

# Rock: The Early Years

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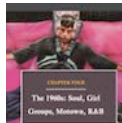
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CHAPTER ONE

Before the Flood:  
Precursors of Rock'n'Roll



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## 1. Robert Christgau, "B.E.: A Dozen Moments in the Prehistory of Rock and Roll," *Details*, 1992

### 1227: MOON-JUNE-SPOON MEETS DEATH-METAL

Simply by inventing (or—here we go—cribbing from the Moors) not love but *l'amour*, love as a concept, the troubadours of Provence laid one of the foundations of rock and roll, which whatever its socially significant pretensions has always had a thing for male-and-female. They were neither effete aesthetes—this was a rough world where all men were warriors and rape was one of the commonplaces that the myth of courtly love glossed over—nor the lute-strumming adventurers you dimly imagine. The itinerant singer-songwriters of the Middle Ages were called jongleurs—all-round entertainers whose etymology honors another of their skills, juggling. Jongleurs played marketplaces, fairs, the hostleries that catered to pilgrims and such, and, when they could get in, castles. Troubadours lived in castles—court poets in an era when "lyric" poetry was still sung to musical accompaniment, they were the highbrows of the secular world, upwardly mobile if not nobility themselves. Considered blasphemous by the religiopolitical powers that were, troubadourism was pretty much wiped out in the Albigensian crusade of the 13th century. So as our symbolic rock and roller we'll select Guilhem Figueira, an embattled hero of the movement's decline who "was not the man to frequent barons and respectable folk, but he was much at home with ribalds, whores, and tavern-haunters"—or so says his *vida*, an unauthorized bio that was as accurate as a press release. Is "In the fires of hell, Rome, you've chosen to dwell" close enough to Metallica for you?

### 1623: THE DISCOVERY OF NATURAL RHYTHM

"There is without doubt, no people on the earth more naturally affected to the sound of musicke than these people; which the principall persons do hold as an ornament of their state, so as when wee come to see them, their musicke will seldome be wanting," claimed Captain Richard Jobson, describing a visit he made to Gambia starting in 1620, the year after a Dutch man-of-war sold North America's first black slaves to British colonists in Jamestown. Africa's music had varied and evolved in uncounted strains and permutations for thousands of years, but this first published account in English is a benchmark, for what is rock and roll but African music as understood and controlled by white people? The intensity of African vocal technique, loud and harsh and keening by European standards, was frequently noted in the numerous reports to come, as was, needless to say, the "multitude of drums in various sizes." Less remarked were the underlying melodic similarities between African song and Scotch-Irish folk music, which would help Brits get into this exotic stuff. Soon Africans who could play an instrument fetched premium prices on the open market. By 1676, the governor of Cape Town owned his own slave orchestra.

### 1815: SEX AND BEER AND ONE-TWO-THREE

The Viennese were dancing fools—during the city's three-day pre-Lenten *Fasching* celebration of 1832, when its population was 400,000, 772 balls attracted 200,000 citizens. After all, this was their heritage. Vienna had produced what remains to this day the greatest revolution in the history of social dancing—the waltz. Just like most of the court dances invented since the 15th century, the waltz was bred from peasant stock. But unlike any court dance, it required couples to embrace each other, and once they went that far, a lot of them went further. Already invading France and England by 1790, danced in seized monasteries by sans-culotte revolutionaries, the waltz was a scandal well before the European powers divvied up Napoleon's empire at the 1815 Congress of Vienna, where

the Prince de Ligne went down in history by quipping: "Le Congrès ne marche pas—il danse." But after the Congress it became a full-fledged vogue. Once the assembled dignitaries had brought their good times home, both social dancing and popular music were permanently linked to a frankly carnal vision of courtship.

#### 1843: STRAIGHT OUT DE LAND OB COTTON

Musical miscegenation is an old story in America, where shocked reports of white teenagers dancing to black fiddlers go back to the 1690's. But though black musicians were common enough in a certain class of bar, even the freemen among them remained strictly local celebrities. Traveling white performers, on the other hand, found that to "imitate" blacks on stage guaranteed yucks. By 1832, when Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice went nationwide with "Jim Crow," a song-and-dance routine he claimed to have stolen from a crippled black stablehand, burnt cork was a staple of American showbiz. But it was not until 1843 that four musicians dubbing themselves the Virginia Minstrels formalized blackface into a full evening's diversion—minstrelsy. Playing banjo, tambourine, "bones" (castanets), and fiddle—the specialty of leader and chief composer Dan Emmett, whose "Dixie" was later appropriated as the unofficial Confederate national anthem—the Virginia Minstrels and their hordes of imitators probably sounded something like the earliest recorded "hillbilly" music of the 1920's, only longer on sentimental ballads and parlor polish. Rendered more genteel by the addition of small pit bands and more businesslike by a burgeoning songwriting industry, the minstrel show was America's dominant popular entertainment for most of the 19th century. Though eventually a few actual African-Americans got into the act, it remains a pungent reminder that black people and what white people make of them are two very different things.

#### 1849: FROM JIM CROW TO TIN PAN ALLEY

Stephen Collins Foster became the toast of his middle-class Pittsburgh neighborhood by performing "Jim Crow" and "Zip Coon" in amateur theatricals in 1835, when he was nine. The extent of his exposure to African-American culture is debatable, but minstrelsy he knew. A typical quasibohemian dreamer, he wasn't rebellious enough to turn minstrel himself. But as his tunes began to bring in some money, he saw a way out of his bookkeeping job. In 1849 he persuaded Firth, Pond & Co., a major New York music firm whose interests went far beyond minstrelsy, to pay him royalties at a time when songs were invariably sold outright for sums that didn't support the performers, conductors, music teachers, and dilettantes who wrote them. Thus he became America's first fulltime professional songwriter, and also the first master of its polyglot musical heritage—Irish ballads and Italian opera as well as African tinge. Foster was never altogether comfortable with his so-called "Ethiopian songs" ("Swanee River," "Camptown Races," "My Old Kentucky Home"), and after he moved to New York in 1853 he concentrated on parlor ballads—since they were more artistic, he figured they'd have a longer shelf life. But only "Jennie With the Light Brown Hair" and "Old Dog Tray" were major successes, and before long the spendthrift songsmith was reduced to writing songs for hire like a common hack. As a nonperforming composer, Foster presaged the Tin Pan Alley rock and roll overthrow. He also presaged almost everything else in American pop. He died a Bowery alcoholic at 37.

#### 1890: DAWN OF THE INDIES

The phonograph that Thomas Edison invented in 1877 was conceived as a dictaphone and didn't work very well. Only after others developed the floating stylus and covered the cylinder Edison recorded on

with wax instead of tinfoil did he merchandise his machine, with his chief target the U.S. Congress, where he believed it would soon render secretaries obsolete. Fortunately, the fate of the phonograph was in the hands of Edison's thirty regional franchisees, all of whom would have lost their shirts pursuing what Edison pumped as "the legitimate side of their business." And somewhere out there somebody came up with a money-making bastard—a coin-in-the-slot protojukebox into which rubes, children, and men about town would insert a nickel to hear tunes by Foster and John Philip Sousa. So before there was really a record business, freelance entrepreneurs with their ears in the air had given the record business a shot in the arm, which is also the story of rock and roll. And let us not forget another independent, rival inventor-entrepreneur Emile Berliner, who in 1887 patented a gramophone that recorded on discs instead of cylinders, an idea whose time soon came. Berliner always knew he was in the home entertainment business, and record collectors owe him their gratitude. Just exactly how would you store 500 long-playing cylinders in a studio apartment?

### 1913: SEX AND CHAMPAGNE AND FOUR-FOUR ANIMALS

Vernon Castle was an English comedian with an engineering degree, Irene Foote the daughter of a physician and the granddaughter of P.T. Barnum's press agent. They married in 1911 and in 1912 lucked into a job dancing at a fashionable Paris cabaret. By this time, the turkey trot, the grizzly bear, the bunny hug, and other barroom-cum-barnyard terpsichore had made inroads in high society, and though the Castles' versions of these "nigger dances," to borrow a phrase Irene was tossing about several years later, were "considerably toned down," they created a sensation. Soon they were back in New York making up steps, first and most prominently the Castle walk, in collaboration with black composer Ford Dabney and black composer-conductor James Reese Europe. It was the waltz all over again—Western civilization going dance-mad from the top. Though slightly less stringent standards of decorum soon replaced the discarded six-inch distance between partners, a barrier had been breached. Song publishers were convinced that hits had to have a good beat, and though many a tearjerker broke the rule, the parlor ballad was finally on its way out.

### 1925: THIS IS LOU-ISS, DOLLY

Well before abolition, the French-Spanish port city of New Orleans spawned a unique music colored by the African dances of Congo Square, and eventually the city's nonstop party generated the greatest musician of the 20th century. But like Muddy Waters and his Delta progeny two decades later, he didn't make his mark until after he took the train up to Chicago. Louis Armstrong invented the improvised solo. His gravelly, sardonic vocal excursions cut singing loose from cornball beauty and bullshit text; his high-handed fun with pop trash prefigured postmodernist recontextualization. And though he's more closely associated with the subcategories "jazz" and "pop," rock would be unimaginable without solos or gravel or high-handed popwise fun. The year I've chosen is when he started recording as a leader, but you might want to check out the Lonnie Johnson guitar solo on 1927's "I'm Not Rough"—sounds for all the world like r&b fixing to cross over. You could also give a listen to "Saints." Or "Hello Dolly."

### 1938: LES PAUL TAKES LUNCH

As long ago as 2000 B.C., when Babylonian lute players were depicted as shepherds rather than priests, the guitar was conceived as a people's instrument. Its 17th-century vogue was associated with dance music, its 19th-century vogue with romantic melody. In America, where guitars were often homemade—a cigar box, a board, and some baling wire would do—the first electric model



was developed in the '20s by country guitarist Lloyd Loar, who couldn't sell it. By 1931 Rickenbacker was manufacturing an electrified Hawaiian version, followed quickly by a so-called "Spanish" guitar, which introduced the electromagnetic pickup. T-Bone Walker is generally credited with introducing such a guitar to blues. The first known recording is "Good Morning Blues," cut in 1938 by Count Basie sideman Eddie Durham, and it was Durham fan Charlie Christian who turned the electric guitar into a phenomenon after he joined Benny Goodman in 1939. But all of these retained the lute's acoustic resonator—its hollow body. Lifelong tinkerer Les Paul had another idea. Sometime around 1938 he fitted a railroad tie with steel strings and a pickup: "You could go out to eat and come back and the note would still be sounding. It didn't sound like a banjo or a mandolin, but like a guitar, an electric guitar. That was the sound I was after." It took another decade for Leo Fender to start manufacturing such an item, and soon the solid-body electric came to dominate pop, bestowing on a single barely trained player the aural power of a symphony orchestra. Les Paul went on to invent multitrack recording.

#### 1940: ENTER THE BARBARIANS

ASCAP—the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers—was Tin Pan Alley's guild, collecting license fees from all manner of musical venues and promoters. It constructed favorable deals for the most powerful Broadway and Hollywood firms, treating more folkish genres with something closely akin to contempt. And though initially it resisted radio, by 1939 it earned two-thirds of its income there and was sure it could up its rates. After all, where else were broadcasters going to get the music they'd created an addiction to? But radio elected to stand and fight, chartering BMI—Broadcast Music, Inc.—to license all the songwriters ASCAP shortchanged. At first BMI concentrated on rearranging uncopyrighted songs, Stephen Foster's among them, but by the end of 1940 it had corralled the catalogues of disgruntled Tin Pan Alley oldtimer Edward B. Marks and ace talent scout Ralph Peer.

Peer was credited with coining the terms "race" and "hillbilly" music for what we now call blues and country, and was the first to record both Jimmie Rodgers and the Carter Family. His Peer International not only controlled many country and blues copyrights, but had invested heavily in Latin American music, as had Marks. So when on January 1, 1941 the broadcasters let their ASCAP contract expire, radio was positioned to boost a bunch of hicks, greasers, and Negroes, many of whom couldn't even read music—and who were about to destroy the pop power brokers' monopoly forever.

#### 1941: AFTERNOON OF THE INDIES

Like Edison's phonograph, radio was first conceived as a business tool—a talking telegraph. But even in the early ham days, when would-be broadcasters would first distribute crystal sets to their neighbors, some had more poetic ideas—a San Jose buff was airing live and recorded music as early as 1909. By 1926, when there were already Tin Pan Alley songsmiths who limited their melodies to the five notes early receivers could handle, David Sarnoff, who'd first proposed a "radio music box" in 1916, had assembled the NBC network. Much of the networks' allure, however, lay in the access they afforded to swank (and costly) metropolitan entertainment *as it happened*—stars live in your living room, big bands playing big hotels. Only in 1941, when the federal government—which back in 1922 had allotted the choicest frequencies to operators who promised not to broadcast records—moved to break the power of the networks, was the stage set for the small local stations whose need for cheap programming would soon transform disc jockeys into tastemaking local celebrities. And in those days, local celebrities played local music—including all the insurgent folk-pop BMI had had



the luck or vision to exploit.

1947: FIX IT IN THE MIX

Bing Crosby was no Armstrong or Sinatra, but again and again he had the right idea at the right time. Linking up John McCormack and Al Jolson with the informal phrasing of the jazz artists he idolized was the least of it—his real genius was a lazy man's instinct for the gadget. Singers "crooned" throughout the '20s, and megaphone-toting Rudy Vallee was the first pop heartthrob. But it was Crosby who mastered vocal amplification by developing a style appropriate to the microphones that defined radio and recording studios—who learned to create an illusion of conversational intimacy by pretending that the mike just happened to be there when he lifted his baritone in song. Soon the floodgates were opened to a host of singers who hadn't gone through the painful rituals whereby a few lucky, hard-working individuals train their freakishly exceptional "beautiful" voices to carry in a concert hall. And eventually the Groaner hit upon an even more democratic technological angle. Frustrated by the sound quality of his half-improvised radio shows, which had to be patched together from 78-rpm master discs so they could be scheduled through four time zones, he became the first entertainer—unless Adolf Hitler counts—to exploit the fidelity and editability of the magnetic tape an enterprising Army officer had purloined from the Nazis. Musical "authenticity" would never be the same. Crosby also had a radical attitude toward the invention that made rock and roll a billion-dollar business: he used to cut an LP in nine hours. He scored well over 300 hits even though he didn't give a paid concert between 1933 and 1976. But the rock and roll that couldn't have happened without him did him in—after 1955, his pop play was limited primarily to "White Christmas."

## **2. David Hajdu, *Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).**

### **Sheet music, pp. 15–17**

By 1920, newspapers were already reporting that the “day of great hits” had passed. The “zenith of the popular music craze,” when sales of hit tunes were estimated to have averaged one million copies per week, was understood to have occurred in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. The transactional form of those song sales was not a recording in any format of sound storage but commercially published sheet music. The words and music of popular songs were presented in the same format as classical compositions, in formal notation: a treble staff for the melody line; the lyrics underneath it, with each syl-la-ble separated to match the notes of the tune; and below the words another pair of staves for piano accompaniment. The music would be printed on a large sheet of heavy cotton-fiber stock, folded in half like a greeting card and intended to serve much the same function as one, to provide mass-produced sentiments for use in the name of individual expression.

When commercial song sheets first came into widespread use, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the cover graphics were typically illustrative in a literal manner, depicting the lyrical content of the song: a pair of dancing polar bears for “Polar Bear Polka”; a young woman receiving a carrier dove for “The Carrier Dove.” Then, in 1892, a portentously wily songwriter in Wisconsin, Charles K. Harris—soon to be famous as the father of the tearjerker but also historic as a great innovator of cross-merchandising and payola—wrote a mopey story-song, a paean to self-pity called “After the Ball.”

Harris set up his own publishing operation to maximize the profits that were unapologetically the sole stimulus to his creative work. According to Harris, an established publisher had offered him ten thousand dollars for the right to print up “After the Ball,” but he refused in order to control sales of the music himself. When a music hall star of the day named J. Aldrich Libbey came through Milwaukee, Harris offered to pay him five hundred dollars—enough for Libbey to have bought, say, a parlor grand piano—plus a cut of the royalties of the sheet music sales, if Libbey agreed to interpolate “After the Ball” into his touring show, *A Trip to Chinatown*, a successful musical comedy that had little to do with Chinatown. In exchange, Harris put a portrait of Libbey on the cover of the sheet music to the tune, and the enduring model for entertainment marketing as image brokering and favor trading was set.

Written in waltz time to an instantly learnable singsong melody in the mode of an Irish folk tune, “After the Ball” tells the tale of a lonely old man who explains to his young niece why he never married. He had once been in love, he tells the girl, but had his heart broken one night when, after the ball, he saw his beloved kissing another man. Many years later in the song, after the woman he had loved has died, the old uncle receives a letter from the other man, and it turns out that he was just her brother. The song is a cheap little cut-glass gem of Victoriana. It has melodrama, a twist ending, a contorted hint of the incestuous (as the uncle describes watching the brother and sister: “When I returned, there stood a man / kissing my sweetheart as lovers can”), and, at the heart of the overt tragedy in the story, a less-than-covert case for the Victorian ethos of blissful domestication. (To be unmarried is a kind of death only in a world where marriage is the most important thing in life.)

