

ROCK 'N' ROLL CLASSICS 1957-1959



THE TIME-LIFE HISTORY OF

ROCK 'N' ROLL

Rock 'N' Roll Classics 1957-1959

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THE TIME-LIFE HISTORY OF
ROCK 'N' ROLL

COMPACT
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R962-01
OPCD-2682
**TIME
LIFE
MUSIC**

ROCK 'N' ROLL CLASSICS
1957-1959

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Little Richard



The pompadoured "King" visits Waco, Texas, July 1957.
Little Richard with Olsie (Baysee) Robinson on bass.

Even though the first wave of rock 'n' rollers defined the turf from about 1954 to 1956, true pioneers, such as Elvis Presley, Fats Domino and Chuck Berry, did not take over the charts immediately. In 1955, for example, the only rockers (using the term loosely) to hit No. 1 were Bill Haley, with *Rock around the Clock*, and Pat Boone, with a tame remake of Fats Domino's *Ain't That a Shame*. But teen America began bopping just the same—and by 1957, the trickle of rock 'n' roll hits had become a landslide.

The evidence was everywhere. Elvis had four No. 1 singles in 1957. He was joined at the top of the charts by such rockers as the Crickets, the Everly Brothers and Sam Cooke, as well as by rock-influenced acts such as Boone, Sonny James, Tatt-Hunter, Paul Anka and Jimmie Rodgers. The music business was beginning to see the

wisdom of concocting teen idols and rock 'n' roll was establishing a set of distinct styles and with a distinct audience of its own. The music's second phase would extend both the styles and the audience.

This came despite loud opposition from mainstream American society (as well as reactionaries within the industry), which held the music responsible for a variety of societal ills including race mixing, atheism and gang violence. Thus, at the same time that exploitation movies starring Little Richard or hallowed DJ Alan Freed were premiering to hordes of teenage

fans, record burnings were being sponsored by preachers across the land. As *American Bandstand* was packaging the music for national television, networks were using scare tactics to attack rock 'n' roll on their news shows.

As successful as it became in those days, unimaginative years of postwar prosperity,



rock 'n' roll remained outsider music—the sound and fury of teenagers who, for the first time ever, were a definable social group with its own customs, styles and language. Teenit also had a fair amount of leisure money to spend, as well as streaks

of both restlessness and open-mindedness that made them more receptive to influences their parents scorned. Rock 'n' roll also now enabled blacks and poor white Southerners to reach mass markets on their own terms. And while some homogenization was taking place, regional styles—New Orleans rhythm and blues, Memphis rockabilly, West Coast R&B, doo-wop from the Eastern cities—prevailed. And since major labels remained slow to react to

trends, local independent labels such as Sun, Chess, Imperial and Atlantic got the bulk of the action.

Rock 'n' roll's second phase encompassed both expansion and codification. The new white stars—Buddy Holly, the



Everlys, Conway Twitty—were obviously indebted to Elvis, but they all contributed something musically unique; Holly's eclecticism, the Everlys' soothing harmonies and Twitty's stellar balladry. Blues and country imagery evolved in the big boat via acts such

as Bo Diddley and Jerry Lee Lewis. The fresh doo-wop sound that percolated to the surface with Frankie Lynton and the Teenagers instantly inspired a new wave that included groups such as the Dell-

Vikings. The Atlantic and Sun labels developed distinct styles of making records—earthy, but still uptown, R&B for the former; spare, echoing rockabilly for the latter—that were instantly recognizable. Rock 'n' roll was attitude as much as sound, and the musical definition was so open-ended that artists and producers felt free to try anything, from the foghorn intro on *Sea Cruise* to the percussive sound effects on *Book of Love*, from the parade chants of Huey “Piano” Smith to the collage records of Buchanan and Goodman. This production team spliced together fragments from hit singles, tying them to fanciful story lines about flying saucers and the like.

