

1950



TIME
LIFE



Bing Crosby

In many ways, 1950 was a year caught between two eras. The big bands that had dominated the 1940s were still around, but many fans felt they were beginning to lose their edge. Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey now appeared as guest soloists with the Indianapolis Symphony. Artie Shaw had retired to write his autobiography, Benny Goodman premiered Aaron Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* with the NBC Symphony Orchestra, and Count Basie re-recorded *One O'Clock Jump* with a mild-mannered seven-piece combo. The new generation of song stylists that would dominate the decade was still waiting in the wings. It was a year of marking time, of taking stock, of playing it safe, and the music business reacted to this mood by recycling the past—dressing older songs in new clothes to feed a new year's nostalgia.

Three of 1950's top hits came from the 1930s. **I Wanna Be Loved** was introduced in 1932 at showman Billy Rose's Casino de Paree in New York, but was revived in 1950 by the Andrews Sisters. By this time, Patty, Laverne and Maxene Andrews had been recording for some 13 years, though this slow, moody piece contrasts sharply with the up-tempo swing-era favorites (like *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*) often associated with the trio. Their second biggest hit was another prewar veteran, **I Can Dream, Can't I?**, spotlighting Patty on lead vocal. Academy Award winner Sammy Fain had written it for a 1937 Broadway musical called *Right This Way*, and he watched the song grow in popularity through the war.

Also from 1937 came **Harbor Lights**, a British import that had been a best-selling record for Rudy Vallee in the

'30s and a theme for a memorable 1940 film called *The Long Voyage Home*. In 1950, when popular bandleader Sammy Kaye switched, with much fanfare, from RCA to Columbia Records, this song was chosen as his first release on the new label. The vocal is by Tony Alamo, who later became a controversial evangelist and the owner of Nashville's best-known glittery Western wear store.

Several other hits went back even further than the 1930s. **Play a Simple Melody**, Bing Crosby's 1950 contribution to the hit parade, echoed from Irving Berlin's 1914 Broadway musical, *Watch Your Step*. Bing remembered sharing a cabin with Berlin and comedian Groucho Marx on the *Queen Elizabeth*: "We kind of buddied up for the whole journey. I had known 'Simple Melody' from the time I was a kid, so the three of us did it together for the captain's entertainment." When Decca producer Dave Kapp suggested that Bing do some duets with his oldest son, Gary, this "generation gap" patter about sentimental songs versus ragtime seemed a natural. Fans agreed and made the disc Bing's 21st million seller.

Dear Hearts and Gentle People, Bing's other big hit of the year, has an odd story behind it. In 1864 Stephen Foster died—a derelict on the Bowery in New York. In his pocket was a slip of paper on which he had written the words "Dear friends and gentle hearts." Scholars speculated that this might have been a title for a final Foster song, but no manuscript for it ever surfaced. In 1949 Bob Hilliard and Sammy Fain, two of Crosby's favorite writers, modified the phrase and created *Dear Hearts and Gentle People*. With its picket-fence and rambling-rose

images, the song reflects a Foster-like longing for hometown simplicity, enhanced by a country and Western arrangement featuring mandolin, guitar and pedal steel.

Goodnight Irene also had its roots in America's musical past, coming from Texas blues singer Huddie Ledbetter (better known as Leadbelly), who had learned it from his uncle sometime before 1918. Leadbelly was serving a prison term for attempted homicide at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in 1933 when folklore collector John Lomax recorded him on a portable disc-cutting machine for the Library of Congress. One of the songs captured was *Irene*, a prison-yard favorite thanks to Leadbelly. The bluesman continued to perform *Irene* after his pardon, eventually moving to New York to be part of the folk music scene. Among the people he met there were the Almanac Singers, who in 1949 reorganized as the Weavers with the express purpose of taking folk material like Leadbelly's to a larger audience. Arranger Gordon Jenkins asked them to work with him, but Decca producer Dave Kapp felt they weren't commercial enough. On the way out of Kapp's office, Jenkins whispered to the group, "I'll get you in on my next recording date."

On May 4, 1950, Jenkins took the Weavers into a studio to cut their smoothed-out version of *Goodnight Irene* under the name "Gordon Jenkins and his Orchestra with The Weavers." Within weeks, the Weavers made half a dozen national magazines, and by year's end the record had been at the No. 1 slot for 13 weeks—longer than any other disc in history up to then.

Many of the new songs from 1950 were infused with a sense of nostalgia. **La Vie en Rose** brought forth memories of postwar France, where the haunting ballad was introduced by legendary chanteuse Edith Piaf. Frankie Laine insisted that "I must go where the wild goose goes"

in **The Cry of the Wild Goose**, written by Pennsylvania folk singer Terry Gilkyson (who would soon join forces with the Weavers for *On Top of Old Smoky*). **A Bushel and a Peck**, from the 1950 musical *Gypsies and Dolls* by Frank Loesser, evoked a bygone age of speakeasies and colorful gangsters.

