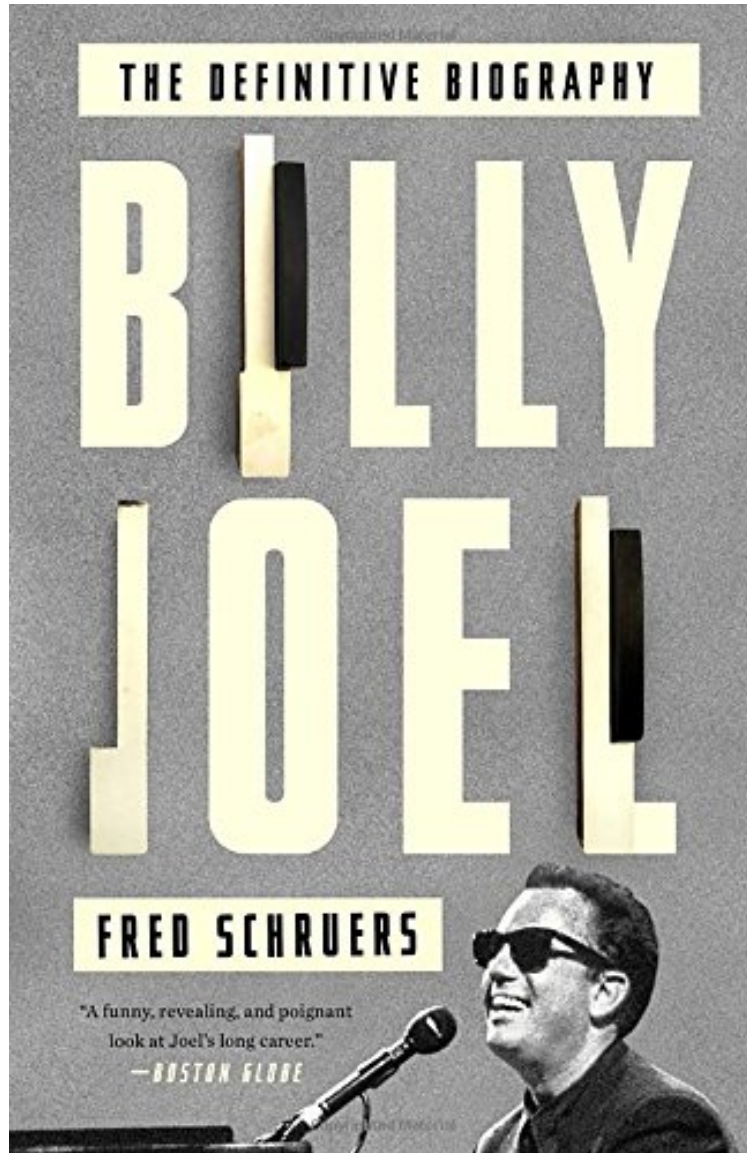


[Mobile book] Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography

## Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography

*Fred Schruers*

*\*Download PDF / ePub / DOC / audiobook / ebooks*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#38030 in Books Schruers Fred 2015-11-17 2015-11-17 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .88 x 5.18l, .81 #File Name: 0804140219400 pages Billy Joel The Definitive Biography | File size: 23.Mb

**Fred Schruers : Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Billy Joel: The Definitive Biography:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. from a long islander and an 80's baby By Joshua Brown LA has James Taylor, the Midwest has Bob Seger, the south has John Fogerty. More locally, Brooklyn has Neil Diamond and Jersey has Bruce Springsteen, but on Long Island, our bard is unquestionably Billy Joel. His songs played from the cassette decks in our parents' cars and then they played into from our Sony Discmans. Our kids will stream them to