Those goofy Buchanan and Goodman sides showed just how quickly rock 'n' roll became self-referential. So did songs such as Berry's *Rock and Roll Music*, which celebrated the music's very existence. Toward the end of the decade, the feeling of exhilaration was so strong that members of the rock 'n' roll community could almost convince themselves they

would stay forever young and rocking. With *Hang Up My Rock and Roll Shoes*, Chuck Willis was the first to remind them, in however a roundabout way, that such fine times might not last forever, that one might simply grow too old for the music.

And aging might indeed have done in the trailblazers and their immediate successors, if less predictable factors hadn't finished them off first. Less than a year after Willis' hit, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper died when their chartered plane crashed near Clear Lake, Iowa, on the way to a gig. By the end of the decade, Chuck Berry was in jail, Little Richard had joined the ministry, Elvis was in the Army and Jerry Lee Lewis was in blacklisted disgrace because of his personal life. The old guard of the music business joined official America in one last stand against rock 'n' roll via the payola hearings. But thanks to these artists, rock 'n' roll was unstoppable.

1. Rock and Roll Music

Chuck Berry

(Berry) *Original issue: Chess 1671. Peak position: No. 8 (12-23-57); No. 6 (R&B).* His third top-10 single was a manifesto demonstrating the wily Chuck Berry's knack for being firstest with the mostest. Berry's initial records about cars and teen romance wed a sped-up country two-beat to bluesy guitar that was influenced by sophisticated blues and jazz stylists like T-Bone Walker and Django Reinhardt. But barely two years into his career, Berry—the black man who read white youth best—was celebrating the sounds as an equal, integral part of the lifestyle rather than as background. His guitar playing had become more abrasive and less subtle. This anthem ignores all outside influences both lyrically and musically; no wonder it became a staple of the Beatles' early repertoire.

2. That'll Be the Day The Crickets (Allison-Petty-Holly) *Brunswick 55009. No. 1 (9-23-57); No. 2 (R&B).*

Buddy Holly's Crickets were rock 'n' roll's first self-contained band—writing, singing and playing their own music—and were obvious models for the Beatles. This was the Lubbock combo's first single as well as its first No. 1—though it came on their second try. Holly had recorded *That'll Be the Day*—an expression repeated by John Wayne throughout John Ford's landmark western *The Searchers*—about a year earlier in Nashville (it was later released as by Buddy and the 3 Tunes). This confident second version made fewer concessions to country music. Holly's endlessly resourceful vocal fillips combine with the Tex-Mex shadings, blues guitar solo and loping beat to crystallize a Texas rock matrix that is still potent today.

3. Lucille Little Richard (Penniman-Collins) *Specialty 598. No. 21 (4-13-57); No. 1 (R&B).* Little Richard sold about 32 million records in his first 18 months as a rocker, with *Lucille* coming near the middle of that streak. He shaped

Fats Domino



Fats chez Domino. Fats and his kids at home
in New Orleans, 1958.

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"THAT WHY"
"LONELY TEAR DROPS"



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the MIDNIGHTERS
THE HANK MOORE ORCHESTRA
"KANSAS CITY"



the FALCONS
"YOU'RE SO FINE"



Jesse BELVIN
"GUESS WHO?"

Mary JOHNSON
"COME TO ME"



Baby WASHINGTON "THE TIME"
with Cliff Driver and his band



the SPENCE TWINS

James Watson
"MAMA WATSON"





Kate GOLDEN

Roland JAMES




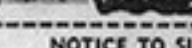
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the moment where jump blues ended and rock 'n' roll began—for this hit, he simply sped up the rhythm of his ballad, *Directly from My Heart to You*, and changed the woman's name from Queen Sonya (a female impersonator in his hometown of Macon, Georgia). The riffing horns and stop-time band attack as relentlessly as ever, but even Richard tones down his trademark shrieks slightly for mass consumption. Richard's wild hair, makeup, and glittery robes and jewelry made him the embodiment of the outrageous side of rock 'n' roll.

