

THE '50s: KEEP ON ROCKIN'



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

Digital Remaster

THE '50s: KEEP ON ROCKIN'

- 1 **Shout (Parts 1 and 2)** The Isley Brothers
- 2 **I'm Ready** Fats Domino
- 3 **Think It Over** The Crickets
- 4 **Oh Julie** The Crescendos
- 5 **Hey, Little Girl** Dee Clark
- 6 **Lavender Blue** Sammy Turner
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- 8 **Sweet Little Rock and Roller** Chuck Berry
- 9 **You Were Mine** The Fireflies
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- 13 **Bad Boy** The Jive Bombers
- 14 **When** The Kalin Twins
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Chuck Willis
- 16 **Susie Darlin'** Robin Luke
- 17 **Only You** The Platters
- 18 **At My Front Door (Crazy Little Mama Song)**
The El Dorados
- 19 **Linda Lu** Ray Sharpe
- 20 **Tear Drops** Lee Andrews and the Hearts
- 21 **Guitar Boogie Shuffle** The Virtues
- 22 **It Was I** Skip and Flip

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ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

THE '50s: KEEP ON ROCKIN'

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

2RNR-24
OPCD-2554

TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

- 1 Shout (Parts 1 and 2) 2 I'm Ready 3 Think It Over 4 Oh Julie
5 Hey, Little Girl 6 Lavender Blue 7 The Girl Can't Help It 8 Sweet
Little Rock and Roller 9 You Were Mine 10 Teen Beat 11 Tragedy
12 Dizzy, Miss Lizzy 13 Bad Boy 14 When 15 Hang Up My Rock
and Roll Shoes 16 Susie Darlin' 17 Only You 18 At My Front
Door (Crazy Little Mama Song) 19 Linda Lu 20 Tear
Drops 21 Guitar Boogie Shuffle 22 It Was I

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The Crickets



THE '50s: KEEP ON ROCKIN'

During the rock 'n' roll era, an extraordinary diversity of musical styles prospered, many of them the products of specific geographic regions and studios. Unlike the popular music of the '40s and early '50s, rock 'n' roll and R & B songs were recorded in large and small cities all across America. The 22 hits in this collection are from 10 different cities, including Honolulu, Hawaii, where Robin Luke cut the Buddy Holly-influenced **Susie Darlin'**. All sorts of studio facilities were used, none more modest than a Philadelphia living room, site of the Virtues' instrumental, **Guitar Boogie Shuffle**.

One of the decade's legendary studios was located in Clovis, New Mexico, where Norman Petty ran the only professional facility within driving distance of West Texas rockers like Buddy Holly and the Crickets, Buddy Knox and Roy Orbison. Petty produced Holly's records, and on **Think It Over** Petty's wife, Vi, added piano. Crickets drummer Jerry Allison, who collaborated on the song, later commented on Holly's cocksure stance in songs such as *That'll Be the Day* and *Think It Over*: "A lot of Buddy's songs had a certain attitude . . . because he was really a self-confident, smart-aleck sort of guy. . . . He'd say anything he wanted to."

An important but unheralded studio was Floyd Ramsey's Audio Recorders in Phoenix, Arizona. Producer Lee Hazlewood (the man who later brought Nancy Sinatra to prominence) recorded Duane Eddy, Sanford Clark (*The Fool*), Ray Sharpe and a host of lesser-known rockabillys there. Sharpe, a black singer and guitarist from Fort Worth, Texas, dressed in cowboy clothes and sang in a hillbilly drawl. His endlessly revived **Linda Lu** features instrumental support from Eddy and members of his band.

Like Sharpe, Chuck Berry had a penchant for country music. When Berry was launching his career in the blues clubs of East St. Louis, he would often surprise his black

audiences by performing country songs. Berry commented in his 1988 autobiography about how amusing a sight it was to see these crowds doing the hoedown barefooted.

In 1958 Leonard Chess wanted a Christmas-oriented release from Berry, so he wrote **Sweet Little Rock and Roller**. The song celebrated the young fans who attended the big holiday package shows Berry often played, like Alan Freed's 1958 Christmas Rock 'n' Roll Spectacular. Held at Manhattan's Loew's State Theater for 10 days, this show presented—hold your breath—Berry, Bo Diddley, the Everly Brothers, Jackie Wilson, Dion and the Belmonts, the Moonglows, the Cadillacs, the Flamingos, Eddie Cochran, the Crests, King Curtis, plus six other acts.

Chicago was the home of Chess Records as well as Vee-Jay, another independent label with an outstanding roster of black blues and rock artists. Vee-Jay's vocal groups included the Spaniels, the Delis, the Impressions and the El Dorados, a Chicago quintet who took their name from one of Cadillac's classiest models. Their sax-driven **At My Front Door** was two and a half minutes of pure doo-wop jubilation capped by Pirkle Moses' meandering falsetto and a resounding finale of "womp-womps" and "diddly-womps."

