

TEEN IDOLS



TIME
LIFE
MUSIC

The
ROCK'N'ROLL
•ERA•

Digital Remaster

TEEN IDOLS

- 1 **Love Letters in the Sand** Pat Boone (1957)
- 2 **Dreamin'** Johnny Burnette (1960)
- 3 **Tiger** Fabian (1959)
- 4 **Who's Sorry Now** Connie Francis (1958)
- 5 **Poetry in Motion** Johnny Tillotson (1960)
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The
ROCK'N'ROLL
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TEEN IDOLS

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

2RNR-27
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- 1 Love Letters in the Sand 2 Dreamin' 3 Tiger 4 Who's Sorry Now 5 Poetry in Motion 6 Sixteen Reasons 7 Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen 8 The Night Has a Thousand Eyes 9 Puppy Love 10 Why 11 Tell Laura I Love Her 12 Venus in Blue Jeans 13 You're Sixteen 14 Turn Me Loose 15 Teen-Age Crush 16 Where the Boys Are 17 Sealed with a Kiss 18 Rubber Ball 19 Oh! Carol 20 Venus 21 Put Your Head on My Shoulder 22 Johnny Angel



Connie Francis

TEEN IDOLS

Between 1957 and 1962, a phenomenon known as the teen idol flourished on the pop music scene. This person was a carefully packaged commodity, the product of musical and sartorial tailoring by a cabal of fast-talking managers, DJs and hypemongers of every stripe. He (or she) combined good looks and manners with just enough sex appeal to excite fans without putting a scare into their parents.

These idols were made to order for white, middle-class America in the happy daze of the Eisenhower '50s, when the sacred rites of adolescence—in all their hand-holding, slow-dancing innocence—seemed to span the years between 12 and 20. The popular singers of the day spoke knowingly and sympathetically of that mystical state of being teen-age. They gave voice to the tortures of young love, specifically the puppy variety.

The teen idols were bounded by two walls of solid rock. Rockabilly and R & B preceded them, while the British Invasion loomed ahead. Compared to the frenzy inherent in the music of Chuck Berry and the Beatles, such glamour boys as Fabian and Frankie Avalon could barely ruffle a neatly Brylcreemed side part. But that was precisely the point: to make rock 'n' roll more parentally palatable without eliminating it altogether. In that sense, the teen idols were more like chaperones than peers, and none more so than Pat Boone.

Boone was the father figure of teen idolism, a short-haired straight arrow in white bucks. In addition to singing, he wrote a best-selling book of advice called *Twixt Twelve and Twenty*, a trove of wisdom on everything from cleanliness to morality. It included such urgent admonitions as "Kissing for fun is like playing with a beautiful candle in a roomful of dynamite!" Boone enjoyed a staggering run of hits in the '50s. His

biggest single, **Love Letters in the Sand**, held the top position for seven weeks in mid-1957. Far from having anything to do with rock 'n' roll, the song was written in the '30s, having previously been recorded by Bing Crosby and Rudy Vallee.

Many of the teen idols, Boone included, also branched out into movies and television. Frankie Avalon, Fabian and Connie Francis lent their magnetic presence to such cinematic milestones as *Beach Blanket Bingo*, *Where the Boys Are* and *Hound-Dog Man*. For Shelley Fabares and Connie Stevens (a regular on *Hawaiian Eye*), singing was merely a sideline to their careers as actresses on popular TV shows. Such dilettantism was encouraged and even expected. Fabares, who played the good daughter Mary Stone on *The Donna Reed Show*, didn't fancy herself a singer, but was reluctantly ushered into the studio to warble up a 45. Many tries later, her producers stitched together a usable take of **Johnny Angel**, which became one of the biggest songs of 1962.

Singer-actor Tommy Sands, while not a huge star, wasn't exactly a flash in the pan either. His big hit from 1957, **Teen-Age Crush**, is the earliest recording in this collection. With its Scotty Moore-style guitar licks and Jordanaïres-type vocal backing, the performance recalled Elvis Presley—and no wonder, since Sands got his big break as a fill-in for Presley on a TV show called *The Singing Idol*. In 1960, he married Nancy Sinatra, a union that lasted five years.

While most of the popular singers of the day were guys, Connie Francis asserted herself with a commanding contralto that would not be denied. As Pat Boone had done, Francis cracked the charts with a standard out of another era, a plum from the '20s called **Who's**

Sorry Now. As a child, Francis (born Concetta Rosa Maria Franconero) had played the song on the accordion. At the age of 18, on the verge of enrolling in college after cutting 10 flop singles, she hastily tossed off *Who's Sorry Now*, a recording that turned out to be the first of many million sellers for Francis.