“After the Ball” had another dimension. In one of the last stanzas, the old uncle mentions, in contradiction to the rest of the song, that by abandoning his girl, he “broke her heart.” Suddenly the man is not a lonesome victim but a heartbreaker, an agent of misbegotten punishment, and the story has become a lament of Victorian guilt and suffering.

### **Tin Pan Alley, p. 18**

In the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, an unassociated group of music publishers coalesced and flourished in New York, at first on Union Square, by the vaudeville theaters, and then on a stretch of West Twenty-eighth Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues derisively nicknamed Tin Pan Alley, for the noise made by all the singing and piano playing in the buildings. Some twenty publishing businesses were set up in rooms in a row of narrow brownstones overpacked with workers making music on the industrial model. Specialists handled each of the tasks involved, one and then another, from the lyricist to the composer to the music transcriber to the publisher to the song plugger, the last of whom peddled the sheet music to professional musicians to perform (for the promotional value in performances by stars of the day, such as J. Aldrich Libbey) and to store owners to sell to amateurs who provided entertainment for one another in their parlors. Tin Pan Alley was a mill district where music was produced by a means my aunts and uncles working in the piecework sweatshops of New Jersey would have understood.

“Nowadays, the consumption of songs by the masses in America is as constant as their consumption of shoes, and the demand is similarly met by factory output,” reported *The New York Times* in 1910. “Songs may be properly classed with the staples, and are manufactured, advertised, and distributed in much the same manner as ordinary commodities.”

Unlike the songs to come in another era of popular music, the age of recordings, the tunes of the sheet music age were created mainly for performance by the general public at home rather than for professional performance. With the rise of the middle class and the five-day workweek in America came an urge among the growing membership of that class to demonstrate their excellence by

spending their newly discretionary money and time on luxuries such as fancy objects and the arts. They bought houses—rococo temples of domestic splendor that earned their later classification as Victorians—and acquitted them with carved-oak furnishings, lacy window dressings, and pianos that served as magnificent display racks for song sheets published with beautiful covers. Between 1890 and 1904, yearly piano sales in the United States grew from 32,000 to 374,000. In 1910, nearly three hundred American piano makers employed some twenty-five thousand people and sold about 375,000 instruments in one year's time. Women (and some men) and children (especially girls) in respectable families (or families aspiring to respectability) took music lessons, and most of the songs they sang and played at the piano were produced for them on Tin Pan Alley. A symbol of domestic refinement performed by girls or their mothers or aunts at the piano, generally speaking, popular music took on associations with femininity that it would carry forever. Indeed, the very notion of having a musical sensibility would be taken to suggest the presence of a feminine quality—in either women or men.

### **Crooners, pp. 66–67**

Lena Horne had a point. Frank Sinatra sang “I’ll Never Smile Again” quietly, softly, with precise but delicate articulation. As he would always say, the microphone was his instrument, and his early style can most readily be grasped as a masterly realization of the potential of electronic recording and delivery technology. The microphone, since it had come into use in the late 1920s, had made feasible a new kind of singing—indeed, a new definition of what it meant to sing. When Al Jolson was the biggest star on Broadway, in the era before records and radio, much of the force of his appeal came from his ability to project from the footlights to the balcony. That skill became less of an asset—in fact, it became something of a liability—with the rise of the microphone and the relocation of popular entertainment from the public sphere to the home. The first vocalists to exploit the potential of the microphone—Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby early among them—were once considered incompetent for their failure to project, with gusto, from the diaphragm. In a movie called *Crooner*, made in 1932, a critic of the leading man snaps, “He can’t sing. He only croons.”

With microphones, singers learned to work more conversationally, sensually, and subtly, and Sinatra mastered these possibilities to sing with such warmth and gentleness that his early music was scandalous. This is not easy to fathom today, knowing as we do that Sinatra turned out to be a swaggering emblem of masculine bravura, but Sinatra made his name, with “I’ll Never Smile Again” and its follow-ups, as an artist whose delicacy and sensitivity were seen as shockingly, even dangerously transgressive. In a three-part series of profiles of Sinatra published in *The New Yorker* in 1946, E. J. Kahn Jr., one of the smart generalists who made the magazine’s reputation in the mid-twentieth century, quotes a critic of Sinatra’s “who thinks much about these things” as finding Sinatra’s “style very dangerous to our morale, for it is passive, luxurious, and ends up not with a bang but with a whimper.” The implication was that Sinatra, as a singer, was not enough of a man.

### **Billboard, pp. 68–69.**

On July 27, 1940, *Billboard* magazine, the trade journal for the music business, started publishing a weekly list of the bestselling records across the country, under the heading “The *Billboard* Music Popularity Chart.” Prior to that issue, *Billboard* had published other music lists—one, as early as 1913, for “Popular Songs Heard in Vaudeville Theaters Last Week,” and others, after that, for “Sheet Music Best Sellers,” “Songs with the Most Radio Plugs,” and “Records Most Popular on Music Machines” (jukeboxes). The magazine had reported on record sales in articles and columns but had not yet attempted to produce an ongoing, systematic tabulation of the sales of 78 rpm singles. (Long-playing records had not been invented, though the term “album” was beginning to be used for booklets packaging three or four 78s by theme, such as “Songs from Hawaii,” much like a

photo album.) The “Music Popularity Chart” was presented as a “trade service feature,” intended to provide market information for the benefit of wholesalers and retailers trying to decide what to stock, radio programmers trying to figure out what to play on the air, and songwriters and producers looking for cues on styles to mimic and trends to exploit. The chart in that issue in 1940 listed ten records, nearly all of them ballads, and most of them sad.



### 3. Kyle Crichton, "Thar's Gold in Them Hillbillies," *Collier's*, Vol. 101, No. 18 (April 30, 1938), pp. 24-5.

The young man with the Adam's apple seemed out of place in a New York elevator. Very definitely he was not a New Yorker and in addition he was not welcome in the crowded car because he carried under his arm a case that looked like a rough box for a horse.

"Will y'all pahdon me?" he said plaintively. "Ah'm havin\* some trouble with this here git-tar."

He carried the trouble with him when he got off at the eleventh floor and was presently in a room before a microphone having an audition for phonograph records. He said, with some hesitation, that he would do imitations of Jimmie Rodgers and started in a thin wailing voice to do Blue Yodel, No. 1, which has for its theme: "T for Texas, T for Tennessee and T for Thelma." It seemed that Thelma had made a bum out of somebody and was to receive a bullet from a .44 through her middle"just for to see her jump and fall."

This was the rare thing of a New York audition for hillbilly songs and race records. The general practice is to take a recording outfit into the territory where such songs grow and out of this endeavor have come such classics as The Wreck of Old 97, Floyd Collins in the Cave, Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane, The Old Hen Cackles, and The Rooster's Goin' ta Crow, Crazy Blues, Jimmie Rodgers and his Blue Yodels (Nos. 1 to 12), That Thing Called Love, Just Because, Deep Elam Blues, The Prisoner's Song, Comin\* Round the Mountain, Hand Me Down My Walkin' Cane, Casey Jones, Twenty-one Years, and hundreds of others.

South of a point that might roughly be regarded as St. Albans, West Virginia, the grapevine system of news distribution still beats anything known to modern science. A hint from New York that David Kapp of Decca or Eli Oberstein of Victor is headed South will find the tidings flying over mountains and the result will be that when the city slickers arrive they will be unable to get into their hotels for the presence of mouth-organ virtuosos, yodelers, blues singers and specialty bands equipped with instruments made of tissue paper on combs, washboards, assorted saws and rutabaga gourds.

If there needs to be another picture at this point, the camera can leap agilely to such distant parts of South Africa and Australia where the native bushmen are busily humming a little number written by Jimmy Davis of Shreveport, Louisiana, and entitled Nobody's Darling But Mine. In short, no matter what the citizens of the United States think about their native songs, the world ranks the hillbilly ballads among the folk-tune wonders of the universe.

It started back in 1921 when Ralph S. Peer was with Okeh records. Sophie Tucker had agreed to do You Can't Keep a Good Man Down but it was found at the last moment that another contract prevented her from working for Okeh. In this crisis Perry Bradford, who was a colored song plugger for W. C. Handy (St. Louis Blues, Memphis Blues, etc.), informed Mr. Peer that he could furnish a girl who was as good as Sophie. She turned out to be Mamie Smith, a colored girl who was working as cleaning woman in a theater. She made the Good Man song, and for the other side of the record did That Thing Called Love. Mamie had a loud raucous voice and there was great difficulty with recordings in that day of poor equipment, but the Okeh people knew they had something when the record sold 75,000 copies the first month. Mamie was forthwith yanked back into the studio and this time she brought with her a horrendous five-piece band known as Mamie Smith's Jazz Hounds. They

made Crazy Blues and It's Right Here for You.

"The most awful record ever made," reports Mr. Peer, "and it sold over a million copies."

### **A Market Nobody Thought Of**

Bert Williams, the colored comedian, had been making records for Columbia for many years but the companies never imagined that the Negroes themselves might be a market for Negro records. In fact,, the companies carefully hid the fact that colored singers were being used. About this time, dealers in New York began to report a curious trend in the business. It seemed that Negro Pullman porters on trains going South invariably left New York with as many as twenty-five records under their arms. Since the records cost one dollar each, the business was big stuff and Mr. Peer went South to investigate. He found (a) that the Negroes were buying records of their own people in great quantities and (b) that the Negroes of Richmond, Virginia, invariably referred to themselves as The Race.

"We had records by all foreign groups," says Mr. Peer. "German records, Swedish records, Polish records, but we were afraid to advertise Negro records. So I listed them in the catalogue as 'race' records and they are still known as that."

About this time the vogue of Mamie Smith at Okeh was swamped by the arrival of the great Bessie Smith on Columbia records. Bessie Smith had now become almost a legendary figure and her records have lately been reissued in a new form and are considered classics in blues singing by experts. Her most famous was Gold Coast Blues, which originally sold into the millions. It may be remarked that at the present day a sale of 100,000 records is held to be sensational in any field.

With Bessie Smith being so successful, Okeh was under the necessity of digging up a new sensation, and Mr. Peer took a portable recording outfit to Atlanta and began looking around. For some reason Atlanta is the worst town in the South for Negro talent (then and now), and Mr. Peer was soon stumped. At the suggestion of a local dealer, who guaranteed to sell enough records to cover the cost, he did a few recordings by Fiddler John Carson, a white mountaineer who arrived for the recordings in overalls. Old John had been a ballyhoo man with a circus, had a repertory of hillbilly songs that never ended, and he could sing a bit with his fiddling. He made Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane, and The Old Hen Cackles and The Rooster's Goin' ta Crow.

"It was so bad that we didn't even put a serial number on the records, thinking that when the local dealer got his supply, that would be the end of it," says Mr. Peer. "We sent him 1,000 records, which he received on a Thursday. That night he called New York on the phone and ordered 5,000 more sent by express and 10,000 by freight. When the national sale got to 500,000, we were so ashamed we had Fiddler John come up to New York and do a re- recording of the numbers."

The matter of the name arose again in this connection. It was obviously impossible to list them under the designation of each section (mountaineer, "Georgia Cracker," etc.) and Mr. Peer, who had come from Kansas City and was well acquainted with the Ozarks, named them hillbilly records. The result is that the word has come to have a general application, and mountaineers of all sections are now known as hillbillies.

The greatest success of all time was made by The Prisoner's Song, which was introduced almost as an after thought by Vernon Dalhart, who had done The Wreck of Old 97 and was desperate for something for the other side of the record. It eventually sold 2,500,000 records for the Victor

company. It cost the company seven cents to make the record (all expenses included) and the wholesale price they received was thirty-seven cents a record.

### **The Singing Brakeman**

The greatest of all romances in the hillbilly business centers about Jimmie Rodgers, the little railroad brakeman who fought desperately against poverty and the ravages of tuberculosis until Mr. Peer discovered him in Bristol, Tennessee, and started him on a career that was fabulous even in the phonograph industry. It is estimated that the Blue Yodel records sold over 5,000,000 copies. Jimmie Rodgers is now dead and his records do not have the fame with collectors that has come to those of Bessie Smith, but he has left a mark on all hillbilly music.

When David Kapp goes out to Dallas now for Decca to record hillbilly and race records, he will do as many as 325 selections in fifteen days. The big stars now are Jimmie Davis, clerk of the Criminal Court in Shreveport, Louisiana, and Gene Autry, the singing cowboy of the movies. Another favorite group is the Carter Family of Maces Springs, Virginia, who sing and play and make marvelous didos with such instruments as the guitar and autoharp, which is really a zither with keys.

The best colored singer since Bessie Smith is said to be Georgia White, and it is in this field that some of the most remarkable records are made. There are colored numbers so strictly African and special that nobody but a Negro could understand them or appreciate them. When Sleepy John Estes does his own Negro compositions, the words are like something out of a voodoo chant and the manner of delivery is such that they make no sense whatever to the untrained mind. The recordings by Petie Wheatstraw come in the same class, and when Kokomo Arnold does the "sebastapool" on his guitar, effects are made that seem unearthly.

Unless the artist is also the writer of his own material and hence shares in the royalty for composers, the rewards of recording are not great, being on an average of \$25 a "side." The payment is outright and there is no bookkeeping.

Among the novelty records are those made by the Calypso people in the West Indies, the Cajuns of Louisiana, and Corny Allen Greer and his band.

The loyalty of the hillbilly audience to its heroes can be seen in the titles of the songs. When Jimmie Davis wrote Nobody's Darling But Mine, he immediately made a sequel entitled An Answer to Nobody's Darling. That was followed by A Woman's Answer to Nobody's Darling. Bob and Joe Shelton, who also come from Shreveport, wrote Just Because in collaboration with Leon Chappalear. When it became a success, they followed immediately with An Answer to Just Because and followed that with Just Because III. It is quite possible that the thing could go on forever.

Students are convinced that Bessie Smith and particularly the players who accompanied Bessie Smith on her records had a great part in stimulating the disease known as swing music, which has now gripped the nation. Bessie had such men doing her accompaniments as Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Joe Smith, Fred Longshaw, Charlie Green and the late James P. Johnson, one of the most spectacular of the hot pianists. Musicians are the keenest people in the world at admiring new talent and just as Benny Goodman will sit goggle-eyed and listening to the "hotteties" of Count Basie, the colored demon of Kansas City, so did the orchestra leaders of ten years ago go insane over the berserk playing of Bessie Smith's boys. From the interest came the change in orchestra music that is

now so pronounced in the work of Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Glen Gray, Jimmy Dorsey and others.

The traditional folk songs of the Southern mountaineers and the spirituals have not been included in this discussion because they occupy a special position in the art of song. In the strictest sense the mountaineer ballads are old English folk songs, some of them even traceable to old Gregorian chants; and as such they are not strictly American products. New York was recently visited by the Rev. John William Dawson, pastor of the Dry Fork Primitive Baptist Church of Morehead, Kentucky, who sang *Lord, Spare Me for Another Year* and *The Wayfaring Stranger*. The words seemed to have grown out of local legends of the mountains but the tunes stemmed back to the earliest days of American history when the first settlers crossed from the old country. Most strictly in the American tradition are the songs of Aunt Molly Jackson of Harlan County, Kentucky, who has told the story of the labor struggles of that section. Her songs are richly evocative and thrilling, carrying the troubadour quality of old.

### **Fans Are Delighted**

But it's when Sleepy John Estes on his guitar and Hammie Nix on his mouth organ get wound up that the newfound fans start yammering with delight. There are isolated groups in all sections of the world prepared to fight to the death to prove that Maxine Sullivan, from the Onyx, is a greater artist than Lily Pons. Miss Sullivan became the storm center of radio controversy as the first person to swing *Loch Lomond* and other ballads. There are strange individuals who wouldn't give a Georgia White and Rhubarb Red (guitar) record for anything made by Caruso.

The cult of the hillbillies may be a passing fancy but it is significant that Ambrose, the swankiest orchestra conductor in London, has made an arrangement of *Nobody's Darling But Mine*. When the *St. Louis Blues* is made into a Metropolitan Opera, the truth will finally be evident. In the meanwhile, the world will need to be content with the nasal-voice boys and girls of the hinterlands who have most curious things to say about love and *My Gal Sal*. There seems to be an awful lot of double-crossing done by the ladies in the "mountings," and they invariably pay for it.

This makes art.

