Obituaries

Jerry Leiber, at 78; lyricist for blues, rock classics

By Jacob Adelman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

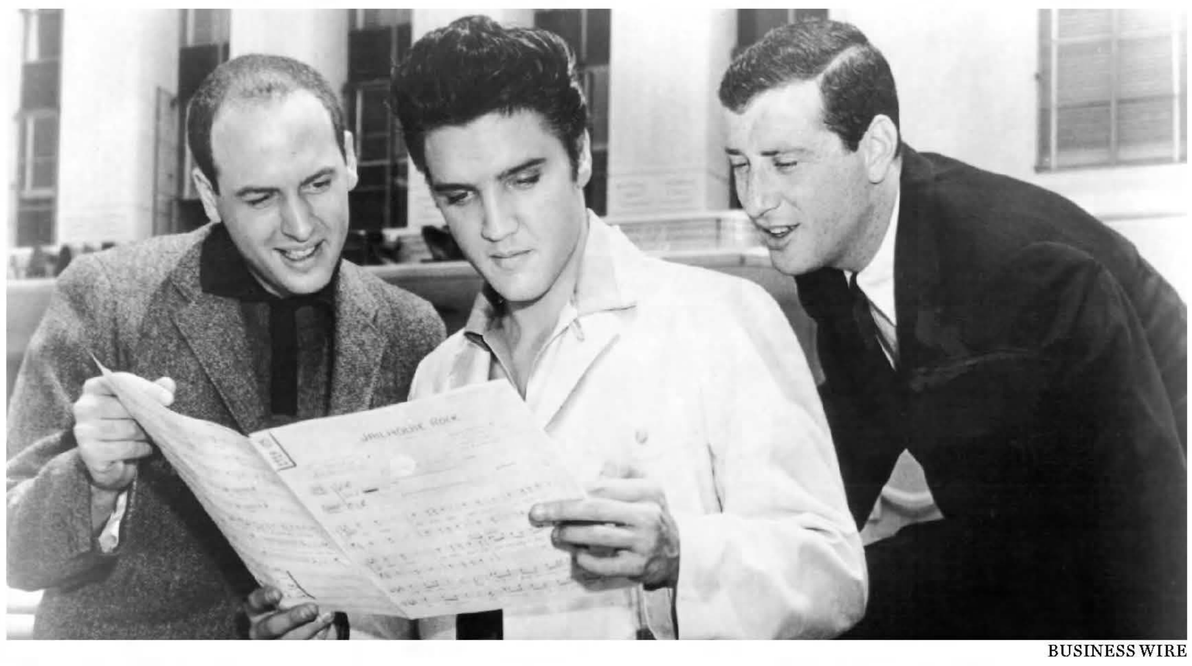
LOS ANGELES — Jerry Leiber, who with longtime partner Mike Stoller wrote "Hound Dog," "Jailhouse Rock," "Yakety Yak," and other hit songs that came to define early rock 'n' roll, died in Los Angeles yesterday at age 78, said his publicist, Bobbi Marcus.

With Mr. Leiber as lyricist and Stoller as composer, the team channeled their blues and jazz backgrounds into pop songs performed by such artists as Elvis Presley, Dion and the Belmonts, the Coasters, the Drifters, and Ben E. King in a way that would help create a joyous new musical style.

From their breakout hit, blues great Big Mama Thornton's 1953 rendition of "Hound Dog," until their songwriting took a more serious turn in 1969 with Peggy Lee's recording of "Is That All There Is?" the pair remained one of the most successful teams in pop music history.

Their writing prowess and influence over the recording industry as pioneering independent producers earned them induction into the nonperformer category of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987.

"The music world lost today one of its greatest poet laureates," said Terry Stewart, president of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. "Jerry not only wrote the words that everyone was singing, he led the way in how we verbalized our feelings about the societal changes we were living with in post-World War II life. Appropriately, his vehicles of choice were the emerging populist musical genres of rhythm and blues and then rock and roll."



BUSINESS WIRE

Jerry Leiber (right), and Mike Stoller went over "Jailhouse Rock" with Elvis Presley.

Mr. Leiber, who like Stoller was white, said his musical inspiration came from the close identification he had with black American culture during his boyhood and teenage years in Baltimore and Los Angeles.

Thus he was the perfect lyricist for bluesy, jazz-inflected compositions like "Kansas City," "Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots," "Charlie Brown," "Drip Drop," "Stand By Me," and "On Broadway."

The lyrics could be poignant, as in "On Broadway," or full of humor, as in the antics of high school goofball Charlie Brown, who "calls the English teacher Daddy-O" and laments, "Why's everybody always pickin' on me?"