Other popular songs used older types of music to summon happier times. **Hoop-Dee-Doo** by Perry Como and the Fontane Sisters, celebrates polka music with bandleader Milton De Lugg, a polka specialist early in his career. **Music! Music! Music!**, a rollicking tribute to the nickelodeon, was the first real hit for 19-year-old Teresa Brewer, an Ohio native who began her career as a child prodigy with the *Major Bowes' Amateur Hour* show. Backing her is a band of veteran Dixieland musicians that includes Max Kaminsky on trumpet, Cutty Cutshall on trombone and Ernie Caceres on clarinet. **Kay Starr's Bonaparte's Retreat** takes us to "a town way down in Dixie" where the fiddles played for a special pair of young lovers. Though set in a Dixieland arrangement, the tune is an old Southern fiddle favorite that dates back to mid-18th-century Scotland. Country and Western bandleader Pee Wee King and his fiddler Redd Stewart added the words in 1950.

In fact, King and Stewart were also responsible for writing the year's biggest hit, **The Tennessee Waltz**. King, a Polish-American born Frank Kuczynski in Wisconsin, had moved from polka to cowboy music in the 1930s. He won early fame performing with Gene Autry, and by 1946 was a regular on the Grand Ole Opry. While driving the instrument truck back to Nashville one night, Stewart heard bluegrass star Bill Monroe's *Kentucky Waltz* on the radio. Stewart thought it was odd that nobody had ever written a Tennessee waltz to complement the Kentucky



The Fontane Sisters



one. King recalled, "So we took an old melody that we were using as our theme—the 'No Name Waltz'—and Redd started writing the lyrics on the back of a matchbook cover." King recorded the song in 1947, but nothing much happened until Patti Page found it.

Page (née Clara Ann Fowler) emerged from a C & W background in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to become a regular on the popular ABC radio show *The Breakfast Club*. She and her manager, Jack Rael, had won a contract with the newly formed Mercury label that allowed them carte blanche in tune selection. They experimented with pop versions of country songs with little success; then, in the summer of 1950, they struck pay dirt with **All My Love**, a French import set to a bolero rhythm. Harry Geller's arrangement gave the piece a Mexican flavor, and Patti had a hit that stayed on the charts 22 weeks.

That fall, after Patti recorded a forgettable Christmas tune called *Boogie Woogie Santa Claus*, she started casting about for a B side. Over lunch, Rael listened to a trade magazine reporter argue that *Tennessee Waltz* should be the B side, and finally agreed. The record made the charts a week before Christmas, only with *Tennessee Waltz* as the A side. Spurred by the lilting melody and by Page's innovative overdubbed vocal harmony, the record went on to sell more than three million copies within a year of its release, and became the best-selling disc ever made by a woman singer. The published version was the last piece of sheet music to sell over a million copies—a small detail, perhaps, but symptomatic of how heavily records and radio were influencing pop music, and of how the year 1950 was at once a tribute to the past and a harbinger of things to come.

—Charles K. Wolfe

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

- 1. Music! Music! Music!** Teresa Brewer • *Music and lyrics by Stephan Weiss and Bernie Brown. London 60A. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 1**
- 2. Enjoy Yourself (It's Later than You Think)** Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians • *Music by Carl Sigman, lyrics by Herb Magidson. Vocals by Kenny Gardner and the Lombardo Trio. Decca 24825. No. 10**
- 3. I Wanna Be Loved** The Andrews Sisters • *Music by John Green, lyrics by Billy Rose and Edward Heyman. Decca 27007. No. 3**
- 4. A Bushel and a Peck** Perry Como and Betty Hutton • *Music and lyrics by Frank Loesser. RCA Victor 3930. Courtesy of BMG Music. No. 6**
- 5. My Foolish Heart** Gordon Jenkins • *Music by Victor Young, lyrics by Ned Washington. Decca 24830. No. 3**
- 6. Play a Simple Melody** Gary Crosby and Friend • *Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. Decca 27112. No. 3**
- 7. The Cry of the Wild Goose** Frankie Laine • *Music and lyrics by Terry Gilkyson. Mercury 5363. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 4**
- 8. All My Love** Patti Page • *Music and lyrics by Mitchell Parish. Mercury 5455. Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 2**
- 9. Sentimental Me** The Ames Brothers • *Music and lyrics by Jim Morehead and Jimmy Cassin. Coral 60140. No. 3**
- 10. There's No Tomorrow** Tony Martin • *Music and lyrics by Al Hoffman, Leo Corday and Leon Carr. RCA Victor 3582. Courtesy of BMG Music. No. 2**
- 11. I'll Never Be Free** Kay Starr and Tennessee Ernie Ford • *Music and lyrics by Bennie Benjamin and George Weiss. Capitol 1124. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 3**
- 12. Harbor Lights** Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye • *Music by Hugh Williams, lyrics by Jimmy Kennedy. Vocals by Tony Alamo and the Kaydets. Columbia 3863. Courtesy of CBS Special Products. No. 1**
- 13. Hoop-Dee-Do** Perry Como and the Fontane Sisters • *Music by Milton De Lugg, lyrics by Frank Loesser. RCA Victor 3747. Courtesy of BMG Music. No. 4**
- 14. I Can Dream, Can't I?** The Andrews Sisters • *Music by Samson Bain, lyrics by Irving Kahal. Decca 24705. No. 1**