whatever device they'll be using in the times to come. But the stories and the music they're set to will be the same - completely endemic to this place we live in. The music of Billy Joel is part of the soul of our existence here, as elemental as the beaches and the bagel stores, the east end and the south shore, the Five Towns and the Gold Coast. To learn the history of Billy's LI upbringing, his rise to fame and his frequent brushes with sorrow, this is the book you'll want to read. Schruers spent hundreds of hours in dozens of locales around the world with our subject, digging deep into the past and scouring archives worth of material to fill in any blanks from the musician's own recollection. Along the way, we get a Billy Joel's personal perspective on the big events of his life, along with his own true feelings about the people who made up his inner circle. This is a great read and lots of fun, despite Joel's apparent obsession with his own death and funeral arrangements - a subject he comes back to throughout the book. The highs and lows are all here, and in case that's not enough, there's also Christie Brinkley. Buy 'Billy Joel', you won't be disappointed. 22 of 25 people found the following review helpful. RICK SHAQ GOLDSTEIN SAYS: AND IM AFRAID TO GO TO SLEEP CAUSE TOMORROW IS TODAY By Rick Shaq Goldstein Regardless of whether you're a Billy Joel fan or not if you simply like music and really really wonder about the true creative process from the highs to the lows to the rewards and rock bottom emotions that actually lead to multiple suicide attempts this is the book for you. Everything in life is obviously not what it looks like but multiply that by a hundred and you will have an idea of what's behind the lyrics in the songs by Billy Joel that have sold millions upon millions of albums. The author in collaboration with Billy takes you on a detailed trip through Billy's life that starts off in a place that I wasn't expecting to see nor did I even have an idea that it existed. I am the same age as Billy born in the same area and like Joel am part of the first Jewish post-Holocaust generation. I was caught off guard when the story started with a history of Joel's family before during and after the despicable Nazi stain on history. Both our families lost members in the death camps and we both had family that escaped from Europe. Billy's Dad went from Europe to Switzerland to Cuba to America. His Grandfather had a multi-million dollar business taken from him under the Nazi law of Jews can't own a business. The reader is literally taken by the hand and shown what shaped Joel everything from dropping out of high school piano lessons and amateur boxing. How's that for a combo for a teenager piano lessons and boxing! Throughout this well-written biography you see how Billy's love of reading educated him far more than staying in school with a particular love of history. His many travails with women are deftly tied to his lyrics that are interspersed throughout the book in expert fashion. If you are a Billy Joel fan you will no longer have to wonder or imagine what's truly behind his lyrics. By the one-third mark of the book I had to fight myself to keep from running to my stereo and re-listen to all the songs that I thought I knew the complete meaning of. I promised myself that that growing pleasure would be a reward for finishing the book. (Another enjoyable personal epiphany was when Joel moved to Los Angeles as I also did the actual bar that Billy worked at at Wilshire and Western that was the true birth place of the all-time classic PIANO MAN was right down the street from where I worked!) It is obvious throughout that Billy never wants to distance himself from who he really is and even more importantly never lose a firm grasp on where he came from. I think it's best summed up by Billy's comments regarding the Nylon Curtain album: The Nylon Curtain was a concept album, says Billy. Even in the love songs, there are troubles, pressure, surprises, and disappointments. Everybody falls, everybody has something bad happen. It's about how you recover, how you cope with it, how you deal with loss and regret and move on. That's a major, recurring theme in a lot of my lyrics. To me that perfectly crystallizes the man the person the performer the imperfect-gifted-human-being that Billy Joel is. This is a tremendous book that reminds all of us why at one time or another we all get caught up or affected by lyrics. Some make us feel not so alone because we realize other people must feel what we feel or there wouldn't be a song about it other lyrics help us dream about what we either haven't achieved yet or realize there are dreams that will never come true but we can still dream and there are lyrics that motivate lyrics that inspire you to wholeheartedly believe that if you get up one more time than you're knocked down you can make it. Billy Joel is one of the best in putting that lyrical hand out to help you up! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. the show was fantastic! It prompted me to purchase this book to ... By Rock Maven Saw one of Billy's "franchise" appearances at MSG recently and it rejuvenated my interest in his career. Needless to say, the show was fantastic! It prompted me to purchase this book to learn more about his career. Mr. Schruers does a very good job filling in some gaps from previous "bios". I particularly appreciated Billy's roots and reminisces about his ancestors in Nazi Germany. Another positive was the inspiration for many of his hits. I felt the author dwelt too much on the financial problems of this rock icon in terms of rip-offs from managers, promoters, contractual entanglements, etc. Billy, in this respect, is no different than scores of other rock artists who were bilked and financially abused. I just finished reading about Ray Davies of the Kinks and his trials and tribulations in this respect. He devoted an album "Lola vs. Powerman" to his trials and tribulations with assorted unscrupulous promoters, managers, etc. Check out the songs "Moneygound" and "Powerman". Even Billy would enjoy them. Things bog down occasionally and a very light touch is given to the sex, drugs and wrecks of touring. I guess it's a concession to Billy who pulled his own auto-bio just before publication. It was enlightening to hear of Billy's thoughts of performing at Medicare-age. God bless him. He wears a suit (a little too tight) and tie for his current shows and pulls no punches about who he is today on stage. No hair dye (no hair!), no fancy stage costumes, just straight out rock and roll from one of the world's most successful songwriters/performers. I hope he does a 100 concerts at MSG!

The long-awaited, all-access biography of a music legend In Billy Joel, acclaimed music journalist Fred Schruers draws upon more than one hundred hours of exclusive interviews with Joel to present an unprecedented look at the life, career, and legacy of the pint-sized kid from Long Island who became a rock icon. Exhibiting unparalleled intimate knowledge, Schruers chronicles Joels rise to the top of the charts, from his working-class origins in Levittown and early days spent in boxing rings and sweaty clubs to his monumental success in the seventies and eighties. He also explores Joels creative transformation in the nineties, his dream performance with Paul McCartney at Shea Stadium in 2008, and beyond. Along the way, Schruers reveals the stories behind all the key events and relationships including Joels high-profile marriages and legal battles that defined his path to stardom and inspired his signature songs, such as Piano Man, Scenes from an Italian Restaurant, New York State of Mind, and Shes Always a Woman. Throughout, he captures the spirit of a restless artist determined to break through by sharing, in his deeply personal lyrics, the dreams and heartbreaks of suburban American life. Comprehensive, vibrantly written, and filled with Joels memories and reflections as well as those of the family, friends, and band members who have formed his inner circle, including Christie Brinkley, Alexa Ray Joel, Jon Small, and Steve Cohen this is the definitive account of a beloved rock stars epic American journey.