#### **4. David Hajdu, *The Carter Family in Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016). pp. 86–89**

When I want to hear some classic country songs, the first thing I usually play is the music of the Carter Family, the trio of two sisters-in-law—Sara Carter, who sang lead and played the autoharp, and Maybelle Carter (June Carter Cash's mother), who played the guitar and held up the trio, musically—and Sara's husband, A. P. Carter, who sang harmony and managed the group. The Carters' music, well preserved through the recordings they began making for Victor in 1927, was judiciously austere: music planed flat and clean. Sara Carter's singing was unfussy but highly controlled—reedy and bare, with no vibrato or showiness, a sound that suggested Puritan humility and discipline—and Maybelle Carter's guitar accompaniment was propulsive, subtly emotive, and exacting. The group's repertoire, put together by A. P. Carter (and mostly copyrighted in his name, whatever the source of the material), mainly comprised songs that honored the values of hearth and family, songs of mourning or hardship, and songs that dealt specifically with southern or rural life—tunes such as "Mid the Green Fields of Virginia," "Little Log Hut in the Lane" (the Carters' variation on an earlier song, "Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane"), and "Wildwood Flower."



The Carters drew from the body of tunes they had learned when they had been young, in Virginia, and A. P. Carter would also bring in material that he would find during song-hunting trips. He would drive around the countryside in the new-model Chevrolet that he had purchased with recording royalties, asking folks he met to share old songs with him, and he would sometimes return with piles of sheet music for popular ditties dating back to the previous century. The Carters had no bias against a song like “Mid the Green Fields of Virginia” because it had been written by Charles K. Harris, who confessed that he did not know if corn was grown in Virginia or if the Carolinas had hills; nor would they reject something like “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane” because it had been written by the commercial writer William Shakespeare Hays for a minstrel show. (Hays, who worked in a music store in Louisville, published more than 350 songs said to have accumulatively sold some twenty million copies.) “Wildwood Flower” and “Keep on the Sunny Side of Life,” the latter of which became the Carter Family’s theme, were both also popular songs published in the nineteenth century, and so were other tunes in the Carter Family songbook.

Many of the group’s songs had lyrics written by the Carters or words adapted from found sources, including traditional ballads, news reports, gossip, and hymns. One of Maybelle Carter’s original songs, “You Are My Flower,” was based on a poem she clipped out of a magazine, with a melody derived from a Mexican tune she had heard on a border radio station. Much of the trio’s work was deeply personal—A. P. and Sara Carter, both of whom had affairs and who split up only to reunite for the opportunity that reconciliation offered, wrote lucidly about betrayal and heartbreak. Still, they wrote the songs in order to record them, in order to be paid. There seemed to be no conflict in their multiple intentions.

The music of the Carter Family spoke with knowing eloquence about human suffering, the comfort and hope that faith provides, and the mysteries of the natural world. The life this music reflected and vindicated, with no (or little) romanticizing gloss, was a tough but good life of hard work and precious few rewards, none of them monetary. There is no disservice to the music’s veracity and potency in the fact that the Carters were unapologetic professionals, working for profit and finding it through use of the latest technologies of mass delivery, records and radio. They were never rich; money was a problem as persistent in the Carter family as romance trouble. But neither were they amateurs or social outsiders, folk musicians by the terms folklorists tended to prefer; the Carters took pride in being paid for making their music.

In the first week of August 1927, the Carter Family made six recordings in two short sessions at a studio in Bristol, Tennessee, under the producer Ralph Peer, whom Victor Records had hired to expand its offerings in “hillbilly” music. Nearly all the songs were grim—tragedy ballads about orphaned and homeless children, storms upon the sea, and scorned lovers praying to die. One of the tunes, an adaptation of a mountain ballad called “Single Girl, Married Girl,” was a critique of female subjugation under marriage, and the Carters performed it as a duo between Sara and Maybelle. A. P. Carter was silent as his wife sang of the unmarried woman who “goes to the store and buys” and the married one who “rocks the cradle and cries.”

The song was released by Victor as a single and made available for mail order through the Montgomery Ward department stores in 1928, and it sold so well throughout the South that the Carter Family was offered a deal to travel to Camden to record in bulk for Victor. “Single Girl, Married Girl,” an unwithering assertion of feminine discontent—sung and played by a duo of women related by both talent and marriage, decades before the feminist movement took form up north—set the Carters, and with them country music, on their course. The stark, gray sound of the Carter Family, sustained by the singing of Sara Carter and the guitar work of Maybelle, defied the clownish yokel image of vaudeville hillbillies and established that commercially produced country music could be radically artful and serious, not just entertainingly hokey. The early Carter Family recordings have often been called “the big bang of country music,” though they hardly burst from a vacuum. (No sales figures for the early Carter Family records exist. As described by the Carter

Family biographers Mark Zwonitzer and Charles Hirshberg in their book, *Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?*, the single 78 rpm record with two songs, "Single Girl, Married Girl" and "The Storms Are on the Ocean," "sold and kept selling," and "suddenly the Carters were making money.")

## 5. Fred Dellar, "HANK WILLIAMS," *MOJO*, December 1998

He couldn't read. He couldn't write. He couldn't stop screwing up. Yet Hank Williams is a giant of popular music without whom rock'n'roll might never have happened.

"I thought about Hank when I walked out on that Opry stage for the first time. all I could think of was, This is the same stage that Hank Williams was on and now I'm here."

– Elvis Presley

IN *JAILHOUSE ROCK*, VINCE EVERETT, PLAYED BY Elvis Presley, has a photograph on his cell wall. Unsurprisingly, it's of Hank Williams. Both singers were influenced by black music early in life, both won talent shows and learnt their stagecraft on touring country shows. Each took a minority music and reshaped it for worldwide consumption. And, to many, Hank Williams' contribution was the greater of the two. For Hank had no precedent.

From Mount Olive, West Alabama, Hank's father Lon Williams was a First World War veteran who'd suffered brain damage in battle. Hank, born Hiram Williams on September 17, 1923, was a frail but spirited kid, raised by his mother, Lilly Stone, who played organ at the local baptist church. Hank stood at her side during services and sang hymns. His love of gospel music never left him, but Hank was musically illiterate. "I have never read a note or written one," he told *The Montgomery Advertiser*. "I can't, I don't know one note from another." Nor was he a whiz at reading or writing English. Even so, when it came to songwriting, the man known as Bones was a genius, fashioning tunes that stick in the mind, simple lyrics that grab the imagination, recalling lost love, back-porch dalliances and Sunday morning feelings, or merely providing anthems for hobo heroes and honky-tonk hotsteppers. Hank's greatest musical mentor was Rufus Payne – better know as Tee-Tot – a hunchback black street musician whom he met as a boy in Georgiana, Alabama. "All the musical training I ever had was from him," acknowledged Hank. "I learned to play the git-tar from an old coloured man. He played in a coloured street band. I was shinin' shoes, sellin' newspapers and following this ole nigras around to get him to teach me to play the guitar. I'd give him 15 cents or whatever I could get hold of for the lesson." Such lessons went well. When he was 12 years old, Hank made his debut on a Montgomery amateur night show performing an original composition, 'WPA Blues'. And pocketed the star prize of 15 dollars.

Black influence on country music was hardly anything new even then. Jimmie Rodgers, the genre's first superstar, learnt much of his craft at an early age while carrying water to black workmen on the Mississippi section of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. His wife Carrie Rodgers claimed: "During the noon dinner-rests they taught him to plunk melody from banjo and guitar. They taught him songs: moaning chants and crooning lullabies." Such influences would bloom in Rodgers' series of legendary blue yodels, one of which found him employing Louis Armstrong in back-up capacity.

By the age of 11 Hank had developed a taste for booze, readily available when he was sent to live with his cousins, the McNeils, in a Monroe County logging town where hillbilly music, beer and boot-leg hooch enlivened Saturday night parties. At 14, Hank Williams, an avid *Grand Ole Opry* listener, linked up with harmonica player Hezzy Adair, working as Hank & Hezzy. Other musicians were added and

dropped. "Then he formed his own group and called them The Drifting Cowboys," explained Hank's first wife Audrey. "He had an early morning radio show on WSFA in Montgomery and could advertise on the show where he and The Drifting Cowboys would be performing. Most of the time, it would be schoolhouses or small honky-tonks." By the late '30s Hank was often legless. At one Drifting Cowboys gig in Alabama, he blew the show by losing his pick and playing guitar with his knuckles, prefacing each song with would-be humorous remarks that incensed the crowd upfront, entertainment that was counter-pointed when Hezzy Adair threw up on-stage. Fights became more frequent, Hank's son Hank Williams Jr recalling: "Those clubs along the Alabama-Tennessee border were mean. Once Daddy had to club a guy with the stainless steel fret-bar from a steel guitar, which Daddy had observed worked very well as an argument settler. And it would have worked well if the other fellow had followed the rules instead of raising up and taking a huge bite out of Hank Williams' eyebrow, hair and all."

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"You got to have smelt a lot of manure before you can sing like a hillbilly."  
– Hank Williams

DON HELMS OF THE DRIFTING COWBOYS TELLS HOW, in 1941, Hank, then knocking on 18, took the band into a pawn-brokers and bought each member a blackjack, saying, "You'll need these." He'd apparently – and expensively – smashed a number of guitars over irate customers' heads. The steel fret-bar – or "bullet" – was more economical, his main source of defence on the 'blood bucket' circuit, though he had a secret weapon in Lilly, who usually collected the door-money and handled gate-crashers in a manner satisfactory to Hank: "There ain't nobody I'd rather have alongside me in a fight than my mama with a broken bottle in her hand."

If, at this point, anyone had nominated Hank Williams as country music's way ahead, they'd have been laughed out of the great Southwest. His vocal style, eventually so distinctive, had hardly developed. He'd published nothing, being merely the beer-swilling leader of a doomed band. Temporary disillusionment allied to the advent of World War II heralded a change of occupation. Suffering from a back-injury incurred during a brief, ill-advised attempt at a rodeo career, Hank was not eligible for army service. Instead he headed into war work, spending a year and a half, on and off, labouring and welding with the Alabama Drydock And Shipbuilding Company in Mobile. His period on defence work gave Hank an opportunity to write. Though he had little education, somehow his simple words formed a kind of unbeatable folk poetry. Willie Nelson once opined: "Countless poets, authors and composers have reported with a feeling of awe that when their best work came it seemed as if some force beyond their control was controlling what they wrote. I don't know if Shakespeare said as much, but I'm sure he felt it. Closer to home, one of my favourite writers, Hank Williams, used to say, 'I pick up the pen and God moves it.'"

Armed with a batch of songs and a will to succeed, Hank returned to Montgomery in mid-1944 and re-formed The Drifting Cowboys. That same year, after checking with a doctor that he hadn't picked up a venereal disease somewhere along the way, he married Audrey Mae Sheppard.

Audrey was even more ambitious than Hank. She urged him to head for Nashville and the Opry, where, like a zillion other hillbilly wannabes, he was initially turned away, presumably because he lacked a style of his own. Claimed Hank: "I was a pretty good imitator of Roy Acuff but then I found out they already had a Roy Acuff, so I started singin' like myself." A return trip in September 1946

produced the apocryphal tale of the first meeting between the singer and Roy Acuff's partner and co-publisher, Fred Rose. Badgered by Audrey, Rose reluctantly agreed to hear Hank perform some of his material. Suitably impressed, he offered to buy the songs for 10 dollars apiece. A publishing contract was offered but no recording deal. Still, Hank was happy. Roy Acuff was his favourite performer, and to be signed to a company associated with him was one hell of an achievement. Such admiration was hardly reciprocated. At one meeting, Acuff informed a half-stoned Williams, "You got a million-dollar voice and a 10-cent brain."

Even so, things were moving. Molly O'Day, rated by some as the greatest female country singer ever, recorded a couple of Hank's songs. And Sterling Records of New York set up his debut recording session, albeit one that produced four maudlin songs, pure hicktown gospel that sold surprisingly well. A second session for Sterling emerged as a minor revelation, one track, 'Honky-Tonkin', proving to be ahead of its time – it was rockin', electric and a blueprint to be followed later by various sons of Sun.

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"I go back, back further all the time. Back into Hank Williams, back into Jimmie Rodgers. Because the human thing in those records is just beautiful and awesome."  
– Bruce Springsteen

THE ADVENT OF WORLD WAR II AND THE intermingling of people from different backgrounds in the armed forces took country music to the big city. Though Jimmie Rodgers had notched up a number of best-selling records during the late '20s and early '30s, and Roy Acuff had established himself as a star in the immediate pre-war years – it's alleged that Japanese troops yelled, "To hell with Roosevelt, to hell with Babe Ruth, to hell with Roy Acuff", as they banzai-charged – the trade magazines had virtually ignored this people's music. *Billboard* eventually established a 'Western And Race' column in January 1942, hastily changing the appellation to 'American Folk Records' a month later. A couple of years on, the first hillbilly record chart was installed. A *Mademoiselle* magazine article penned in the '40s averred: "The decentralisation of backwoods ballads was helped along by the war. Industrial workers from the South carried their ditties cross-country into the aircraft plants and shipyards of the Pacific Coast. Servicemen from the hillbilly districts toted guitars and laments of – and for – home from camp to camp. When they weren't sounding off on their own, they had the radio in the USO turned up volume-high for Elton Britt's 'There's A Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere', the unofficial hillbilly theme of the armed forces."

The mid-'40s also saw Nashville growing as a music centre in the wake of Decca's decision to record Red Foley there, following which a modern recording facility, Castle Studio, was installed in the Tulane Hotel. The establishment of the Acuff-Rose publishing empire in 1942 completed the foundation on which Music Row would be built, All that was needed now was a beacon of exciting new talent to attract fresh energy and ideas. 'Move It On Over' lit that beacon.

Encouraged by the admittedly moderate sales of his Sterling releases, Hank had signed for MGM, a young but wealthy label originally launched by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1946 as an outlet for film soundtrack material. Hank's first MGM single, 'Move It On Over', was, in its way, as important as Elvis Presley's 'Heartbreak Hotel' eight years later. Based around a tune that seemed to have been part of R&B since blues-birth, it was basically black in concept, only Hank's driving yet down-homey vocal betraying its country origin. A downright commercial slice of cross-culture that bridged not only musical areas but also generation gaps, 'Move It On Over' was made for the jukebox age. In



September 1947 the song headed into the Top 5 of Most Played Jukebox Hillbilly Records chart, which led to Hank being signed as a regular on Shreveport's prestigious *Louisiana Hayride* radio show, beamed to a large audience every Saturday night. At the same Castle Studio session that produced 'Move It On Over', Hank also recorded 'I Saw The Light'. A gospel hand-clapper that would never be a hit of any kind until the '70s, when Roy Acuff would record it with The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, it nevertheless would prove to be one of the most performed songs in country music history, the show-closer to top all show-closers, though, like 'Move It On Over', closer inspection would prove that it had enjoyed a previous incarnation, being near-identical to gospel writer Albert E. Brumley's 'He Set Me Free', first published in 1939.

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HANK NOTCHED A COUPLE OF HITS IN 1948, a remake of 'Honky Tonkin' clambering into the Hillbilly Top 20, while 'I'm A Long Gone Daddy', a blues-brother to 'Move It On Over', went Top 10. But there were problems. The passing of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 made it impossible for the Musician's Union to collect royalties from record sales in a manner previously agreed by the Union and the record companies. This brought about a recording ban that lasted most of 1948 and Hank was unable to record any new material until December that year, cutting just four sides in Cincinnati, one of which was 'Lovesick Blues'.

'Lovesick Blues' wasn't a Williams original or even a true blues. It was basically a vaudeville ditty, though it was blues singer Ann Chandler who began featuring it in 1922, the same year that the song was recorded by Elsie Clark. But it was first popularised in the late '20s by Emmett Miller, a white man who sang in blackface. Miller was the whole enchilada. He sang and yodelled pop, jazz, blues and country, and his way of doing things eventually influenced musicians ranging from Jimmie Rodgers and Bob Wills through to Merle Haggard, who recorded a whole album of Miller's songs. Hank Williams Jr reckons: "Without doubt my father learned 'Lovesick Blues' from Emmett Miller. It was either by record or he heard him perform it in person at a minstrel show." However, it's more likely that Hank had heard country singer Rex Griffin's 1939 version of the song, his arrangement approximating that of the Griffin record.

Whatever the song's ancestry, it made a star out of Hank Williams. The record not only topped the country listings but stayed in pole position for 16 weeks. As it clung to the charts, it was joined by such Williams releases as 'Never Again', 'Mansion On The Hill' and 'Wedding Bells'. Though *the Grand Ole Opry* radio show management, aware of the singer's booze problem and resulting unreliability, had been fighting shy of employing Hank, they were forced by public demand to give him a guest spot. Such was his reception that, within a short space of time, he became an *Opry* fixture. Such a prestigious residency called for a new band, one formed from the best young musicians around. Lead guitarist Bob McNett had come to Nashville with Hank, who then re-called steelie Don Helms, who'd been playing at a skating rink, adding 21-year-old bass-man Hillous Butrum and fiddler Jerry Rivers, a Nashville veteran at 19. The first time they played the *Opry*, Hank again stopped the show with 'Lovesick Blues'. Awed both by the occasion and the reception, Rivers remembers "the roaring applause continued for at least five minutes after we returned to the dressing room".

