

1954-1955



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

Digital Remaster

1954-1955

- 1 **Rock around the Clock** (2:05)
Bill Haley and the Comets
- 2 **Honey Love** (2:21)
Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters
- 3 **Sincerely** (3:07) The Moonglows
- 4 **Speedo** (2:18) The Cadillacs
- 5 **Bo Diddley** (2:40) Bo Diddley
- 6 **Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight**
(2:41) The Spaniels
- 7 **Shake, Rattle and Roll** (2:59) Joe Turner
- 8 **The Great Pretender** (2:34) The Platters
- 9 **I Hear You Knocking** (2:32) Smiley Lewis
- 10 **Work with Me Annie** (2:44) The Midnighters

- 11 **Earth Angel** (2:47) The Penguins
- 12 **Maybellene** (2:17) Chuck Berry
- 13 **Tutti-Frutti** (2:24) Little Richard
- 14 **Twedlee Dee** (2:59) LaVern Baker
- 15 **Ain't That a Shame** (2:22) Fats Domino
- 16 **Hearts of Stone** (2:30) The Charms
- 17 **Pledging My Love** (2:29) Johnny Ace
- 18 **Sh-Boom** (2:22) The Chords
- 19 **I Got a Woman** (2:53) Ray Charles
- 20 **Oh What a Dream** (2:56) Ruth Brown
- 21 **The Wallflower** (2:41) Etta James
- 22 **Gee** (2:14) The Crows

SEE PROGRAM NOTES INSIDE

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The
ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

1954-1955

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

2RNR-08
OPCD-2535

TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

- 5232-S 28C-08e
- 1 Rock around the Clock
 - 2 Honey Love
 - 3 Sincerely
 - 4 Speedo
 - 5 Bo Diddley
 - 6 Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight
 - 7 Shake, Rattle and Roll
 - 8 The Great Pretender
 - 9 I Hear You Knocking
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 - 16 Hearts of Stone
 - 17 Pledging My Love
 - 18 Sh-Boom
 - 19 I Got a Woman
 - 20 Oh What a Dream
 - 21 The Wallflower
 - 22 Gee

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Little Richard

1954-1955

The blues had a baby and they called it rock 'n' roll.

— Muddy Waters

A 1954 record called **Sh-Boom** by the Chords is often cited as the first rock 'n' roll song. While it may have marked a new era, the music's roots really are part of the most important postwar development in American popular music — the rise of rhythm and blues.

After World War II, popular music had three distinct markets — pop, country and R & B — each with its own record charts, artists and audiences. The dominant white pop market had consistent hit-makers like Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Perry Como, Patti Page and Jo Stafford, and full-scale support from the biggest record companies (RCA, Columbia, Decca, Capitol and Mercury). The music, though, was mostly sweet ballads, sprinkled with novelties — hardly the stuff to excite the minds or bodies of America's teenagers.

R & B was the most dynamic field, and it took off after the war through the efforts of small labels such as King, Atlantic, Chess and Specialty, which catered to black record buyers ignored by the major companies. R & B was beat-heavy, sexy, irreverent, comic and, above all, down to earth. It drew from urban, rural and regional influences, embracing styles as diverse as the jump blues of Louis Jordan, the vocal-group sounds of the Dominoes and Clovers, the New Orleans piano boogie of Fats Domino and the raw Chicago blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.

That the rock 'n' roll phenomenon happened at all was due to the discovery and acceptance of R & B by increasing numbers of young, white record buyers. In the early '50s, more and more radio stations played this music, including WJW in Cleveland, where in 1952 a white DJ named Alan Freed introduced R & B to his listeners and

promoted it at integrated concerts. Freed moved to WINS in New York City two years later, and there began applying the term "rock 'n' roll" (a sexual euphemism often heard in R & B songs) to the music he championed.

R & B officially crossed over in 1954, that is, a number of singles cracked the almost exclusively white pop charts and became hits. The first of these was **Gee** by the New York City vocal group the Crows. Although no one could have predicted it at the time, *Gee's* unexpected success was a small but significant victory in a revolution that, within a few years, would radically change the nature of popular music in America.

There was a larger victory several months later. The bouncy novelty *Sh-Boom* by the Chords crossed over and was the first R & B single to make the pop top 10. *Sh-Boom* was quickly covered by a white vocal group, the Crew Cuts, whose version went to No. 1. The fact that one song accounted for two separate hits within a month of each other raised eyebrows industry-wide, drawing attention to R & B's rising popularity.