Kay Starr

14. **I Can Dream**, *Can't It* The Andrews Sisters • *Music* by Sammy Fain, *Lyrics* by Irving Kahal, Decca 24705, No. 1*
15. **Mona Lisa** Nat King Cole • *Music and lyrics* by Jan Lievingston and Ray Erans, Capitol 3811, Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 1*
16. **Nevertheless** The Mills Brothers • *Music and lyrics* by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby, Decca 27253, No. 3*
17. **Goodnight Irene** Gordon Jenkins and the Weavers • *Music and lyrics* by Huddie Ledbetter and John Lomax, Decca 27077, No. 3*
18. **Bevitched** Doris Day • *Music* by Richard Rodgers, *Lyrics* by Lorenz Hart, Columbia 38698, Courtesy of CBS Special Products, No. 10*
19. **Rag Mop** The Ames Brothers • *Music and lyrics* by Johnny Lee Wells and Deacon Anderson, Coral 60140, No. 1*
20. **Bonaparte's Retreat** Kay Starr • *Music and lyrics* by Pee Wee King and Redd Stewart, Capitol 3336, Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 5*
21. **La Vie en Rose** Tony Martin • *Music* by Louigay, *Lyrics* by Mac David, RCA Victor 3819, Courtesy of BMG Music, No. 9*
22. **The Tennessee Waltz** Patsy Page • *Music and lyrics* by Redd Stewart and Pee Wee King, Mercury 5534, Under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 1*
23. **Dear Hearts and Gentle People** Bing Crosby • *Music* by Sammy Fain, *Lyrics* by Bob Hilliard, Decca 24798, No. 2*
24. **It Isn't Fair** Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye • *Music* by Richard Himber, Frank Warshawer and Sylvester Sprigato, *Lyrics* by Richard Himber, Vocal by Don Cornell, RCA Victor 3689, Courtesy of BMG Music, No. 3*

1950

- 1 **Music! Music! Music!** Teresa Brewer
- 2 **Enjoy Yourself (It's Later than You Think)**
Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians
- 3 **I Wanna Be Loved** The Andrews Sisters
- 4 **A Bushel and a Peck** Perry Como and Betty Hutton
- 5 **My Foolish Heart** Gordon Jenkins
- 6 **Play a Simple Melody** Gary Crosby and Friend
- 7 **The Cry of the Wild Goose** Frankie Laine
- 8 **All My Love** Patti Page
- 9 **Sentimental Me** The Ames Brothers
- 10 **There's No Tomorrow** Tony Martin
- 11 **I'll Never Be Free** Kay Starr and Tennessee Ernie Ford
- 12 **Harbor Lights** Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye
- 13 **Hoop-Dee-Do** Perry Como and the Fontane Sisters
- 14 **I Can Dream, Can't I?** The Andrews Sisters
- 15 **Mona Lisa** Nat King Cole
- 16 **Nevertheless** The Mills Brothers
- 17 **Goodnight Irene** Gordon Jenkins and the Weavers
- 18 **Bewitched** Doris Day
- 19 **Rag Mop** The Ames Brothers
- 20 **Bonaparte's Retreat** Kay Starr
- 21 **La Vie en Rose** Tony Martin
- 22 **The Tennessee Waltz** Patti Page
- 23 **Dear Hearts and Gentle People** Bing Crosby
- 24 **It Isn't Fair** Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye



President: Paul R. Stewart

Vice Presidents: Terence J. Furlong, Carol Kaplan

Executive Producer: Charles McCardell

Recording Producer: Bill Inglot

Series Consultant: Charles K. Wolfe

Creative Director: Don Sheldon

Art Director: Robin Bray

Production Coordinator: Brian Miller

Art Studio: Nina Bridges

1950 was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with MCA Records, Inc. Digitally remastered at K-Disc, Hollywood, Calif.; Ken Perry, engineer.

The Author: Three-time Grammy nominee Charles K. Wolfe teaches English at Middle Tennessee State University. He has written numerous books and articles on country music and has also produced country and folk music recordings.

Time-Life Music wishes to thank William L. Schurk of the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, for providing valuable reference material.

TIME-LIFE MUSIC is a division of Time-Life Books Inc.

© 1988 Time-Life Books Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. TIME-LIFE is a trademark of Time Incorporated U.S.A.

Picture Credits: Cover art by John Maggard © 1988 Time-Life Books Inc. Opening spread: Photo courtesy Frank Driggs Collection. Center spread: courtesy Michael Ochs Archives, Venice, Calif. (2)

Manufactured for Time-Life Music by MCA Records, Inc.

Ⓟ 1988 MCA Records, Inc.

MSD 35125

HPD-02