

# THE TEENAGE YEARS 1957-1964



THE TIME-LIFE HISTORY OF

ROCK 'N' ROLL

# The Teenage Years 1957-1964

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THE TIME-LIFE HISTORY OF

# ROCK 'N' ROLL

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The Teenage Years  
1957-1964

# Connie Francis

Hear **CONNIE FRANCIS** sing on  
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**"WHERE THE BOYS ARE"**  
on **M-G-M Records**



**SEE THE PICTURE!** **Where the Boys Are**

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In CinemaScope  
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Starring  
DOLORES HART • GEORGE HAMILTON • YVETTE MIMIEUX  
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with FRANK GORSHIN and introducing **CONNIE FRANCIS**

Screen Play by GEORGE WELLS • Based on the novel by GILBERT SWEETFOOT  
Directed by HENRY LEVIN • Produced by JOE PASTERNAK

A great pop singer who came of age during the rock 'n' roll era

# Brenda Lee



Brenda Lee, one of the first female rockers—and a country singer to boot

If you accept 1954 as the year rock 'n' roll emerged, then it took only about three years for the music to return to the control of the industry it had rendered obsolete. Most of the earliest rockers, producers and executives, as well as the artists, operated well outside the American pop music system. They owned or recorded for independent labels and—like most of the blues and country artists who were their inspiration—wrote much of their own material or leaned heavily on traditional music. Feeling threatened by these mavericks, the mainstream record business denounced rock as a passing fad.

But the numbers involved were undeniably good. Some music-business veterans wasted little time cashing in on the “fad” while it lasted. Others sensed that rock 'n' roll was, indeed, here to stay. And for each teenage outcast who em-

braced rebel music, there were many more good clean kids—especially from the growing suburbs—who were eager to hear music by and about themselves.

Middle-class angst replaced working-class anger; students were in, hoodlums

were out. Teen idols spoke to these new fans in a language they understood: The music was about puppy love, not sex, and about fitting in, not busting loose. It was not too loud or too primitive, and the melody was more important than the beat. In most cases, long-standing pros or get-rich-quick newcomers wrote and produced the songs. The voices of the teen idols were just one of several pieces needed to

assemble a hit record; the other parts were lush vocal choirs and orchestras. Rhythm sections—once a key element in a hit—became secondary, and countless singles began bearing the credit, “Orchestra and cho-



Tommy Roe, rockin' early  
before he became a creator  
of the bubblegum sound



rus conducted by ...” Rock ‘n’ roll had begun to change from a music of the people to a music of the producers.

This being rock ‘n’ roll, however, nothing was quite that cut and dried. Some of the arranger-producers, from Bert Berns to Phil Spector to Burt Bacharach and Hal David, went on to become bona fide creative trailblazers. Among artists, several of the old-line rockers such as Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, Dion and Ritchie Valens were perfectly compatible with the new sounds. Even Elvis underwent a post-Army makeover that qualified him as a star of the era. And at least one teen idol spawned by the movement, Ricky Nelson, proved to have artistic staying power. But the performers who best personified the trend—namely Fabian, Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello—were simply adult America’s idea of squeaky-clean kids.

Take Fabian, who hailed from Philadelphia, Teen Idol Central (Avalon and Bobby Rydell also lived there). Fabian Forte was discovered and groomed by Bob Marcucci, manager of Avalon and owner of Chancellor Records, the cornerstone of the scene along

with Swan and Cameo-Parkway. Supposedly, Marcucci had stopped to help Philadelphia policeman Dominick Forte, who was having a heart attack on the street. The record mogul could not help noticing how much the policeman’s son looked like Elvis. He took the youth to a voice teacher who said Fabian sang so poorly he could not help him. But others stepped forward to say they could. Marcucci spent two years grooming Fabian on matters such as voice and etiquette. He then sprung Fabian on the nation through appearances on Dick Clark’s *American Bandstand*, the best vehicle for nationwide exposure. Clark just happened to own a piece of Chancellor, too. From 1959 to 1960, three of Fabian’s Chancellor singles cracked the top 10. And though the star cheerfully admitted that he *still* could not sing, he took his sudden fame in stride. It was as if being a teen idol was simply another part of growing up.

To diehard rock ‘n’ roll fans, this slick packaging had been going on since Pat Boone, but the enormity of it was disheartening. The lily-white, suburban sensibility was taking over. To outsiders, the gambit



symbolized everything that was wrong with rock 'n' roll. Fabian confirmed the oft-repeated bias that it took no talent at all to be a star, and that those who liked the music were being hoodwinked and brainwashed into parting with their money.

