



Here Comes the Night: The Dark Soul of Bert Berns and the Dirty Business of Rhythm and Blues

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Here Comes the Night is both a definitive account of the golden age of rhythm and blues of the early '60s 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 pops—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.

Here Comes the Night: The Dark Soul of Bert Berns and the Dirty Business of Rhythm and Blues Details

Date : Published April 15th 2014 by Counterpoint (first published April 8th 2014)

ISBN : 9781619023024

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Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction, Biography Memoir, History

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From Reader Review Here Comes the Night: The Dark Soul of Bert Berns and the Dirty Business of Rhythm and Blues for online ebook

Amy Binkerd says

I won this book from a Goodreads giveaway!

This book really opened my eyes to the fact that the music industry has always been jacked up. We just didn't know about it as much because they didn't have social media like we do now. I was amazed at how corrupt and selfish people from a more "innocent" era were. I guess I was naive to think that they were more respectable and had their lives more together. It was a good book. I wouldn't necessarily label it a book specifically about Bert Berns. He is mentioned a lot obviously, but it's really more of a book about the times surrounding the period when Berns was in the industry.

Michael Ritchie says

One of the best books on pop music that I've read. The subtitle is a little misleading. Bert Berns is ostensibly the subject, and the book does follow the arc of his career as a songwriter ("Twist and Shout," "Here Comes the Night"), producer (The Drifters, Solomon Burke, Isley Brothers), and head of the record label Bang, whose biggest artist was Neil Diamond. But the book is really about the pop music industry of the 50s and 60s: the songwriters, producers, and label bosses. There is almost as much here about Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records and songwriter duos Leiber/Stoller and Barry/Greenwich as there is about Berns. The middle tends toward simple listings of Berns' various recording sessions, but overall this is a compelling read, and I highly recommend it.

Don says

This is in part a biography--focusing on the professional more than the personal life--of Bert Berns, a significant figure in the early Sixties record business, and in part a broader portrait of that business. Berns was most closely affiliated with Atlantic Records when it was still an independently owned label, Lieber and Stoller (key songwriters of the era) and others.

A couple of problems with the book: First, Selvin at times does an almost day-by-day recitation of the records Berns made with various artists. This gets a bit boring and repetitive. On the other hand, since so many of the recordings made were unsuccessful, this does, in a way, give one a more accurate feel for the business than some other works. So much of what was then recorded was dreck, with the occasional hit resulting.

Second, Selvin has an annoying habit of adopting industry slang--Berns "cut a record on" this artist or that artist.

My biggest criticism, however, is that, for a book about the music business--where publishing is at least as important as the records themselves--Selvin should have, but didn't spend some time early on explaining to the readers the difference between music publishing rights and recording rights and the different sources of income for each. Much of the book deals with the acquisition of publishing rights.

If you are interested in this subject but without much knowledge, the broader treatment of the music industry at that time should be very informative and interesting. If you have some substantial knowledge of the business, the interesting parts of the book really have to do with some of the characters and the maneuvering that takes place. I, for one, was aware that Jerry Wexler was a tough and often unscrupulous businessman, but I hadn't realized what a total asshole he was.

Barry Hammond says

People may not have heard of Bert Berns much today but he was a major force in the transition of the music business from the tin pan alley style of song-writing at the turn of the century to the teen-oriented, rock and roll and black-driven ascendant styles of the 1950's and 60's. As a songwriter or co-writer of such songs as Twist and Shout, My Girl Sloop, Piece of My Heart, and Here Comes the Night he rates right up there with songwriters like Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, Gerry Goffin and Carole King, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, whose careers his intersected. As a producer, he was as much responsible for the reign of Atlantic Records as Gerry Wexler or Ahmet Ertegun. He worked with major stars like The Drifters, Solomon Burke, Ben E. King, Neil Diamond, Van Morrison, Patti LaBelle, Freddie Scott, Tony Orlando, Betty Harris, King Curtis, Gene Pitney, and many others.

Starting out in the nightclubs of mambo and Latin Jazz, the unlikely story of Berns' tragically short life (he was felled by the effects of rheumatic fever) has been told by Joel Selvin, pop music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle for thirty-six years, who has written books on The Monterey Pop Festival, Sly and The Family Stone, Sammy Hagar and The Peppermint Twist Nightclub among many other subjects.