Hank notched eight major hits during 1949 including a version of 'My Bucket's Got A Hole In It', a song which Tee-Tot had reputedly taught him back in his Georgiana days, and 'Lost Highway'. The following year saw him logging a similar number of successes, including two Number 1s: 'Long Gone Lonesome Blues', on which Bruce Springsteen would base 'The River', and 'Why Don't You Love

Me (Like You Used To Do)?', which related to Hank's ongoing problems with the ambitious Audrey. His wife wished to further her own career, and insisted on singing on-stage with her husband and cutting duets at recording sessions – ill-advised projects considering that Audrey could hardly hold a tune. Pregnancy frustrated her further – her cowboy outfits didn't fit and, towards the end, she felt unable to keep tabs on the ever-errant Hank.

The arrival of Hank Jr in May 1949 didn't change her cool disposition. "Daddy was haunted by his genius," recalls the son Hank called Bocephus, "and when the blues came around at midnight, he had no-one to grab ahold of. His life was marked by strong women, first Lilly, his mother, then Audrey, his wife, and I'd be lying if I didn't admit that they pushed. Lord, how they pushed!"

Hank's stepdaughter Lycrecia Williams claims that Hank had been on his best behaviour while in Shreveport, only tumbling off the wagon on two or three occasions. But success brought more problems than failure. Following an argument that ended with a then-pregnant Audrey puncturing the tyres on his car and Hank responding by smashing furniture and anything else he could lay his hands on around the house, he took to his bed having tranquillised himself with sleeping pills. From then on, his drinking sessions would only be matched by his pill- popping.

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"Cold Cold Heart was the first country song ever to be performed with strings and the first to become an international hit. Within two weeks it sold two million records. Hank Williams loved the royalties but had a very humorous way of thanking me for its success. He called me up and said, 'What's the idea of ruining my song?'"

– Tony Bennett

COUNTRY HAD PROVIDED INTERNATIONAL hits for pop stars long before Bennett reluctantly covered 'Cold Cold Heart'. Bing Crosby had massive success with The Sons Of The Pioneers' 'Tumbling Tumbleweeds' in 1940, Bob Wills' 'New San Antonio Rose' in 1941 and Jimmie Davis' 'You Are My Sunshine' that same year. There were plenty of others. But perhaps the record that broke the dam and caused the pop brigade to come scurrying towards Nashville was Pee Wee King and Redd Stewart's 'Tennessee Waltz'. Penned in 1948, it was recorded by Patti Page in 1950 and became one of the biggest hits of all time, topping the US pop charts for 13 straight weeks and selling an unprecedented six million copies. A&R man Mitch Miller, who'd quit Mercury just before Patti Page's record was released, moved to Columbia and began checking out other country song possibilities. Hank's 'Cold Cold Heart', a C&W chart topper, was suggested by Jerry Wexler, then a *Billboard* columnist. Penned in the wake of one of the many arguments between Hank and Audrey – one story has it that a hospitalised Audrey, suffering from a post- abortion infection, refused to kiss Hank on one of his visits to her bedside – 'Cold Cold Heart' was another of Hank's appropriations, the melody basically stemming from T. Texas Tyler's 'You'll Still Be In My Heart' from 1945. But Hank's heart-worn delivery turned it into a country monster. When he performed it on the *Opry* in late January, 1951, he tore the place apart.

Mitch Miller, looking for a song to follow up 'Because Of You', Tony Bennett's initial chart-topper, grabbed 'Cold Cold Heart' with alacrity, had Percy Faith write a lush string arrangement, talked the unwilling singer into recording the song – Bennett thought it far too hokey – then sat back and waited for the sales figures to accrue. And they did, Bennett's record topping the US charts for six weeks. According to Williams' one-time fiddle-player Jerry Rivers, Hank just couldn't hear Bennett's cover often enough and played it over and over every time he found it on a jukebox.

Having had one success with a Hank Williams song, Miller looked for more. Sometime later he had Rosemary Clooney cut 'Half As Much', which Hank had previously covered, achieving another pop Number 1, while Frankie Laine was assigned 'Hey Good Lookin' and 'Your Cheatin' Heart', and eventually, after Hank's death, he was teamed with Jo Stafford for a duet on 'Tonight We're Settin' The Woods On Fire'. All of the cover versions were major hits and the money poured into the Williams household. During 1951, Audrey was said to have spent some \$50,000. Among the items acquired in the spree was a \$4,000 Cadillac convertible.

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"To me, there's only four original stylists: Al Jolson, Jimmie Rodgers, Hank Williams and Jerry Lee Lewis."

– Jerry Lee Lewis

PUBLISHER AND BOOKING AGENT JIM DENNY WAS THE man responsible for bringing Hank Williams to the *Opry*. In August 1952 he was also the man who fired him – Hank's bouts of boozing and pill-popping had made him miss too many radio shots and concerts. Their first meeting was hardly a bonding experience, Hank having to be sobered-up beforehand. On another occasion Denny had his wayward charge flown back to Madison Hospital (where he'd been several times previously) for rest and recuperation following a particularly bad spell at the Baltimore Hippodrome. "Every time Hank went on-stage he was drunk," recalled Whitey Ford, known as the Duke Of Pacudah, "and every time he opened with the same lines: 'Here I am in Baltimore. I ain't never been in Baltimore. If I come back, it'll be twice I've been here.' I told Hank not to open with that but each time he would.

We did four shows a day for a week. He was so drunk on-stage that he'd sway back on his heels and then forward on his toes. The pit band moved out of the way while he was on."

Denny was so horrified that he assigned two Pinkerton security operatives to watch Hank: one to stand outside Hank's dressing room and halt any suppliers of drinks and drugs getting in, the other to stay inside the room, just in case Hank smuggled in the offending items himself. But the inside man failed miserably. Hank got him drunk.

1951 proved a good news-bad news year for Hank. He accrued another eight major hits of his own and turned on many pop performers in the process. He toured with Little Jimmy Dickens; he opened The Hank And Audrey Corral, Nashville's first Western clothes store; and, back in Montgomery, July 15 was proclaimed Hank Williams Homecoming Day, culminating in over 9,000 fans turning up for a show at the city's new Cow Coliseum, hosted by Hank and Audrey and featuring Chet Atkins, Hank Snow and The Carter Family.

Then there was the downside. Promoting a patent cure-all medicine, the Hadacol Caravan was a tour by rail, the artistes travelling in 19 luxury Pullman cars; admission free with two Hadacol packet tops per adult and one per child, it cost a million to mount over its 40-day run. And, no matter where the Caravan played. Hank still had to return to Nashville for his Saturday night *Opry* gigs. His health, never good, began to slide. The booze and pills didn't help. Nor did Audrey. Don Helms, who claims he took Hank to the Madison Sanatorium many times throughout the years, says: "We'd come off a 1,000 mile trip and couldn't take him home because Audrey would raise hell when he'd been drinking." At the Sanatorium, Hank would sober up quickly, spend a day or two reading his ever-present supply of comics, smoke, chew candy bars and then begin fretting 'til they let him take to the road again.

A hunting accident had exacerbated his back pain and major surgery was scheduled. According to Hank, the surgeons discovered that the problems were worse than first thought – he had two ruptured discs. A less than successful operation was performed leaving Hank in no shape to resume touring. As always, Hank ignored all advice and discharged himself from hospital, first returning to Audrey for a family Christmas during which he threw a chair at her. Visitors reported that one of the doors to the Williams home was riddled with bullet holes after one of their battles. Worse still, over the New Year he had to remain home while Audrey fronted *The Drifting Cowboys*, his only contribution to the dates being a pre-recorded message explaining his inability to appear.

In January 1952, claiming that she was in fear of her life, Audrey requested that Hank move out of the family abode, then filed for divorce, stating "cohabitation was unsafe and improper", which came through on May 29. Hank was in bad shape. Minnie Pearl had worked with him in late April and recalled, "When he saw me, he said, 'Oh, Minnie!', and started to cry. It was a dreadful occasion for me because I loved Hank." In August he was arrested in Alexander City for being drunk and disorderly and the same month was sacked from the *Opry* and forced to return in disgrace to the *Louisiana Hayride*. Yet the hits kept coming, as 'Honky Tonk Blues', 'Half As Much', 'Jambalaya', 'Settin' The Woods On Fire' and 'You Win Again' echoed from every well-placed Wurlitzer.

Though he constantly suffered from bouts of the DTs, Hank continued to tour, albeit spasmodically. He missed Audrey, but he would show her he didn't need her. He did so by marrying 19-year-old divorcee Billie Jean Jones Eshlimar three times, once conventionally and then twice more next day, on-stage at New Orleans Municipal Auditorium before paying audiences at the matinee and evening shows. The gig netted \$30,000 dollars.

Photographs taken at the wedding on October 18, 1952 depict a healthy looking Hank, who'd actually gained weight. There was little indication that he had but three months left to live.

\*

"More than anything, I wanted to be Hank Williams. I even stayed drunk for three years once trying to be like him. But it didn 't work."

– T-Bone Burnette

A PLANNED HONEYMOON IN CUBA WAS POSTPONED because Hank was too drunk. Within a few days he was readmitted to the sanatorium. A filed report noted: "This 30-year-old [sic] man has been admitted for Rx of acute alcoholic intoxication. States he has been on the road for seven weeks playing various stage commitments and has been drinking steadily for the entire period. Complains of chest pains, especially over upper chest regions. States that deep breathing greatly exaggerates pain. Has had almost constant cold and cough for past several weeks. Has taken many kinds of antibiotics in huge quantities."

There were other problems. After the split with Audrey, Hank had moved in with singer Ray Price. Lonesome as hell, he took up with Bobbie Jett, a Nashville secretary. Within weeks she was pregnant. The baby was due around the beginning of January 1953. Though Hank wouldn't admit that he was the father, just two days before he married Billie Jean he signed an agreement that Bobbie would receive various monies. The document began, "In view of the fact that the paternity of said child is in doubt... the said Bobbie W. Jett does hereby release the said Hank Williams from any and all further claims arising out her condition or the birth of the said child." Billie Jean was unhappy with the whole

affair, unhappy, too, that Hank refused to shape up. "I ain't got nothin' but just my guitar and a wife," he confided to a friend. "And I wish to hell I didn't have nothin' but a guitar."

Now and then, he'd turn up to play shows, mainly at honky-tonk joints, which he hated. And when he did appear he was unpredictable. After one stumbling, drunken performance he had to escape his hotel via the tradesmen's entrance and head at full speed for the county line. In Lafayette, he merely stalked on to the stage, yelled, "You paid to see ol' Hank, didn't ya?", then snapped, "Well, you've seen him..." And then he promptly disappeared into the wings.

Fellow performers began describing Hank's appearance as being like the living dead. At one point, he was found in the back of a car, hardly breathing. He was taking morphine, chloral hydrate, dextro-amphetamine sulphate – anything that dulled the pain in his back and the devil that lived in his head. Obtaining drugs was no problem; Doc Marshall gave him blank prescriptions and pointed him in the direction of the nearest pharmacy – a course of treatment one might expect from a man who, before buying his phony doctor's diploma, had done time in San Quentin for armed robbery.

\*

THE OFFICIAL LINE IS THAT HANK'S HEART FINALLY gave out in the back of a Cadillac while en route to play a New Year's night gig in Canton, Ohio. He was alive when he and his 17-year-old driver, Charles Carr, left Knoxville, Tennessee and dead by the time the car reached Oak Hill, West Virginia. For years nobody questioned this particular version of Hank's hardly unexpected demise.

However, a report by highway patrolman Swann Kitts surfaced some years later and cast doubts on the official line. Printed in the *Knoxville Journal*, it alleged that Williams and Carr had caught a plane out of Knoxville on December 31, 1952 but had been forced to return to the airport due to bad weather. Hank, completely drunk, reportedly managed a few words as he was carried to a room in the town's Andrew Johnson Hotel. A Dr Cardwell claims that he was called to the hotel, where he found Hank drunk but still capable of holding some form of conversation. He gave the singer two injections of morphine and B-12. A couple of hours later, Carr and some hotel porters clothed the inert Williams and carried him to his car. The original intention, it seems, was that Hank would spend the night at the Andrew Johnson. An hour later, at 11.45 pm, Carr was given a ticket for speeding by patrolman Kitts, who says: "Carr said he was driving Hank Williams. I noticed Williams and asked if he could be dead, as he was pale and blue-looking. But he said Williams had drunk six bottles of beer and a doctor had given him two injections to help him sleep. He asked me not to wake him up."

Later, investigating Hank's death, Kitts came to the conclusion that the singer must have died at the hotel and, for reasons unknown, his death was covered up until some hours later. Driver Carr denies many points in this story. According to his version, they did stay at the hotel after the plane failed to make the trip to Canton. He also agreed that a doctor attended Williams but did not inject the singer with morphine but merely gave him some vitamins, after which, receiving telephoned orders from somebody unknown, it was decided to push on by car.

It was the version of events that Nashville favoured at the time. Less messy, less likely to cause a decline in Hank's record sales. After all, in the record business, there's life after death. Hank may have only been 29, but there were those around who reckoned he might make it to 50 in terms of sales years.

The Beckley, West Virginia pathologist who examined Hank's body came up with a dream autopsy report. Hank had died of haemorrhages in his heart and neck. There were traces of alcohol in the bloodstream but no evidence of narcotics. The death certificate recorded the cause of death as "acute right ventricular dilation". Drugs? What drugs?

\*

"I said to Honk Williams: How lonely does it get? Hank Williams hasn't answered yet. "  
– Leonard Cohen ('The Tower Of Song')

AFTER THE POST-MORTEM, HANK'S BODY WAS shipped back to Montgomery for a funeral due to take place on Sunday, January 4, 1953. The municipal auditorium was packed. Outside, another 20,000 mourned. Inside, Ernest Tubb, June Carter, Ray Price, Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Little Jimmy Dickens and other stars paid due homage. Jim Denny took a look around and mused to a friend that if Hank could raise the lid of his coffin, he'd take a look around and yell, "I told you dumb sons of bitches I could draw more dead than you could alive!" And, as usual, Hank had got his timing right, his funeral proving almost a promo gig for his most recent hit – 'I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive'. It would prove to be his eighth Number 1.

As Audrey and Billie Jean each attempted to grab their piece of the action, MGM turned over its entire pressing plant to producing Hank Williams records. 'Kaw-Liga' and 'Your Cheatin' Heart' both headed the chart although they were separate sides of the same record. Before they dropped from the listings, 'Take These Chains From My Heart' was on hand to ensure Hank's domination of country music's pole position. In his lifetime, Hank had only issued two albums. His meagre supply of releases was about to create a whole industry, one which would find him singing along to string arrangements, others in which later voices, his son's and his grandson's, would be dubbed alongside his to a Southern rock backing. There'd be a film, with music by Hank Jr and George Hamilton providing an amazingly inaccurate screen portrait of a Hank who performed songs he never actually got around to singing on- stage. And there'd also be a regular supply of tribute albums by George Jones, Ronnie Hawkins, Ray Price and countless others.

An early death ensured Hank Williams legendary status – and legends don't die, they merely guarantee profits for decades to come. Maybe, if Hank had managed to straighten out his ways, he might have continued as a hit machine. Some country stars of the '40s, like Eddy Arnold and, to a lesser extent Webb Pierce, continued their hit- making ways right through the '60s, though most of their contemporaries faded under the onslaught of rock.

But, as a legend he's more valuable: Nashville's answer to Norma Jean and James Dean, a soundtrack for rebels past and those yet to come. When the city launched its Country Music Hall of Fame in 1961, three people were honoured by plaques in that first year – Fred Rose, Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams, the last's inscribed, "Hank Williams September 1923-January 1 1953. Performing artist, songwriter... Hank Williams will live on in the memories of millions of Americans. The simple, beautiful melodies and straightforward plaintive stories in his lyrics, of life as he knew it, will never die. His songs appealed not only to the country music field but brought him great acclaim in the pop music world as well."

From a grave somewhere in Montgomery, came a laugh that swooped into a yodel.

© Fred Dellar, 1998

## 6. Cliff White , “... Howlin’ for the Wolf,” *New Musical Express*, 24 January 1976.

*"I was just a country boy, glad to get some sounds on wax"*

IT WASN'T unexpected; not like the sudden shock when a man is wiped out in his prime by ice on the wings, vomit in the throat, or a wayward bullet; but there was still a sense of irretrievable loss that came with the news of Howlin' Wolf's death.

He'd been ill for a long time now. Overweight and subject to heart attacks, he'd been in and out of hospital since the late sixties and more or less inactive for the last couple of years. Now the news reports tell us it was cancer that finally tipped the scales. It still didn't make it any easier to accept.