The city that best exploited the craze for teen idols was Los Angeles, where the existing star-making machinery could simply be retooled to produce a new kind of star.

*American Bandstand* had already established itself as the single most effective device for validating rock 'n' roll stars. Elvis had shown that a rocker could make the transition to movies and amplify his impact rather than dilute it. And Ricky Nelson had proved that regular exposure from a television series could establish a recording career. Nelson was especially significant because he was from Hollywood. In his wake came Annette Funicello, perky lead Mouseketeer from Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse Club* and future B-movie star opposite Frankie Avalon; Paul Peterson and Shelley Fabares from the *Donna Reed Show*; Edd "Kookie" Byrnes from *77 Sunset Strip*; John-

ny Crawford from the *Rifleman*; and many others. On the big screen, James Darren, another Philadelphian, parlayed his lead in the *Gidget* films into a brief fling as a recording star, while Connie Francis used her status as America's leading female soloist to land the starring role in *Where The Boys Are*.

Indeed, the connection between rock 'n' roll and TV and films joined suburbanization and the emergence of arranger-producers as the generation's most enduring contributions to the music. The final contribution was the rise of professional rock 'n' roll songwriters—particularly at the Brill Building on Broadway in Manhattan, where Don Kirshner and Al Nevins ran Aldon Music. On the theory that kids spoke best to other kids, Aldon hired as staff writers such teams as Howie Greenfield and Neil Sedaka, Gerry Goffin and Carole King, and Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. These writers blew away the tired old Tin Pan Alley songsmiths who were supplying tunes to teen idols, and they did so by applying Tin Pan Alley's own principles of craftsmanship to rock 'n' roll. The new

# Paul and Paula



Paul and Paula, one of a number of lovey-dovey teen-oriented duos

writers integrated rock 'n' roll into the mainstream American music business—but in this case, the writers were kids doing it themselves. With the Beach Boys arriving as harbingers in 1962, the next step would be a generation of self-contained rock groups that wrote their own songs and sang and performed on them too.

### **1. (Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear**

Elvis Presley

(Mann-Lowe) RCA 7000. No. 1 (7-8-57); No. 1 (R&B). *Teddy Bear* came from Elvis' first movie, *Loving You*, and was thus integral to the plan to make him accessible to the most people possible. There was no room for a mystery train or a blue moon of Kentucky in his newer material. Indeed, this song was written by two of Philadelphia's leading teen barons, and exploited the widespread fact that Elvis was a collector of teddy bears—which was not true, but after this record fans mailed him thousands. Given how innocuous the song was, the arrangement is surprisingly Spartan—little more than Elvis' voice, albeit a little breathier than usual, a piano and doo-woppish background harmonies by the Jordanaires.



**Rosie, of the Originals**

**2. Dream Lover** Bobby Darin  
(Darin) *Atco 6140. No. 2 (6-8-59); No. 4 (R&B)*. Darin was perhaps the classiest of the teen idols—in the old-school, nightclub sense—and here he stretches out formulaic rock-ballad chords to create a spacier effect. This makes room for the strings and an orchestra that, while not exactly rocking, does hold its own with the rhythm section. The perfectionist Darin required 32 takes to get this song right.

**3. Susie Darlin'** Robin Luke  
(Luke) *Dot 15781. No. 5 (10-13-58); No. 6 (R&B)*. This song is yet another echo of *Peggy Sue*, this time from a Hawaiian television star. Luke takes the motif softer and slower, with the guitar providing more of a hook than the drums.

**4. Donna** Ritchie Valens  
(Valens) *Del-Fi 4110. No. 2 (2-23-59); No. 11 (R&B)*. For this testimonial to the lost love of his high school sweetheart, Valens used Mexican-tinted guitar to personalize one of the most instantly-recognizable teen-ballad chord progressions around. His sweet, broken voice did the rest.

**5. Sheila** Tommy Roe  
(Roe) *ABC-Paramount 10329. No. 1 (9-1-62); No. 6 (R&B)*. Roe was one of several teen idols patterned after Buddy Holly, and *Sheila* is a faithful *Peggy Sue* tribute, right down to the pummeling drums-and-guitar lead and semi-stuttering vocal. His light touch helped pave the way for bubblegum music of the early '70s.

