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Ken Emerson

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Ken Emerson : Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era:

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Ken Emerson's Brill-iant book about the music and magic On BroadwayBy Laura Pinto'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/Ellie 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.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. When Oldies Were Newies By Bill Emblom
 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.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. because of the writer's love of his topic and the music involved
 By Paul Larsen
 An exceptional book, due to its research and level of writing.....and, also, not the least, because of the writer's love of his topic and the music involved. I'm reading Carole King's memoir and the biography of Bert Berns simultaneously with this and feel I'm walking the streets of those times. All three of these books are well worth the time of anyone who grew up when these artists and songs were the soundtrack to their lives and/or loves the music in and of itself. I can't sing this book's praises enough. Ken Emerson weaves a wonderful tapestry, seriously, constantly relating back to what he'd written in previous chapters and presenting a picture that could be no fuller let alone equaled.

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.