As a result, the big labels routinely had their white artists cover the big R & B songs. Superior distribution, airplay and promotion of these remakes helped them outsell the originals. For example, two of the era's most unforgettable ballads, the Spaniels' **Goodnight, Sweetheart**, **Goodnight** and the Moonglows' **Sincerely**, never made the pop charts, no doubt because of competing cover versions put out by the McGuire Sisters. In retrospect, only the R & B originals, featuring the cool, dreamy tenor voices of the Spaniels' Pookie Hudson and the Moonglows' Harvey Fuqua, are recognized as truly classic performances.

The cover craze overtook other 1954 R & B hits, including the Charms' **Hearts of Stone**, Ruth Brown's **Oh What a Dream** and Joe Turner's **Shake, Rattle**



The Chords

Etta James

and Roll. Brown, the top female R & B artist, failed to reach a broader pop audience with her recording because of a rival Patti Page version. The Fontane Sisters scored a chart-topping single covering *Hearts of Stone*, and an ex-country singer from Pennsylvania by the name of Bill Haley reached the top 10 with a bowdlerized *Shake, Rattle and Roll*.

One song that escaped this fate was **Work with Me Annie** by the Midnights, led by Hank Ballard, a rough-voiced shouter who wrote and recorded the original version of *The Twist* in 1959. With its salacious exhortation "let's get it while the gettin' is good," *Work with Me* was the biggest and most controversial R & B hit of 1954. This song, and its equally earthy sequels, *Sexy Ways* and *Annie Had a Baby*, were branded "smut" by those already nervous about R & B's supposed corrupting influence on the nation's youth.

The music's detractors often called it "jungle music," thus making clear the racist attitudes underlying their views. The musicologists responsible for *The Encyclopedia Britannica's* year-end musical review joined the growing chorus of criticism: "The rock 'n' roll school in general concentrated on a minimum of melodic line and a maximum of rhythmic noise, deliberately competing with the artistic ideals of the jungle itself." Nonetheless, by the end of the year *Billboard* magazine reported, "Youngsters, the backbone of the pop record business, appear to want R & B music so much they search it out in stores and jukeboxes."

The tide started to turn in 1955. Alan Freed announced he would no longer play cover versions. Early in the year, both the Penguins' **Earth Angel** and Johnny Ace's **Pledging My Love** outsold their respective covers by the Crew Cuts and Teresa Brewer. Ace became rock 'n' roll's first great tragedy when he blew his brains out, supposedly during a game of Russian roulette, backstage at the Houston Auditorium on Christmas Eve, 1954.

Rock 'n' roll's national breakthrough in 1955 went hand in hand with the emergence of some of the music's most influential artists. Ray Charles' uninhibited **I Got a Woman** offered an innovative marriage of blues and gospel and helped lay the foundation for soul music. On his first recording, **Bo Diddley**, Ellas McDaniel sang his own praises and introduced a pounding, voodooish drum pattern — the Bo Diddley beat — taken up by future stars Buddy Holly, the Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen, among many others.

One of Bo Diddley's label-mates at Chess/Checker Records in Chicago was a young blues guitarist from St. Louis by the name of Chuck Berry. With the teen-age market expanding, label owner Leonard Chess decided that Berry should debut with his revision of a country tune, *Ida Red*, now retitled **Maybellene**. As Chess put it, the song had "the big beat, cars and young love." Like Berry, Little Richard entered 1955 a bluesman and exited a rock 'n' roller. **Tutti-Frutti**, an outrageous, shrieking piece of nonsense, established Richard as the era's most flamboyant artist.

Fats Domino, successful on the R & B market since his 1950 hit *The Fat Man*, didn't gain a national pop audience for his warm Creole vocal style until **Ain't That a Shame** struck in 1955. His exposure helped other New Orleans musicians like Smiley Lewis get national recording contracts. Lewis' **I Hear You Knocking** is perhaps best known today from a 1971 cover version by British rocker Dave Edmunds, although TV's *My Little Margie*, Gale Storm, also scored a hit with the song in 1955.

Undoubtedly, the most important record of 1955 was Bill Haley's **Rock around the Clock**. Not only was it the first rock 'n' roll song to make it to No. 1, but it still stands as the largest-selling rock 'n' roll single in history. Released in 1954, the record did not sell well at first. But after it was used in the opening credits of *The Blackboard Jungle*, a 1955 MGM movie about juvenile delin-

quents, both the song and the film became international sensations. Decca re-released the single and it shot to No. 1, holding that position for eight weeks and staying on the pop charts for nearly half a year.