"If you call yourself a Joel fan, you'll be reading this." *Newsday* "[T]he rollicking story of a Hicksville boy made good." *Maura Johnston, Newsday* "Schruers clearly realizes he has gold in his interviews with Joel, his friends, paramours and confidants... [He delivers] insights on individual songs that will surprise even the most studied Joel fan.... [and] has given us the most complete look at Joels life and career to date." *Dallas Morning News* [Billy Joel] not only lives up to its subtitle, but has the strengths of both an autobiography and biography.... [It] will likely end up as the most complete tome on the Bard of Long Island, with the most access to its subject." *Houston Press* "[A] funny, revealing, and poignant look at [Joel's] long career." *Boston Globe* "Schruers' account of Joel's 1970s rise is fantastic, rich in anecdotes about the origins of different songs." *Billboard* "[A] funny and revealing account of one of the most popular songwriters of our time." *New York Daily News* "Schruers uses interviews to great effect, allowing to emerge the everyman persona that resonates with Joel's fans... a fair, thorough assessment of Joel's celebrity." *Publishers Weekly* From the Hardcover edition. About the Author FRED SCHRUERS enjoyed a successful high-profile career as a writer at *Rolling Stone*, chronicling an impressive body of musicians and actors, including Fleetwood Mac, Bruce Springsteen, Jack Nicholson, Sheryl Crow, Matthew McConaughey, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and Chris Rock. His writing has also appeared in *Premiere*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Mens Journal*, *GQ*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Columbia Journalism*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Prologue Its five o'clock on a Monday, and the regular crowd shuffles in . . . to the chilly, unpopulated great hall of Madison Square Garden, where a crew is still slapping down chairs on the big slabs of decking that cover the hockey rink. Toting guitars, drumsticks, horns, and earpieces, Billy Joels band arrays itself for a sound check, and now up a metal staircase comes the man himself. You could say hes shuffling as well; both hips were re-placed in mid-2010, and now, January 27, 2014, hes fully mended but not likely to be doing the backflips off the piano that, hell occasionally speculate, led to that operation. As he perches on his compact stool, checking settings on the hybrid acoustic/synthesized piano he uses, the band looks up expectantly. Hes notoriously bored by sound checks, which means therell be plenty of japes about his age, certain band peccadillos, or the world situation, all delivered with ready wit. But at the same time, all hands had better be on the one when he delivers a casual instruction, because the message wont come twice. From time to time, as in an open-air-arena sound check in Perth in December 2008, hell get a wild hair and lead the band through pretty much an entire classic album. In that case, it was *Disraeli Gears* by Cream at least until the constables put a stop to it after a volley of noise complaints from the neighborhood. Billy, warmed by a plain black watch ap and a wool sports coat, plinks out a few exploratory notes as the others tune up around him. He gazes about I dont hear the room as well I used to hear it. Tonight will be his forty-seventh show at whats pretty much the most storied concert venue in the world. You get here just the way you get to Carnegie Hall Practice but it really helps if you sell tens of millions of albums. In his case the figure is 110 million or so, and thats part of the reason hes playing this inaugural gig to kick off an open-ended residency, a series of monthly Garden dates that will continue, as he said in a recent press conference, as long as theres demand. A blogger for *Forbes* computed that, based on rapid sellouts, the strength of the Joel catalog, and what demographers might call his enormous local and worldwide fan base, something approaching forty shows might match that demand. No ones expecting him to do that many, of course, but you never know. Billys still eyeballing the arenas distant reaches, somewhat obscured by new carpeted catwalks leading to bunker-like luxury suites. Hes wondering why the sound waves seem muted: Either Im going deaf or the room is different. Is there a big sponge up there? He waits a beat, as the band, knowing his timing, remains at parade rest Ah, I guess its the hair in my ears. At sixty-four, hes allowed to kvetch a bit. Three hours from now, a few songs into his set, when the packed house has already marched in place to the epic sweep of *Miami 1975*, bounced in rhythm (the Garden is on massive, pulsating springs) to *Pressure*, crooned along to the enchanting soliloquy that is *Summer, Highland Falls*, and ditty-bopped and doo-wopped to *The Longest Time*, he pauses: Good evening, New York City . . . A roar like a gut punch breaks over the stage. I have no idea how long this is gonna go. The alert eyes, somehow made more magnetic by the

bald pate above, swivel around the room as he takes a sip of water. The guys in the crowd give their dates a knowing look- You think its really water? This year is my fiftieth year in show business. A subtle resettling of his spine as in, were practicing our trade here. Another beat. What was I thinking? Now he turns to peer at the image of his head and torso, many times life-size. I didnt think I was gonna end up looking like that in 1964. The big banks of speakers are putting out their crisp, almost subliminal exhalations as the crowd noise modulates down the fans are thinking what fifty years means to Billy, and to them. Theyre hoping to hear Movin Out (Anthonys Song), New York State of Mind, and River of Dreams, which are all but a certainty, as well as Piano Man, which is a certainty, and the set list sites have hinted theyll be sent out into the night after a four-song encore capped by a tub-thumping, horn-washed take of Only the Good Die Young. Theres time enough for the key anthems, and time, too, for some deep cuts like Wheres the Orchestra? But first Billys got one more observation about the doo-wop moment: It sounds better in the mens room, as he and his bandmates demonstrated, bouncing The Longest Time off dingy tiles in the songs 1984 video. We used to sneak out at night and sing it on the street corner and people would throw shit at us! Well, clearly that was then. And tonight, when hes sixty-four, they still need him, too, to borrow a phrase from a song. Mike DelGuidice, new utility player in the band, centerpiece of his own Joel tribute band called Big Shot, and maybe the number one fan in the room, will sum it up later in the bar where the band gathers. Hes just the guy. That is the guy. Hes more loved than anyone on the planet, musically. Mike has just come down from the hotel room he hurried to after the gig to take a family phone call. When he sat on the bed and started to think about having just played opening night alongside Billy in the Garden, he wept like a baby for a good five minutes. That Billys even here in this sacramental spot, soon to be filled with eighteen thousand faithful fans, goes against the steepest of odds. If a harbormaster in Havana hadnt let his fathers family disembark to find refuge from the Nazis; if his mom hadnt found that piano teacher; if he hadnt drilled into his own alienation to write his saga as that piano man; and if some label bosses hadnt stuck by him after his first two albums tanked, he might be sitting down to the keys at a very different spot on the map. Theres a particular moment in almost every one of his shows when, a song or two in, while listening to that odd sonic tumult of roaring approval, hollered song titles, and proprietary shout-outs of his first name, he leans left and forward on his piano stool and searches the faces of the crowd in his periphery. Theres usually a tentative grin, but theres also a jigger of uncertainty and therefore vulnerability that stops short of neediness but is still somehow in touch with it. Tonight it will come before Summer, Highland Falls, with its telling lyric: And as we stand upon the ledges of our lives / With our respective similarities / Its either sadness or euphoria. On a different day, in a different city, in what his intimates still think of as the bad, sad old days of 2009, he grew reflective on a hotel balcony: Obviously I have plenty of regrets. Whenever I hurt somebody, whether it was inadvertently or rashly, I still regret that to this day. Ive never wanted to ever hurt anybody, and those are regrets Ill take with me to the grave. But I dont think youve lived unless you have regrets. I dont think youve had that experience without them, where you can say honestly, when youre ready to kick, hey, I lived. Good Lord, man, what a life Ive lived. I think Im going to do that. That may take some of the sting out of dying to say, I did it all.