Dee Clark had a string of hits on Vee-Jay from 1958 to 1962, but his first taste of commercial success came in 1952. Then 13 years old, Clark was a member of the Hambone Kids, a trio that with the Red Saunders Orchestra scored with a novelty called *Hambone*, in which the Kids beat out rhythms by slapping their legs, arms and chests (a black tradition called patted jubba). Otis Blackwell, author of *Don't Be Cruel* and *Great Balls of Fire*, among many others, wrote Clark's **Hey, Little Girl**, but it was guitarist Phil Upchurch's idea to add the Bo Diddley beat.

Rock 'n' roll's image of youthful rebellion often obscured the fact that many songs were the work of music-

business veterans simply adapting to a new style. For example, the Platters' manager and producer, Buck Ram, had arranged for the big bands in the '30s and had written for the Ink Spots. In some ways, Ram cast the Platters as modern Ink Spots with Tony Williams assuming the dramatic role of the Ink Spots' lead tenor, Bill Kenny. The Platters had already recorded **Only You** for Federal Records when Ram took over and produced a hit version for Mercury.

An even more "ancient" rocker was the Jive Bombers' lead singer, Clarence Palmer, once a member of the Palmer Brothers, a vocal group popular in New York City in the mid-'20s. In 1952 the Jive Bombers recorded *Brown Boy*, an adaptation of Lillian Armstrong's *Brown Girl*. A new Jive Bombers was formed in 1956, employing the talents of Al and Pee Wee Tinney, a song-and-dance team from the '30s. This line-up transformed *Brown Boy* to the more universal **Bad Boy**, featuring Palmer's unique "human echo chamber" vocals.

After playing the Philadelphia area for 13 years, Frank Virtue and his Virtuoso Trio shortened their name to the Virtues and had a surprise hit with *Guitar Boogie Shuffle* in 1959. This was a reworking of Arthur Smith's 1947 smash, *Guitar Boogie*; Virtue had learned the tune from Smith when both guitarists were members of the Regular Navy Dance Band in 1945. By 1959 rock instrumentals were the rage, and *Guitar Boogie Shuffle* topped the sheet music sales chart as a legion of neophyte string benders tried to master the licks.

While most rock instrumentals spotlighted guitars or saxophones, Sandy Nelson turned his drums loose on a series of pounding hits starting with **Teen Beat** in 1959. Nelson was also a session player in Los Angeles, keeping time on classics like the Teddy Bears' *To Know Him Is to Love Him* and Kathy Young and the Innocents' *A Thousand Stars*. Though Nelson later lost his right foot in a motorcycle accident, he never lost a beat in a string of successful al-

The Firelies





Sandy Nelson

bums, including the aptly titled *Superdrums*, *Drummin' Up a Storm*, *Drums Are My Beat* and *Beat That #!!@* Drum*.

Nelson's hero was the legendary drummer Earl Palmer, who provided the backbeat on countless New Orleans recordings such as Little Richard's **The Girl Can't Help It**, the title track for the finest rock 'n' roll flick of the '50s. In the movie, a satire of show-biz hucksterism, a gangster tries to transform his girlfriend, Jayne Mansfield, into a singing star, only to find out that she can't carry a tune in a bucket. She can, however, emit a piercing shriek, which turns out to be the perfect sound effect for a hit record sung by the gangster himself. In the film's most salacious scene, the overendowed Mansfield undulates across a nightclub floor while Richard bangs out *She's Got It* with maniacal glee.

Richard's frantic style inspired Larry Williams, and the two singers shared labels (Specialty), producers (Bumps Blackwell) and studio musicians (including Earl Palmer). In 1958 Williams tried to follow his *Short Fat Fannie* and *Bony Moronie* with a song about another mythic lady, **Dizzy, Miss Lizzy**, but the record did little on the charts. Regarding Williams' inability to become a consistent hit-maker, Bumps Blackwell later explained: "Larry Williams didn't know whether he wanted to be a pimp or a musician. If he had made up his mind, he would've been much bigger than he was."

By the late '50s, there were fewer wild rockers about Lucilles and Lizzies and more broken-hearted ballads devoted to teen queens like the subject of the Crescendos' **Oh Julie**. A romantic sensibility dominated songs such as Skip and Flip's **It Was I** (excellent grammar, fellas) and **You Were Mine** by the Fireflies, a New York City group whose lead singer, Ritchie Adams, wrote Bobby Lewis' 1961 chart topper, *Tossin' and Turnin'*. Few ballads achieved the gloriously tortured despair of **Tragedy**, recorded for the small Fernwood label by Thomas Wayne,

brother of Luther Perkins (Johnny Cash's long-time guitar player), Scotty Moore, the great rockabilly guitarist heard on all of Elvis Presley's early records, backed Wayne on *Tragedy*.

