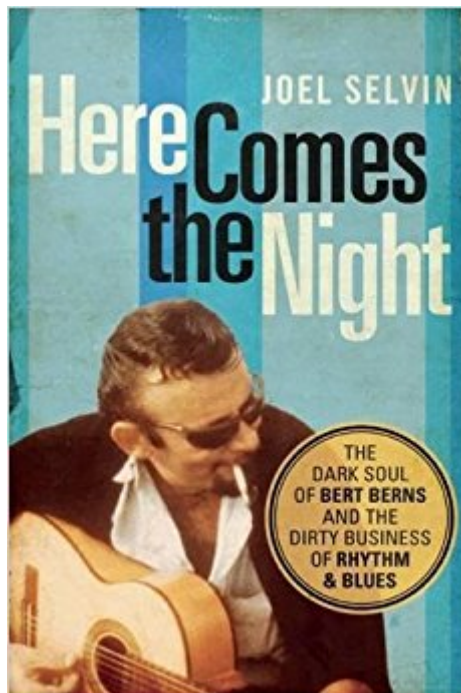


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# Here Comes The Night: The Dark Soul Of Bert Berns And The Dirty Business Of Rhythm And Blues



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

Veteran music journalist Selvin focuses on a figure little known to those outside of the music business of the fifties and sixties and delivers an authoritative look at a crucial point in American popular culture. The main subject, Bert Berns, wrote or co-wrote many rhythm-and-blues classics, notably “Twist and Shout” and “Piece of My Heart.” Though hardly

without clunkers, the extraordinary discography of compositions and productions included here testifies to Berns's stature. The supporting cast includes the best musicians and songwriters of the period, particularly songwriters Leiber and Stoller, Atlantic Records's Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler, and performers Ray Charles and Solomon Burke. Berns, afflicted with a heart condition since childhood, felt himself doomed and incorporated signature wails of despair into his songs, typically "Cry Baby." As Selvin makes clear, the independent R&B and rock-music business then was sleazy, gangster-ridden, and, like Berns's life, short in duration. Sometimes the book reads like an annotated list of recordings and erratically named performers, but if you grew up with the songs, you'll leave the book happily singing to yourself, though also saddened (this being the blues). --Mark Levine

"Selvin's tale...rights a historical injustice, shining a light on an overshadowed great man and deepening our understanding of a history we continue to dance to." *New York Times* "A compelling biography of a man who wrote and produced records in a fever. It's also an unvarnished account of the often-sordid world of East Coast music publishers, tunesmiths, record hustlers, label executives, gamblers, studio engineers, rack-jobbers, dee jays and leg breakers. This book belongs in the esteemed company of groundbreaking exposes [...] Selvin has told the story of a tortured soul of worthy of the Deems Taylor Award." *Downbeat Magazine* "Joel Selvin's new book makes a claim to greatness. In the world of glaringly and exhaustively over-examined star bios, the San Francisco-based journalist not only exhumes a lost soul in the pantheon of '60s pop and soul (along with capturing rock 'n' roll's burgeoning eruption), he also creates as engaged and energetic a narrative as any so-called serious writing can contain." *Paste Magazine* "The author provides a vivid, character-filled picture of the wild west atmosphere of the New York music biz, often branching out into narrative detours that are consistently entertaining and enlightening" *Austin Chronicle* "Selvin has such great fun telling tales about off-kilter, unscrupulous record-biz denizens [...] the book is both an informative history of a wild time in the music business and a compendium of acerbically delivered gossip" *Macleans* "[...] a detailed insider's look at 20th-century music." *San Jose Mercury News* "Berns is simply a hook for a larger history of the business of rhythm and blues in the 1960s. *Here Comes the Night* paints this milieu; unscrupulous businessmen shilling teenybopper hits" *Los Angeles Review of Books* "Here, Selvin chronicles in delicious detail the golden era of the early 1960s rhythm and blues music scene and the turbulent, hard-knuckle world of record-making behind the glitzy, gold foil facade of rock and roll success and glamor."

"Cleveland Plain Dealer" Joel Selvin has written a book whose prose is so alive, it begs to be read out loud. Its subject matter is so thrilling, you feel the excitement of writing a great song, finding an artist for that song, and producing the song on your own label."