4. Poison Ivy The Coasters
(Leiber-Stoller) *Atco 6146. No. 7 (10-12-59); No. 1 (R&B)*. The Coasters extended the black vocal group tradition into rock, and this was the last of their four million-sellers. They were the greatest proponents of R&B novelty songs, and one of the first acts whose music was shaped primarily by producers. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller wrote and produced what the latter called "playlets," brief story-songs

that united blues humor and philosophy with teenage language and situations. *Poison Ivy* strays from that motif, and is further unusual for using guitar instead of sax as the lead instrument. But all the other hallmarks of the style remain, including the keen timing so crucial for setting up jokes.

5. Whole Lot of Shakin'

Going On Jerry Lee Lewis (David-Williams) *Sun 267. No. 3 (9-9-57); No. 1 (R&B)*. With his second single, this Louisiana boogie-woogie man forged his demonic rockabilly style into a smash hit on the rock, country and R&B charts alike. *Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On* was universal enough to be recorded by R&B shouter Big Maybelle, black vocal group the Commodores and big band singer Delores Frederick before Jerry Lee made it his and his alone. Sun released it as the B side to *It'll Be Me*, a jaunty honky-tonk song meant to crack the country charts. Roland Janes's countrified Chuck Berry guitar licks mark the only time another

instrument was cofeatured on a Jerry Lee single. But the Killer's lascivious vocalizing and unforgiving eight-to-the-bar piano enabled this carnal stomp to surpass its A side, and Jerry Lee's take-no-prisoners television performance on *The Steve Allen Show* helped put the song over the top.

6. Get a Job The Silhouettes (Beal-Edwards-Horton-Lewis) *Ember 1029. No. 1 (2-24-58); No. 1 (R&B)*. *Get a Job* was the first doo-wop record to reach No. 1, helping make the genre emblematic of the era. These Philadelphia one-hit wonders, previously a religious group known as the Gospel Tornados, used non-sense syllables and a screaming sax to convey the beleaguered frustration of an unemployed youth who couldn't seem to please anyone.

7. Little Bitty Pretty One

Thurston Harris (Byrd) *Aladdin 3398. No. 6 (11-11-57); No. 2 (R&B)*. Thurston Harris was a veter-



THE JOHNNY OTIS SHOW

RING-A-LING

WILLIE AND
THE HAND JIVE

RECORD NO. 3966 Vocal by Johnny Otis

an of several L.A. vocal groups (most notably, the Sharps), when his cover of Bobby Day's *Little Bitty Pretty One* soared past the original. The song typifies the loose style of West Coast R&B. Over humming background singers and a feel-good groove, Harris repeated the same

two-line phrase in a voice that conveyed urgency, if not R&B grit. It was his sole crossover.

