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ARTS & CULTURE

Madison Square Garden's Last Wedding Was for 2,000 Couples at Once

If Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce get married at the Midtown Manhattan arena, they would be following a legacy of unconventional weddings

By Olivia Hau

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In 1982, 4,150 people got married at Madison Square Garden in a mass religious ceremony. (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification)

Forty-four years ago, Lisa Kohn watched her mother get married at Madison Square Garden. That day, around 2,000 couples tied the knot in a mass religious ceremony, wearing the same dresses and suits, reciting their vows in unison.

"I always say the best seats I ever had at Madison Square Garden were at my mother's wedding," said Kohn, 62.

Now, rumors that Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce may wed at the arena have revived interest in its unusual matrimonial history. Though known for sports, concerts and political conventions, MSG has hosted only two known weddings: a 1974 rock 'n' roll ceremony for funk musician Sly Stone, who died last year, and actress Kathy Silva, and the 1982 mass wedding led by the Unification Church, a religious group founded in South Korea.

Whether or not the pop star and football player choose the venue, the speculation has prompted a look back at the Garden's rare and eclectic history as a wedding site.

A Chorus of Matching Vows

At 18 years old, Kohn recalled desperately searching for her mother in a sea of brides and grooms at the Unification Church ceremony on July 1, 1982. She sat by her older brother and her mom's cousin in the largely empty stands.

Her mother was one of 2,075 brides wearing the "Blessing Dress," a white polyester and satin gown with puffed sleeves and a modest high neckline. A veil rested on their heads, held by a satin flowered headband. They each carried a bouquet of white flowers.



At the Unification Church wedding, brides wore identical white dresses and grooms wore navy suits and red ties. (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification)

The grooms lined up beside them in navy blue suits and deep-red ties. The men, with their hands wrapped in satin white gloves, each held identical 14-karat gold rings for their betrothed. Every match was approved by Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder and former leader of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, more commonly known as the Unification Church. Moon died in 2012.

“The couples pledged to create families centered on God,” said Rev. Demian Dunkley, president of the church’s U.S.A. chapter. Many of the couples had met just a few weeks prior during their “matchings” ceremony, and some didn’t speak the same language.

Another couple, Marjorie and Richard Buessing, had known each other for three years through work at the church before Moon matched them in 1979. Though they were legally married that year, the religious ceremony wasn’t until three years later.

On their wedding day the Buessings met up in the lobby of the historic New Yorker hotel, which is owned by the Unification Church.



The Buessings on their wedding day in 1982; the couple in 2026. Marjorie and Richard Buessing (Marjorie and Richard Buessing)

A wave of brides and grooms made their way to MSG as bystanders stared and cheered, taxis honked and protesters gathered outside.

Marjorie, 76, thought, how was Richard going to find her? Was she even going to recognize him? “You’ll never see me in any pictures, I’m too short,” she said, laughing.

The couples made their way onto the carpeted floor as Moon sprinkled Holy water onto them. They exchanged vows and rings. In a solemn ceremony, Moon recited his proclamation on an elevated stage.

“My wife looked very beautiful,” said Richard, 75. “I was more attentive to her than everything else.”

After the ceremony, Kohn met up with her mom and new stepfather on a corner of 7th Avenue in the Fashion District. “I was finally going to have a real father,” said Kohn, the author of “to the Moon and Back,” a memoir about her childhood in the church and eventual departure from it.

The Buessings are still married today, living in Colorado, and have four children and six grandchildren. Kohn said her mother and stepfather broke “the blessing” and got divorced a few years after the wedding.

A Rock ‘n’ Roll Union

Sylvester Stewart, known as Sly Stone, was navigating a career dip when his friend and representative Stephen Paley suggested he get married at MSG. Stone was already planning to propose to Kathy Silva, with whom he shared a 9-month-old child. Plus, rumors of a wedding was seen as a way to boost publicity for his band, Sly and the Family Stone. Silva could not be reached for comment.

“By the power that is vested in me, I pronounce that they are husband and wife,” said the officiant on June 5, 1974. Stone and Silva were married onstage as the audience roared.



Sly Stone and Kathy Silva on stage at their MSG wedding in 1974. (Oscar Abolafia/TPLP/Getty Images)

The outfits were designed in a little over a week by Halston, a celebrity fashion designer. Stone wore a sequined gold jumpsuit, unzipped to the bottom of his chest, with a matching shiny cape. Silva wore a long sequined gold dress with a halter neckline paired with bangles and gold pumps.

Shortly after 10 p.m., Stone turned to the crowd of around 20,000 people and began his regularly scheduled concert.

“Years later I saw a picture of a ticket someone kept: \$8.50 for a wedding and a concert both,” Stone said in his memoir “Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin).”

A New Yorker article at the time called it “The Biggest Event This Year.” Stone and Silva divorced two years later.

Half a century later, the spotlight on Madison Square Garden has never been bigger.



Rumors are swirling that Swift and Kelce might tie the knot at MSG. (Patrick Smith/Getty Images)

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