

Profile: Shel Silverstein

November 23, 1932 - May 10, 1999

Yes, *that* Shel Silverstein, the author of so many children's books:



- *Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book* (1961)
- *Uncle Shelby's Story of Lafcadio, the Lion Who Back* (1963)
- *The Giving Tree* (1964)
- *Uncle Shelby's Giraffe and a Half* (1964)
- *Uncle Shelby's Zoo; Don't Bump the Glump!* (1964)
- *Who Wants a Cheap Rhinoceros?* (1964)
- *Where the Sidewalk Ends; Poems and Drawings* (1974)
- *The Missing Piece* (1976)
- *The Missing Piece Meets the Big O* (1981)
- *A Light in the Attic* (poems) (1981)
- *Falling Up: Poems and Drawings* (1996)

Why, you may ask, is Shel Silverstein being profiled in an article about songwriting?

Because Shel Silverstein was a prolific lyricist and songwriter who penned some of the most memorable songs of our youth. A glance through BMI's web catalog of his songs reveals *789 published titles!*

Who has not at some point heard the story of why there aren't any unicorns? How hard did you laugh when you first heard "A Boy Named Sue"?

When Silverstein passed away in the spring of 1999, it disturbed me to see his songwriting legacy take a back seat to his children's literature. It is true that he was better known as an author than as a songwriter, but many of the articles I've read since his death will mention one or two song titles and then focus primarily on the literature.

Shel Silverstein was a *writer*, someone who knew how to upset our paradigms through both words and music.

However, there is a myth that must be dispelled: Silverstein did *not* write "Hello Mudduh Hello Fadduh (A Letter from Camp)". I have found articles in highly respected publications that attribute this song to Silverstein, but ASCAP lists the writers as Allan Sherman (who recorded the song) and Louis F. Bush. Those are the writers collecting the royalty checks, not Silverstein.

Silverstein scored several movies, including *Ned Kelly* [United Artists] (1970), *Who Is Harry Kellerman And Why Is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?* [Columbia] (1971) (in which he also had a role), *Thieves* (1977) and *Postcards from the Edge* (1996), for which his song "I'm Checkin' Out" was nominated for an Academy Award.

Silverstein's song collections recorded by others include *Freakin' at the Freaker's Ball* (1972), *Sloppy Seconds* (1972), *Dr. Hook* (1972) and *Bobby Bare Sings Lullabys, Legends and Lies (The Songs of Shel Silverstein)* (1973).

Shel Silverstein's Cuts (*bold indicates hits*)

A Boy Named Sue - Johnny Cash

Cover of the Rolling Stone - Dr. Hook

Here in Topeka (One's on the Way) - Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty

Hey Loretta - Loretta Lynn

Hey, Nelly Nelly - Judy Collins

I'm Checkin' Out -- From *Postcards From the Edge*

Marie Lavaux - Bobby Bare, Canned Heat, Cathy Winter. Girl Trouble

Numbers - Bobby Bare

One's On the Way - Loretta Lynn

Queen of the Silver Dollar - Emmylou Harris, Doctor Hook, Dave & Sugar

Sylvia's Mother - Dr. Hook

The Taker - Waylon Jennings & others

The Unicorn Song - The Irish Rovers, Bill Anderson

The Winner - Bobby Bare

...and many, many more....

- Jim Melko