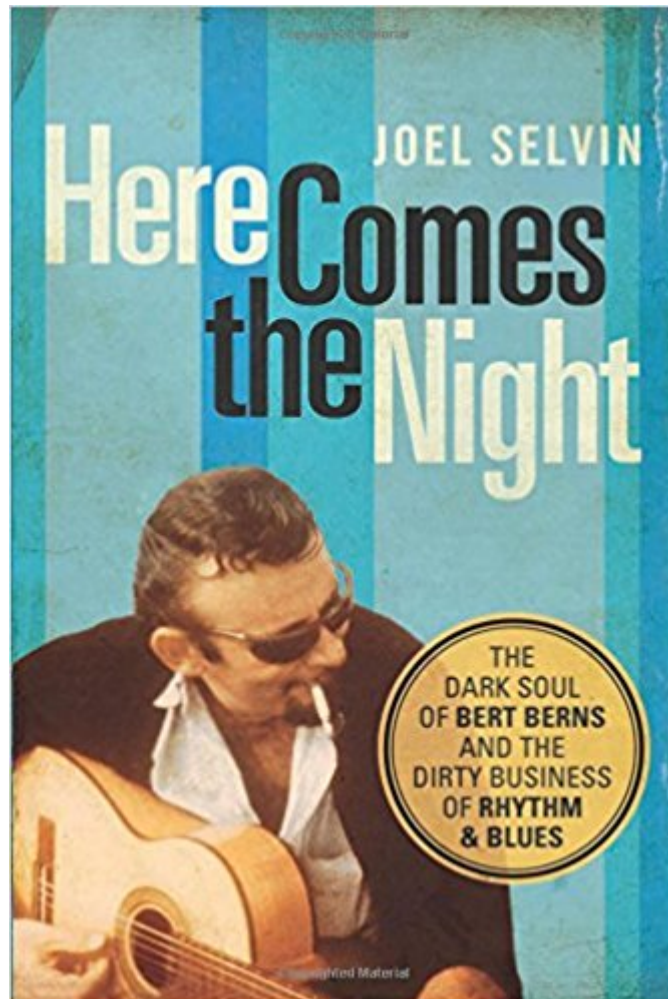


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Here Comes The Night: The Dark Soul Of Bert Berns And The Dirty Business Of Rhythm And Blues



Synopsis

Here Comes the Night is both a definitive account of the golden age of rhythm and blues of the early 1960s and the harrowing, ultimately tragic story of songwriter and record producer Bert Berns, whose meteoric career was fueled by his pending doom. His heart damaged by rheumatic fever as a youth, Berns was not expected to live to see 21. Although his name is little remembered today, Berns worked alongside all the greats of the era—Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler, Burt Bacharach, Phil Spector, Gerry Goffin and Carole King, anyone who was anyone in New York rhythm and blues. In seven quick years, he went from nobody to the top of the pop—producer of monumental R&B classics, songwriter of "Twist and Shout," "My Girl Sloop," "Piece of My Heart," and others. His fury to succeed led Berns to use his Mafia associations to muscle Atlantic Records out of their partnership and intimidate new talents like Neil Diamond and Van Morrison, whom he had signed to his record label. Berns died at age 38 from a long-expected heart attack, just when he was seeing his grandest plans and life's ambitions frustrated and foiled.

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Counterpoint (April 15, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1619023024

ISBN-13: 978-1619023024

Product Dimensions: 1.5 x 6.5 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (78 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #384,843 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #95 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Soul #97 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Rhythm & Blues #226 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Regional U.S. > Mid Atlantic

Customer Reviews

A look into the way a nobody with real talent works his way into the corrupt business of R&B records. Lots of inside stories. Especially liked the story of the recording of the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout." A real look at how it was in the '50s and '60s in the world of making records. As Danny O'Keefe said in his song about the music business, "you write about the moon, and you write about

the stars; You're right about the moon, but you're wrong about the stars." An ugly business at times as people - some talented, some not - are scratching their way to their lifelong dreams. Some sell their souls along the way.

Most histories of the Brill Building era treat Bert Berns with hissing contempt, but Joel Selvin's fast-paced overview of Berns and his milieu shows you the complex man beneath the bad toupee. Selvin doesn't whitewash Berns' tendency to screw-over his artists, or his mob connections and willingness to use them, but he gives due to the man's joie de vivre, his rapport with musicians, and what nobody can deny: his ability to create more than a few unforgettable hit songs. It's interesting how Berns -- not unlike Bobby Darin -- had a heart condition (sounds like valve disease -- Selvin could have gone into the medical side a little more deeply) and knew he was in a race against time to make his mark on the world. Yes, Berns was vulgar and obnoxious, and hurt some people who didn't deserve it (and some who did), but songs he wrote, produced or brought to market have contributed much to the "gaiety of nations" and "increased the stock of harmless pleasure in the world". Selvin handles all this with great skill, and fills each page with behind-the-songs stories and potted biographies of everyone from backup singers, to mob enforcers. The book is so rich with offhand characters and tantalizing byways, it makes you realize that there are many more great tales yet to be told of this wonderful period in American music.

Hemingway once advised young short story writers to "start with the truth, then leave stuff out" until you are left with a story. This book does not leave enough out. Many sections of it read as if the production notes from recording sessions of Brill Building recording sessions of the late 50s and 60s, were all strung together to make a book. That might sound appealing, if that is where your musical tastes are, and it is certainly what drew me to the book, but in practice it gets old pretty quickly. Bert Berns is too minor a player and too unappealing a character to be the focus of a major biography. Author Joel Selvin seems to recognize this, and devotes more of the book to the "times" of Bert Berns than the life. Also,,the book pays more attention to the sales and business side of rock and roll than the artistic, creative and cultural side. In terms of style, the book is over written and stuffed with the sort of bland filler of so many pop albums. The narrative style is that of a show off and know it all. With all that, I do have to admit to enjoying the book, although that may say more about me than the book. I loved much of the music that comes from that era, and was shocked when I first approached the book to realize that "Hang on Sloopy", "Here Comes the Night" and "Piece of My Heart" were all written by the same person. If you loved this music you will very likely

enjoy this book. But I have to admit if the author had taken this approach on a subject such as classic, or rap, music, I would have passed on reading it.

Like Jon Tiven, I've been waiting for this book for years. THANK YOU JOEL FOR FINALLY GETTING IT TO ALL OF US! First of all, it's incredibly well-written. And because of that, I lost only one day of work staying up way past my bedtime, because this really is a book you cannot put down. The book weaves the story of Berns, and the reason why this genius has been overlooked, with the backstory- which is essentially a history of R&B once rock and roll entered the lexicon and the culture. The attention to detail and impeccable research is superb-and I can really say that because I'm working on a project about a person who is sort of a peripheral part of this story and is in the book. I might suggest that in the next print run of this book, the youtube urls be included when Mr Selvin writes about Berns' productions and songs he'd written, because this is no namby-pamby book: Selvin uses his skills as one of the country's best rock critics from lets say the Woodstock days to the present to write about what's going on in each song. (I read the book on my laptop, opened a new tab, and listened to all the songs as i read about them). Selvin doesnt mince words when describing the players: I was a bit taken aback by his description of Jerry Wexler because it is so blatantly honest. The entire book is that honest. The only down side: I was left bereft when the book ended, because Berns died, and the book ended. I wanted more. If you know about some of the stories and some of the players, this book gives you more. If you dont know about them, this is the book that gives you the keys to the kingdom. Bert Berns WAS a genius and many of us knew that. That Joel Selvin has finally told the story is a gift to all of us who love the music.

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