Philadelphia produced more teen idols than any other city, thanks to the concerted efforts of hometown boosters like Dick Clark of *American Bandstand* fame and Bob Marucci, founder of Chancellor Records. Frankie Avalon and Fabian rose to the top largely because of their massive exposure on *Bandstand*. The pair shared Italian good looks and a charming, deferential manner. Avalon, though, was more than just a pretty face. A trumpet-playing child prodigy signed to RCA at the age of 11, he also possessed a pleasant singing voice and some acting ability. Fabian, on the other hand, was the proverbial overnight success whose fame owed little to natural talent. Marucci (who also managed Avalon) discovered him sitting on a Philly curb and asked, "How'd you like to be a singer?" ("You crazy?" he snarled back.) Fabian didn't have much of a voice, but he admirably bluffing his way through **Turn Me Loose** and **Tiger**. Avalon, meanwhile, made hearts flutter with his cuddlesome romantic ballads **Venus** and **Why**.

Not to be outdone as a prodigy was Paul Anka, who was all of 15 when he wrote *Diana*, an ode to an older girl he had a crush on. He turned 16 the day after it entered *Billboard's* top 40, where it shot to No. 1. But Anka's finest hour, even by his own admission, was **Put Your Head on My Shoulder**, an evocative love song that's got the feeling of '59 stamped all over it. **Puppy Love**, a blubbery ballad, is not nearly so memorable, though it's an amusing period piece. Like Pat Boone and Connie Francis, Anka proved to have staying power on the charts. Each of the three singers has

amassed 30-plus hits, for a total of 105 among them!

Neil Sedaka was no slouch as a hit-maker either. He scored both as a solo artist and as a songwriter for the likes of Connie Francis (**Where the Boys Are** and *Stupid Cupid*). Sedaka turned out dependably hook-laden melodies that sounded cheerful even when the subject was something as distressing as breaking up. **Oh! Carol** was Sedaka's musical valentine to girlfriend Carol Klein (better known as Carole King), who responded with an answer song, *Oh Neil*. One of Sedaka's best happy-go-lucky hits was **Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen**.

The magic number turns up again in **You're Sixteen** by Johnny Burnette. The ruggedly handsome Burnette started out as an electrician in the same Memphis firm for which Elvis Presley drove a truck. He went on to become a boxer and a rockabilly cat with the Johnny Burnette Trio before toning down his act, à la Buddy Holly, with strings. *You're Sixteen* and **Dreamin'** are two of the more agreeable pop hits of 1960; a cover version of the former became a sizable hit for Ringo Starr in 1974. A promising career was suddenly cut short when Burnette died in a boating accident at the age of 30.

Tragedy, it seemed, constantly dogged the early heroes of rock 'n' roll. Perhaps the most disastrous event of all occurred on February 3, 1959, when a chartered plane carrying Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper plunged into an icy lake in Iowa en route to Fargo, North Dakota. As last-minute replacements for them at a scheduled date there, a local group called the Shadows was quickly recruited. The lead singer was Bobby Vee, whose career was thereupon set in motion. A clean-cut singer with some of the nicest sweaters in any teen idol's wardrobe, Vee racked up hits clear through the '60s. Among them were **Rubber Ball** and **The Night Has a Thousand**



Fans adored heartthrob Fabian, who made his film debut in Hound Dog Man and charted seven times in 1959.



Bobby

Eyes, perhaps the first time a phrase from Shakespeare found its way into the top 40.

From 1957 to 1962 the charts were saturated with what Paul McCartney has called "silly love songs." There were serenades to an object of adoration (**Poetry in Motion** by Johnny Tillotson) as well as threnodies about that awful word "goodbye" (**Sealed with a Kiss** by Brian Hyland). Other songs were morbidly lugubrious, such as Ray Peterson's **Tell Laura I**

Love Her, in which Tommy enters a stock-car race, hoping to win enough cash to buy Laura an engagement ring. Of course, he has a grisly wreck on the final lap.

So it went in the era of the teen idols. Love was an ideal to be celebrated or mourned in song with the mawkish passion and sentimentality of youth. Maybe the songs themselves weren't always timeless, but the memories they evoke certainly are.