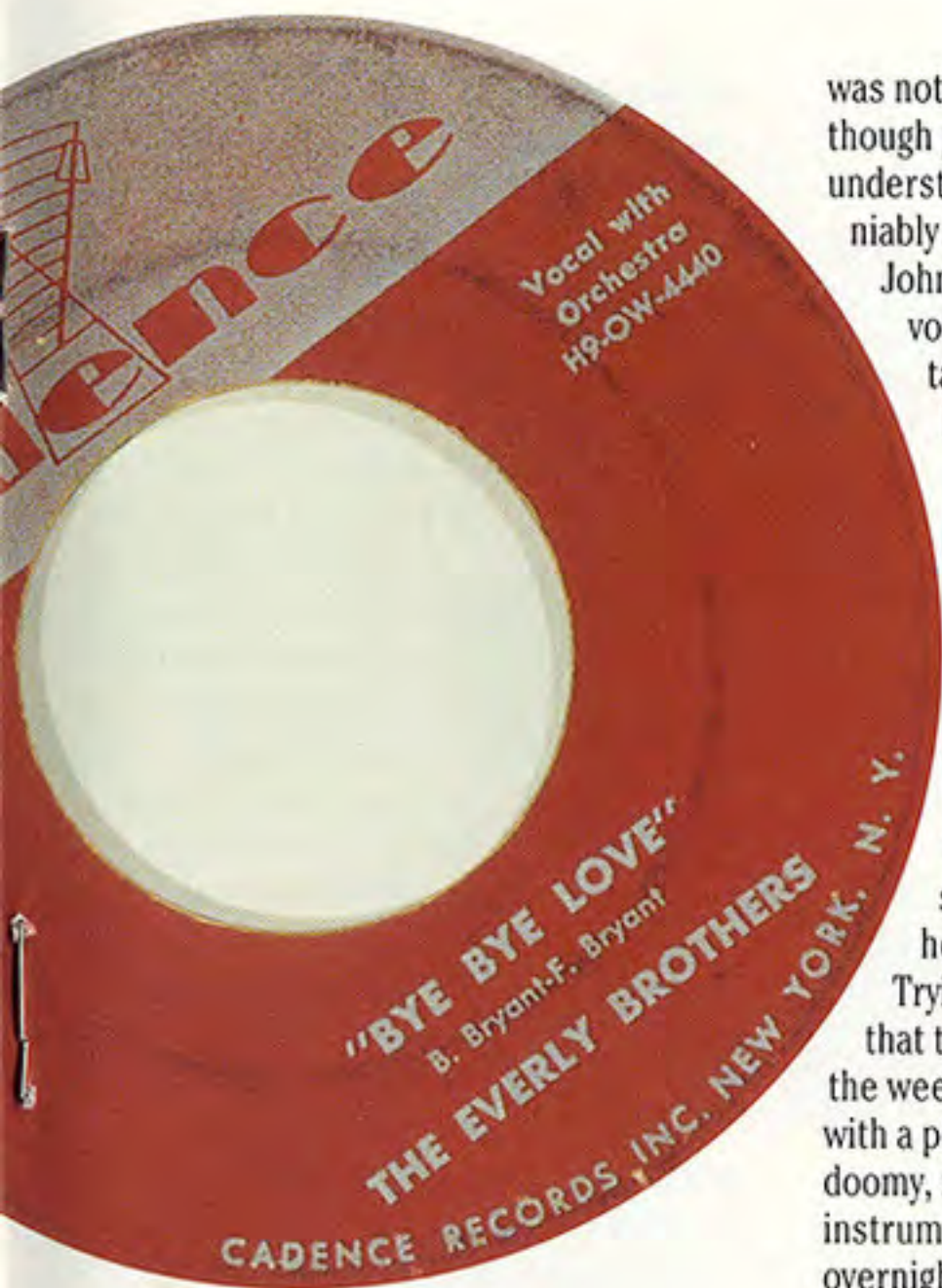
8. Book of Love The Monotones (Davis-Malone-Patrick) *Argo 5290. No. 5 (4-21-58); No. 3 (R&B)*. Thanks to the dra-

“Rock ’n’ Roll remained outsider music—the sound and fury of teenagers who, for the first time ever, were a definable social group with its own customs, styles and language.”

matic sound effects, comic overtones and irreverent blend of black sacred and secular styles, this definitive doo-wop single (the group’s only hit) has proved one of the genre’s most enduring. The drum *whap* after the word “who” in the hook lyric is one of the great accidents in rock ’n’ roll. When the sound of a kid’s ball thrown against the studio wall turned up on a rehearsal tape, the Monotones liked the effect so much they incorporated it into the arrangement.

9. Sea Cruise Frankie Ford (Smith) *Ace 554. No. 14 (4-6-59); No. 11 (R&B)*. As one of the few New Orleans whites to play rock ’n’ roll, Frankie Ford had his only smash when a gimmick was slapped over his recording to create one of New Orleans’ most atmospheric singles. The song was first recorded by Huey “Piano” Smith and the Clowns without their usual singer, Bobby Marchan. An Ace Records executive had the idea to overdub the foghorn off a sound effects album. The musicians balked because it





was not in tune with the real horns, and though proved wrong, their wariness is understandable—the song has an undeniably snazzy horn chart. Label boss

Johnny Vincent replaced Smith's weak vocals with Ford, then sped up the tape so Ford would sound more like Marchan.

10. Rumble

Link Wray and His Ray Men (Wray) *Cadence 1347. No. 16 (6-30-58); No. 11 (R&B)*. Wray introduced fuzz-tone guitar to rock 'n' roll a full decade before it became commonplace. He inspired the Who's Pete Townshend directly and generations of heavy metal guitarists indirectly. Trying to capture the feel of a fight that took place at a dance he had played the week before, Wray punctured his amp with a pencil to add crackling fuzz to a doomy, monstrous riff, thereby making instrumentals a potent new genre almost overnight.

