said he was writing the music for *The Nanny* musical, based on her hit 1990s TV show. His songs also appeared in the films *There's Something About Mary*, *Music and Lyrics*, *Shallow Hal*, *Scary Movie*, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and several others. He also was a producer who'd worked with the Monkees and Fastball, among others.

Schlesinger's music publisher, Danny Benair of Burger Music Publishing LLC, said Schlesinger's demo for *That Thing You Do!* was so good, it was used directly to create the film version. Benair, who at the time ran Polygram Publishing's film and TV department, told American Songwriter he had asked Schlesinger and other artists, including Karl Wallinger of World Party, to try their hand at composing the song, following very specific directions. On Facebook, he noted, "It was obvious [when he played it] that he had the theme; everyone in the office kept saying 'play it again.'" The song, with the Candy Butchers' Mike Viola on lead vocals, became an actual hit for the fictional band the Wonders, reaching No. 18 on Billboard's Adult Top 40 chart and ranking on three others, including the Hot 100.

Rolling Stone writer Rob Sheffield tweeted, "It was impossible to spend a minute with Adam Schlesinger and not feel all lit up by his boyish enthusiasm for music. He was a worldly adult who somehow never lost that pure glow of fandom. He was one of a kind and this is just a devastating loss."

Jimmy Kimmel wrote, "I had the pleasure of working with Adam when he wrote the theme to [the TV show] *Crank Yankers*. He was a kind and super-talented man who will be missed."

In response to Variety's story about Schlesinger's death, singer-songwriter Peter Himmelman wrote, "I am stunned. I count Adam among my all-time favorite musicians and songwriters. His passing has made me sad and angry. May his memory be a blessing, may his music shine on."

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