Chapter 3 TOMORROW IS TODAY In the late 1960s, as the British Invasion led to an expanding galaxy of stateside rock groups, Billy and his chronically unnameable band ended up being dropped from Mercury Records but played the Plainview, Long Island, nightclub My House frequently. The Island was as warm with fledgling bands. Billy had often watched My Houses resident band, the Hassles, who were relied upon, if hardly coddled, by club owner and sometime restaurateur Danny Mazur. Danny recalled by Billy as a typical Long Island club owner, kind of a tough, older Jewish guy, pinky ring, very heavy set, kind of gruff sometimes kept company with some beefy types Billy surmised were wise guys. Working alongside him and as the Hassles manager was his son Irwin. Though Irwin would later, via Dannys connections, be briefly employed by industry legend Morris Moishe Levy (of whom Irwin freely says, He was Jewish Mafia), at this time he was helping Danny audition and book bands. He had returned to Long Island for that purpose from Philadelphia, where he was studying dentistry at University of Pennsylvania. The Hassles were drawing big crowds at the time. We could draw a thousand people a night to a place, recalls drummer Jon Small, already a cover-band veteran when he formed the group. We were very, very popular. They had a keyboard player named Harry Weber, and Small was married to Harrys sister Elizabeth and had a son by her, Sean, born in April 1967. Billy would never know Harry well he recalls the infamously dissolute musician had a lot of issues but of course he would come to know Elizabeth very well indeed. Finally one night Harry and Jon had a serious set-to triggered by Harrys deepening immersion in glue-sniffing, even onstage, where hed catch half-hidden snorts from a poly bag while crouched on the low bench behind his keyboard. Harry finally exploded backstage after being rebuked one last time. As Small describes it: He had his feet on my shoulders and was pulling my hair out. What it came down to was either him leaving or me leaving. And the other guys stuck with me. Harry, as part of a gaggle of Weber siblings who were raised in tony Syosset but lived a cursed history that most would associate with a less privileged lifestyle, would not land happily. A few years after being discharged from the band, he was found dead on a railroad track, the reported victim of an overdose. In what Small smilingly calls a very crafty maneuver, he put an ad in the local paper in the spring of 1966 saying My House was seeking a second house band. What they the Echoes, the key auditioning band that included Billy didnt know was that I was sitting there looking to steal their keyboard player. As Small sat in the otherwise empty club with Elizabeth, Hassles guitarist Richie McKenna, lead singer Little John

Dizek, and Irwin, the Echoes with Billy on Farfisa organ performed a few songs. Small remembers, I instantly loved this keyboard player. He wore a little bebop hat, and he actually got down on one knee and sang Soul and Inspiration, the Righteous Brothers song. So I convinced the other guys that this is the guy, and I went to Billy and sat him in the room and said, The reason youre here is how would you like to join the Hassles? And he looked at me and said, Nope, not interested. So I had to use another tactic. I knew these guys nobody had any money. I had to bribe him is what it really came down to. I said, So what is it going to take for you to get in the band? He said, Look, Im loyal to my band, Ive been with these guys, grew up with these guys. I said, Well, I have a Hammond B3 organ. Thats what everybody wanted. You join the band, its yours. It didnt take more than a glimmer in his eye to think about it, and he said, Okay, Ill come in the band. But you have to take the bass player from my band, Howie Blauvelt. Billy didnt want to be responsible, as Weber had been, for playing the bass line on the Hammonds bass pedals. The Hassles were only a four-piece band, says small. But I thought, Okay, why not? Well just branch out; well be a five-piece band. So Billy and Howie joined. The Hassles offered Billy \$250 a week, which in 1967 when the minimum hourly wage was a little more than two dollars was good money, especially given the added benefit of being drafted into a top local band. Youre working fifty-two weeks a year if you want, Mazur added to Jon Smalls pitch, guaranteed. For someone who had worked in an inking factory blacking typewriter ribbons; and had worked winter mornings on the wet, greasy deck of an oyster dredge; and had even written a few rock reviews for Changes magazine for the twenty-five-dollar fee they earned him, it all sounded quite satisfactory. Nobody was worried about having a real job then, recalls Billy. I was happy just to be a musician with enough money to buy some food and have my own place. As for that Hammond B3 Jon said theyd give Billy? Theyd be deducting fifty dollars a month from his pay to cover the cost. What his new band mates soon found out was that their new keyboardist still singing backgrounds while the band worked the crowd with a raspy-voiced and marginally talented (but very Mick Jaggerlike) front man, Little John was interested in little else but the music. What was important to Billy besides music was smoking cigarettes, says Small. He smoked cigarettes like a chimney, and I hated smoke and he didnt have a drivers license. Billy didnt even have a wallet. He was this funny guy. You could tell he was very smart, but the thing young guys craved were to have their first car but he had no craving to have one. So I became the chauffeur. As Little John was slowly being edged out, Small and Billy bonded over music, cruising the Island clubs, drinking in the emerging local bands like the Pigeons, who would become Vanilla Fudge, and the Vagrants featuring Leslie West, later of Mountain both signed to the Atco label. The slate of local groups included the Good Rats, the Illusion, and the Rich Kids. But to Billy, the defining band of that moment was the Young Rascals, led by organ virtuoso Felix Cavaliere: Anybody that played covers in bars for a living had to know their Rascals. They were out of northern New Jersey, but they were cool with the Long Island fans, as well as great musicians in that hybrid genre that was known as blue-eyed soul. There were forays into Manhattan and, conveniently close, the borough of Queens: Ill never forget sneaking into the Jimi Hendrix gig at the Singer Bowl, which is now the Louis Armstrong Stadium, Billy says. We did the same at Randalls Island Stadium, now Carl Icahn Stadium. Jon Small remembers regularly teaming with Billy who used his gift for mimicry to sound British to sneak into Carnegie Hall shows for the likes of Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull, until they were exposed and all but literally booted out of the hall by notoriously thuggy British manager (and Sharon Osbournes dad) Don Arden. When the Beatles played Shea Stadium in August 1965, the Hassles even had the delirious notion of jumping onstage as an uninvited warm-up act. With manager Irwin Mazurs connivance, they gave one of the Hassles roadies a dark suit and a skippers cap belonging to Irwins dad, Danny, and arrived in Dannys Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham. Promoter Sid Bernstein sniffed out the ruse though the band lore insists he was leaning toward allowing it until Beatles manager Brian Epstein vetoed them for not having the needed membership in the musicians union but the scheme got them as far as privileged seats in the dugout. (Of course in 2008, Paul McCartney would jump onto Billys stage there by invitation, as recorded in the Last Play at Shea film.) During 1965 and 1966 the Hassles honed their live chops via steady gigging at My House and, during the summer of 1966, a series of dates at a Hamptons club called the Eye. We played all summer long, recalled Blauvelt in an interview for the Great East Coast Bands website two decades later. We used to play five sets a night. That got the band really tight. Some two years of steady live work led to recording sessions in May 1967. Billy considers the two albums he made with the Hassles unmemorable other than their role as part of his education in the music business. The Hassles were signed by United Artists, which had been formed as a label to put out sound tracks for the film side of the company and ended up with a few notable acts, including Traffic. In fact, the Hassles self-titled 1967 debut had a cover of Coloured Rain, which Stevie Winwood and his bandmates in Traffic had sent to UA as a demo track and would soon record, but which label mates the Hassles were also given a crack at. The lyrics were full of adolescent yearning: Yesterday I was a young boy, searchin for my way / not knowing what I wanted, living life from day to day. Stevie was an early hero, says Billy, a multi-instrumentalist especially good on the Hammond organ, and about a decade later I persuaded him to be a guest player on my [1986] album The Bridge. Billy had his own Hammond sound, much in evidence in a Hassles love song collected on the 2005 My Lives box set, called Every Step I Take (Every Move I Make), a brew of Rascals and Zombies influences. (The similarly titled and musically kindred Police song quite innocently resembled it and was the best-selling single of 1983.) The two producers of that first Hassles album, Tony Michaels and Vinny Gorman, took two-thirds of the copyright and