**6. Take Good Care of My Baby**

Bobby Vee

(Goffin-King) *Liberty 55354. No. 1 (9-18-61)*. Vee launched his career when his band filled in for Buddy Holly the day after the superstar's plane crashed on February 3, 1959. Vee was soon picked up by L.A. producer Snuff Garrett, who found this song at the Aldon offices in the Brill Building. The background voices here are sung in a more conventionally pop manner; the piano is too sweet to be called rock 'n' roll at all; the drummer plays lickety-split turnarounds that defuse the beat; the strings take over; and Vee's unmistakably suburban voice has a folkish edge that effectively conveys teen wistfulness.



# Elvis and Brenda

Elvis Presley and a young  
Brenda Lee, delighted to  
have her own teddy bear

## 7. Lollipop

The Chordettes

(Ross-Dixon) *Cadence 1345. No. 2 (3-31-58); No. 3 (R&B)*. Formed in the '40s and patterned after barbershop-harmony groups, the Chordettes were unabashed bandwagon-jumpers. This song was a cover of an R&B duet record by Ronald and Ruby, who co-wrote it under her real name of Beverly Ross. With its clapping intro, jumpy sing-along vocals, cute sound effects and boy vocals offering contrast to the femmes, *Lollipop* represents early girl-group style. What could be more girl-group, or more teen-idol, than lyrics such as "sweeter than candy on a stick," even coming from oldsters like these?

## 8. Hey Paula

Paul and Paula

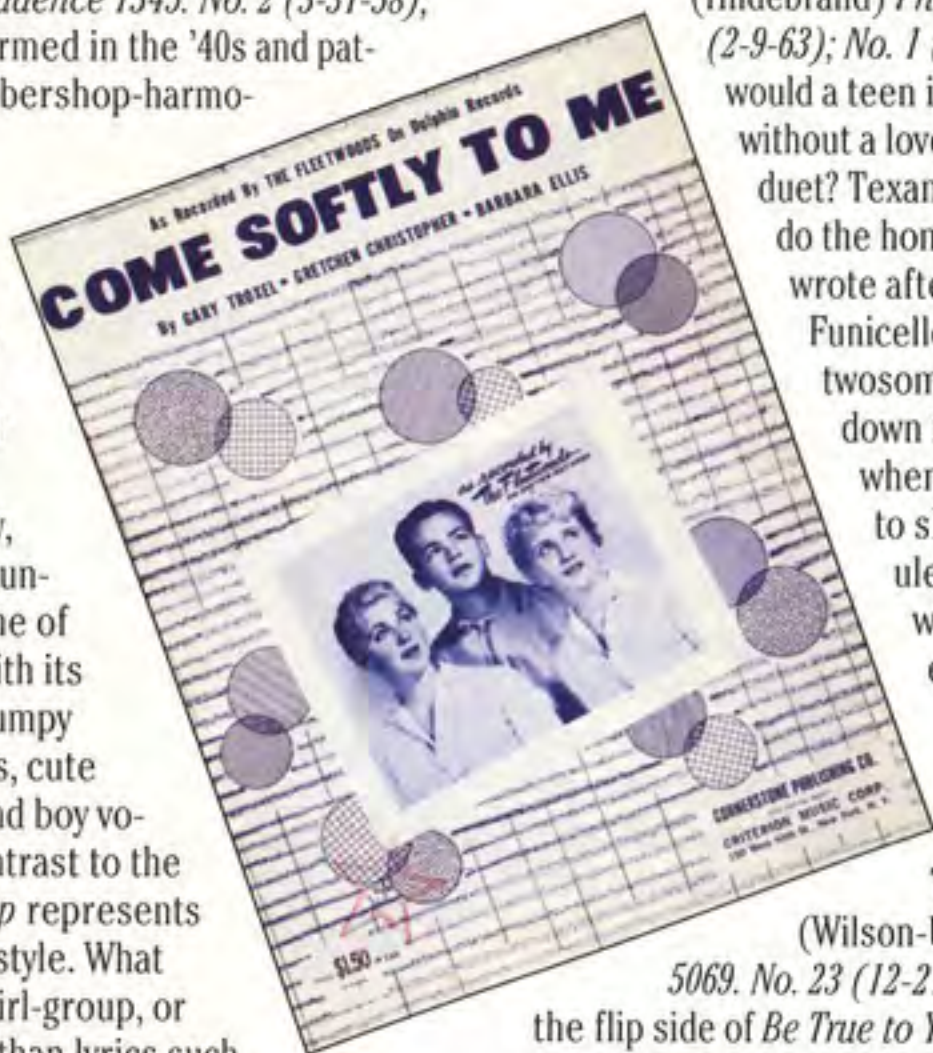
(Hildebrand) *Philips 40084. No. 1 (2-9-63); No. 1 (R&B)*. What would a teen idol collection be without a lovey-dovey boy-girl duet? Texans Paul and Paula do the honors on a song he wrote after hearing Annette Funicello's *Tall Paul*. The twosome put *Hey Paula* down in 18 minutes when somebody failed to show for a scheduled studio session, which might help explain the loose, breezy feel.