The result was a serious departure from the classically inflected music that had been produced by a previous generation of pop songwriters that included George Gershwin and Irving Berlin.

"Irving Berlin was the greatest songwriter of all time," Mr. Leiber told The Los Angeles Times's West magazine in 2006. "I was in awe of him. But his music wasn't my music. My music was the blues."

Over their career, the two men had 15 number one hits in a variety of genres by 10 different artists. They were instrumental in helping to launch Presley's career with such songs as "Hound Dog" and "Jailhouse Rock."

The two far preferred Thornton's version of "Hound Dog" to Presley's, in part because the latter version changed some of the lyrics.

In the 1990s their songs became the centerpiece of a long-running Broadway revue, "Smokey Joe's Cafe," which won a Grammy for best musical show album in 1996.

Their last song to reach wide acclaim was the 1969 ballad "Is That All There Is?"

Jerry Leiber was born in Baltimore. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland. He met Stoller after moving to Los Angeles with his mother in 1950.

The pair had grown tired of writing pop hits by the late 1960s, Mr. Leiber once said, and decided to concentrate on more serious music. Those later efforts never found the wide audience that their earlier work did, but Mr. Leiber said that was fine with him and his partner.

"The earlier market of swing and Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee and Duke Ellington was pretty much gone, but we liked that kind of sound and wanted to imitate it," he told The New York Times in 1995. "In a way, we had helped kill it with what we had done."

Nick Ashford; penned Motown hits with wife

By Nekesa Mumbi Moody
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Nick Ashford, one-half of the legendary Motown songwriting duo Ashford & Simpson that penned elegant, soulful classics for the likes of Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye and funk hits for Chaka Khan and others, died yesterday at age 70, his former publicist said.

Mr. Ashford, who along with his wife, Valerie Simpson, wrote some of Motown's biggest hits, died in a New York City hospital, said Liz Rosenberg, who also was Mr. Ashford's longtime friend. He had been suffering from throat cancer and had undergone radiation treatment, she said.

Though they had some of their greatest success at Motown with classics such as "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and "Reach Out And Touch Somebody's Hand" by Ross and "You're All I Need To Get By" by Gaye and Tammi Terrell, Ashford & Simpson also created classics for others, like the anthem "I'm Every Woman" by Khan, which was remade by Whitney Houston.

They also had success writing for themselves: Perhaps their biggest known hit on which they sang was "Solid As A Rock."

Mr. Ashford and Simpson's relationship stretched more than four decades. They met in 1964 in a New York City church; Mr. Ashford, a South Carolina native, had come to the city to pursue a dance career. Simpson was a music student, and after connecting with her, they decided to start to write songs together.

Their first major success occurred when they came up with "Let's Go Get Stoned" for Ray Charles. That song became a huge hit, and soon, they came to the attention of Motown Records and began penning hits for their artists. The started out writing for Gaye and Terrell. "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" was originally their hit, until Ross recorded it and made it her signature song.

The duo, who were married for 38 years, helped sell millions of records for several artists. They also had success singing their own songs, but other than the 1980s hit "Solid As a Rock," their hits were dwarfed by those that they penned for others.

In recent years, the pair continued to perform. They also were owners of the New York City restaurant Sugar Bar, where many top names and emerging talents would put on showcases.

Mr. Ashford leaves his wife and two daughters.



REUTERS/FILE 2009

NICK ASHFORD

Jack Layton, 61, popular head of Canada's opposition party

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TORONTO — Jack Layton, a folksy and charismatic political leader who guided his party to become the dominant opposition group in Canada's Parliament while battling severe health problems, died yesterday of cancer. He was 61.

Mr. Layton hobbled through the campaign earlier this year as he recovered from a broken hip and prostate cancer. Under his upbeat leadership the leftist New Democrats outpolled the Liberals and became the official opposition party for the first time in their 50-year history.

The New Democrat party issued a statement saying Mr. Layton died peacefully at his Toronto home, surrounded by family and loved ones. Only weeks ago, a gaunt Mr. Layton held a press conference to announce he was fighting a second bout of cancer.

The spring campaign started out looking like a straight battle between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Liberals' Michael Ignatieff, with Mr. Layton recovering from prostate cancer and a broken hip.

But Mr. Layton's party scored its historic win by garnering 103 seats in the May federal election, up from a previous 37.

His cheerful message, his strong performance in the debates, and his popularity in the French-speaking province of Quebec went over well with voters. He once was voted the politician Canadians would most want to have a beer with.

He was a native of Montreal, and a photo of him wearing a Canadiens jersey and pouring a beer during the hockey playoffs went viral in Quebec.

But Harper's Conservative government won a coveted majority in part because the left-center vote in Canada split between the Liberals and New Democrats.

