

THE EARLY '50s



TIME
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MUSIC



*Musical electronics wiz
Les Paul with his wife,
singer Mary Ford*

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The first part of the 1950s was a relatively settled time in popular music. Though momentous changes were just around the corner, the tenor of the times was still rooted in the 1940s. Many of the most successful songs and styles of the period were extensions of movements begun in the late '40s, when the big bands started breaking up and the age of swing became the "age of sing." As Americans struggled to adjust to the cold war, Korea, television and the new leadership of former general Dwight Eisenhower, our pop songs provided a nostalgic link with the past.

There was the case, for example, of songs based on the boogie style. A big-band fad of the early '40s, boogie, which originated with blues piano players in 1920s Chicago, reached new heights of popularity in the early 1950s. Tennessee Ernie Ford, a former disc jockey from Bristol, Tennessee, was best known as a star on the West Coast TV show *Hometown Jamboree* when he hit with **The Shot Gun Boogie** in 1951.

Ford wrote the song just one day before the recording session, after he had returned from a Tennessee vacation. "I'd been squirrel hunting and rabbit hunting back home," he recalled, "and it gave me the idea." Ford sketched the song's chords on the piano for Capitol arranger Billy Liebert, who wrote an arrangement on the spot. Punctuated by drummer Roy Harte's "gunshots" (a feature that caused some country musicians to refer to Capitol as "Rimshot Records") and set off by the jazzy steel guitar of Speedy West, *The Shot Gun Boogie* became one of Ford's biggest hits to date and eventually won him a chance to play London's Palladium.

Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy was another boogie

song, one that actually made it to No. 1 on the charts in 1950. Its singer, Red Foley, was a Kentucky mountain boy whose smooth baritone won him success in both pop and country circles. He was a fixture on the Grand Ole Opry when he got this song with the implausible composer credits of Jack Stapp and Harry Stone, two Opry executives with little history of song writing. Most music insiders believed the real author was country composer Fred Rose, who had supposedly given it to the executives as an incentive to let Rose's protégé, Hank Williams, join the Opry. Drummer Ferris Coursey slapped his thigh to imitate the shoeshine rag—a technique that almost backfired when Foley insisted on rehearsal after rehearsal, during which Coursey's right thigh got so sore that he had to switch to his left one.

Ella Mae Morse used a hammer and arvil to punctuate her boogie-blues entry, **The Blacksmith Blues**, in 1952. A Dallas native who had started singing with Jimmy Dorsey's band when she was 15, Morse lent her brassy style to a number of 1940s favorites, such as *Cow Cow Boogie*, *The House of Blue Lights* and *Shoo Shoo Baby*. She retired for a few years toward the end of the decade, then made a comeback using Capitol's arrangers and house bands (in this case Nelson Riddle). *The Blacksmith Blues* was written in 1950 by Jack Holmes under the original title *Happy Payoff Day*.

Another aspect of the music's continuity during this time was the reworking of old songs like Guy Mitchell's **The Roving Kind**. Music publisher Howie Richmond first noticed the lyrics when he ran across them in Sinclair Lewis' novel *Arrowsmith*; he later discovered that they were, in

fact, drawn from an old English sea chantey called *The Pirate Ship*. After a reworking by Jessie Cavanaugh and Arnold Stanton, the song found its way to Mitch Miller, Columbia's A & R head, who decided it was perfect for Frank Sinatra.

Miller learned that Sinatra would be flying through New York one day in October 1950 and decided to rush him into the studio to cut it. To save time, Miller reserved the studio, rehearsed the orchestra and then had them on standby while he played the song for Sinatra. "I won't do that," said Sinatra—and left. In a desperate effort to salvage the day, Miller called in young Guy Mitchell, who had been under contract to Columbia but who had never had a hit. After an intense rehearsal, Mitchell cut *The Roving Kind* and another song Sinatra had rejected, *My Heart Cries for You*, and soon found himself with a two-sided bestseller.

