

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR, ONE-OF-A-KIND SONGWRITER

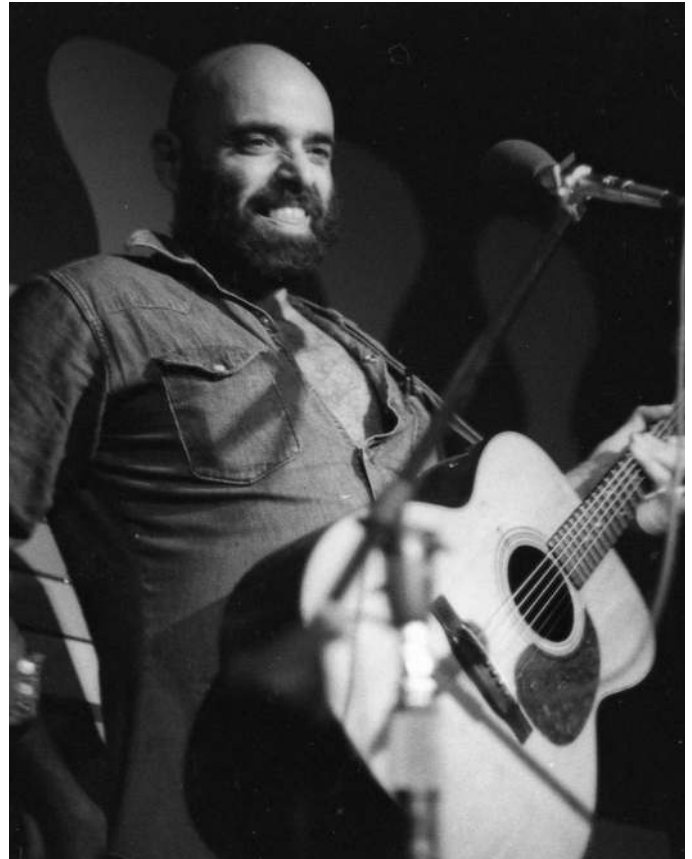
Shel Silverstein is most famous for the best-selling children's books that he wrote and illustrated: *The Giving Tree*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, and *A Light in the Attic*. But Silverstein's imaginative talent also stretched into songwriting, and he played an important role in Outlaw-era music making.

Born on September 25, 1930, in Chicago, Silverstein enjoyed listening to country music as a boy, but he felt a stronger tug toward art and words that were meant to be read. After serving in the U.S. Army as a cartoonist for a military publication, he found success as a magazine cartoonist and writer based in Chicago. He also began writing quirky, one-of-a-kind folk songs and performing them in nightclubs, though not all listeners enjoyed his high, raspy voice. ("For the voice I've got," he once said, "I like what I do with it.")

Silverstein's 1962 folk album caught the attention of country artist Johnny Cash, who recorded a song from it. In 1969, Cash turned to Silverstein again for what would be one of his biggest hits, "A Boy Named Sue," a humorous story song about a man with a girl's name. It went on to win Grammys for best male country vocal performance and for best country song.

Silverstein followed this success by writing for many other country singers over the next few years, including Outlaw-era artists. Waylon Jennings released "The Taker" (co-written with Kris Kristofferson) in 1971. Tompall Glaser recorded "Put Another Log on the Fire," which appeared on the landmark *Wanted! The Outlaws* album in 1976.

Silverstein formed an especially close partnership with Bobby Bare. The country artist's 1973 album, *Bobby Bare Sings Lullabys, Legends, and Lies*,



featured only Silverstein songs. Bare's most successful album, it spent thirty weeks on the country chart and featured the #1 single "Marie Laveau." The two men continued working together until Silverstein's death from a heart attack, at his Key West, Florida, home, in 1999. He was sixty-eight.

Over the years, Silverstein recorded several solo albums, and he wrote adult poetry and short stories, as well as scripts for television, film, and the theater, bringing his unique outlook to all of his work. His books of children's stories and poetry have sold more than twenty-nine million copies worldwide.

"If it's good, it's too good not to share," he said. "That's the way I feel about my work."

SOURCES

The Atlantic, BobbyBare.com,
Chicago Tribune, National Public Radio,
Publishers Weekly

LISTEN

"Daddy What If" (recorded by Bobby Bare and Bobby Bare Jr.)
"The Unicorn Song" (recorded by the Irish Rovers)