If the mild-mannered Haley was an unlikely rock 'n' roll hero, his popularity was nonetheless crucial to establishing the new music. Haley and *Rock around the Clock* were proof that country-rooted artists could use R & B to create an authentic white form of rock 'n' roll. Another such artist was Elvis Presley, who throughout 1955 was tearing up the Deep South with his rockabilly music and hip-shaking antics. On November 22, Presley left the small Sun label in Memphis and signed with RCA Records. Within a year, he would have the music industry, America's youth and their parents all shook up.

— Joe Sasy



*Bo Diddley and his custom
Gretsch axe*

DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

1. **Rock around the Clock** (2:05) Bill Haley and the Comets • *Music and lyrics by Jimmy DeKnight and Max C. Freedman. Original issue: Decca 29124. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1**
2. **Honey Love** (2:21) Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters • *Music and lyrics by Clyde McPhatter and Jerry Wexler. Original issue: Atlantic 1029. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 1 (R & B)**
3. **Sincerely** (3:07) The Moonglows • *Music and lyrics by Harvey Fuqua and Alan Freed. Original issue: Chess 1581. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 2 (R & B)**
4. **Speedo** (2:18) The Cadillacs • *Music and lyrics by Esther Navarro. Original issue: Josie 785. Courtesy of Roulette Records, Inc. No. 30**
5. **Bo Diddley** (2:40) Bo Diddley • *Music and lyrics by Ellas McDaniel. Original issue: Checker 814. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 2 (R & B)**
6. **Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight** (2:41) The Spaniels • *Music and lyrics by Calvin Carter and James Hudson. Original issue: Yee-Jay 107. Courtesy of Yee-Jay Records. No. 5 (R & B)**
7. **Shake, Rattle and Roll** (2:59) Joe Turner • *Music and lyrics by Charles E. Calhoun. Original issue: Atlantic 1026. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 2 (R & B)**
8. **The Great Pretender** (2:34) The Platters • *Music and lyrics by Buck Ram. Original issue: Mercury 70753. The Great Pretender by the Platters under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 1**
9. **I Hear You Knocking** (2:32) Smiley Lewis • *Music and lyrics by Dave Bartholomew and Pearl King. Original issue: Imperial 5356. Courtesy of EMI America Records, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 2 (R & B)**
10. **Work with Me Annie** (2:44) The Midnighters • *Music and lyrics by Hank Ballard. Original issue: Federal 12169. Courtesy of Gusto Records. No. 1 (R & B)**
11. **Earth Angel** (2:47) The Penguins • *Music and lyrics by Dootsie Williams. Original issue: Dootone 348. Courtesy of Dootone Records. No. 8**
12. **Maybellene** (2:17) Chuck Berry • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Berry. Original issue: Chess 1604. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 5**
13. **Tutti-Frutti** (2:24) Little Richard • *Music and lyrics by Richard Penniman, Dorothy La Bostrie and Joe Lubin. Original issue: Specialty 561. Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 21**
14. **Tweedlee Dee** (2:59) LaVern Baker • *Music and lyrics by Winfield Scott. Original issue: Atlantic 1047. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 22**
15. **Ain't That a Shame** (2:22) Fats Domino • *Music and lyrics by Dave Bartholomew and Antoine Domino. Original issue: Imperial 5348. Courtesy of EMI America Records, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 16**
16. **Hearts of Stone** (2:30) The Charms • *Music by Rudy Jackson, lyrics by Eddy Roy. Original issue: Deluxe 6062. Courtesy of Gusto Records. No. 15**
17. **Pledging My Love** (2:29) Johnny Ace • *Music and lyrics by Ferdinand Washington and Don D. Robey. Original issue: Duke 136. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 17**
18. **Sh-Boom** (2:22) The Chords • *Music and lyrics by James Keyes, Claude Feaster, Carl Feaster, Floyd McRae and James Edwards. Original issue: Cat 104. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 9**
19. **I Got a Woman** (2:53) Ray Charles • *Music and lyrics by Ray Charles and Renald J. Richard. Original issue: Atlantic 1050. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 2 (R & B)**
20. **Oh What a Dream** (2:56) Ruth Brown • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Willis. Original issue: Atlantic 1036. Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 1 (R & B)**
21. **The Wallflower** (2:41) Etta James • *Music and lyrics by Johnny Otis, Hank Ballard and Etta James. Original issue: Modern 947. Courtesy of Kent Music, Inc. No. 2 (R & B)**
22. **Gee** (2:14) The Crows • *Music and lyrics by William Davis and Morris Levy. Original issue: Rama 5. Courtesy of Roulette Records, Inc. No. 17**

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NOTES INSIDE

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Art Director: Robin Bray
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Art Studio: Nina Bridges

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