## 9. In My Room

The Beach Boys

(Wilson-Usher) *Capitol*

*5069. No. 23 (12-21-63)*. This was the flip side of *Be True to Your School*, and its emotional opposite as well. The eternally troubled Brian Wilson sang over violins in a



scared falsetto, while the rest of the Boys took care of the fragile melody. Rarely has been dispirit—and sanctuary—been evoked so well. The Beach Boys were one of the chief bridges between the vocal group sounds of the '50s and the '60s.

### 10. Come Softly to Me

The Fleetwoods

(Troxel-Christopher-Ellis) *Liberty 55188*. No. 1 (4-13-59); No. 5 (R&B). Known first as *Two Girls and a Guy*, the Fleetwoods came out of the Northwest with this hit that was patched together from two song fragments. It is perhaps the only record ever made on which the vocals were recorded first a cappella and then the instrumentation was overdubbed later. The sole percussion consists of group member Gary Troxel shaking his car keys. The vocal arrangement reflects member Gretchen Christopher's classical training, but the soothing "neo-doo-wop," as it was called, shaped the sound of early '60s folkie harmonizers and girl-groups alike.



### 11. My True Love

Jack Scott

(Scott) *Coxton 462*. No. 3 (8-18-58); No. 5 (R&B). Canadian Jack Scalfone Jr., better known as Jack Scott, sang with more soul and with more of a rockabilly influence than did most teen idols. He also had more charisma, perhaps owing to the sheer repetition of most of his music, and the recitation here is a time-tested attention-grabber as well.

### 12. Runaround Sue

Dion

(Maresca-DiMucci) *Laurie 3110*. No. 1 (10-23-61); No. 4 (R&B). Dion's Bronx doo-wop softened only a little after he first left the Belmonts. With these lyrics, he plays the hood with the tender rather than hard heart, and the song is arranged so that listeners can clap along or join the Del Satins (uncredited) on backup vocals. Previously, fans tried fitting their voices into the more complex harmonies of the Belmonts. The closing sax is a screamer, and the groove surges as it picks up momentum—which is only fitting for a song written in a school yard while Dion and some friends pounded on cardboard boxes.

# TIGER MIGHTY COLD

(TO A WARM, WARM HEART)

45 RPM  
Chancellor



C 1037

F  
A  
B  
I  
A  
N



FABIAN INTERNATIONAL FAN CLUB  
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### **13. Tiger** Fabian

(Jones) *Chancellor 1037. No. 3 (7-20-59); No. 15 (R&B)*. Sharp Philly production values and a professional studio band went a long way toward disguising his deficiencies. Elvis had his *Teddy Bear* and Fabe had his *Tiger*, which proved his only million-seller.

### **14. A Teenager's Romance**

Ricky Nelson

(Gillam) *Verve 10047. No. 2 (6-10-57)*. This song was the flip side to Ricky's debut, a cover of Fats Domino's *I'm Walking*. But *A Teenager's Romance* was the bigger smash, perhaps because the theme played more directly to girls who already followed him on TV. Thanks to the Jordanaires' doo-wop backup, it has more of a '50s feel than subsequent hits. Ricky's clear tuneful trademark was there from the beginning, and the slow-drag guitar crystallizes the sound. As one of the few to urbanize rockabilly, Ricky proved a seminal influence on '70s country-rockers in his native Los Angeles.

### **15. Where the Boys Are**

Connie Francis

(Sedaka-Greenfield) *MGM 12971. No. 4 (3-20-61)*. Another movie theme, and an obvious one at that—but just as obviously a teen tune (written by Neil Sedaka and Howie Greenfield) that could not have had impact before rock 'n' roll. The big orchestral intro, thick strings and tinkly piano emphasize that Connie Francis was a conventional pop singer who happened to come of age during the rock 'n' roll era.