publishing credits for the songs Billy had written his first taste of larceny in the music business. Billy and the band also recorded one of their live favorites, Sam and Dave's "You Got Me Hummin", which labored its way to number 112 on the Billboard Bubbling Under the Hot 100 singles chart (and reached number 71 in Record World). It was an energetic stab at blue-eyed soul and the originals gospel-rooted, highly improvisational Stax studio sound, but in Billy's words, it wasn't going to make Sam or Dave quit the business. ON OCTOBER 28, 1967, about eight months after the first single had hit and as the band was completing their debut album, the leading Long Island daily *Newsday* published staffer Harvey Aronson's "Look What Grew on Our Lawns", a three-page celebration leavened with some wry asides about suburbia of the Hassles and their homegrown success. Occupying much of the opening spread was a sprawling group shot of the band clutching their instruments in front of the Dizack family's Syosset home. Framed in the foreground were the impatiently squinting Danny and Irwin Mazur, who sported suits and ties. Arrayed behind were friends and family, all on the neatly clipped lawn in front of a split level. Text and photo worked the same conceit, as summed up in a pull quote: "The Hassles are all heart and all suburban. And they stand for the universality of rock n roll and further text: A group of sprouts native to Long Island has blossomed into one of the areas hottest rock n roll combos, feeding on fees of \$1,000 a night. With a little more care and a hit record or two the Hassles could begin to resemble a high-rising money tree. Portrayed as working twenty-hour days roaming between the Island and Manhattan clubs (including Steve Paul's the Scene, where Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix actually once got on stage together with the Young Rascals), and even needing a police escort from an unnamed Queens venue, the group was said to have sold ten thousand copies of "You Got Me Hummin" in the first week in such cities as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Providence, and Pittsburgh. The single is described as a glorious mlang of wham-bam-boom with lots of moans and a sensational scream, though whether Aronson was aware of the Sam Dave original seems dubious. The writer notes that Irwin talks in terms of The Hassles grossing \$250,000 this year, but today Irwin recalls that he had to stretch his own finances to provide \$30,000 (presumably less Billy's fifty dollars per week for the B3) to buy the band's equipment. The piece recounts the band's reaction to hearing their song on the radio. "I was in the back of the truck," says Richie (a phlegmatic kid who gets animated when he talks about the record), ". . . Its the best feeling there is to ride in a car and hear the record on the radio. Every- body started screaming and banging on the walls. . . . We almost hit another car. The band member whom the article calls Billy Joe and equips with an erroneous added name (which dogged him for years), William Martin Joseph Joel, is correctly depicted as age eighteen and from Hicksville. He's described as lead singer (though Dizack is cited as front man and, per Irwin, the group's sex symbol) as well as piano and organ player, and as the group's most learned musician . . . He likes Beethoven and Rachmaninoff, but they don't pay off for longhairs anymore. In a sentiment he would echo throughout his career, Billy advised the reporter that playing rock n roll isn't hard; getting new ideas is the hard thing. Most of the current rock songs, he conceded, would be unsung and unremembered a generation hence, unlike and apparently these are Billy's examples "White Christmas" and "I'm in the Mood for Love". The point that we squares should try to grasp, wrote Aronson, teeing Billy up for some hipster jargon, is that (Billy declared) our music is all part of the today scene were not trying to add any- thing to posterity. Things would work out a little differently, but who could have said so then? As Irwin and Danny estimated for the piece, since they'd auditioned the Hassles in August 1966, Long Island had come to boast more than four hundred discotheques (a term that embraced rock clubs as well as dance venues) and one thousand groups. Despite the long odds, the Mazurs had sold "My House" in July 1967, annexed the first album's producers (Michael's, twenty-six, and Gorman, twenty-one) as part of Mazur Enterprises, and added two road managers. A UA spokesman said of the Hassles, "We're going all out with them. We're giving them a lot of promotion; we're getting them as many TV shows as possible. In fact, their breakout hit, "You Got Me Hummin", would be squandered as a commercial point of entry. Irwin told Aronson that he wanted to send the boys to drama school and make them bigger than the Monkees. And yet he almost seemed to foresee problems with the dysfunction that was built into the band front man Little John had the moves, but Billy, hidden behind his Hammond, had the voice. Irwin knew, he said, that it has to happen with a record not this one, the next one. The article included a round of parents musings. "I always knew he would be in show business," said Billy's mom. "He sang before he could talk. Finally, Aronson describes their appearance on *The Clay Cole Show*, a dance show starring the local rock-on-TV bellwether who'd once hosted a pairing of the Beatles and Stonesthat typically featured lip- synching bands and a cast of regular dancers la Dick Clark's national counterpart, *American Bandstand*. Cole would quit in January 1968, simply walking away from a scene that he'd self-described as a "black-tie, tuxedo guy . . . adrift . . . in the quicksand of psychedelic acid rock felt alienated from. Virtually all the shows are lost to pop history, erased so the tape could be reused. With Billy Joe sporting an Indian shawl and Little John in a paisley print shirt, the Hassles may have spooked Cole with what Aronson called the flying hair and the flying hips, and the big-beat stridence that makes young people of today jump, scream, and spend money. Aronson concluded with "Make it? Why not? And just think it all happened right here on our lawns. Perhaps the article was a jinx in its own right. In any event, the Hassles slide into obscurity or at best, to getting the occasional nod as one of Billy's early bands was already quietly awaiting. THE BANDS SECOND album, *Hour of the Wolf*, was made with an underground legend named Thomas Jefferson Kaye, who had disputably claimed to have produced "Question Mark" and the Mysterians 1966 classic "96 Tears", and who later worked with Steely Dan. As much as Billy would be a fan of the