Other folk or folklike songs received similar treatments. The great Woody Guthrie, who had rambled around the country and written more than 1,000 songs by 1950, saw his **So Long (It's Been Good to Know Yuh)** place in the top 10 courtesy of his friends the Weavers. Listed on the label beneath Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra to placate nervous Decca executives, the Weavers were already riding high with their version of *Goodnight, Irene*.

Dinah Shore found luck with **Sweet Violets**, an old bawdy folk song that had been popularized in the 1930s by a Chicago radio band called the Prairie Ramblers (who often recorded as the Sweet Violet Boys). Cy Coben and Charlie Grean, two RCA country composers, preserved the lilt and style of the older song while coming up with new lyrics more acceptable to hit parade disc jockeys.

Another type of folk music, that of the Austrian zither, furnished the sound track for Orson Welles's postwar film classic *The Third Man*. A Viennese zither player named Anton Karas was hired to provide the music, and he composed one especially haunting strain called *The Harry Lime Theme*, after the movie's main character. Released as a single and retitled "**The Third Man**" Theme, it sold over four million copies and became a favorite of amateur

The remarkable guitarist and studio wizard Les Paul took Paul Whiteman's 1920 favorite **Whispering** and made it sound like nothing ever heard on record before. Using overdubs, echo chambers, experimental amplifiers and variable-speed tape playback, Paul struck pay dirt and for the next several years produced a series of singles that swept the country. Another oldie from the 1920s, **The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise**, featured the voice of Paul's wife, Mary Ford, harmonizing with herself through more of Paul's tape innovations.

A number of the year's hits came from artists who had been famous during the Second World War. Dick Haymes, born in Argentina in 1916, had been a big-band singer with Harry James, Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey; he stepped out on his own in 1943 and ran up some 40 chart singles by the time he cut **The Old Master Painter** in late 1949. The Mills Brothers, originally billed as Four Boys and a Guitar when they started recording back in 1931, showed that their classic barbershop harmonies still had appeal with their version of a new song, **Daddy's Little Girl**. Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, who had collaborated on a dozen good records during the war, ended their run of hits with **Sparrow in the Tree Top** in 1951.

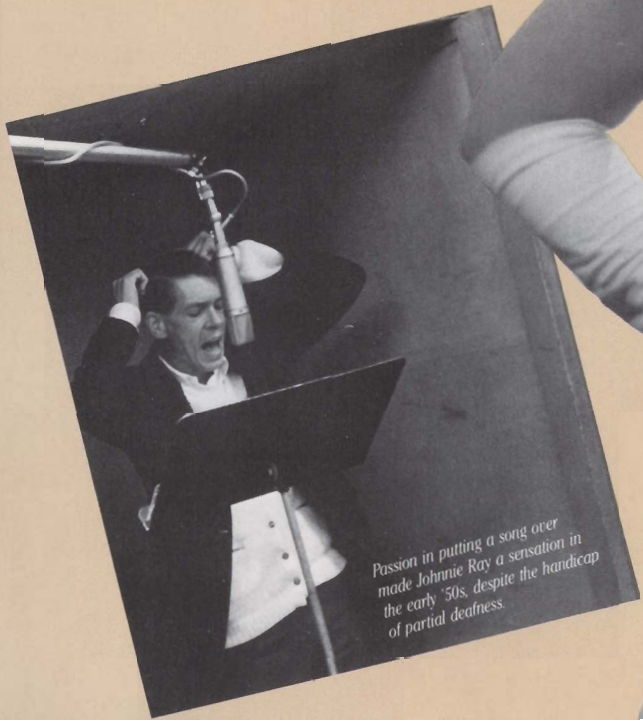
Another Crosby collaboration was an unusual duet with his son Gary (the Decca label bills them as "Gary Crosby and Friend"). **Sam's Song** came about when a publisher friend of Bing's received the untitled manuscript from two of his writers, Lew Quadling and Jack Elliott. Asked about a title, the writers replied with a shrug. "It's your song, Sam." Sam decided that was a good enough title and pitched it to Bing. At first, Bing tried to do the "patter section" in the second half, but he decided it was too fast for an old crooner and deferred to young Gary's more nimble voice.