As the decade closed, however, a new source of energy—gospel music—began to invigorate rock 'n' roll, thanks in part to Ray Charles' ground-breaking *What'd I Say*. It was quickly followed by the Isley Brothers' *Shout*,

another musical slice of revivalistic abandon that left audiences gasping for breath. Back in the Isleys' hometown of Cincinnati, their mother had to answer charges of blasphemy in the local church because of *Shout's* obvious gospel roots. Whatever her reply, the truth was simple: What is blasphemy to some is only rock 'n' roll to others.

—Joe Sasy

The El Dorados



DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

- 1. Shout (Parts 1 and 2)** (4:32) The Isley Brothers • *Music and lyrics by O'Kelly Isley, Ronald Isley and Rudolph Isley. RCA 7588 (1959). Courtesy of RCA Records, a label of BMG Music. No. 47**
- 2. I'm Ready** (2:02) Fats Domino • *Music and lyrics by Al Lewis, Sylvestre Bradford and Antoine Domino. Imperial 5585 (1959). Courtesy of EMI-Manhattan Records, a Division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 16**
- 3. Think It Over** (1:44) The Crickets • *Music and lyrics by Buddy Holly and Norman Petty. Brunswick 55072 (1958). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 27**
- 4. Oh Julie** (2:35) The Crescendos • *Music and lyrics by Kenneth R. Moffitt and Noel Ball. Nasco 6005 (1958). Courtesy of Nasco Records, a Division of Nashboro Records, No. 5**
- 5. Hey, Little Girl** (2:15) Dee Clark • *Music and lyrics by Bobby Stevenson and Otis Blackwell. Abner 1029 (1959). Courtesy of Vee-Jay Records. No. 20**
- 6. Lavender Blue** (2:13) Sammy Turner • *Music by Elliot Daniel, lyrics by Larry Morey. Big Top 3016 (1959). Courtesy of Aberbach Enterprises Ltd. No. 3**
- 7. The Girl Can't Help It** (2:20) Little Richard • *Music and lyrics by Bobby Troup. Specialty 591 (1957). Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 49**
- 8. Sweet Little Rock and Roller** (2:39) Chuck Berry • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Berry. Chess 1709 (1958). ©1987 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 47**
- 9. You Were Mine** (1:52) The Fireflies • *Music and lyrics by Paul Gialcone. Ribbon 6901 (1959). Courtesy of Dominion Entertainment, Inc. No. 21**
- 10. Teen Beat** (2:22) Sandy Nelson • *Music by Sander Nelson and Arthur Egnoian. Original Sound 5 (1959). Courtesy of Original Sound Records c/o Original Sound Entertainment. No. 4**
- 11. Tragedy** (2:05) Thomas Wayne with the DeLons • *Music and lyrics by Gerald H. Nelson and Fred B. Burch. Fernwood 109 (1959). Courtesy of R. G. McGinnis. No. 5**
- 12. Lizzy, Miss Lizzy** (2:25) Larry Williams • *Music and lyrics by Larry Williams. Specialty 626 (1958). Courtesy of Specialty Records, Inc. No. 69**
- 13. Bad Boy** (2:49) The Jive Bombers • *Music and lyrics by Avon Long and Lillian Hardin Armstrong. Savoy 1508 (1957). Courtesy of JI Records, Inc. (Savoy Jazz). No. 36**
- 14. When** (2:26) The Kalin Twins • *Music and lyrics by Jack Reardon and Paul Evans. Decca 30642 (1958). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 5**
- 15. Hang Up My Rock and Roll Shoes** (2:18) Chuck Willis • *Music and lyrics by Chuck Willis. Atlantic 1179 (1958). Produced under license from Atlantic Recording Corp. No. 24**
- 16. Susie Darlin'** (2:30) Robin Luke • *Music and lyrics by Robin Luke. Dot 15781 (1958). ©1986 MCA Records, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 5**
- 17. Only You** (2:33) The Platters • *Music and lyrics by Buck Ram and Ande Rand. Mercury 70633 (1955). Produced under license from PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 5**
- 18. At My Front Door (Crazy Little Mama Song)** (2:32) The El Dorados • *Music and lyrics by John C. Moore and Ewart G. Abner Jr. Vee-Jay 147 (1955). Courtesy of Vee-Jay Records. No. 35**
- 19. Linda Lu** (2:05) Ray Sharpe • *Music and lyrics by Ray Sharpe. Jamie 1128 (1959). Courtesy of Jamie Record Co. No. 46**
- 20. Tear Drops** (2:20) Lee Andrews and the Hearts • *Music and lyrics by Edwin Charles, Helen Stanley, Roy Calhoun and Barry Golder. Chess 1675 (1957). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 20**
- 21. Guitar Boogie Shuffle** (2:22) The Virtues • *Music by Arthur Smith. Hunt 324 (1959). Courtesy of Janus Records. No. 5**
- 22. It Was I** (2:15) Skip and Flip • *Music and lyrics by Gary Paxton. Brent 7002 (1959). Courtesy of Janus Records. No. 11**

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NOTES INSIDE

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Art Director: Robin Bray

Production Coordinator: Brian Miller

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