latter group, the eccentric Kaye was probably not the best producer for the Hassles. Billy and the band set up the sessions in the old Skitch Henderson studio in New York and spent months recording. Some of the bunch was smoking hash, but Jon and Billy abstained. The drug-addled process went on endlessly, Billy recalls, and Small remembers being aggravated when an inebriated Judy Garland, apparently an acquaintance of Kayes, sat slumped on the sofa in the control room batting out mumbled queries. Everybody was tripping, Billy would recall, and we spent six months in this crazy little studio until we got so psychedelic we didnt know what we were doing anymore. Despite it all, the musicianship was capable and generally a cut above the lyrics of the title track (cowritten by Billy and Little John): Death Has come alive within a creature With the eyes of burning fire There is a tingling in your brain You want to run but you remain It is the hour of the wolf. The title song shared a title (and, by coincidence, a theme of dawning madness) with the Ingmar Bergman movie of a year earlier, and amid its grandiose twelve minutes, featured wolf noises from the band. Ultimately the Hassles Hour of the Wolf, with an acid-expressionistic cover centered on a wolfs skull in lurid colors, was released in January 1969 and disappeared immediately. Around that point, John Dizak decided hed had enough. Years later, for the liner notes to a reissue of the bands work, he grouched that the Mazurs were out for their own interests: They used us to support them- selves . . . [and] kept us at My House during the most crucial time. . . . We should have been touring to support our album. Billy took over lead vocals. Also left in the band were the untamed Howie Blauvelt and guitar player Richie McKenna, always viewed by Billy as difficult. Howie had been a steady friend of Billys for years, from their early days in Hicksville and the Parkway Green gang through their shared discoveries of rock musics magic. However, Billy eventually grew apart from him, largely due to Howies experiments with different intoxicants. (Unexceptionally, if unluckily for the era, Blauvelt had been arrested in January 1966 at age nineteen, charged with pos- session of marijuana as a felony with eight other minors, in a pot bust at a Hicksville motel; the disposition of the case is unknown.) Another bad sign came when Howie fell off the stage one night, mid performance. Given the kinds of clubs they were playing, where there was barely room for a couple of small risers onstage, it was hazardous enough up there without being in an altered state. So Jon and Billy inevitably became a clique of two and would simply leave the Hassles and their only too appropriate moniker behind. (Howie would go on to brief notoriety in the local band Ram Jam, and died in 1993.) To them, the groups 1960s soul-pop had begun to pale be- side a new influence like Led Zeppelin. We wanted to be a heavy band and decided we were going to get heavy. Somehow. At that moment in rock, heavy signified intense, stoney, even psychedelic workouts though soon enough, heavy would be connected with metal and turn away from its blues-influenced roots toward faster, head-banging, Judas Prieststyle fare. In any event, Billyunlike, say, John Lennonhad never actually taken acid. It was during this apprenticeship that Billy had a couple one-off gigs that gave him a minor stake in the pop ethos that preceded the hippie 1960s. One was a session gig playing keyboards behind Chubby Checker, he of The Twist (a monumental 1960 remake of the Hank Ballard original) and other dance hits in a string that petered out around 1965. Also around then Billy went to a Long Island studio to assist minor legend Shadow Morton in producing some tracks. Whether Billy is heard on the demo or the master recording for producers Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barrys Walking in the Sand has been discussed in certain obscure pop history circles for years. Billy to this day cant swear if he is or isnt in the mix on that great anthem of teenage love and loss. After a few more desultory gigs, Jon and Billy split from the Hassles and began their quest for musical heftin the basement of Jons parents wallpaper store in Syosset. They were encouraged when they quickly snared a sponsorship deal with an outfit called Plush Amplifiers, whose amp cases were lined in rolled and tucked black vinyl padding but, more crucially, were capable of shoving out torrents of noise. By trial and errorJon took some painful voltage while holding stripped wire from the organ to contacts on an amplifierthe duo figured out how to wire Billys gear for a maximum raunch-rock noise, and it produced an ear- splitting, distorted sound. Now they felt, Billy recalls, unstoppable. Although I missed Jimi Hendrix at WoodstockI went up for one day, realized I didnt really care for mud, rain, or acid, and hitchhiked homehe was the nexus of what was becoming the fuzz and feedback era, Billy says. I got a wah-wah pedal so I could wow-wow-ee-ow like Jimi, and added a distortion pedal, which I figured would double the mangled noise we already were making. Then we just pinned the volume to the wall. The year was 1969, and rocks insurgent energy was still shrouded under such radio hits as Tommy Roes Dizzy and the Archies Sugar Sugar (though Billys role models, Rod Argents Zombies, had a hit with Time of the Season and the Brits made a raucous statement with the Rolling Stones Honky Tonk Women and the Beatles Get Back). Billy wrote a bunch of heavy metal songs, which were somewhat indecipherable onstage or on tape, and Irwin Mazur, who continued to manage him and Jon post-Hassles, thought the result was the worst crap I ever heard in my life, but I got them a deal with Epic Records with a fifty-thousand-dollar advance. Some of that money went toward investing in some real rock threads: goofy Carnaby Streetstyle out- fits they bought at an East Village store called Granny Takes a Trip. Soon afterward Billy and Jon set out to make their self-titled album for Epic under the moniker Attila. The name, which Billy chose, was in tribute to Jack Palance, who had slashed Romans and smooched a princess as Attila the Hun in Douglas Sirks 1954 Sign of the Pagan. If youre going to assault the rock world and crush it under ten Marshall amps, wouldnt Attila the Hun, who plundered Italy and Gaul and slaughtered quite a few innocents along the way, work as a role model? thought Billy. I was nineteen, and at that age, if youre loving your heavy metal, its all about thrash, kill, metal, slash, burn, pillage, repeat. Unfortunately, the art director at Epic took this

