

# The Telegraph

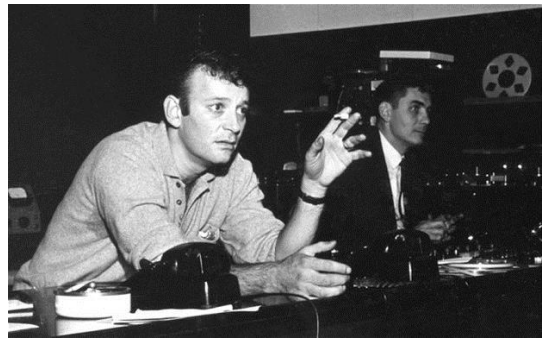
June 17, 2014

## Bert Berns: the man behind 51 pop hits

*New musical Piece of my Heart shines spotlight on forgotten composer Bert Berns, the man behind Twist and Shout, Brown Eyed Girl and Under the Boardwalk*

By [Martin Chilton](#)

Twist and Shout, Under the Boardwalk, Everybody Needs Somebody to Love, Piece of My Heart, Brown Eyed Girl and Hang on Sloopy. They are seminal pop hits and all involved, either as songwriter, producer or arranger, a man called Bert Berns. But how many people know about Berns, who was behind 51 hits in just seven years from 1961.



That is poised to change with a new musical, *Piece of My Heart: The Bert Berns Story*, which opens in previews on June 25 and will be running Off-Broadway from July 21 at The Pershing Square Signature Centre, New York.

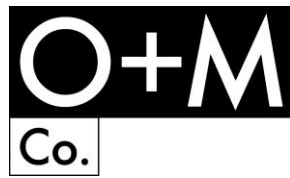
Denis Jones, the director and choreographer of the production, believes it is time to highlight what *Rolling Stone* magazine has described as "one of the great untold stories of rock and roll".

It's not quite accurate to say that his story is untold, however. There is a book out this spring by US music writer Joel Selvin called *Here Comes the Night – subtitled The Dark Soul of Bert Berns and the Dirty Business of Rhythm and Blues* – which makes it clear that Bronx-born Berns was a ruthless businessman and a dangerous foe. When Selvin approached Sixties Atlantic Records boss Jerry Wexler to talk about Berns, he said: "I don't know where he's buried but if I did, I would p--- on his grave."

As a teenager Berns suffered from rheumatic fever, which damaged his heart. He died from a heart attack at the age of 38 on December 30, 1967. "He was not supposed to live past 30," Jones told Reuters.

"Interestingly, the entire body of work that he generated was between his 30th birthday and his passing." Jones insisted that Berns's past will not be glossed over in the production, saying: "He had some connections, some people around him who were tricky. And based on their business practices, after he passed certain people decided to wipe him out of the history books. All of that will be explained in the play," he added.

As well as a songwriter, Berns was also a renowned producer and arranger. He worked on the song *Under the Boardwalk* for The Drifters and on *Cherry Cherry*, which sent Neil Diamond to the top of the charts.



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Berns also produced dozens of hits that were recorded by [The Beatles](#), [The Rolling Stones](#) and David Bowie. Among his other songs were I Want Candy, Tell Him, Cry to Me and Cry Baby.

Zak Resnick (*Mamma Mia!*) plays Berns and Leslie Kritzer (*Legally Blonde*) is his daughter in a musical that shifts between the Sixties and present-day New York. Resnick says of Berns: "He is such an intense, complicated person. He went through so much to find his voice, his sound and his style. There were some dark times and he left this world far too soon."

Berns is also noted for his work with Van Morrison. Here Comes the Night is a 1964 song written by Berns, which became a hit for Morrison and his band Them in 1965. Morrison subsequently signed as a solo artist for Berns's Bang Records in 1965 and recorded eight songs for him, including Brown Eyed Girl.



But the Irish musician and Burns "fell quickly into a very troubled relationship", in Selvey's words, and Morrison later had problems getting out of his contract with Bang Records after the death of Berns. Whatever the controversies, there is no disputing his place in music history, as one of the most successful songwriters of his time.