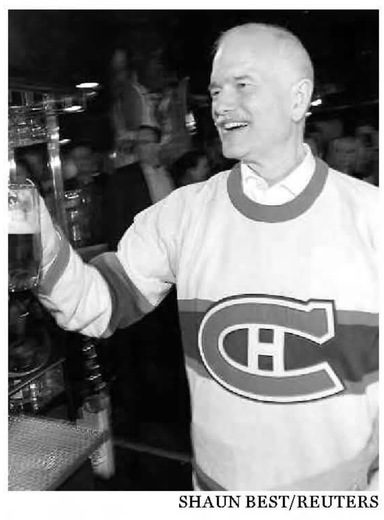
Harper said he was deeply saddened by Mr. Layton's death.

"When I last spoke with Jack following his announcement in July, I wished him well, and he told me he'd be seeing me in the House of Commons in the fall," Harper said in a statement. "This, sadly, will no longer come to pass."

Harper later spoke to the nation in a televised address from Parliament.

"Jack Layton will be remembered for the force of his personality and dedication to public life," Harper said. "We have all lost an engaging personality and a man with strong principles."

Harper, who sometimes plays the piano and sings, said he regretted not getting a chance to "jam" with Layton, who played the guitar, piano, harmonica, and accordion.



SHAUN BEST/REUTERS

JACK LAYTON

Canadians left flowers and cards at the eternal flame on Parliament Hill, where the flag on the peace tower was lowered to half-staff.

Mr. Layton announced in February 2010 that he had been battling prostate cancer, but he continued a crowded schedule while getting treatment. He lost a considerable amount of weight, and his voice was very weak when he said last month that his battle with prostate cancer was going well, but that recent tests showed he had a new form of cancer. He not did elaborate on what type of cancer was discovered.

He was remembered yesterday as a regular guy who made friends easily. On the quiet Toronto side street where Mr. Layton lived, friends and neighbors stopped by, some bearing flowers.

"He was someone you could have a beer with," said Ted Hawkins, who laid a single red rose on the doorstep. "He was a very down-to-earth person."

Interim Liberal Leader Bob Rae said the public and the private sides of Mr. Layton were one and the same: a naturally upbeat person that everyone liked, even if they disagreed with his political views.

Mr. Layton wrote a letter to Canadians this past Saturday that was released by his wife, Olivia Chow, after his death.

He called for a Canada that shares its benefits more fairly and asked Canadians to give his party a chance in the years to come.

Mr. Layton's wife is a former Toronto city councilor and now the New Democrat Parliament member for a downtown Toronto district. He leaves two children, Sarah and Mike, from a previous marriage. Mike is a Toronto city councilor.

'Businessmen were surprised or shocked. How could a homemaker, with no business experience, run a newspaper?'

FEMINIST BETTY FRIEDAN, *writing about Mrs. Clark for Everywoman's Family Circle in the 1950s*

Rhoda Shaw Clark, 99; published N.H. newspaper after husband's tragic death

By Gloria Negri
GLOBE STAFF

Rhoda Shaw Clark was a contented homemaker, wife, and mother of five who had no desire for a career, much less one as demanding as publisher of a daily newspaper. But in 1950, fate stepped in, and there was Mrs. Clark sitting behind the publisher's desk at the Claremont Daily Eagle, where her husband, John, had sat days before drowning in the flooded Sugar River near their home in Claremont, N.H. They were both 39.

John McLane Clark had worked as a journalist at The Washington Post, but he decided after serving in World War II that he would like to run a small-town newspaper. He bought the Claremont Daily Eagle and became its editor and publisher.

After his death, Mrs. Clark volunteered and got overwhelming support. Her son, Winfield Shaw Clark of New Boston, N.H., said she served as publisher from 1950 to 1963, running the ship, writing a weekly column, selling advertising space, attending meetings of town officials, and seeing that the paper worked for the community's common good, as her husband had vowed.

Mrs. Clark, who sold the newspaper in 1963, died at her New Boston, home on Aug. 7 of complications of dementia, her son said. She was 99.

When feminist Betty Friedan interviewed Mrs. Clark for Everywoman's Family Circle in the 1950s, she wrote that John Clark "bought a heavily mortgaged Claremont Daily Eagle and used it to help rebuild a community that had become demoralized by loss of many of its industries."

On hearing of Mrs. Clark's decision to run the paper, Friedan wrote, "Businessmen were surprised or shocked. How could a homemaker, with no business experience, run a newspaper? Even Rhoda's father warned, 'You're not tough enough.' But, less than a week after her husband's death, Rhoda sat down at his Daily Eagle desk, noted the appointments he could not keep, and read through an enormous accumulation of mail. 'It's all beyond me,' she thought, but I've got to do it.' "

As if administrative work were not enough, Mrs. Clark wrote a weekly column titled, "Random Pencilings on a Lace Cuff," a chatty, folksy report of goings-on about town and the larger area. When three new shoe companies opened in Claremont and Newport, providing jobs for many, she wrote: "Must all be a dream. Claremonters and Newporters are all wandering around wearing big smiles."