More than any other surviving blues singer The Wolf epitomised the uncertain role of his music in today's world. Too forceful a personality and too vital a talent to be written off as an historical curio; far too inflexible to adapt to a changing society; just like the blues, he was in a limbo where all you can do is do what you must.

He didn't start recording until that period in life when many men are past their best, and he reached his own peak long after it was relevant, bringing with him sounds and emotions from an age that most of his contemporaries had left behind. Out of time and rejected by the people of whom he was fiercely proud; startlingly unique yet more a son of heritage than those who sought to find their "roots", the best of his records and live performances were – in fact *are* – souvenirs that time will elevate to their rightful place in black music's history.

\*

A GREAT BEAR of a man, 6 ft. 3 in. and nearly 300 lbs before his illness, he sang like he breakfasted on broken glass washed down with gasoline, yet for all that it was a subtle voice. Not just a raucous shout but an instrument of sorrow, humour, tragedy, joyful boasting... the whole gamut of emotions were at Wolf's command, and it's not generally recognised that he took great pains to tell it like he wanted.

On stage he could be just as industrious, for he liked to give a show, acting out the message of his songs. He'd roll those great hips and stomp up and down, far more involved in his performance than the average bluesmen who seemed resigned to playing a part for posterity. On good nights he was positively athletic, as witnessed by American writer Peter Guralnick:

"He leapt in the air, he rolled on the floor, he cradled the microphone between his legs, he pounded at the posts with a frightening ferocity, and at the end of the evening he lay on his back roaring into the mike and struggling to get to his feet again and again. Each time he would raise himself to a sitting position and then fall back and the whole stage would shudder, until at last he leapt up, towered over us in the front row and announced 'The Wolf Don't Jive'."

All in all he was a giant among mediocrity and we shan't experience his like again.

\*

BORN Chester Arthur Burnett in West Point near Aberdeen, Mississippi on June 10th, 1910, he was raised on a plantation, and, apart from his stint in the army, stayed working the farms in Mississippi and Arkansas until his father's death in the late forties.

During this time he entertained at the juke joints, on the plantations, and occasionally on city streets



"working all night for a fish sandwich, and glad to get it too." Playing the guitar and harmonica he'd been given in his teens (neither of which he ever really mastered) he picked up the songs of men like Charlie Patton ('Saddle My Pony', 'Spoonful', 'Red Rooster') and Tommy Johnson ('I Asked For Water'), two pre-war blues giants who employed many of the mannerisms adopted by Wolf. He also hung around with Sonny Boy Williamson for a while.

In 1948 he settled in West Memphis, put together a band that included Willie Johnson (guitar) and Willie Steel (drums), and got himself a 30 minute singing-cum-advertising spot on radio station KWEM. As with Sonny Boy, King and Rufus Thomas, the broadcasts boosted his reputation and he was quickly snapped up by roving talent scout Ike Turner (now of "... and Tina" fame) who took him to Sam Phillips' studios in Memphis proper (now of "Elvis was here" fame).

This was just before Phillips launched his legendary Sun label, when he was still leasing recordings to companies like Chess in Chicago, who got the first Wolf track 'Saddle My Pony'. At the same time Turner was busily sending masters to R.P.M. in Los Angeles, so they too issued a bunch of early Wolf sides circa 1950. The man himself was not consulted. "I didn't know what was happening. I was just a country boy, glad to get some sounds on wax."

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CHESS finally settled the matter by signing him direct, and after one more session in Memphis in 1951, he moved to Chicago where he was based for the rest of his life and where he recorded all his greatest sides. The Memphis sessions were already extraordinary, particularly the eerie 'Moanin' At Midnight' and a re-worked traditional blues 'How Many More Years', but it was in Chicago that he really came into his own. With a new band, including Hubert Sumlin (guitar) and Hosea Lee Kennard, then later Henry Gray (piano), he began creating some of the most striking music to ever emerge from that city, mainly recorded in two distinct periods, 1954-56 and 1960-62.

The earlier sessions produced most of the tracks that were later used on his first L.P., notably 'Evil', '44', 'I Asked For Water'; and 'I Have A Little Girl' which was included on the *More Real Folk Blues* album. But it was 'Smokestack Lightning' that became the legend. A truly magnificent example of the man's forceful imagery, it gave him one of his only three hits in March 1956, and unbelievably nudged our own charts nearly a decade later, during the so-called R&B boom.

Throughout the second half of the fifties he continued to record quite prolifically, but only 'Mr. Airplane Man', 'The Natches Burning', and 'Tell Me' equalled the power of the early tracks, preceding what were to become the most dynamic two years of his career. The six consecutive releases at the beginning of the sixties are still among the finest Chicago R&B on record. Too late to be successful at home, they were however a vital education for European fans and budding stars who even now are re-working the sounds of 'Spoonful', 'Wang Dang Doodle'/'Back Door Man', 'Down In The Bottom', 'The Red Rooster', 'You'll Be Mine'/'Goin' Down Slow', and 'Just Like I Treat You'/'I Ain't Superstitious'. Nearly all these tracks made up his second L.P., which needs to be reissued *immediately*.

In an attempt to bring him up to date, Chess started recording him with younger bluesman like guitarist Buddy Guy (which was O.K.), and tried to find more commercial material augmented by heavier production using sax (which wasn't). A victim of confused ideas, his recordings slowly deteriorated despite occasional flashes of brilliance like 'Trail Dragger' and 'Killing Floor'. Rock bottom was reached in 1969 when the company did the real dirt on him in the grotesque form of a "psychedelic" album which Wolf dismissed as "birdshit".

Presumably realising the error of their ways, in the last few years they recorded him more sympathetically, and having just about survived the mandatory superstar London sessions, he was heard to good advantage on albums like *Live And Cookin'* and *The Back Door Man*.

By far the best picture of Wolf was given by Peter Guralnick in his book *Portraits In Blues and Rock 'n' Roll* (Dutton, 1971) from which I've extracted the quotes used here. As far as I know, all of Wolf's records are currently deleted, but with All Platinum recently acquiring the Chess catalogue we can only hope that they'll soon put out a worthwhile memorial set, PLEASE NOT in electronically reprocessed stereo. It's only fitting that someone should treat him right now he's gone: He certainly didn't get much respect when he needed it. As he once confided to Guralnick, "I wished it could have been better. Somehow or other though, it just wasn't for me to have the breaks other people have."

© Cliff White, 1976

## **7. David Hajdu, *Early Blues Mamas in Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), pp. 101–103.**

This story, being a tale of American music in the modern era, begins with the blues. As Albert Murray, the great scholar of blues theory, explained to me in a conversation/improvised lecture on the prehistory of rock, "No Bessie, no Basie, no Beatles."

Murray referred first in that alliterative syllogism to Bessie Smith, the singer and cyclonic force who embodied the blues in the mind of the public when the music surfaced as a popular phenomenon in the decade after World War I. The blues, having begun to coalesce as a musical form around the Mississippi Delta in the late nineteenth century, found a national audience in the early 1920s through recordings made by Bessie Smith, Mamie Smith (whose "Crazy Blues," recorded in 1920, was a blues grafted onto a vaudeville novelty song and became a million-selling hit), Ma Rainey (a primary figure in American music, billed during her own lifetime as the "Mother of the Blues," whose rowdy theatricality did not always translate well to record), Alberta Hunter (a witty lyricist and composer of blues for other singers, as well as a vocalist herself), Ethel Waters (who would later become a respected actress on Broadway and film), Ida Cox, Sippie Wallace, and other women. The blues they sang, with lyrics they often but not always wrote themselves, was hard-driving and tough-minded, rawly emotive, sometimes mournful or melancholy but just as often brassily joyful, with a lyrical sophistication that the tone of its back-alley talk belied; the blues was intricately coded, with multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings and allusions decipherable only to the informed. All the most successful blues singers of the music's first blossoming in the national consciousness, all African American and all women, projected, through both their music and their outsized stage personalities, a collective image of black womanhood as a prefeminist ideal of physical prepossession and independence of mind and body. Slinging double and triple entendres to punchy arrangements for small piano-based bands, the "blues queens," as they would come to be known, upended the Tin Pan Alley tropes of women as sweet little objects of male desire.

Bessie Smith was the biggest name among them—"the very sound of the blues to most Americans," in Albert Murray's words. Within a few years of her first recordings for Columbia Records, made in 1923, Smith became nationally famous as the "Empress of the Blues," outranking the mere queens around her. In the segregated South, she gave separate concerts for whites and blacks but played to

full houses of both races. Her signature song, “Tain’t Nobody’s Biz-ness If I Do” (credited on her record to a pair of male pianists, Porter Grainger and Everett Robbins), was a manifesto of womanly self-rule:

If I go to church on Sunday

Then cabaret on Monday

’Taint nobody’s business if I do.

## **8. Peter Guralnick, “Blues in History: A Quick Sketch,” in *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock ‘N’ Roll* (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)**

Blues takes in a lot of territory. If you confess to a liking for it, you open yourself to any number of responses. Oh, Louis Armstrong, someone will say. Bessie Smith. B.B. King. Ten Years After. Any one of them will be correct, because within a fairly narrow framework there exists a real multiplicity of styles. But if it’s *country blues* that you’re talking about, despite all the exposure and attention which have been lavished on the blues in recent years, it’s unlikely that you’re going to be able to make yourself clear. Because, somehow or other, this music, which is the background for all the flourishes and refinements and the underpinning for nearly all of today’s popular music, has been obscured in each new phase of its development. Country blues, which was at first considered too disreputable to record, remains to this day too funky in a pejorative sense to merit serious attention.

Classic blues, it’s true, was recorded first. The first blues to have been put on record seems to have been Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” (1920) and W.C. Handy, Clarence Williams, Perry Bradford all copyrighted and formally “composed” blues for the great women singers (Bessie Smith, Bessie Smith’s mentor Ma Rainey, Clara Smith, Victoria Spivey). These blues were common property long before they were set down on paper, however, and if the recording of the classic blues singers stimulated a new period of growth for the country blues, W.C. Handy himself admitted, “Each one of my blues is based on some old Negro song of the South, some old song that is part of the memories of my childhood and my race. I can tell you the exact song I used as the basis for any one of my blues.”

Instrumental jazz started out as the articulation of that same feeling, an ingenious approximation of the human voice. Certainly it went on to become something quite sophisticated of its own, but listen to Charles Mingus, or Coltrane, or Miles Davis and you’ll hear wordless blues that go back to field hollers and slavery times. Ornette Coleman, the most committed of modernists, worked in countless rhythm and blues bands around Fort Worth; just a few years ago Charles Lloyd was boasting of his association with Howlin’ Wolf twenty years before in West Memphis. Almost no black musician of any prominence will deny his roots or his blues heritage.

There are many popular misconceptions about the blues. For one thing it’s thought to be an intensely personal music. Now, obviously, in certain instances it is. Robert Johnson sings as feelingly and with as direct an emotional thrust as can be imagined. Skip James was a unique and idiosyncratic stylist. Robert Pete Williams today invents blues which are free to the point of occasional anarchy. These are exceptions, however, to the general rule. For blues, like business, baseball, and other American inventions, is a highly conservative institution. Its structure is rigid, its lyrics derivative, and there is little place in its canon for oddness or eccentricity. “Don’t pester me with your jazz or your how high the moon spodee-do. I don’t play nothin’ but blues,” says Howlin’ Wolf. And for most musicians that just about covers it. Blues is a twelve-bar structure, three-line verse, the words rhyme and most frequently derive from a common pool of lyrics or “floating verses.” To Furry Lewis the most

important thing is to rhyme the verses up. "It got to be rhymed up if you call yourself being with the blues. If it ain't rhymed up it don't sound good to me or nobody else." Each singer has his own individual way of expressing himself, but there is a common thread of ideas as well as lyrics which enables almost any blues player to sit in with any other, and some of the most notable collaborations on record have been the result of chance studio meetings which would not have been possible in any other music.

We thought of blues, when we first took it up, as protest music. This, too, seems a vast misconception, even though much of the literature on the subject continues to see it as a reflection of sociological conditions and a commentary on the black man's lot. Most blues unfortunately don't even deal with the subject, and, unless passing references and veiled allusions can be said to constitute a body of protest music, blues is for the most part singularly free of even the most casual reference to these conditions.

Lightnin' Hopkins, it's true, could deal with such considerations quite explicitly in "Tim Moore's Farm." Whether this derived from personal experience or, as is more likely (from the evidence of Johnny Shines's brilliant "Mr. Tim Green's Farm" and numerous Texas versions), from a commonly shared folk tradition, there is no question that it was deeply felt and sharply observed:

Now Mr. Tim  
Moore's a man He  
don't never stand and  
grin  
He just say, keep out of the  
graveyard I'll save you from  
the pen.

Skip James, too, dealt with uncharacteristic bluntness with the Depression in "Hard Time Killing

Floor Blues": Now the people all drifting  
From door to door  
Can't find no heaven, I don't care where they go.

There are other songs that might be cited, but they are, really, isolated instances and blues for the most part confines itself to a very restricted range of subjects: women and whiskey but rarely social conditions; sexual but never political innuendo.

Blues as poetry. That was another well-intentioned romance on our part. There are blues singers, it is true, who might be considered poets. Robert Johnson, for instance, chooses his images with sufficient care to bear repetition on the printed page. Johnny Shines, too, employs often startling imagery, and the explicit autobiography of Sleepy John Estes (or on a more instinctive level Robert Pete Williams) is at its best a vivid, strikingly "poetic" document. Most blues, however, consist of no more than a series of unrelated verses strung together at random, and for most blues singers the words are of only secondary importance. Skip James, for example, as intimate and personal a singer as he is, fails to put a distinctive stamp on most of the blues *lyrics* that he sings. Singers like Howlin' Wolf and Elmore James and even Muddy Waters seem to care scarcely at all for the words that they are singing. What meaning there is they convey not through words but through feeling and intonation. Elmore James sounds constantly on the edge of hysteria. Wolf suggests menace with his magnificently expressive voice. It's not that what they sing is trivial exactly. It's just that it does not entirely reflect what they

are singing about.

What almost every blues does possess is a shared feeling for love and loss. Wit and irony, paradox, a metaphorical reclamation of reality—these are the property of nearly every blues singer. In this sense the blues might be considered poetry, but it is the tradition, not the individual blues singer, which is the poet. Lines like “Did you ever dream lucky, wake up cold in hand?” “They arrest me for forgery but I can’t sign my name,” “You can read my letter but you sure can’t read my mind/Well, you thought I was loving but I was leaving you all the time,” and phrases like “laughing just to keep from crying,” “easy rider” and “old-time used-to-be” show up in song after song, and the grimly ironic personification of the blues (“Good morning, blues, blues how do you do?”) tells a story as true as any individual invention.

What is blues then? Well, it’s a lot easier to keep on saying what blues is not. It isn’t necessarily sad music. It doesn’t tell a story. It neither makes nor alludes to minor chords. It is for the most part self-accompanied. It follows certain basic progressions (I-IV-V-IV-I or tonic, subdominant, dominant chord patterns). It is not a music of particular technical accomplishment. In the end you come back to the familiar conundrum; if you have to ask, well then you’re just not going to understand. Because blues after all is little more than a feeling. And what could be more durable or more fleeting and ephemeral than just that? ....

## II

Muddy is one of the few blues singers who has made it. He plays jazz clubs and the college circuit and has established a white audience which, if it is not as large as B.B. King’s, is certainly just as loyal. When blues was the popular music of blacks he was a popular artist, and he has been driving a Cadillac for years. Around Chicago his name is legend (like B.B., Elmore James, Wolf, and even Junior Wells he has his own imitator, Muddy Jr., currently working the clubs), his influence has been almost universally acknowledged, and in the last ten years he has gained something of the international status of a Louis Armstrong in jazz or a Ray Charles or James Brown in contemporary rhythm and blues.

And yet his life is not so different from the average and less successful bluesman’s. He doesn’t have a jet or a retinue of personal retainers. He owns his own home, but it remains in the heart of Chicago’s South Side in a section that’s been steadily deteriorating for the last ten years. Inside the walls are all panelled and there are plastic slipcovers on sofa and chairs, but there’s no way of shutting out the street outside and a recurrent topic of conversation is the decline of the neighbourhood and the decline of the South Side in general. His neighbours all refer to him with respect; to the livery driver across the street “I guess he’s the king of the blues.” But it’s said with a deprecatory chuckle and until very recently his dominion, for a monarch, was exceedingly small. For years he played the dingy neighbourhood joints and bars and even at the height of his popularity he was working seven nights a week in clubs like Smitty’s, Pepper’s, and Gary’s F&J Lounge, with occasional forays into the South. It wasn’t until his first trip to England in 1958 that he became aware of a larger audience, and he still expresses honest amazement at the extent of his success. “I went up to Montreal,” he told a Chicago newspaper reporter. “There were men and women of all ages [in the audience]. Some of them was older than me. I look at them and I say, What the hell is this thing? What is going on?”