11. La Bamba Ritchie Valens
(Valens) *Del-Fi 4110. No. 22 (2-2-59)*.
The music's first Mexican-American star paved the way for a host of '60s Chicanos like Cannibal and the Headhunters, as well as for later groups such as Los Lobos, whose revival of this song as the title track to the 1987 movie about Valens also sold spectacularly (it held the No. 1 spot for three weeks). Indeed, when he put an exuberant rock beat, Latin percussion and electric guitar to the melody of this traditional Mexican dance tune, the San Fernando Valley teen created a three-chord, garage-band sound that resonated down through *Twist and*

Shout, Louie Louie and other frat-house standards, mutating eventually into the '70s punk-era Ramones.



12. Summer-time Blues
Eddie Cochran
(Cochran-Capehart)
Liberty 55144. No. 8 (9-29-58); No. 11 (R&B). Cochran's only top-10 hit is influenced by nothing but rock 'n' roll itself. Co-writer Jerry Capehart conceived the song after realizing that summer was the only season not immortalized by a blues song. But this chunky acoustic riff

has nothing to do with blues forms, and the lyric is pure teen angst. The L.A. rocker was one of the most influential

in England, probably because he toured Great Britain extensively and died there in a 1960 car crash.

13. Mona Bo Diddley

(McDaniel) *Checker 860. Did not chart (1957)*. Though the “hambone” beat entered American music with the slaves, Diddley’s mastery of it is one of rock ‘n’ roll’s touchstones. Buddy Holly and others picked up on it right away, followed by the bluesy British Invasion bands. Diddley was one of rock’s first guitar heroes, experimenting with feedback, fuzz tone and other effects. With maracas adding Afro-Caribbean flavors to its heavily-synco-pated cross-rhythms, *Mona* swaggered with blues-derived machismo—but with a grin. Diddley made the most defiantly vulgar records of the era, but paid for it with sales that were quite insignificant considering his actual influence.

14. Dizzy, Miss Lizzy

Larry Williams

(Williams) *Specialty 626. No. 69 (4-28-58)*.

Williams’ hits were rock ‘n’ roll, rather than rhythm and blues that crossed over, and he reveled in alliteration and rhyming titles and lyrics. His music was a catchy fusion of the New Orleans-gone-L.A. commercial styles of Lloyd Price and Little Richard, except that Williams usually featured guitar in his songs. He was a favorite of British bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, both of whom revived his material.

15. Come Go with Me

The Dell-Vikings

(Quick) *Dot 15538. No. 4 (5-6-57); No. 2 (R&B)*. *Come Go with Me* is essential doo-wop, albeit lighter than the music of more street-oriented groups. The racially integrated Dell-Vikings (formed on an Air Force base outside Pittsburgh) recorded this original by first tenor Clarence Quick in a local hotel using one mike, with the singers standing in a closet so they would balance with the instruments. The voices surging in and out of the arrangement defy doo-wop formula, with the nonverbal vocalizing especially irresistible.

16. Peggy Sue Buddy Holly
(Holly-Allison-Petty) *Coral 61885. No. 3*
(12-30-57); *No. 2 (R&B)*. *Peggy Sue* was
the first solo single for Holly, who record-
ed under his own name while with the
Crickets and after leaving them. As a solo
act, Holly grew increasingly imaginative as
a writer, singer and arranger. His bespec-
taced Everyman look confirmed, in the
early days of rock, that anyone who could
deliver the goods could rule the roost, a
notion that soon changed when the record
industry began promoting talentless
pretty-boys into stardom. The song's title
was adapted from the name of drummer
Jerry Allison's girlfriend, Cindy Lou. The
song itself was a cha-cha until Holly
insisted Allison insert the powerhouse
drumrolls that make it explode.