Winfield said she wrote only on a typewriter, using the "hunt-and-peck" method.

Though Mrs. Clark was a Republican, she was considered too liberal by some. Another son, Alexander Shaw Clark of Falmouth, Maine, said William Loeb, the late Union Leader publisher, attacked her liberalism. Winfield said Loeb called her "an egghead liberal." Mrs. Clark did write a somewhat light editorial about it, Winfield said. "Mother had a good bit of resilience and a kind of easy-going sense of humor."

One of her former cub reporters, Dan North of Jersey City, N.J., recalled that he had been assigned to cover the trial of "a left-wing minister" accused of Communism. "It was during the McCarthy era," he said. He said he felt he should tell Mrs. Clark that his parents were Communists in the event someone would attack her for assigning him to the trial.

He said her reply was, "As long as you are an honest reporter, I don't give a darn about the politics of your parents."

"Rhoda was a Republican, not a left-winger," he said, "but she was definitely a civil libertarian."

Nelson Bryant of West Tisbury was Mrs. Clark's managing editor at the time when the paper had a daily circulation of 10,000. "I think Rhoda and I learned to run a newspaper together," Bryant says. "She was a hardworking, honest woman, and there were women reporters on the staff."

As a top editor, she was known to be demanding, Charles Caruso of New York City well remembers. "I had gone there for a job, but before I went for the interview went to a road house where people were dancing. I saw this very pretty woman and asked her for a dance. As we danced, I told her I was nervous about an interview the next day with the publisher of the Daily Eagle. " 'I hear the woman publisher is a harridan, a real curmudgeon,' " he said. His dance partner turned out to be Mrs. Clark. He got the job.

She was born to Winfield Lowry and Lois (Warren) Shaw in Braintree, Mass., where her father was involved in the shoe manufacturing business. Her mother was a suffragist. Mrs. Clark was a student at Vassar College when she met John Clark at Dartmouth College's Winter Carnival. She graduated from Vassar in 1934 with a major in geology, her family said. After her retirement from the paper, she spent 30 years researching her ancestors throughout New England.

She and John married in 1936 on the front lawn of the family home in New Boston. Over the next 14 years, including Mr. Clark's four years overseas in the Office of Strategic Services, she raised their five children mostly on her own, her children said. Before working for The Washington Post, he went to Ecuador with a nonprofit antipoverty group. For a time, when Mr. Clark worked for the Post, they lived in Alexandria, Va.

Claremont had a different pace. In her interview with Mrs. Clark, Friedan wrote about how Mrs. Clark was focused on "paring the household budget and making clothes last longer so John could pay off that mortgage. . . . With five children to keep me busy, I seldom had time to read the paper through," Mrs. Clark told her.

That was before Mr. Clark, with several of his children and their Irish setter, set out in a canoe on the Sugar River. Their canoe was swamped by flood waters, and Mr. Clark drowned.

In the midst of tragedy, Mrs. Clark focused on assuming her husband's job, getting five children off to school in the morning, and trying to be there when they came home. Her eldest child Linda, then 12, made breakfast for her siblings, Mrs. Clark told Friedan. "After school she mended or made dresses for her little sisters." Linda Clark McGoldrick of Littleton died at 55.

As soon as she could, she hired women to look after her children and their home when she was tied up with newspaper business and would write her columns at home to be with them. Both sons were paper boys.

Reflecting on their youth, daughter Ellen Clark Anderson of Sun City, Calif. recalled how she and her friends would visit the newspaper. "We watched the presses roll and saw mother in her office. Mother would go out and collect advertising bills and take on whatever was necessary. She surprised everyone."

Another daughter, Catherine Shaw Clark of New Boston, was her mother's primary daytime caregiver for six years.

Mrs. Clark's children attribute much of her longevity to her early athletic life. She was 5 feet 10 inches tall, and coached fencing at Vassar. She skied and hiked. She loved the outdoors and was a gardener. She had never smoked and was rarely sick. Her son Winfield said she had a drink of vodka before dinner.

After her retirement from the newspaper, she moved to her late parents farm in New Boston, where she remained active in town affairs and held the Boston Post Cane, as the town's oldest citizen.

In addition to her two sons and two daughters, Mrs. Clark leaves seven grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

A celebration of her life will be held at the New Boston Community Church at 1 p.m. Sept. 2, which would have been her 100th birthday.



RHODA SHAW CLARK