He is subject in many ways, too, to the limitations of the world in which he grew up. Lacking any real education, he has developed a kind of wariness both in his personal manner and in his professional dealings. Without ever showing any open hostility he retains an inscrutable look and a

cautiousness of expression which protects him from committing himself too quickly. He never says more than he means, and even in conversation with friends he seems to maintain a guarded watchfulness and will take the listener's part more often than not.

He is the same up on the bandstand. He hasn't got any act, he avoids elaborate announcements, and he will rarely resort to theatrical gesture or false histrionics. He presents a song straightforwardly, gets what he wants from the band by a word or a glance from his hooded eyes, and both in public and in private always carries himself with an enormous dignity. He is, it is obvious, an extremely proud man, and sometimes it is not difficult to imagine that the titles which have been bestowed upon him for his singing were not in fact his by earlier possession. For Muddy Waters carries himself with all the dignity of a king.

V

What is it that can have contributed to his extraordinary success up to that point? Johnny Shines, Elmore James, Homesick James, Robert Jr. Lockwood, all were playing and singing in a style that was similar to Muddy's. The blues of Robert Johnson had in fact turned out to be as influential and as popular as any previously existing style. But Muddy Waters alone turned that style into a vehicle for personal popularity, and fifteen years later it is Muddy Waters alone who retains any wide personal following.

"It was sex," says twenty-seven-year-old Marshall Chess, whose father, Leonard, discovered Muddy. "If you had ever seen Muddy then, the effect he had on women. Because blues, you know, has always been a women's market. On Saturday night they'd be lined up ten deep."

"He had that drive," says Marshall's uncle Phil, who started the Aristocrat label with his brother. "A guy like Johnny Shines? He was a run-of-the-mill singer. But Muddy had that drive."

"I like to think I could really master a stage," says Muddy. "I think I was a pretty good stage personality, and I knew how to present myself right. No, I never developed an act of any kind. I just had a natural feel for it."

Undoubtedly all of the above statements are true. More than any other blues singer I've ever met Muddy is single-minded in his purpose and can channel all his impressive energy towards a single highly specific end. He is, in addition, of course, an exceptionally creative musician, whose compositions and recordings over the years have been as remarkable for their consistency as for their brilliance. But more than anything else what seems to me the key to Muddy Waters's success has been his ability to organize and maintain a succession of bands which have almost perfectly reflected the very personal kind of music which he plays. Virtually alone Muddy Waters developed the ensemble style of play which has come to characterize the omnipresent school of Chicago blues.

When he started out he was, of course, accompanied by only one or two other instruments, and he continues to express a preference for this kind of music. "I think I done it right, man. I was playing blues like I knowed them, and all that bass player have to do was follow." He prefers, too, the "true sound" of the acoustic guitar and would, he says, if he had the choice, return to playing as a solo performer. But it was necessary in order to be heard in the noisy clubs and taverns of Chicago to take up an amplified instrument. And it was necessary, to achieve any kind of success in the big-band-oriented rhythm and blues market, to put together some kind of group.

This was not as easy as it might at first appear. Because for one thing the blues is not exactly a formal

music with regular time signatures and predictable chord changes. For another, working with a group posed some very real conflicts in presentation and style. “See, my blues is not as easy to play as some people think they are. ’Cause here, this is it, I may have thirteen beats in some song, and the average man, he not used to that kind of thing. He got to follow me, not himself, because I make the blues different. Do that change thing when I change, just the way I feel, that’s the way it went. I mean, you take that song, ‘Just to Be With You.’ Now that’s a good blues tune, and I made it just the way I felt, sometimes I play thirteen, sometimes I play fourteen beats. And I got just about as good time in the blues as anyone.” ....

Discography:

*Mississippi Moaners, Lonesome Road Blues, Tex-Arkana-Louisiana Country, and Frank Stokes’ Dream* (Yazoo 1009, 1038, 1004, 1008) *The Blues: A Smithsonian Collection of Classic Blues Singers* (Smithsonian 101)

*Blues Masters* series (Rhino 71121–71135) Muddy Waters:

*The Complete Plantation Recordings* (Chess 9344).

*Muddy Waters: His Best 1947–1955* and *1956–1964* (Chess 9370, 9380).

*The Aristocrat of the Blues* (Chess 9387).

## **9. David Hajdu, *Jump Blues in Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), pp. 107–109.**

Big-band swing—lively and fun, a social art meant for public use by teams of young men and women, produced mostly by large ensembles—was not sustainable in wartime. By the end of World War II, the big-band craze had faded, a victim of the decline in the dating population, the heavying of the national mood, and the resultant shutdown of dance halls and ballrooms (accelerated in 1944 by a battering federal excise tax of 30 percent, later lowered to 20 percent, on venues providing food, drink, and dancing). But a strain of swing survived in a musically stripped-down, lyrically juiced-up form called jump music or jump blues. Some people called it rhythm music or simply rhythm or used the broader term “rhythm and blues” in reference to it.

Performed by small groups, nearly all of them African American at first, jump blues was rawer than big-band swing, harder driving and more brazenly sexy. The music rarely ventured far from standard blues patterns, and the lyrics were mostly slangy celebrations of the pleasures of gin, reefer, and other sources of taboo kicks. Sex was never far from the lyrical content, even when the words were about dressing up or chowing down or finding a dance partner. After all, dancing, in popular music, is always code for sex—not that jump music had much patience for the genteel niceties of innuendo. It hardly took much poetic imagination to pick up the meaning in the image of “a one-eyed cat peepin’ in a seafood store” in Big Joe Turner’s record of “Shake, Rattle, and Roll.” In jump blues, as in the blues historically, there was never any doubt that to slip and slide, to shake and rattle, to rock and roll, meant to have sex. And the music itself—insistent, ecstatic, throbbing, pounding—sounded, if not like sex in all the varied possibilities of eros, like the having of a good fuck. That the music was also elementally African American, suggesting nothing other than black sex—or, by vicarious extension to nonblack listeners, sex between blacks and whites—made it all the more



titillating to the music's fans and terrifying to its detractors.

A gleefully exuberant, charismatic singer and alto saxophonist from the Chick Webb Orchestra, Louis Jordan, formed a small jump combo of his own, named the Tympany Five for the attention-grabbing drum that provided visual novelty and little else to the band, and recorded a succession of lighthearted but hard-swinging tunes that exalted in the having of good times: "Let the Good Times Roll," "Ain't Nobody Here but Us Chickens," "Choo Choo Ch'Boogie," and "Caldonia," a hit for both Jordan and the trumpeter/bandleader Erskine Hawkins (co-composer of "Tuxedo Junction") in 1945, which *Billboard* magazine described as "rock and roll." Jordan, in his prime as a jump blues star, was among the most popular entertainers in America. He recorded duets with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and Bing Crosby and was a role model for young would-be musicians such as Chuck Berry, who learned the electric guitar riff that opened the Jordan record "Ain't That Just Like a Woman" and used it as the musical signature of "Johnny B. Goode," "Roll Over, Beethoven," and the many variations thereof that Berry recorded. "The first time I heard [that riff] was in one of [the guitarist] Carl Hogan's riffs in Louis Jordan's band. Ain't nothing new under the sun," Berry would later recall.

"To my recollection, Louis Jordan was the first [person] that I heard play rock and roll," Berry said. "I identify myself with Louis Jordan more than any other artist."

In the last years of World War II and the period immediately following the war's end, when the GIs who did not die returned home with the horrors of battle in their bones, jump music, in its exuberance and licentiousness, seemed at odds with the national narrative of sober maturity and self-sacrifice. It did not help the music's reputation for it to be closely associated with an emerging phenomenon that social scientists and the press were calling juvenile delinquency. That is to say, the music's bad reputation boosted its growing image as the sound of youth rebellion and nonconformity, the background score to the drive-in movie image of gangs of wayward teenagers rumbling in high-school parking lots.

## **10. Cliff White, "Louis Jordan," *The History of Rock*, 1982**

The King of Jive Who Made The Good Times Roll

IF BILL HALEY AND ELVIS PRESLEY have to be dubbed the father and king of rock'n'roll, then Louis Jordan must be considered its godfather. Practically all of the black American rhythm and blues, rock'n'roll and early soul stars who upset the Fifties have cited Jordan as the main man of their youth and several of the white rock'n'rollers have acknowledged his influence or recorded his songs. Certain elements of rock'n'roll were developing even before Jordan appeared on the scene and others cropped up after his heyday. But most were completely and successfully defined by Jordan.

In much the same way that James Brown stood out from the Sixties soul scene to inspire and influence the Seventies generation of new funk stars, Louis Jordan exemplified the crystallizing core of urban rhythm and blues music which was to be the major force in the emergence of rock'n'roll in the Fifties and beyond.

Born in Brinkley, Arkansas, on 8 July 1908, Louis Thomas Jordan was the son of an itinerant musician who encouraged his boy's interest in music by coaching him on clarinet and saxophone and introducing him to the world of the then-popular traveling minstrel shows. During the school vacations of his early teens, Louis was already performing as musicians and dancer in southern minstrel shows, notably with the famous Rabbit Foot Minstrels and reputedly with the equally renowned Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, commonly remembered as 'The Mother of the Blues'. Coming out of down-home roots with a vaudeville swagger, the minstrel shows were a rich source of both music

and showmanship. These elements were encapsulated by Jordan and then greatly exaggerated by rock'n'roll.

From such earthy foundations, Louis Jordan graduated to full-time professional gigs with several hot jazz and swing ensembles, before securing a plum job in 1936 at the Savoy ballroom in New York as alto-ist and occasional singer with Chick Webb's band. Jordan enjoyed over two years of contributing to and learning from the band at its peak of popularity, before striking out with his own group in 1938 shortly before Webb's premature death the following year.

### **Birth of the Tympany Five**

Jordan originally called his group the Elks Rendezvous Band after the New York nightspot where he first established a reputation for boisterous showmanship. Before he'd even begun to take off, however, he'd quickly redubbed his accompanists the Tympany Five, a name that stuck until 1954 despite numerous personnel changes and fluctuations in size.

For most of that time the group consisted of one or two trumpeters and tenor saxmen, one of them usually doubling on clarinet, plus a pianist/organist, bassist and drummer. All shouted asides and choruses behind Jordan shuckin' and jivin' upfront on vocals, alto and occasionally tenor sax and much athletic looning about; high-kicks were a specialty. In 1945 he added a regular electric guitar player to the line-up, in 1949 a couple of extra trumpeters and in 1951 he briefly toured and recorded with a 15-piece big band before completely stepping out of character for one session in 1953 with the Nelson Riddle Orchestra. But it was the compact horn and rhythm section format that was Jordan's métier: tightly-knit arrangements for 'jumping' musicians, most notably including keyboard players Wild Bill Davis and Bill Doggett.

Jordan's early recordings in his own right were often light and lively variations of the current swing sound. But he was also performing and recording a fair amount of straight blues material and, by 1941, had begun to develop a fuller, more forthright sound than his immediate predecessors and contemporaries by accentuating the shuffle rhythms of boogie-woogie in his repertoire.

### **King of the Harlem Hit Parade**

In the early Forties he scored the first of an amazing run of hits in the jukebox 'Race' charts, then newly-created by American trade magazine *Billboard*. As Arnold Shaw noted in his authoritative survey of the pre-rock'n'roll era, *Honkers and Shouters* (Collier Books, 1978):

"For almost a decade after 1942, Jordan's records were seldom off the Harlem Hit Parade, as black charts were then typed in *Billboard*. Not infrequently he monopolized a majority of the slots with three or four discs, placing no fewer than 11 recordings in the best-selling category in 1946. That he was able to sell over a million copies of 'Choo Choo Ch'Boogie' and close to that of 'Saturday Night Fish Fry' suggests the breadth of his appeal. You could not sell that many discs in the years from 1946 to 1950 to black buyers alone. Even when he was not selling a million, his 1944 discs of 'GI Jive' and 'Is You Is Or You Ain't My Baby' were pop jukebox as well as 'race' hits. And 'Is You Is' was heard in no fewer than four Hollywood films."

During his heyday in the mid-Forties to early-Fifties, Jordan was not just the most popular and influential black artist among black audiences, he was perhaps the first to take an early combination

of some of the roots music that made up rock'n'roll to a substantial white audience.

On the one hand he was a popularist, an irrepressible extrovert and showman with a disarming fund of humor, jive talk and appealingly novel songs. As he himself admitted: "I wanted to play for the people, for millions, not just a few hep cats." At the same time he was a more than capable singer and saxman with a knack for picking fine accompanists; beneath the jive, too, he dealt with the musical and social themes of everyday black America.

### **Radio and jukebox promotion**

At least three other factors contributed to his success and influence. Firstly, unlike the majority of wartime/postwar rhythm and blues artist who shaped rock'n'roll, Jordan was signed to a relatively large record company, Decca. By the peak of his career in the immediate postwar years, this would not necessarily have been an advantage: the late- Forties rise of the 'indies' against the establishment's conservatism was one of the keys that released rock'n'roll. But in the early part of his recording career it could only have helped, for although Decca was then barely a major company it had a lot more national influence with radio stations, jukebox operators and promoters than did any local label. Of all the major record companies, Decca probably had the most progressive musical outlook.

Secondly, once it became apparent that Louis was a hot property, there seems to have been an unprecedented amount of what is now called 'marketing and promotion' effort put behind him (unprecedented, that is, for a raunchy black artist). Jordan and his Tympany Five were solid-booked throughout America in the Forties into every conceivable type of venue, from ghetto theatres to white supper clubs. Furthermore, between 1942 and 1947 he reportedly appeared in about 20 film shorts and four or five full-length movies, many of the former titled after and promoting his hit records. He was also able to make several important radio broadcasts and even appeared in an early Ed Sullivan television show in 1949, seven years before Elvis caused a ruckus in the same slot.

It is to Louis Jordan's credit that his music did not suffer during those hectic years. On the contrary, with increased success his records became consistently stronger. Many were rock'n'roll in all but name, notably the immortal 'Caldonia' (1945), 'Ain't That Just Like A Woman', the aforementioned 'Choo Choo Ch'Boogie (1946) and the 1949 classic 'Beans And Cornbread'.

Responsible for the overall sound and release of these and other hits was the third important 'other factor' in Jordan's success and influence: one Milt Gabler, Decca A&R man and producer of virtually all of Jordan's Decca recordings.

### **The 'positively negative' approach**

As far as Jordan's success goes, Gabler's assistance towards it might be termed a 'positively negative' approach, in that he appears to have had the rare good judgement to try to coax the best out of Louis without attempting to influence his style. Jordan said: "One good thing I had in my life [was] that the people who associated themselves with me let me portray *my* talent. Milt Gabler of Decca: he's one of the main fellows in my life. If we were recording a tune and I said, 'I would like to do it this way,' he never said, 'No, don't do it that way.'"

Within three months of Jordan's last session for Decca in January 1954, Gabler found himself in

charge of the company's newest recruits, Billy Haley and the Comets. From their first session came 'Rock Around The Clock' soon followed by 'Shake, Rattle And Roll' and a string of hits nearly as long as Jordan's and somewhat greater in total sales, Gabler explained how he worked with Haley:

"We'd begin with Jordan's shuffle rhythm ... you know, dotted eighth notes and sixteenths, and we'd build on it. I'd sing Jordan's riffs to the group that would be picked up by the electric guitars and tenor sax [man] Rudy Pompilli. They got a sound that had the drive of the Tympany Five and the colour of country and western."

### **Jordan's musical offspring.**

Apart from Haley and the Comets, the most obvious of Jordan's offspring were the sax-led jump blues combos and gusty singers – the 'honkers' and 'shouters' of Arnold Shaw's survey – that included artists like Wynonie Harris, Roy Brown and to some extent Fats Domino, and culminated in the extremes of Little Richard and Screamin' Jay Hawkins. Louis Jordan's influence also passed through rock'n'roll to the blues and soul of singers like Ray Charles and James Brown.

Less apparent, perhaps, in musical terms is that Jordan was even a marginal influence on the Memphis and Chicago-based blues scenes. B.B. King and Muddy Waters both cite Jordan as an early inspiration and more directly relevant to rock'n'roll, so do Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry. The latter once went so far as to say: "I identify myself with Louis Jordan more than any other artist. I have a lot of flighty things like Louis had, comical things and natural things and not too heavy."

Finally it should be noted that even at the centre of rockabilly – Sam Phillips' Sun studio – Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis both recorded versions of Jordan's hits; meanwhile in Britain, long before Tommy Steele appeared, while Lonnie Donegan was still emerging as king of skiffle, Ray Ellington regularly performed Louis' brand of prototype rock'n'roll on the weekly *Goon Show*.

Alas, the man himself didn't greatly benefit from the evolution of his music: during the vital years between DJ Alan Freed promoting rhythm and blues as rock'n'roll and the music's international break-out, Louis was off the road and out of the running, stricken with exhaustion and ill-health, and a little too dated by then to compete with his brash, young successors.