17. Bye Bye Love

The Everly Brothers
(Bryant-Bryant) *Cadence 1315. No. 2* (6-
17-57); *No. 5 (R&B)*. With their first hit,
the Everlys adapted country close har-
monies to rock 'n' roll, creating a sweet

blend that generations of country-
rockers, particularly in Hollywood in the
'70s, tried to recapture. Though the Ever-
lys recorded in Nashville, using some of
Music City's top sessions players, they
were on a New York label that intended
for them to be pop stars. The song was
written by country mainstays Felice and
Boudleaux Bryant. The two brother tenors
limned the melody—Phil a tad higher
than Don—while the lyric applied country
simplicity and directness to teen senti-
ment.

18. Willie and the Hand Jive

The Johnny Otis Show
(Otis) *Capitol 3966. No. 9* (8-4-58); *No. 3*
(R&B). Johnny Otis reconfirmed the dura-
bility of Bo Diddley's "hambone" beat
while showing how some established R&B
stars disparaged rock 'n' roll. He was a
veteran bandleader who once ran the
Barrelhouse, postwar L.A.'s hottest black
nightspot. When Otis signed with a major
label he needed a hit, and figured a novel-
ty was the way to go. As a purist, Johnny

Buddy Holly



Rock 'n' roll Texas-style. Back, left to right: Jerry Allison, Joe B. Mauldin, Niki Sullivan. Front: Buddy Holly.

The Coasters

POISON IVY

Words and Music by JERRY LEIBER and MIKE STOLLER



This black vocal group was the greatest practitioner of R&B novelty songs, brief stories uniting blues humor with teenage language.

Otis often considered this delightful doggerel his sellout to commercial pressures.

19. Whole Lotta Loving

Fats Domino

(Domino-Bartholomew) *Imperial 5553*. No. 6 (1-12-59); No. 2 (R&B). Domino gave piano triplets a permanent place in the rock 'n' roll vocabulary, and was one of the R&B stars flexible enough to adapt to the new audience. His *The Fat Man* (1950) is often cited as the first rock 'n' roll record, but Domino did not start crossing over to white audiences until *Ain't That a Shame* in 1955. The New Orleans star fused jump blues and Dixieland with easy-going second-line rhythms and his laconic, country-accented vocals to create a sound both funky and unthreatening. Bandleader-producer Dave Bartholomew kept him evolving with the times—adding strings here, softening the beat there—but *Whole Lotta Loving* had punch, right down to the use of drumbeats as a substitute for key lyrics.

20. Rockin' Pneumonia and the Boogie Woogie Flu

Huey "Piano" Smith and the Clowns (Smith) *Ace 530*. No. 52 (9-16-57); No. 5 (R&B). Smith and company took the New Orleans party ethos to a near-anarchistic extreme, deconstructing those chugga-chugga second-line parade rhythms and the leader's boogie-rumba piano while adding absurd chants and whoops. They were sublimely ridiculous, and contagious enough to inspire remakes by acts as diverse as Johnny Rivers and the Flamin' Groovies.

21. Hang Up My Rock and Roll Shoes

Chuck Willis

(Willis) *Atlantic 1179*. No. 24 (5-26-58); No. 9 (R&B). Few labels did a better job than Atlantic of making rhythm and blues records with integrity that could still cross-over, and Willis' sinuous vocal stylings were a prime beneficiary. The former jump blues singer from Atlanta wore a turban onstage and capitalized on dance fads by billing himself as the Sheik

of Shake or the King of the Stroll. This is precisely the kind of record Atlantic specialized in: Willis' controlled vocals set off against distinctive background singers, inventive horn-percussion interplay and a driving sax solo. The lyric was meant to speak for the audience as much as the performer, but proved prophetic—Willis' record was released just two weeks after his death on the operating table.

—John Morthland

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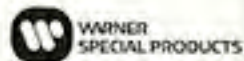
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Everly Bros.

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More than teen idols, the Everly Brothers adapted country close harmonies to rockin' rhythms.

Jerry Lee Lewis



A whole lot of shakin' going on, indeed. Jerry Lee Lewis' demonic rockabilly explodes on the cover of his first EP on the Sun label.