Selvin chronicles the story of the independent music business in New York City in the mid-twentieth Century with its colourful cast of street hustlers, shark-toothed businessmen, and mob gangsters with both humour and honesty. Characters like Morris Levy, Phil Spector, Bobby Darin, Frank Sinatra, Mickie Most, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Big Bill Broonzy, and many others float through the pages like big game animals in a lush musical jungle. It was a hard-knuckled business where only the strong and sharp survived and flourished. Bert Berns was one of the few to come out on top with a combination of talent and street savvy. It's both a revealing and amusing read. - BH.

Don Gorman says

If you check my reviews you can see that I am a music nut. This book was right in my wheelhouse but with more information than anyone ever cared about. When Selvin is telling stories, it is probably a 3 star book, but so much of this effort is list after list after list of songs recorded, what producer did what and what songwriter brought what tune to what label. Bert Berns is an interesting character. The mob connections in the music business, which Van Morrison references in a later album heavily, is a little known story, but certainly one that adds spice to this book. Lots of interesting info about the r & b music business but you have to be a real aficionado to get through this one.

Tosh says

The big surprise of the book for me is that I thought it would be very much a biography on Bert Berns, and it

is, but a great deal of the book is really about the music business of the early 1960's - especially with Atlantic Records and of course Bang, which Berns ran, with help from Mobsters as well as record men. It was a fascinating world that left a lot of great recordings on this planet, but also its fascinating character studies of various kingpins of the music world, including Berns. Also significant exposure on the Brill Building culture as well. I didn't really learn anything new here, but it is a story well told, and Joel Selvin did a good job on the research. What does come alive here is the Manhattan culture of that time, and yes, these guys are pretty much thugs, but they also can come up with the goods, with respect to records and songs.

P.e. lolo says

This book is more than a book about a song writer, producer and singer. It is also about the history of R&B and from mostly Atlantic Records. I had never heard the name Bert Berns, but I had heard the song titles, "Twist & Shout", "My Girl Sloop", "Piece of my Heart", "Baby I'm Yours", "Everybody needs somebody to love", "25 miles", and produced "Brown eyed girl" by Van Morrison. Also produced Neil Diamond. When he first started working at Atlantic he was working with Ruth Brown and Big Joe Turner. He then started working with Wilson Pickett and Patti LaBelle & the Bluebells, along with other artists. This was also the time he began working with the Isley Bros. the book also takes you behind the group the Drifters and how that manger forced them into a working contract. I now know why many of those guys left once their contract was up. And you find out about a writing time by the name of Leiber & Stroller. But like everything else that happen at Atlantic records once they lost Ray Charles, they could not keep up with the bigger record companies. Wexler who at this point was running the show by now was losing just about everyone. Berns leaves and this is where he finds Diamond and a band from Belfast named "THEM", this is when Berns heard Morrison and knew their contract was up with Decca. And produces his first record. By this time Berns is also running the streets of New York, with Pasty Pagano and Tommy Eboli, both part of the Genovese family. Let's just say that he has no problem collecting money owed to him. Berns passes away in 67 asleep in his apartment and some people say R&B died with him. Don't know but I do know the music was changing and he would have been right there. He had also work on some Cuban records so he was really a forward thinker when it came to music. Here is something to think about in 7 years he had 51 chart singles and 19 in 1964 the year of the British invasion. A very good book. I got this book from net galley.

Sean O'Brien says

Very enjoyable.

Ben Winch says

Unremarkable book made remarkable, for me, by its confirmation of a long-held belief that Jimmy Page played lead guitar on Them's "Baby Please Don't Go". According to Joel Selvin, they cooked it up after recording producer Bert Berns's "Here Comes the Night" when Berns was in the studio smashing a cymbal (or was it a tamborine?) and shouting "Let's get something cooking!"

Of course given the book's undistinguished pedigree, and its claim that Page also played on The Kinks' "You Really Got Me", which has been publically refuted, I'm not quite sure I can trust it. And while it's interesting to realise it was Berns who brought Van Morrison to New York after Them broke up, and produced "Brown-Eyed Girl" and let Van channel the entire 9-minute "T.B. Sheets" in an upmarket studio

though he (Berns) couldn't grasp it at all, I coulda lived without entire passages apparently ripped wholesale from Peter Guralnick's *Sweet Soul Music* – the bit about Aretha going down to Muscle Shoals to record with Dan Penn, for eg, and the ensuing dust-up between Atlantic and Fame Studios. Hell, at least half the Atlantic/Jerry Wexler stuff I'd read before, and huge sections had no direct bearing on Bert Berns (the ostensible topic of the book).