### **Hard gigging and fast living**

Judging by the themes of many of his records, in his formative and prime years Jordan was as wild offstage as on. But a couple of decades of hard gigging and fast living took their toll and he was forced to settle into a more sedate way of life, although not, by all accounts, much less energetic on stage – just appearing far less often.

He soon proved he hadn't totally burned himself out with some splendidly vigorous re-cuts of his hits for Mercury in 1956 and continued to perform and record intermittently for a further 20 years, including a tour of England in 1962, recordings for Ray Charles' Tangerine label during 1963-64 and a lively session in Paris in 1973.

In the years immediately before Louis Jordan died of pneumonia in Los Angeles of 4 February 1975, the British pub-rock scene saw many a group reviving his material. Indeed, his music returned to the charts in mid-1981 when new wave vocalist Joe Jackson covered several of Jordan's compositions on an album entitled *Jumpin' Jive*. It is probable that in any week of any year, somebody somewhere is

performing 'Caldonia', 'Choo Choo Ch'Boogie', 'Let The Good Times Roll' or some other hardy perennial from Louis' irrepressible repertoire.

© Cliff White, 1982

## **11. Dave Headlam, "Appropriations of blues and gospel in popular music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. by Allan Moore (Cambridge University Press, 2002)**

Appropriations of blues and gospel – taking musical and textual elements and recombining them in new contexts – is a topic bound up with issues of race, identity, culture, and social and economic class, as well as music history and theory. Viewed benignly, such appropriations are part of the inevitable evolution of musical styles and cultural values, both within societies and between classes and races. In a broader view, however, they are emblematic of the exploitation found throughout history in encounters between groups of peoples. In the United States, black musical expressions in blues and gospel have been appropriated by the recording industry for the mass white audience throughout the twentieth century, in a tension between music as identity and culture and music as mass-marketed, profitable diversion. Of the many aspects to the role of blues and gospel in U.S. society, I am concerned here with their contexts within the legacy of slavery, and the appropriation of musical elements by other genres. How do blues and gospel songs give rise to styles – rhythm and blues, rock'n'roll, doo-wop, rock, heavy metal, soul, funk, disco, rap, ska, reggae, pop-gospel, contemporary Christian, and others – which continue to dominate all forms of media today?

... In most writings, r&r is described as a crossover style – one that crosses over from one core audience to another to create a new, larger audience – emerging from a fusion of elements in music of the time:

- 1) country and western (c&w) music, known earlier as "hillbilly" and "folk" music, and generally associated with a lower-class southern and western segment of the white population;
- 2) the popular or "pop" style of mainstream white singers and Tin Pan Alley style tunes, associated with a mass white audience and;
- 3) rhythm and blues (r&b) styles, labeled "race" music before 1949 and associated with a black audience.

The defining features of these categories are racial, regional, social, and economic: reference points are positions on the Billboard charts, a changing set of sales lists used by the music industry. However, r&r, c&w, pop, and r&b are interrelated, catchall terms for varied musical styles that feature interaction between white and black musical elements and which change over time. What distinguishes r&r is its economic impact, influence on subsequent musical styles, the social changes it reflected and fostered in relations between whites and blacks, and the large audience it created, which mark it as a music of crossover, fusion, and appropriation. ...

### **Blues to 1950s r&b and r&r**

In the 1940s, many blues-related music forms, categorized now as r&b, echoed city life, where the faster pace, electrified instruments, and an urban audience and setting prompted a wide variety of

blues-derived styles. The recordings of this music generally come from small, independent record labels, as the big labels stayed with white pop. Most of the styles of r&b were based on blues forms, the twelve-bar format and variants, but in regularized, speeded-up versions, often with added “stop time” verses, where the entire ensemble would stop abruptly, leaving the singer to articulate a compelling lyric solo. Branches of swing jazz and ensemble blues-influenced music called “jump” and “shout” blues emerged, with main figures Louis Jordan, Joe Turner, Roy Brown, Lloyd Price, Wynonie Harris, and Fats Domino. Jordan, a singer and saxophone player, was known for his “jive” or jump styles, in a small jazz-style combo with witty lyrical *doubles entendres* that combined urban sophistication with down home references (e.g., “Saturday Night Fish Fry”). Jordan’s style was altered in songs like Roy Brown and Wynonie Harris’ versions of “Good Rockin’ Tonight” (late 1940s) where the boogie shuffle rhythm is augmented by the “rockin’” gospel-influenced, emphasized backbeat “2 and 4” style characteristic of r&r.

At the same time, up-tempo, electrified updates of country blues songs emerged, with Elmore James doing updated, boogie-rocking versions (with prominent electric guitar) of Robert Johnson songs like “Dust My Broom,” and Muddy Waters transforming country blues elements in Chicago with an evolving small combo eventually adding harmonica and blues piano to guitar, bass, and drums. In the small group format, more emphasis was given to the rhythmic elements and a defined beat in faster tempos; the twelve-bar blues form and variants with “stop time” recitative-like vocal breaks were, as with jump blues, standardized as the basic framework. The electric guitar gained in influence and not only replaced the saxophone but spawned its own unique forms: in Detroit, John Lee Hooker’s solo guitar and voice song, “Boogie Chillun” (1948), maintains only the outlines of the blues form within its mostly riff and drone basis.

By the early 1950s, the transformation from blues to varying styles of boogie and rockin’ r&b and electric blues was complete. It had a strong following in the black community but there was also some crossover interest as a young white audience responded to black r&b vocal group and solo styles. These events occurred, however, at a time when black performers were not allowed into clubs unless they were on stage and were generally ripped-off in their contracts, while whites and blacks could not even appear on the same stage or dance together in public venues in the South (although mixing and influence occurred in private or smaller settings). But DJ Allan Freed noted that white teenagers were buying r&b records in Cleveland in the early 1950s, so he applied the term “rock’n’roll” to a wide variety of the music to give the songs a non-stereotyped identity, with the new audience oblivious to the connotations of “rockin’ and rollin’” or “rollin’ and tumblin’” or any one of many sexual metaphors.<sup>3</sup> With the incentive of selling records to the emerging teenage baby-boom generation, the search was on for the right mix of appropriated elements and ways around the racial problem of convincing a mass audience of whites to buy black music. While appropriations of black music had been an established practice from ragtime at the turn of the century, the economic and youthful population factors in the 1950s dramatically increased the pace.

The centers for music most involved in the appropriations of blues elements in the 1950s were Chicago, Memphis, and New Orleans.<sup>4</sup> In Chicago, electric blues recordings on the Chess and Vee-Jay labels, among others, featured Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Little Walter, and Willie Dixon. Chess recordings epitomized the vocal, lyric, and small ensemble aspects of the transformed blues, where the roles of Dixon as performer, composer, producer, and arranger added the type of studio production familiar from pop music. The other side of music at Chess was the

r&b and r&r of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. Diddley's pioneering style of rhythm guitar playing was highly influential in Britain in the 1960s, but he never achieved the chart success of Berry. Diddley attributed his own music to the "Shout," an antecedent to gospel; his characteristic "Bo Diddley rhythm" ("shave and a haircut, two bits") has been variously related to sources ranging from Cuban clavé to ragtime Habañera. For white audiences, it was just a good beat for dancing; for Diddley, however, bitter about money, r&b was "rip-off and bullshit."<sup>5</sup>

In Memphis, B. B. King, Bobby Bland, and Junior Parker were among the blues performers, who were often from Mississippi, recording and performing in the late 1940s and 1950s at mixed race venues like the Palace Theatre. White record producer Sam Phillips exploited the local social mix by recording r&b and c&w by Ike Turner, Howlin' Wolf, Earl Hooker, and Rosco Gordon, and selling masters to labels like Chess. Phillips noted the increased buying activity around r&b, formed his own label, Sun records, and recorded Rufus Thomas among others, but, famously wanted to find a white performer who could sing in an authentic black r&b style. That singer was Elvis Presley. While not the first to combine black and white elements – Frankie Laine (1947 "That's My Desire") and Johnnie Ray (1951, "Cry") are often cited as earlier white singers who sounded "black," and "hillbilly boogie" songs had appeared from 1945 (the Delmore Brothers "Hillbilly Boogie") – his early exposure to church gospel, the personal quality in his voice with its rebel tone and gospel grain, and his charismatic persona helped launch him as a superstar who generated a mass white audience.<sup>6</sup> Other similar white performers were Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison, who all recorded at Sun Studios, and later Buddy Holly from Texas.

The third center for r&r was New Orleans, where, in the 1950s, Fats Domino and Little Richard emerged to represent two sides of black music and performers. Domino was presented as a non-threatening figure in the tradition of minstrel shows: a good time dance machine for white audiences. Working with white producer Dave Bartholomew, and session players like drummer Earl Palmer, Domino reworked Professor Longhair's (Henry Roeland "Roy" Byrd) traditional New Orleans piano style of rollicking gumbo boogie blues and high triplets to become one of the best-selling 1950s r&b and/or r&r artists. Little Richard, as discussed above, built on a long tradition of showmanship from vaudeville to influence musicians ranging from Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney to James Brown, George Clinton and Prince. That Richard turned to the church in 1958 revealed the gospel influences on his vocal style.

The sheer variety evident in lists of the "first" r&r songs indicate the extent of the crossover and fusion at the time.<sup>7</sup> "Rocket 88" by Jackie Brenston with Ike Turner, recorded in Memphis in 1951, is often cited in this context, and features a compendium of r&r-style elements in its lyrics, performance, and instrumentation. But the true economic impact of r&r came from white covers. A significant appropriation of the early 1950s was Bill Haley's cover of "Shake Rattle and Roll," originally by Joe Turner. Turner, from Kansas City, was a blues shouter who appeared with pianist Pete Johnson in one of the "Spirituals to Swing" concerts at Carnegie Hall (1938), and whose songs are quintessential turnings of r&b into proto-r&r expressions. In "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," based on an unwavering twelve-bar blues form, a boogie acoustic bass is doubled by the piano left hand under continuous right-hand piano licks, saxophones and electric guitar, and drums slapping the snare on beats 2 and 4. The bass is still mostly walking in a jazz style, but adds some characteristic rock'n'roll rhythms under syncopated accompaniment figures. Over a saxophone counterpoint in verses 3 and 7, Turner shows his vocal prowess: the power in the high register with a quick vibrato, particularly on the word



“Devil.” The text contains lots of sexual innuendo, of the “one-eyed cat peeping in a seafood store” variety, mostly too salty for a wide release.

Bill Haley, following earlier c&w crossover figures Jimmie Rodgers, who sang “blue yodels,” and Hank Williams, a r&r forerunner, converted his western swing group into an r&b cover band, the “Comets.” Haley’s adaptation of “Shake, Rattle, and Roll,” from 1954, is in a faster tempo, with the prominent guitar and saxophones playing short, rockin’ riffs in call-and-response answers to the vocal phrases, a typical blues effect missing from the Turner version. The series of four solos ends with the famous fourth solo: electric guitar in a proto-Chuck Berry style with the virtuosic descending scale in quadruple plucking. Although the bass, now electric, still walks in a jazz-derived style, it also combines with the saxophones in the quintessential rock’n’roll rhythm. The lighter tone of the voice, the greater use of the guitar and more filling in the higher-register space, along with the faster tempo gives Haley’s version a lighter, r&r sound compared to the heavier, lower-tessitura Turner recording, and the text, altered but not completely devoid of *doubles entendres*, loses its meaning in the new context. ...<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

3. Freed and other DJs themselves appropriated black DJ styles. See George (1988).
4. Los Angeles was also somewhat prominent with Roy Milton, Joe Liggins, T-Bone Walker, Johnny Otis, Charles Brown, and many record labels.
5. Booklet from Bo Diddley, *The Chess Box*, MCA Records, 1990, and Diddley’s interview in *The Rolling Stone Interviews: The 1980s*, pp. 181–90.
7. Dawson and Propes (1992)
8. Haley’s “Rock Around the Clock” has come to represent the 1950s by its use in movies of the time like *Blackboard Jungle*, and the later George Lucas movie *American Graffiti* and associations with the TV show *Happy Days*. As with the white Original Dixieland Jazz Band, however, most listeners had no idea of the appropriations involved. Belz (1972: 33–8) and Clarke (1995: 382) note Haley’s sixty U.S. chart hits in seven years. Friedlander (1996: 39) adds that “approximately twenty-five major movies were devoted to the subject of rock and roll,” including Chuck Berry in *Rock, Rock, Rock*, *Mr. Rock and Roll*, and *Go Johnny Go* and Little Richard in *Don’t Knock the Rock* and *The Girl Can’t Help it*.

## 12. Sylvie Simmons, “THE CARTER FAMILY: INTO THE VALLEY,’ *MOJO*, November 2002

FIRST KILL YOUR HOG. SKIN IT, singe off the hairs and leave the hide to soften. Tug it over a round frame, whittle out a neck, "and there's your banjo", says Roni Stoneman.

"The five-string banjo is the only American instrument. The black people brought the four-string banjo, but the five-stringer and the clawhammer style came from the mountains." Roni, elderly Southern belle and professional banjo player, is one of the 15 of Ernest 'Pops' Stoneman's 23 children who made it to adulthood. "A lot of people made their own instruments. There wasn't much money around, but there was plenty of music in these here mountains, way before 1927. You just played for each other, for the frolics when the chores were done on Saturday night."

The Appalachians, they say, are the world's oldest mountains, and Clinch Mountain the oldest peak. On one side of the river running along the bottom lies Poor Valley – its land, presumably, less fertile than Rich Valley on the other side. Right now, in the sweltering, humid Virginia summer, it's lush and verdant, its hills perfectly green and rolling like a Teletubbies set, with the odd wooden shack decomposing here and there. The tiny, rickety log cabin in Poor Valley where A.P. Carter and his seven siblings were born and raised is still standing – just. Soon it will be moved and restored alongside the Carter museum a mile up the road they've renamed the A.P. Carter Highway. It was a dirt road back in 1927 when A.P. packed his wife Sara – together with his brother's 18-year-old, eight-months- pregnant wife Maybelle, Sara's baby, an eight-year-old daughter to babysit, Sara's autoharp and Maybelle's Stella guitar – into a borrowed car and made the day-long, 26-mile drive to Bristol for what Maybelle's future son-in-law Johnny Cash would describe as "the single most important event in the history of country music".

In the summer of '27, Ralph Peer, a 35-year-old record executive and 'race' music specialist from New York spent 12 days in a disused hat warehouse on State Street in Bristol, which straddles the Tennessee/Virginia border. There he recorded 76 sides by 19 different acts, including minister Ernest Phipps & His Holiness Quartet and Blind Alfred Reed, and bands with names like the West Virginia Coon Hunters and the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers. Plus Ernest Stoneman, who had recorded 'The Sinking Of The Titanic' for Peer three years earlier, and "which was selling like hot-cakes", says Roni's big sister Patsy. It was Stoneman's idea to come to the mountains on a talent search, since the mountains sure weren't going to come to New York. But it was two acts recorded during the second week that made the Bristol Sessions legendary. A yodelling, tuberculoid railwayman from Meridian, Mississippi named Jimmie Rodgers, and a trio from the mountains, The Carter Family.

There had been country records by many other names – "mountain music", "old-time music", "rural monologue with violin specialty"; Peer was the first to use the "hillbilly" tag – before Bristol's 'big band'. In 1923 Peer had recorded what's accepted as the first country record, Fiddlin' John Carson's 'Little Old Log Cabin In The Lane'. He thought it "pluperfect awful", hating the shoddy sound of the primitive acoustic recording. And there had been others since – Stoneman; Dock Boggs; Uncle Dave Macon; Vernon Dalhart's million-selling 'Wreck Of The Old '97'. But by advertising for musicians locally and taking the "recording laboratory" to them – something made possible by the very recent invention of electric recording – Peer had not only given the country music *business* a kick-start, he'd also snared 'The Father Of Country Music' (Rodgers) and 'Country's First Family' (Carters) – the country equivalent of Father, Mother, Son and Holy Ghost.

All country music since can be traced back to the Carters' sober, stoic songs about church, family and hardship or Rodgers' insouciant numbers about rambling, law-breaking and women; the Carters' vision of the simple, rural home or Rodgers' America of wide-open spaces and glittering rails; Rodgers' yodel and his appropriation/adaptation of the blues and the Carters' harmonies and appropriation/adaptation of traditional ballads and hymns (*and* black spirituals and blues; it would take a team of musicologists working around the clock to untangle the complex black-and-white, church-and-secular roots. Both took these borrowed and invented musical elements and shaped them into a sound distinctly their own, creating songs ('Will The Circle Be Unbroken', 'Wildwood Flower', 'Lovesick Blues') that became country standards.