Even the singers making their debuts on the hit parade during these years paid homage to the older stylistic traditions. Golf pro Don

guitarists everywhere.

Cherry tried out his pipes

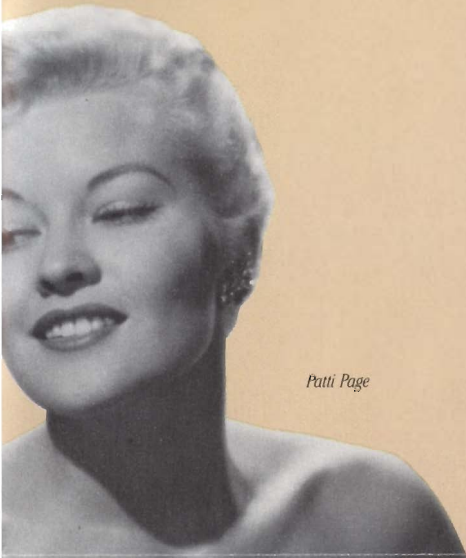
Other songs revived and refurbished during the early 1950s included old Tin Pan Alley standards. Johnnie Ray's **Walkin' My Baby Back Home**, his fifth top-10 entry in a little over seven months, was introduced in 1930 by pianist and singer Harry Richman, one-time accompanist for Mae West.



Passion in putting a song over
made Johnnie Ray a sensation in
the early '50s, despite the handicap
of partial deafness.

on **Thinking of You**; the fresh-faced western Kentucky college students who made up the Hilltoppers worked out their classic arrangement of **Trying** in 1952; and Rexburg, Ohio, native Karen Chandler, who had been a band vocalist at Brigham Young University, had a hit with **Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me** in 1953. Theirs were mellow sounds for mellow years, and they helped define pop music as a style rather than a commodity.

—Charles K. Wolfe



Patti Page

DISCOGRAPHY

- 1. Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy** Red Foley • *Music and lyrics by Harry Stone and Jack Stapp. Decca 46205 (1950).*
- 2. The Blacksmith Blues** Ella Mae Morse • *Music and lyrics by Jack Holmes. Capitol 1922 (1952). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 3. Rose, Rose, I Love You** Frankie Laine • *Music arranged from a traditional Chinese melody by Chris Langdon, English lyrics by Wilfred Thomas. Backup vocals by the Norman Luboff Choir. Columbia 39367 (1951). Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 4. So Long (It's Been Good to Know Yuh)** Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra and the Weavers • *Music and lyrics by Woody Guthrie. Decca 27376 (1951).*
- 5. "The Third Man" Theme** Anton Karas • *Music by Anton Karas. London 536 (1950). Under license from PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc.*
- 6. The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise** Les Paul and Mary Ford • *Music by Ernest Seitz, lyrics by Eugene Lockhart. Capitol 1748 (1951). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 7. Orange Colored Sky** Nat King Cole • *Music by Milton De Lugg, lyrics by William Stein. Capitol 1184 (1950). With His Trio and Stan Kenton and His Orchestra. Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.*
- 8. Walkin' My Baby Back Home** Johnnie Ray • *Music and lyrics by Roy Turk and Fred E. Ahlert. Columbia 39750 (1952). Courtesy of CBS Special Products.*
- 9. Sam's Song (The Happy Tune)** Gary Crosby and Friend • *Music by Lew Quadling, lyrics by Jack Elliott. Decca 27112 (1950).*
- 10. Would I Love You (Love You, Love You)** Patti Page • *Music by Harold Spina, lyrics by Bob Russell. Mercury 5371 (1951). Under license from PolyGram Special Products, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc.*
- 11. Trying** The Hilltoppers • *Music and lyrics by Billy Vaughn. Dot 15018 (1952).*
- 12. Thinking of You** Don Cherry • *Music by Harry Ruby, lyrics by Bert Kalmar. Decca 27128 (1950).*
- 13. The Syncopated Clock** Leroy Anderson and His "Pops" Concert Orchestra • *Music by Leroy Anderson. Decca 16005 (1951).*
- 14. The Shot Gun Boogie** Tennessee Ernie • *Music and lyrics by Tennessee Ernie Ford. Capitol 1295 (1951). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special*