inspiration a bit too literally and set up an album cover photo shoot in a meat locker, with Billy and Jon in fur-and-breastplate barbarian getups and surrounded by giant, marbled carcasses of beef. It was a moment in Billys career when absurdity ruled. A video from the era snippet of it appears in the documentary *The Last Play at Sheashows* Jon and Billy on the famous Cyclone roller coaster at Coney Island. Back then, the park had a little person from one of the nearby freak shows zapping people with a cattle prod when they got off the ride, which seemed to suit the outr tendencies of the *Attila* album as it marched to oblivion. For most of the songs on the record, Billy deployed a small keyboard beside his left hand that could supply the bass line, and with his right hand he played his chords and leads screaming the lyrics at the top of his lungs. Jon played drums feverishly all the way though every song. Ultimately, Billy was relieved that the band wasnt a success, realizing that he would have had to scream like that every night for years: I was trying to sing like Robert Plant, and I was no Robert Plant. Inevitably, they didnt sell many albums and got dropped by their label quickly. Jon didnt recall much tsuris about it. Irwin was making all the deals; we were just the dopey musicians in the basement of my parents wallpaper store. After all these years, Jon and Billy are still in agreement that *Attila* sucked. As Jon admits, We sucked in the studio, and in the six or so gigs we ever played live. But the bond that grew between us as we were going through the low points probably equipped us for a friendship that would stand the test of time. Time was far from the only test the friendship would see. The signal challenge for the comradeship would see the two men sharing an ex- wife, Harry Webers sister Elizabeth. Jon and Elizabeth had married abruptly not long into their relationship, shortly before Billy joined the Hassles, when she became pregnant with their son Sean. (Sean can be seen, at age nine, on the cover of 1976s *Turnstiles*, at Billys elbow amid various crowded-in extras.) The history of the love triangle emerges straightforwardly, in the present day, from the two male principals. In fact, the two men, insiders say, still compare notes on their shared exdid you have to go through this too? But at the time when the partners were changed, and in several tumultuous years afterward, the relationship would be wrenchingly emotional. Jon remembers one crucial twist. This is the part where it gets a little squirrely for me, he says. We were a bunch of hippies. Thats what we really were. And [in 1970] we moved into one house together, in Dix Hills. It was all stone and cement, so wed end up naming it the Rock House. And it was me, Elizabeth, and Billy. Prior to that, the trio had been living in the Fairhaven Apartments near Billys old street in HicksvilleJon and Elizabeth in one apartment, with Billy across the hall. At the same time, Jon ranged about Long Islands clubs seeking out gigs, while Billy worked occasional odd jobs. Says Jon: What happened is real simplehe just fell in love with my wife. Thats it. And when I found out, our friendship was over. In fact, the bond between Billy and Jon would ultimately survive. But Billys fascination with Elizabeth was inescapable, partly based on her indefinability: She wasdifferent. She wasnt like a lot of the other girls I knew at that time who had taken home ec and cooking classes. She was a very bright woman, and she wasnt afraid to show how smart she was. I suppose that made her kind of exotic. Intelligent and not afraid to speak her mind, but could also be seductive. Almost like a European type not a typical American girl. The situation reached its breaking point one day when Billy and Jon were doing one of the rare gigs they played as *Attila*two shows, both sold out, at a club in Amityville. So we played the first set, remembers Jon, and and we went over great. Billy never perspired, but when Id go in the dressing room, Id be soaking wet. I used to use an Electrolux vacuum cleaner to blow-dry my hair, because there were no blow dryers back then. So I had this big vacuum cleaner going, holding it up. Im looking out the window, and there are Elizabeth and Billy talking. The next thing I see is that Billys getting in the car with her and leaving. But we still have another show to do. I get dressed as fast as I can, jump in my car, and I know theyre going back to the Rock House . . . and there they were. Whether Jons anger was purely a late wave of jealousy and resentment, or partly derived from his band mate skipping out on a gig Jon had set up, he reacted blindly: Billy was sitting playing piano, Elizabeth was there, and her sister was there. I walked in, I was in a rage. I threw her younger sister, Josephine, through the screen door; she went right through the screen and broke the glass. And then Elizabeth ran out, and I punched Billy. Billy describes the turn of events as unexpected: I remember that I was turning toward Jonand I got hit. There was blood coming out of my nose. I was just kind of startled, even though I had been punched many times when I used to box. This was just a punch I hadnt seen coming. But lets face it, I deserved it. Before that night, Billy believed that Elizabeth had already talked to Jon about them; in his mind, the long-alienated married couple were already separatedat least emotionallyand headed for a clean break. Making matters worse, the two men hadnt discussed the couples issuesor the budding romance between Elizabeth and Billy that was becoming obvious from body language, muted exchanges, and not- quite-stolen glances. Billy attributes the silence to a typically male mix of sensitivity and yet also not wanting to overly share. (Long Island guys with a foot still in the working class simply dont share on most subjects deeper than the Mets.) Up until that moment when Jon clocked me, I dont remember feeling particularly guilty, because I thought it was all out in the open, what was going on, says Billy. But Jon didnt know [the whole truth] about Elizabeth and me. When I realized that Jon didnt know, I was filled with crippling guilt. After that scene and the realization that hed been deeply deceiving Jon, Billy felt like everything was crumbling at once. *Attila* had been a failure. He didnt have any bank account to speak of. And now he felt that he was causing his best friends divorce. Then, to top it all off, rather than divorcing Jon to be with Billy, Elizabeth disappeared. Thats when I started feeling suicidal, says Billy. Billy called me up at one in the morninghes got to talk to me. And I meet him at the Jericho Diner, recalls Irwin Mazur. He tells me hes having an affair with Elizabeth. And he

