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McCartney joins VH1 benefit to 'help out'

Firefighters' heroism stirs pride for 'me dad'

By Edna Gundersen
USA TODAY

Paul McCartney, one of the leading attractions lined up for Saturday's all-star Concert for New York City, felt compelled to board VH1's benefit bandwagon for a variety of reasons: He loves New York. His father was a volunteer fireman in Liverpool during World War II. And Mayor Rudy Giuliani reactivated the job force.

"I've been ordered back to work by the mayor, and that's good enough for me," McCartney says.

The ex-Beatle had planned a lavish concert in Russia to promote new album *Driving Rain*, due Nov. 13, then switched to the idea of a New York benefit concert after the Sept. 11 terror attacks. He gave up solo fundraising plans to join VH1's five-hour charity concert, airing at 7 p.m. ET (live)/PT (tape-delayed).

He's on a bill with veterans John Mellencamp, Billy Joel, James Taylor, Bon Jovi, Jay-Z, Destiny's Child, Backstreet Boys, Macy Gray and U2's Bono and The Edge.

"It's a marathon, a bit of an epic," he says. "The hope is to raise a lot of money and a few spirits. For me, it's a chance to stand up and be counted for democracy. A blow of this magnitude against freedom is unacceptable. I wanted to put my feelings somewhere and help out.



By Christine Nesbitt, AP

Democratic duty: McCartney shelved his plans for a concert in Russia.

"I personally think music plays a big part in the healing process. People find solace and comfort in music. It can be good for your soul. As a kid, I remember how listening to an Elvis Presley record would instantly get rid of a headache."

He considers the Brit-heavy marquee, which includes Mick Jagger, Elton John, The Who, Eric Clapton and David Bowie, a testament to the solidarity between the USA and the U.K.

"We are allies, and this will prove it one more time," says McCartney, who is impressed by the U.S. response to the attacks. "The American government has been very sensible and measured in building a diplomatic and political alliance instead of rushing into something. Most of the world, including many Islamic nations, support this action."

McCartney is mum about his benefit performance, except to say he hopes to introduce two songs from the new album. He's anticipating a moving experience for both performers and spectators.

About 5,000 firefighters will be in the audience at Madison Square Garden.

"Just looking at them will be emotional," he says.

Bound for England, McCartney and fiancée Heather Mills were on a plane at JFK Airport when the terrorists struck the World Trade Center. Their flight grounded, the couple stared helplessly as smoke poured from Manhattan. Forced to stay in New York, McCartney was touched by the heroism of rescue workers and reminded of his own father's bravery.

"It never really struck me before," he says. "It was just me dad's job. But when the guys in New York were going into those buildings while everyone else was running away, I realized, gosh, my dad did that type of thing. Maybe it took this to awaken me. I felt so proud of him."

In addition to his benefit appearance, McCartney will donate profits from new single *From a Lover to a Friend*, in stores Oct. 30, to New York's fire and police departments.

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