—Parke Puterbaugh



DISCOGRAPHY

*Indicates highest Billboard chart position

- 1. Love Letters in the Sand** Pat Boone • Music by J. Fred Coots, lyrics by Nick Kenny and Charles Kenny. Dot 15570 (1957). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 1*
- 2. Dreamin'** Johnny Burnette • Music and lyrics by Ted Ellis and Barry DeVorzon. Liberty 55258 (1960). Courtesy of EMI, a division of Capitol Records, Inc., under license from Capitol Special Markets. No. 11*
- 3. Tiger Fabian** • Music and lyrics by Ollie Jones, Chancellor 1037 (1959). Courtesy of Chancellor Records, No. 3*
- 4. Who's Sorry Now** Connie Francis • Music by Ted Snyder, lyrics by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. MGM 12588 (1958). Courtesy of PolyGram Special Projects, a Division of PolyGram Records, Inc. No. 4*
- 5. Poetry in Motion** Johnny Tillotson • Music and lyrics by Paul Kaufman and Mike Anthony. Cadence 1384 (1960). Courtesy of Bamoby Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 6. Sixteen Reasons** Connie Stevens • Music and lyrics by Bill Post and Doree Post. Warner Bros. 5137 (1960). Produced under license from Warner Bros. Records Inc. No. 3*
- 7. Happy Birthday, Sweet Sixteen** Neil Sedaka • Music and lyrics by Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield. RCA Victor 7957 (1962). Courtesy of RCA Records, a label of BMG Music. No. 6*
- 8. The Night Has a Thousand Eyes** Bobby Vee • Music and lyrics by Dottie Wayne, Marilyn Garrett and Ben Weisman. Liberty 55521 (1962). Courtesy of EMI, a division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 3*
- 9. Puppy Love** Paul Anka • Music and lyrics by Paul Anka. ABC-Paramount 10082 (1960). Produced under license from Paul Anka, No. 2*
- 10. Why** Frankie Avalon • Music by Peter De Angelis, lyrics by Bob Marcucci. Chancellor 1045 (1959). Courtesy of Chancellor Records, No. 1*
- 11. Tell Laura I Love Her** Ray Peterson • Music and lyrics by Jeff Barry and Ben Raleigh. RCA 7745 (1960). Courtesy of RCA Records, a label of BMG Music. No. 7*
- 12. Venus in Blue Jeans** Jimmy Clanton • Music and lyrics by Howard Greenfield and Jack Keller. Ace 8001 (1962). Courtesy of Janus Records, No. 7*
- 13. You're Sixteen** Johnny Burnette • Music and lyrics by Dick Sherman and Bob Sherman. Liberty 55285 (1960). Courtesy of EMI, a division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 8*
- 14. Turn Me Loose** Fabian • Music and lyrics by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman. Chancellor 1033 (1959). Courtesy of Chancellor Records, No. 9*
- 15. Teen-Age Crush** Tommy Sands • Music and lyrics by Audrey Allison and Joe Allison. Capitol 3639 (1957). Courtesy of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 2*
- 16. Where the Boys Are** Connie Francis • Music by Neil Sedaka, lyrics by Howard Greenfield. MGM 12971 (1961). Courtesy of PolyGram Special Projects. No. 4*
- 17. Sealed with a Kiss** Brian Hyland • Music by Gary Geld, lyrics by Peter Udell. ABC-Paramount 10336 (1962). Courtesy of MCA Records, Inc. No. 3*
- 18. Rubber Ball** Bobby Vee • Music and lyrics by Aarn Schroeder and Anne Orlofski. Liberty 55287 (1960). Courtesy of EMI, a division of Capitol Records, Inc. No. 6*
- 19. Oh! Carol** Neil Sedaka • Music by Neil Sedaka, lyrics by Howard Greenfield. RCA Victor 7595 (1959). Courtesy of RCA Records, a label of BMG Music. No. 9*
- 20. Venus** Frankie Avalon • Music and lyrics by Ed Marshall. Chancellor 1031 (1959). Courtesy of Chancellor Records, No. 1*
- 21. Put Your Head on My Shoulder** Paul Anka • Music and lyrics by Paul Anka. ABC-Paramount 10040 (1959). Produced under license from Paul Anka, No. 2*
- 22. Johnny Angel** Shelley Fabares • Music by Lee Pockriss, lyrics by Lyn Duddy. Colpix 621 (1962). Courtesy of Emus Records Corp. No. 1*

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NOTES INSIDE

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Associate Producer: Brian Miller
Art Studio: Nina Bridges
Production Director: Fernando Pargas
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