15. Sweet Violets Dinah Shore • Music and lyrics by Cy Cohen and Charles Green. With chorus directed by Henri Rene. RCA Victor 4174 (1951). Courtesy of BMG Music.

16. The Old Master Painter Dick Haymes
• Music by Beasley Smith, lyrics by Haven Gillespie. Backup vocals by 4 Hits and a Miss. Decca 2480 (1950).

17. Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me
Karen Chandler • Music and lyrics by Harry Noble. Coral 60831 (1953).

18. Daddy's Little Girl The Mills Brothers
• Music and lyrics by Bobby Burke and Horace Gerlach. Decca 24872 (1950).

19. Too Old to Cut the Mustard Marlene Dietrich and Rosemary Clooney • Music and lyrics by Bill Carlisle. Columbia 39812 (1952). Courtesy of CBS Special Products.

20. The Roving Kind Guy Mitchell • Music and lyrics by Jessie Cavanaugh and Arnold Stanton. With chorus directed by Mitch Miller. Columbia 39067 (1951). Courtesy of CBS Special Products.

21. You're Just in Love Perry Como • Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. With the Fontane Sisters. RCA Victor 3945 (1951). Courtesy of BMG Music.

22. Whispering Les Paul • Music by John Schonberger. Capitol 1748 (1951). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from CEMA Special Markets.

23. Sparrow in the Tree Top Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters • Music and lyrics by Bob Merrill. Decca 27471 (1951).

24. Can Anyone Explain? (No, No, No!) The Ames Brothers • Music and lyrics by Bennie Benjamin and George Weiss. Coral 60253 (1950).

THE EARLY '50s

- 1 **Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy** Red Foley
- 2 **The Blacksmith Blues** Ella Mae Morse
- 3 **Rose, Rose, I Love You** Frankie Laine
- 4 **So Long (It's Been Good to Know Yuh)**
Gordon Jenkins and His Orchestra and the Weavers
- 5 **"The Third Man" Theme** Anton Karas
- 6 **The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise**
Les Paul and Mary Ford
- 7 **Orange Colored Sky** Nat King Cole
- 8 **Walkin' My Baby Back Home** Johnnie Ray
- 9 **Sam's Song (The Happy Tune)**
Gary Crosby and Friend
- 10 **Would I Love You (Love You, Love You)**
Patti Page
- 11 **Trying** The Hilltoppers
- 12 **Thinking of You** Don Cherry
- 13 **The Syncopated Clock**
Leroy Anderson and His "Pops" Concert Orchestra
- 14 **The Shot Gun Boogie** Tennessee Ernie
- 15 **Sweet Violets** Dinah Shore
- 16 **The Old Master Painter** Dick Haymes
- 17 **Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me** Karen Chandler
- 18 **Daddy's Little Girl** The Mills Brothers
- 19 **Too Old to Cut the Mustard**
Marlene Dietrich and Rosemary Clooney
- 20 **The Roving Kind** Guy Mitchell
- 21 **You're Just in Love** Perry Como
- 22 **Whispering** Les Paul
- 23 **Sparrow in the Tree Top**
Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters
- 24 **Can Anyone Explain? (No, No, No!)**
The Ames Brothers



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President: John Hall

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Associate Producer: Brian Miller

Art Studio: A Sexton Design

Chief Financial Officer: Eric R. Eaton

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