"Goldmine Magazine" Here Comes the Night makes a strong case for Berns as the consummate record man, not just another white guy trolling to world of NYC independent R&B looking for a buck but a passionate believer in music.... Selvin takes a labyrinthine tale involving hundreds of characters and tames it... It's a classic a'60s music story as any. And Selvin tells it with period-appropriate style... In the 400-plus pages [...] Selvin also proves a shred salesman: by the end you'll have bought into the idea that Bert Berns, for all his flaws, was truly one of the great ones."

"Mojo, four-star review" Selvin makes the case that borderline-shady characters like Berns have always cast a big shadow over pop.

"Rolling Stone, 3 and 1/2 stars out of 4" A thrilling story of a little-known songwriter and record producer of some of the greatest rhythm and blues hits. Longtime San Francisco Chronicle music critic Selvin digs with gusto into the tasty history of New York City's hit-making songwriters, artists and record magnates of the great R&B era of the early 1960s, focusing on one of the greatest, if least sung of the bunch, Bert Berns.

Selvin's prose, muscular and Runyon-esque and never taking itself too seriously, moves the narrative along from its upbeat start to its sordid denouement at the edges of New York's gangland. A fascinating time capsule of a free-wheeling era in American music and society.

"Kirkus" Again and again, Selvin brings forgotten recording sessions that any other chronicler would have ignored to such stirring life that they validate not only the story he has to tell but the worth of Berns's own life. Selvin lets you feel the contingency of the moment, how everything that happened; this inflection, that hesitation; could have turned out completely differently, and led to nothing.

"The Believer (Greil Marcus)" [Selvin] delivers an authoritative look at a crucial point in American popular culture. [T]he extraordinary discography of compositions and productions included here testifies to Berns's stature; if you grew up with the songs, you'll leave the book happily singing to yourself, though also saddened (this being the blues).

"Booklist" Here Comes The Night purports to be the story of Bert Berns and it is certainly that -- plus the in-depth story of many other fascinating individuals, as well as a socio-economic history of a musical culture, and how Rhythm & Blues and Rock 'n' Roll changed the music business and indeed... the world. I couldn't put it down!" -- Mike Stoller of Leiber and Stoller

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.

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.

I would normally give this excellent book 5 stars. Mr. Selvin has used the Bert Berns story to weave a magnificent book about the history of rhythm and blues and the record business in New York. I'm only able to give it 4 stars because of the unfair treatment of Neil Diamond. It is obvious that Mr. Selvin did not interview Mr. Diamond (Neil probably didn't want to talk about the fact that his career was almost ended by the mob). I feel Mr. Selvin didn't or couldn't interview Neil Diamond, so he decided he would portray Diamond as self centered and unappreciative of the assistance his career was given by Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich. Nothing is further from the truth. Diamond always mentioned Barry and Greenwich with warm regards and both songwriters greatly profited by "discovering" Neil Diamond with thousands of dollars in royalties. The fact is, Neil was such a force and talent, he would have been a star without Barry and Greenwich-it was just a matter of time. And Selvin ignores the real story of Bang Records and Berns--that Diamond and his manager Weintraub- who was badly beaten by thugs- stood up to Berns and the mob despite threats and actual physical attacks. Instead of cowering down, Neil carried a gun and went to the DA. He left Barry and Greenwich, not because he was greedy-he left because he was too big of a talent to stay in New York recording bubblegum tunes. The rest of the book is the best history of the music record business in New York out there.

Oh, baby! If you thought the rock-and-roll era was all about youthful innocence and kids singing doo-wop songs on street corners in NYC, this book will bring you into the real world. It was dirty, linked to the Mafia and a whole bunch of small-time hustlers but out of all this came the soundtrack of the 50's and 60's. Loaded with fascinating information, complete with a discography at the end, Here Comes the Night weaves the real history of rock-and-roll around the life of Bert Berns. His life alone was an interesting read but Selvin brings out some of the other shady characters who made up the New York music scene. My only complaint is that parts of the book read as if Selvin was dictating, someone else was transcribing, and the copy was cut and pasted into manuscript form. Sometimes Selvin jumps from one era to another, backs up, then moves forward. Still, Here Comes the Night is a book I'd strongly recommend if you want to know the "real" story of the Rock Era.

Wow what an interesting read! As someone who buys a lot of music industry books I thought I knew the Atlantic Records story but for reasons which were made apparent in the book, the story of Bert Burns had heretofore gone untold. And what a story! He was involved in so many hit records. The author has really done some great research in bringing this story to light. In parts the book reads like an action, crime novel and in other places it is a wonderfully nostalgic look at what was going on

with the people behind the hits in the 50's to the late '60's. Recommended.

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