



Hound Dog: The Leiber & Stoller Autobiography

Jerry Leiber, Mike Stoller

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In 1950 a couple of rhythm and blues-loving teenagers named Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller met for the first time. Leiber was looking for someone to help compose music for lyrics he'd written, and a friend recommended a piano player named Mike Stoller. They discovered their mutual affection for R&B, and, as Jerry and Mike put it in this fascinating autobiography, it was the beginning of an argument that has been going on for more than fifty years with no resolution in sight.

Leiber and Stoller had their first success with a song called "Hard Times" that became an R&B hit in 1952. They followed it with the classic song "Kansas City," and then another bluesy composition, "Hound Dog," for the inimitable Big Mama Thornton. They were still in their teens and working with some of the pioneers of rock and roll. A few years later "Hound Dog" would become a #1 record for Elvis Presley, and Jerry and Mike became the King's favorite songwriters. They wrote such early Elvis hits as "Jailhouse Rock," "Treat Me Nice," and "You're So Square (Baby I Don't Care)." Their affection for Elvis was mutual, but Elvis's manager, "Colonel" Tom Parker, didn't appreciate Jerry and Mike's independent ways and ended the relationship.

Leiber and Stoller had a string of hits with the Coasters, including "Yakety Yak," "Poison Ivy," and "Charlie Brown." They infused their songs with wit and playfulness. They had founded their own music label, which led them to an arrangement with Atlantic Records, where they wrote hits for the Drifters and Ben E. King, including "On Broadway" (with Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil) and "Stand by Me" (with King). Their productions for the Drifters brought new instrumentation and musical sophistication to rock music.

Not yet in their thirties, Leiber and Stoller became part of the Brill Building scene in the early 1960s. Their Red Bird label produced and recorded some of the most successful girl groups of the era. Along the way they mentored an ambitious young writer-producer named Phil Spector and influenced musician Burt Bacharach.

In a completely different genre, Leiber and Stoller wrote and produced "Is That All There Is?" for Peggy Lee. They also created the smash musical *Smokey Joe's Café*, which premiered in 1995 and became the longest-running musical revue in Broadway history. With the assistance of David Ritz, they describe what it was like when Elvis was a fresh new face and when two young guys with tons of talent and an insatiable love of good old American R&B could create the soundtrack for a generation -- and have a great time doing it.

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