

INTERVIEW WITH THE CHILDREN OF BERT BERNS: BRETT AND CASSANDRA BERNS



1. Why is it so important to tell the story of Bert Berns?

CASSANDRA: Our dad was one of the greatest songwriters and record producers of the twentieth century, yet few have ever heard his name. And his short but spectacular life is not only the greatest untold story of rock and roll, but perhaps one of the greatest of them all. We long ago realized that only through the telling of his dramatic life story would he be recognized for his epochal body of work.

2. What made you decide to tell the story as a musical?

BRETT: The life story of Bert Berns is as fascinating as any work of fiction. And his body of work is largely autobiographical. The convergence of these two forces made for a unique musical vision which allowed us to bring my father back to life through the ultimate art form of musical theater.

3. What have been some of the challenges of telling your father's life story as a musical?

BRETT: The Bert Berns story is vast and complicated - it took biographer Joel Selvin nearly 400 pages to tell it properly in his new book *Here Comes The Night*. This being a musical where the songs tell the story, we were able to overcome the most difficult challenge presented to any bio-musical and create a truly transformative work of art.

4. How does the character of Jessie represent your own journey of discovery?

CASSANDRA: Jessie is an amalgamation of my brothers and I, and is representative of our quest to learn who our father was and the long effort to champion his legacy. Knowing he would die young, our father would say "my children will know me through my music." Jessie's journey of discovery is a dramatization of our own long search for clues to the heart and soul of Bert Berns.

5. How has your father's story inspired you?

BRETT: The Bert Berns story is inspirational on so many levels. His is an example of extraordinary vision, courage and perseverance. Of respect, collaboration and humility. And of living life with passion and love - as if every day might be your last.

6. Who were some of the great artists that Bert collaborated with?

BRETT: Van Morrison, Neil Diamond, Solomon Burke, Ben E. King, Wilson Pickett, Jimmy Page, Freddie Scott, Garnet Mimms, Patti LaBelle, Barbara Lewis, Lavern Baker, Esther Phillips, Tammy Montgomery, Erma Franklin, Cissy Houston, Lulu, Tami Lynn, The Isley Brothers, The Drifters, The Exciters, The McCoys, The Strangeloves, The Kingsmen, The Jarmels, Hoagy Lands, King Curtis, Jimmy Radcliffe, Gene Pitney, Arsenio Rodriguez, Betty Harris - the list goes on and on.

7. Do you have a favorite Bert Berns song?

CASSANDRA: There's a song in the musical called "I'll Take Good Care of You" that has always spoken to me. It's a beautiful and deeply soulful song that he wrote before I was born, but feels all these years later as if it could have been written for me.

