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# Always Magic In The Air: The Bomp And Brilliance Of The Brill Building Era



## Synopsis

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, after the shock of Elvis Presley and before the Beatles spearheaded the British Invasion, fourteen gifted young songwriters huddled in midtown Manhattan's legendary Brill Building and a warren of offices a bit farther uptown and composed some of the most beguiling and enduring entries in the Great American Songbook. *Always Magic in the Air* is the first thorough history of these renowned songwriters-tunesmiths who melded black, white, and Latino sounds, integrated audiences before America desegregated its schools, and brought a new social consciousness to pop music.

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## Customer Reviews

'Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era' is an entertaining, comprehensive, and riveting study of seven legendary songwriting teams - Doc Pomus/Mort Shuman; Jerry Leiber/Mike Stoller; Burt Bacharach/Hal David; Neil Sedaka/Howard Greenfield; Barry Mann/Cynthia Weil; Gerry Goffin/Carole King; and Jeff Barry/Elle Greenwich. The time was the 1950's and 1960's - the Golden Era of rock and roll - and the place was New York City. The

players were young, talented, and Jewish. They came from varying social and economic backgrounds. They brought with them their energy, enthusiasm, and artistry, and they left their collective footprints in musical history - and in our minds and hearts. More than just a biography of fourteen people, however, 'Always Magic...' is an all-inclusive study of the sounds born in two relatively unimposing buildings in Manhattan - the Brill Building, located at 1619 Broadway, and its near neighbor at 1650 Broadway. The roots of rock and roll in general are discussed, as are the Latin influences behind some of the songs brought forth by these talented scribes (one example is the \*baion\* drumbeat intro to "Be My Baby"); and the individual and collective backgrounds and lives of the principals, several of whom were interviewed for this book, are covered in depth. Their personal histories are fascinating to read about. In the case of the composers no longer with us - Doc Pomus, Mort Shuman, and Howard Greenfield - author Ken Emerson drew on a wealth of biographical and historical information as well as contributions from friends, relatives, and other reliable sources. Emerson also utilized material from previously published and/or broadcast articles, interviews and documentaries in all cases. The result is a thorough and generously annotated book, well researched with a comprehensive bibliography, a must-have for rock historians who will want to add this delightful and informative book to their collections, and for those who are simply fans of what has become known as the Brill Building sound. 'Always Magic...' is an absolute pleasure to read - fun and interesting, a study of people as well as music (and of music as well as people), it never lets up. From "Hound Dog" to "Save the Last Dance For Me," from "Breaking Up is Hard to Do" to "What the World Needs Now," from "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" to "Chapel of Love" to "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," the sounds of the Brill Building era are as much a part of our lives as the air that we breathe, and Ken Emerson's rockumentary is a breath of fresh air - always magical, from start to finish.

Author Ken Emerson has given us a well-researched book on seven song writing teams during the late 1950's and early 1960's. It is a marvelous companion volume to the DVD set entitled The Songmakers, part of which is devoted to these songwriters in the portion called "The Hitmakers--The Teens Who Stole Pop Music". The fact that musical history was being created during this time period was lost on the talented writers and singers as they provided the teen buying public who had the buck to purchase the 45 RPM record. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller brought their considerable talents from California to New York in 1957 while Brooklyn in particular seemed to be a hotbed for those writers and singers who did their work in the Brill Building or at 1650 Broadway. All was not a bed of roses for these talented individuals, however. Stress in their private lives led to

marital breakups as well as other problems. The DVD set has the advantage of letting you listen to these talented song writers talk about their experiences, and listen to snippets of songs they made popular, while this book has the advantage of going into more detail along with anecdotes about these individuals and how some experience would trigger an idea for a song. When the 1960's generation reaches nursing home status instead of listening to "You Are My Sunshine" and "Shine on Harvest Moon" they will be singing to "Leader of the Pack", "He's A Rebel", and other such songs. Jeff and Ellie, Carole and Gerry, Barry and Cynthia, Jerry and Mike, Neil and Howard, Doc and Mort, and Burt and Hal: There is more to history than wars, treaties, and presidents, and the American public is deeply indebted to you for adding so much to our cultural history.

It's Ben E. King weaving a romantic spell around "Spanish Harlem" . . . soul music pioneer Clyde McPhatter going Latin "Deep In The Heart Of Harlem" . . . Marvin Gaye inviting you to cha-cha with his "Stubborn Kinda Fella" . . . Len Barry dressing up the Latin boogaloo in Motown trappings on "One-Two-Three" . . . Major Lance and Curtis Mayfield adapting Brazilian rhythms for the urban dance floor on "The Monkey Time" and "Um, Um, Um, Um, Um, Um" . . . Joe South slapping a Tex Max tango arrangement onto Billy Joe Royal's "Down In The Boondocks" . . . Gene Pitney crossing the bossa nova with mariachi horns on "Last Chance To Turn Around" . . . Elvis Presley rocking the samba in his 1963 film FUN IN ACAPULCO . . . and Diana Ross and The Supremes putting on Spanish airs with "Ask Any Girl." It's "habanera rock" (a term probably coined by Connie Francis in 1960), a potent pop/rock/soul sound from the '60s that found Cuban, Brazilian, Spanish and Mexican rhythms forming the foundation of hits like Steve Alaimo's "Every Day I Have To Cry," Tony Orlando's "Bless You," Neil Diamond's "Cherry, Cherry," Gene McDaniels' "Spanish Lace" and Gary US Bonds' "New Orleans." It was a highly commercial sound that largely drove the music industry until the advent of The Beatles and the British Invasion. There were precedents for this trend in the previous decade: The music of Bo Diddley, and hit records like Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away," Ray Charles' "Mary Ann," and Johnny Otis' "Willie and The Hand Jive." But it was producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller who really kicked the trend into overdrive in 1959 with their groundbreaking, baion beat-laden production of "There Goes My Baby" for The Drifters. With The Drifters, their former lead singer Ben E. King and Jay and The Americans (another Leiber-Stoller group) anchoring the habanera rock movement, it spread across the airwaves and into A & R departments all over the country - in Nashville, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles - and beyond American shores. Records by artists as diverse as Ral Donner, Johnny Nash, Billy J. Kramer and The Dakotas and Eydie Gorme held forth with this sound, and girl group records galore(largely influenced by Phil

Spector's productions with The Crystals and The Ronettes) were resplendent with castanets and habanera rhythms. This book tells the story of that wonderful red, white and blue sound (red for Latin beats; white for classically-influenced melodies; and blue for R & B vocal arrangements) and identifies the most important of the songwriters and producers who popularized it. Most were Jewish, and several plied their trade in Manhattan's Brill Building. Ken Emerson's chapter called "Jewish Latin" is easily the most important piece of rock writing of the last decade. The book is worth the purchase price for that reason alone.

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