So avoid it, I guess, unless you're a sixties trainspotter. Me, I skipped the start and skimmed the rest of it, just hunting for facts. Oh, and Berns's other claim to fame: he wrote "Twist and Shout", and brought the world Neil Diamond, about which I won't say a word.

Jennifer says

Received this through First reads. I have to say it disappointed me a bit. For the first 2/3 of the book I felt as if all I was reading was a series of lists, with an isolated passage that actually gave some depth to the people mentioned. That was another thing, a lot of space was wasted putting in the name of what seemed like every single person who ever MET Bert Berns. I never got a sense of who Berns actually was. It felt more like a datebook than a biography.

Patrick Macke says

though i consider Bert Berns to be but a footnote in this story, it is worth reading for the first 100 pages alone, as Selvin brilliantly writes about the birth of rock, R&B and the independent record label ... Selvin knows his stuff, but fatigue ultimately sets in through the litany of songs, producers and artists that simply overwhelm the hidden narrative about Berns

Ed Mckeon says

I typically breeze through music biographies, but Selvin's sentences and paragraphs are sometimes so dense with information, that there is no value in a cursory read, and sometimes very little joy, in a close read. While Berns figures largely in the story, Selvin uses his main character to map out the milieux of the R&B and early rock business in New York, Detroit, London, Memphis and Muscle Shoals. It was (and is?) indeed, a dirty business, where record execs connived to wrest control of intellectual property from artists and producers. Berns, was undoubtedly, a brilliant producer, and had a hand in writing some timeless and unforgettable pop (Twist and Shout, Hang on Sloopy, Here Comes the Night), and producing others (Brown Eyed Girl, Under the Boardwalk). This is more a discography, and less a psychological analysis of the principal characters, who include Berns, Ahmet Artegun, Gerry Wexler and others. If you thought you understood the pressures, plots and creative output of the Brill Building, you'll think differently after reading this.

Ken says

"Here Comes the Night" is the best music biography that I've read since Peter Guralnick's epic two-volume

biography of Elvis Presley. While Selvin's story is ostensibly about the often forgotten songwriter and producer Bert Berns, he uses the opportunity to tell the story of the popular music scene in New York City in the '50s and '60s. At times it seems that Bern is an ancillary character as Selvin peoples the stage with some of the legendary figures of the time including Jerry Wexler, Solomon Burke, Ahmet Ertegun, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, Wilson Pickett, Ben E. King, Burt Bacharach, Carole King, and many others. It's a remarkable story told with just enough attitude to match the street smarts that Berns himself had. This book is not to be missed by any fan of the early years of rock and roll, or anyone who wants to learn more about how it all came together.

Harvey Solomon says

Bert Berns wasn't a household name, then or now. I'll bet only a handful of music aficionados even know his name. Perhaps author Joel Selvin can change that. "These were record men," writes Selvin. "Their work was their lives. They were a breed apart and operated by their own rules... Berns was one of these centurions of pop."

Selvin cogently tells the tale of this hard, hard driving man. But he crams in so many artists, players, hangers-on, songs, sessions, etc., that the casual music fan may at times feel overwhelmed by the detail.

Yet if you stay with it you're rewarded with a smashing story about Berns and the shadowy rhythm & blues world he embraced and embodied. A gem of a book, just like so many of Berns' classics. Personally, I rank Are You Lonely For Me (Baby) as one of the best ever, and I've never even been to Jacksonville.

Carol Kowalski says

It was a book that had to be written, a story that had to be told, about a subject, Bert Berns, who deserves much wider appreciation. Still, I never felt like I got close to Bert Berns, only to the characters around him. The book is an amazing reference piece and provides intimate insight into the Brill Building and related song-writers, their business relationships and their interpersonal rivalries and alliances, and especially the scuzzy music business as it was practiced in the 20th century. Now that the music business is digital and "non-monetized" one wonders what the mafia is doing with itself these days.