### **16. True Love Ways** Buddy Holly

(Petty-Holly) *Coral 62210. Did not chart (1959)*. Holly's music was nothing if not adaptable, and when he got into orchestration he was still writing his own material and had much to say about the final sound, regardless of the producers and arrangers credited. He thus remained connected directly to his records in a way that most teen idols were not. His use of strings later in his career was not something forced on him, but a reflection of his eagerness to experiment. This slow dance from one of his last New York sessions is based on the Angelic Gospel Singers' *I'll Be*

*All Right*, and along with the country twang, there is plenty of gospel longing and steadfastness in Buddy's vocals. Sam "The Man" Taylor's sax plays brilliantly off the strings. The Beatles, who were Holly devotees, were probably encouraged by records such as this one when they made their own move toward orchestration several years later. Peter and Gordon used close Everly Brothers-style harmonies for their top-20 cover version of the song in 1965.

**17. I'm Sorry** Brenda Lee  
(Self-Allbritten) *Decca 31093. No. 1 (7-18-60); No. 4 (R&B)*. Brenda Lee was all of 16 when she released this mature, sexy ballad—and she had been singing for a living since she was 10. *I'm Sorry* was one of the first Nashville records to use strings, which played obligato to Brenda's reading of the title phrase, and her deep, husky spoken passages carried a dramatic punch of their own. Her status as one of rock's first female solo stars made her a primary role model, but even as a rocker Brenda was always primarily a crossover country singer.

**18. Cathy's Clown** The Everly Brothers (Everly-Everly) *Warner 5151. No. 1 (5-23-60); No. 1 (R&B)*. Don and Phil Everly had such an agreeable sound that they segued effortlessly into the era of teen idols. There was no rock 'n' roll anger or revenge in their hearts. They rarely expressed more than the quest for the perfect girl, and their first Warner Brothers single, after eight hits in a row for independent Cadence, was no different. The beat remains forceful, and Don's fascination with Bo Diddley shows through in his choppy rhythm guitar parts. The harmonies exemplify teen innocence and idealism on the surface, while the lyrics carry the sinking sensation that, in the end, reality will prevail.

### **19. Rhythm of the Rain**

The Cascades  
(Gummoe) *Valiant 6026. No. 3 (3-9-63); No. 7 (R&B)*. With the celesta and sound effects providing atmospherics, this soft harmony number complemented the urban folk music emerging in the early '60s, and was thus a surefire pop hit. But how is one to explain its ascendance into the R&B top 10?



# **Bobby Darin**

**Darin, who changed his last name from Cassotto by picking the name at random from a phone book, temporarily found his dream lover, marrying Sandra Dee in 1960.**

## 20. Last Kiss

J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers  
(Cochran) *Josie 923. No. 2 (11-7-64)*. Blue-eyed soul Southerner Wayne Cochran wrote and first recorded *Last Kiss*, based on an incident that took place on a highway near his home in rural Georgia. His version failed, perhaps because the song ultimately dripped too much pathos from a soft singer. J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers, from their lower-register intro to their doomy vocals, set the standard for dead-girlfriend records.

## 21. Angel Baby

Rosie and the Originals  
(Hamlin) *Highland 1011. No. 5 (1-23-61)*; *No. 5 (R&B)*. Many people, including John Lennon, considered this song one of early

rock's greatest ballads. At the very least, it is one of the greatest accidents. Born in Alaska, Rosalie Hamlin moved with her family

to San Diego as a teenager, and quickly won a spot in guitar player David Ponci's band the Originals. She was fighting a bad cold the day they cut this song. The result was an ethereal nasal vocal, augmented by an out-of-tune guitar hook and drums that career all over the place. When the voice surrenders to the off-key sax break, the heavens open up. Rosie's performance was so distinctive that

she got top billing on the single, causing the breakup of the band. Both she and her former band spent the rest of their inconsequential careers separately chasing the





## **J. Frank Wilson and the Cavaliers**

Texan J. Frank Wilson left his job at a slaughterhouse, joined the Cavaliers and set the standard for dead-girlfriend records.

sound in vain. Because no tape could be found of the American version, the edited British version, released on London records in 1961, is presented here.

—John Morthland

The Cascades, a soft harmony vocal group whose sound complemented the urban folk music of the early '60s



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# Robin Luke

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# DION

LARRY  
*Mastermind*  
3110

"RUNAROUND SUE"  
B/W "RUNAWAY GIRL"



After leaving the Belmonts, Dion DiMucci hit with this admonition about a footloose girl—who had the same first name as the woman he eventually married.