doesn't know what to do. For a few months leading up to the blowup, Billy had been keeping a small apartment in the Fairhaven where he slept under an American flag even as Jon anchored the Rock House and Elizabeth increasingly spent time in the Weber family home in Syosset. But with Elizabeth absenting herself from both men for a time and Jon in a kind of exile, Billy was adrift, lacking the money for rent, without a car or license, and occasionally crashing at Irwin Mazur's home. So Billy's staying in our apartment one night, Irwin says, and I get up in the morning, and I go in the dining room, and there's a loose-leaf page Billy left there with what are obviously lyrics to a song. And I read it, and the title of the song is Tomorrow Is Today. I think his state of mind would be pretty well summed up in his song. It was a suicide note. I've been livin' for the moment But I just can't have my way And I'm afraid to go to sleep Cause tomorrow is today . . . I don't care to know the hour Cause it's passing anyway I don't have to see tomorrow Cause I saw it yesterday . . . Oh, my, I'm goin' to the river Gonna take a ride and the Lord will deliver me Make my bed, now I'm gonna lie in it If you don't come, I'm sure gonna die in it Too late, too much givin' I've seen a lot of life and I'm damn sick of livin' it I keep hopin' that you will pass my way. It was 1970. I'd reached the age of twenty-one and still had no money, says Billy. I had no place to live. I was out of the Rock House, crashing at my mom's place again, which is abject failure, when you have to go back to your parents' house. To avoid that, I'd been roaming about like a homeless person crashing on friends' couches, sometimes in a car I'd find unlocked, in the warmth of a Laundromat, back and forth in the subways in Queens, even in the woods. Jon Small remembers one day's communication between himself and Billy slowly resumed, with Elizabeth's reclusiveness easing the state of things saying to Billy, Come on, were going to go out and go hang out at the bar, bring some girls or whatever, we'll figure it out. And he was just lying there, couldn't even talk. And he said to me, I think I'm going to commit suicide or something. And I said to him, Well, go ahead. Go ahead. Kill yourself. Get it over with. Because this is not doing you any good. So I left him there and I went out. And when I came back, he was on the floor. I was still feeling so down, Billy says. A well-intentioned friend of mine had gotten me some pills, Nembutal, to try to help me to cope with this terrible guilt and anxiety I was having. I was at my mom's house in Hicksville, and I thought to myself, Well, I've got these pills, I might as well take them. The way Billy's sister, Judy, tells the story, Billy called up Jon to apologize for the transgressions that, despite the seeming reconciliation, still left him feeling remorseful, and Jon came and found Billy passed out. Jon and Billy's mother called the ambulance, and Billy was taken to the hospital. The next thing I remember, I woke up in the hospital and learned that they had pumped my stomach, says Billy. I thought to myself, oh, great, I couldn't even do this right. It was just another failure. Billy was released, but he'd be back in a hospital within a few weeks. I was still having all these feelings of guilt and despair and hopelessness, and in the closet at home I saw there were two bottles that bore a skull and crossbones warning, remembers Billy. The bleach didn't look too palatable. So I drank the Old English Scratch Cover [Not, as often has been cited, Lemon Pledge]. After I drank it, I remember sitting in a chair waiting to die. I thought, I'll sit in this chair, and I'll die here. I ended up sitting there, polishing my mother's furniture by farting a lot. Judy's husband, Frank Molinari, got the job of taking me off to the hospital. Even as we were traveling there, I was saying to myself, this is stupid. This is ridiculous. I need help. I was coherent enough to check myself in to an observation ward at what was then called Meadowbrook Hospital. Billy would remain in the hospital three weeks. He later remembered the hospital as being just like the one in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*: You go to the nurses station, they give you your little cup of pills, and they look at your chart. I remember going up to the nurses at the station and saying, Hey, I'm okay. They're crazy. But I'm okay. And the nurses would just look at me, with my long hair and moustache looking like Louis the Fourteenth, and say, Yes, Mr. Joel. Here are your pills. I just couldn't wait to get out of there. We all slept in one big community room, on cots, right next to one another. The next guy over would be moaning all night, and another guy would be screaming. It was like Bedlam, a very scary place. At the end of three weeks, after Billy had talked to a battery of doctors and they were satisfied that they could release him, Billy was free to leave. I walked out. I remember this, because they had an electric door with bars on it, and it made a big noiseschlink! like a prison door. And I remember walking down Carmen Avenue, where the Nassau County Jail was, right down the street, and thinking, Don't look back. I hitched a ride to my mom's house. Billy's time in the hospital proved to be a lesson in reality and a life-long guard against self-pity: To be in that observation ward with all those profoundly disturbed patients I realized that my situation was nothing compared to that of the others. For the most part, the people I was locked up with were never going to be able to overcome their problems, whereas mine were all self-made. I can fix this, I thought. All things considered, it was probably one of the best things I've ever done, because I learned not to get so hung up on self-pity that I couldn't think straight. I'd like to think I shed the rock star skin at that point. Irwin Mazur confronted Billy sometime after he was released from the hospital: I asked him, What the hell did you do? and Billy says, I drank furniture polish. And he says, Listen, I can't take this music business anymore. I said, Have you been writing songs? And Billy says, Yeah, I have. And there was *Shes Got a Way and Why* *Judy Why* and *Everybody Loves You Now*. He played me those. So he says, Listen, I'm ready. Billy was determined to get one of his songs covered soon, ideally by an artist he admired, or he'd find some alternative path through life, some other means of self-support. Look, he warned Irwin, I'm going to go to the Midwest. I'll be a bartender. I've had enough of this. If it doesn't happen soon, I'm not hanging on anymore. From the Hardcover edition.