Bob Dylan is a huge Rodgers fan, but the day he met Johnny Cash the first thing he asked was, "Have you met A.P. Carter?" Alvin Pleasant Delaney Carter was born in 1891 on the Methodist side of the mountain. The Methodists didn't hold too much with singing, "except in the church", says his

daughter Janette, and certainly not with "frolicking" (still don't; an old banjo player performing at the Carter Fold's 75th anniversary show ordered dancers to sit down during a lively spiritual). "They called the fiddle the 'devil's box'," says Roni Stoneman. A.P. could play fiddle but refused to do it on record. He was taciturn, imaginative, taken to wandering, and his hands and voice shook since childhood with the palsy – his mother blamed a lightning storm when she was pregnant. It was a fine voice, though; he sang bass in the church and at his uncle's singing school. Always restless (his jobs included carpenter, farmer, foundryman, sawmill operator and storekeeper) he'd come back home from working the railroad to be a fruit-tree salesman. Heading over Clinch Mountain, on foot, with his catalogue, to Copper Creek – a day's walk – he heard a 16-year-old girl singing in a bold, distinctive voice a ballad called 'Engine 143', about a local engine driver who burned to death. He fell in love.

Sara Dougherty's nickname was Jake; she carried herself with the self-possession of a man. Musician/musicologist Mike Seeger, who met her, talks of her "regal" bearing. "She was a proud lady," says her son Joe, now in his seventies, "and carried herself like one, but she could shoot a gun and smoked these old Wings cigarettes." Sara's mother died when Sara was three, and she was sent to an aunt and uncle in Rich Valley, on the Baptist side of the mountain – the dancing side. "She danced real good," says Joe's elder sister Janette Carter. Sara also played banjo, autoharp and guitar, and liked the way A.P. sang. Nevertheless, she made him make the day-long walk over the mountain – two ridges, a river, six creeks – for a year before agreeing to marry him in 1915. They moved to a two-room cabin with an earth floor, and worked together cutting timber for the paper mills, sometimes performing together at 'conventions', where people from the county got together and sang, usually spirituals. Sara's voice was said to have moved people so much they'd press money into her hands.

Sara's young cousin Maybelle would come by and play – she too played autoharp and banjo, until at 13 her brothers bought her a guitar from a mail-order catalogue. She developed the rhythmic style they call the "Carter scratch", picking out the melody on the bass string with the thumb and brushing the chords on the high strings. In 1926, aged 16, she eloped to Bristol with A.P.'s younger brother. Eck had well-paid work as a mail clerk on the railroad, and was the first person in the valley to own a car. When A.P. pleaded to borrow it – *and* Eck's wife – to try out as recording artists, he was less than enthusiastic. Joe: "Daddy had to agree to hoe the weeds out of Eck's corn patch for him for two days afore he'd agree,"

A.P. had seen an ad in the Bristol newspaper: "The Victor Co. will have a recording machine in Bristol for 10 days beginning Monday to record records." Peer was paying \$50 a side for whatever he recorded. Sara – who'd had experience with talent-scouts; A.P. brought one home from one of his frequent trips and he'd turned them down because only 'race' records had female lead singers – pooh-poohed the idea: "Ain't nobody gonna pay us that much money to hear us sing." Then a few days later a story appeared with the even more tempting information that Stoneman's records had earned him a then-enormous \$3,500 the previous year. The journey through the foothills, over rocky roads and fording the River, was an ordeal in the stifling heat. The thin tyres frequently burst; the puncture-patches melted. They stayed at A.P.'s sister's, whose husband also planned to audition, and the next day, in their Sunday best, joined the crowd outside the warehouse.

Peer's first impressions of the Carters weren't good. "The women are country women from way back there – calico clothes on. The children look like hillbillies." And baby Joe was screaming to be fed. But when he heard them perform, he invited them straight back to record – upstairs, where the walls

were buffered with quilts, a microphone hung from the ceiling, and a scaffold with a complex system of pulleys and weights powered the turntable, rural electricity being highly unreliable. The Carters went home \$300 richer.

By October, 11 of the Bristol groups had records out on the 'New Orthoponic Victor Southern Series', but not the Carters. Peer too had reservations about female leads, and was somewhat perturbed by A.P.'s way of leaving a song mid-way and wandering about. "He just sang every now and then," Janette wrote in her book *Living With Memories*. "He would walk to and fro, even on stage. He drove my mother and Maybelle up a wall!" A.P. didn't even show up for the second session. "Someone said to him, 'You don't do much, do you?'" says Seeger, "and he said, 'No, I just bass in sometimes.' But he didn't just come in whimsically. I've listened to those recordings closely, taught their harmonies in folk music camps, and if you try singing bass in places where he didn't it doesn't work. What A.P. did on those songs was quite ingenious, very different from the harmony singing of the time, Sara too. They crossed parts, something you think of as very modern, and did unisons, which people in those days didn't like to do at all. And Maybelle's musicianship was amazing."

'The Poor Orphan Child' finally appeared in November, selling 100,000. Peer, who offered to manage them, invited them to New Jersey to record more. He said to bring as many new songs as they could find, and they came with a variety – "English" (traditional) songs, hymns, scaffold songs, murder ballads, work songs, parlour songs, vaudeville numbers from the "ballets" (song sheets) sold at the travelling tent shows, and all sorts of amalgams. They'd ask neighbours and friends, and piece songs together like Chinese whispers.

"A.P.," says The Handsome Family's Rennie Sparks, "is probably single-handedly responsible for saving many ancient folk songs that otherwise might have drifted off into the ether. At the same time they had that understanding that simple melodies and simple stories of everyday life can hold within them moments of pure transcendent magic. You could write a book about 'Wildwood Flower' and talk about the strains of medieval poetry, the beautiful guitar work, the soft and simple harmonies. But mostly, I think about how the simple act of twining flowers into your hair can heal a broken heart."

With his third of the royalty cheques, A.P. bought a red Chevrolet. He used it to ferry his sow across his land to the stud pig and to tow home the sawmills he became addicted to buying. He also used it for the band's 'tours' – usually regional churches and schools; 25 cent tickets and a sign declaring "The Program Is Morally Good". During 1928-9 their record sales were second only to Jimmie Rodgers, but their approach remained far more homespun. (The contrasts were highlighted on the odd 'skit' record the Carters and Rodgers made together in 1931.) Sara bought a motorbike with her share, Maybelle a top-of-the-range Gibson arch-top L5 guitar, which she played the rest of her life, but it didn't even occur to them to give up work.

As the growing record industry demanded more product, A.P. took off in his Chevy to look for songs. Often he took along Lesley Riddle, a one-legged black blues musician he'd seen playing in nearby Kingsport and invited home;

A.P. wasn't much for social norms. "My mother bought him his first leg," recalls Joe. "He could play really good."

A.P. had problems remembering melodies, so Riddle would memorise them and teach them to Maybelle and Sara when they got back (he tried teaching A.P. guitar, but failed). Problems only arose at night-time – the strangers who put A.P. up drew the line at accommodating a black man.

It was his father's frequent absences, Joe surmises, that caused his mother to go. "He just left her for quite a long time and didn't think of his obligations." One time he left his young cousin, Coy Bayes, to help with the chores. Coy and Sara fell in love. Coy's parents, stepping in, moved the family to California, claiming the climate was better for Coy's siblings – they suffered from TB, the disease that killed Rodgers in 1933. When Coy left the Valley, Sara did too, moving back to her aunt and uncle's at Copper Creek.

A few weeks later, Peer summoned them to record for new label The American Record Company. Sara refused, but with the Depression biting and money hard to come by, she relented. Her departure hadn't helped A.P.'s fierce, Old Testament moodiness, and the 1934 sessions included songs pointedly about an errant wife. After their divorce in '36 they carried on recording, now for upstart new label Decca.

These sessions were some of their best, but sales were poor. There was little spare cash around for records. Even Pops Stoneman was back working in a factory. Then the group were offered a residency at one of the big new radio stations on the Mexican border that circumvented US laws about the wattage power of regional stations. These 'super transmitters' broadcast nationwide. And just as local bar-owners had worked out that music helped them sell drinks, the businessmen who owned the stations knew bands could help them sell their products on a grander scale. Consolidated Royal Chemical Corporation of Chicago gave them a massive \$4,000 apiece to move to Texas and play two shows a day at XERA for six months. Listeners could send in CRCCC bottle-tops for a free Bible signed by the Carters.

"Imagine how powerful it must have been to hear The Carter Family on the radio and think, This is my music, this is speaking to me, then go out and buy the record and hear it again, at a time when records were so new," says Gillian Welch. XERA increased the group's national acclaim. Listeners included Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams (who would later fall for Maybelle's youngest daughter, Anita – as would Elvis), Johnny Cash (who would marry Maybelle's daughter June) and Coy Bayes. He heard the love song 'Sara' dedicated to him, drove to Texas and married her. Janette says the wedding broke her father's heart. The radio station thought so too; they said his forlorn voice was upsetting the listeners and sent him home. Sara and Maybelle finished the shows alone.

They returned for another season – this time with Maybelle's young daughters playing – but when XERA closed down in the early '40s, so pretty much did The Carter Family. After a final session (for Victor again) in 1943, Sara went back to the California trailer park where she lived with Coy, and A.P. went home to the mountains. While 'Mother Maybelle' continued to perform with the 'Carter Sisters' – Eck, who had retired, became their manager, hiring Chet Atkins on second guitar – A.P. went back to carpentry. He built homes for his children and a general store for himself that, typically, he only opened when he felt like it. It's now the Carter Museum, part of the Carter Fold, the weekly, old-time music acoustic venue that Janette set up to fulfil her father's dying wish to "keep the music alive". A.P. died in 1960, a few weeks before a large royalty cheque arrived for The Kingston Trio's hit recording of his 'Worried Man Blues'.

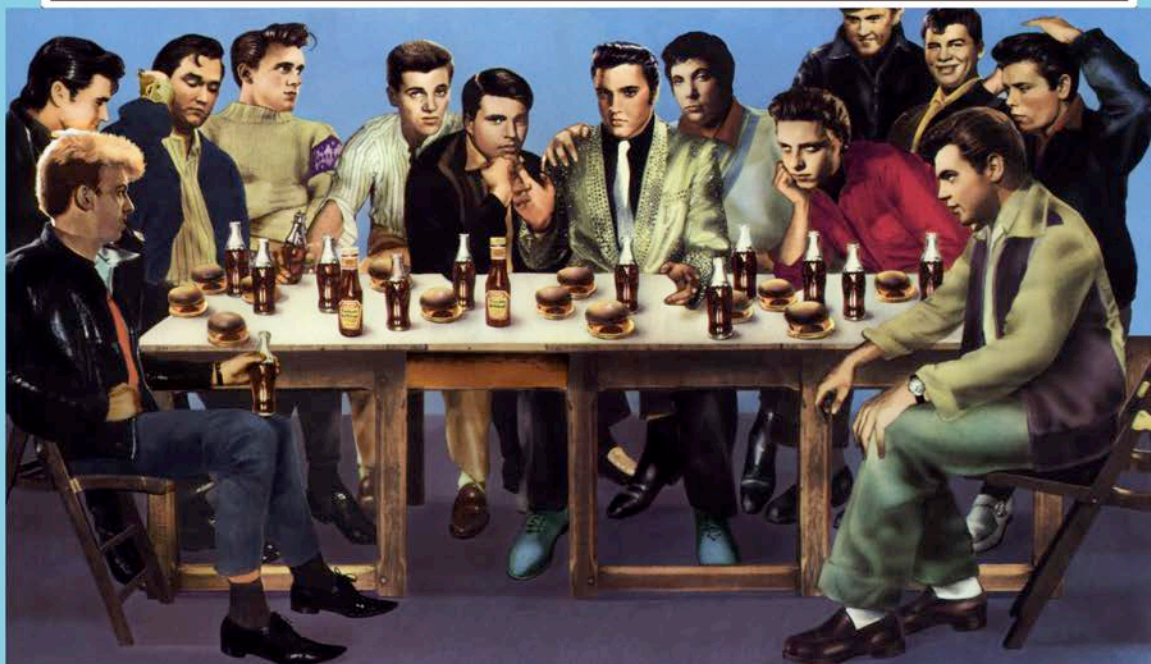
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## CHAPTER TWO

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# The 1950s: Rock'n'Roll Begins, Doo-Wop, & the Rock business



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## **1. Peter Guralnick, Introduction, *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'N' Roll* (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)**

Like nearly everyone I knew I was unsure how to react to rock 'n' roll. I was twelve when Elvis scored his first success, and he wasn't much older. The excitement, the exhilaration, the novelty of that moment is something it would be impossible to recapture.

"Hail, hail, rock 'n' roll/Deliver us from the days of old." Rock 'n' roll did deliver us from the days of old in more ways than it could ever know. Its energy was explosive. It introduced us to a culture whose existence we had never previously suspected. It served as a vehicle for vague proletarian yearnings. It confirmed to us our own reality.

Looking back on it from the vantage point of the present it seems hard to believe we ever lived through an era in which values were so circumscribed and distinctions so sharp. But those were the boundaries of our world. It was a world in which "crazy mixed-up kids" was a household word and dirty boogying an act of social defiance.

I don't mean to dwell on the era, because I don't know too much about it. Pegged pants and ducktail haircuts, raised collars and switchblades: these seem like familiar landmarks, but I don't know that they're anything more than the nostalgic by-products of an era. Growing up in it you don't imagine that what is going on around you can be of any great importance; afterwards nearly everything seems of equally momentous significance. From the viewpoint of the present, though, it seems to me that the overwhelming feeling my friends and I shared was that we must be doing something terribly wrong. We measured ourselves against the judgement of our elders and believed what they told us even when it rang false to our own experience. There were at that time certain immutable standards, and if they said that rock 'n' roll was a passing fad, like swing and Frank Sinatra, it seemed unimaginable that it was not.

That's why our first reaction was necessarily so ambiguous. There was, at least among my acquaintances, not the faintest suspicion of any Woodstock nation, not the least idea that there was anyone even remotely resembling us out there. We believed pretty much what we were told, though we sensed that it was wrong. Harry Belafonte had a hit with "Day-O" and calypso had supplanted rock 'n' roll. The next year it was Pat Boone with a clean-cut ballad or two, and the year after that by Time's report thrill-crazed youth had gone on a gospel kick which would never actually materialize. When the treacle period of the late fifties and early sixties engulfed us we recited the familiar litany, by now grown stale from repetition: Elvis in the Army, Buddy Holly dead, Little Richard in the ministry, Jerry Lee Lewis in disgrace and Chuck Berry in jail. We mourned the passing of our youth, but took it as our due. It was this, I think, as much as anything else that contributed to the considerable staying power of our culture: that we were not overburdened with self-righteousness.

The great thing about it, in the beginning at least, was that there seemed to be no one in control. It was our music in more than just name not because it represented some kind of pure aesthetic (rock 'n' roll has always been the most commercial of musics) but because it was for the most part beneath the contempt of those who were marketing it.

Almost by accident it sprang out of an industry that was only beginning to discover itself, and as a result it grew up free and unencumbered, its success not only uninstrutive but actually counter to good business methods.

“Like all great folk artists,” read the liner notes of the first Lightnin’ Hopkins album I ever bought, “like Ives, Lightnin’ Hopkins improvises easily.” To the record producers teenagers had just about the same status as blacks thirty years earlier and just about the same appeal, too. They represented a huge but totally unpredictable market subject to whims of taste and fancy no sane person could sensibly predict. “In selecting the songs for this new album,” boasted the liner notes to Little Richard’s second LP for Specialty, “Little Richard tried to top his first album... [and] included some unreleased material especially for his fans’ parents who still may not ‘dig the beat.’ He feels that if they’ll only listen to songs they remember like ‘Baby Face’ and ‘By the Light of the Silvery Moon’ done up in the Little Richard style, they’ll enjoy this new album, too!”

With advocacy like this who could blame us for a certain schizophrenia of our own? The first time I heard Little Richard’s “Tutti Frutti” was on the car radio on the way to school.

A-wop bop a lu bop a lop bam boom Tutti frutti, oh rooty  
Tutti frutti, oh rooty

it burst out at us. Our first reaction, I think, was one of chagrin. Somebody’s father was driving, and he expressed our discomfort before we could ourselves. What command of the English language, he said, and switched stations. We all laughed self-consciously because it was, after all, our fault.

Jackie Wilson’s “Lonely Teardrops,” The Diamonds’ “Little Darling,” The Platters, The Penguins, The G Clefs all met with similar reactions. We didn’t know what to make of this new music for the simple reason that we had never been exposed to anything like it before. Our first encounter with Elvis Presley was no different.

You ain’t nothin’ but a hound dog Crying all the time.  
You ain’t nothing but a hound dog Crying all the time.  
You ain’t never caught a rabbit, and you ain’t no friend of mine.

Even the irony of a male singer voicing these sentiments escaped us at the time. What do you think of Elvis Presley? was the first business of social exchange, and your answer defined you politically, morally, sociologically. It was a little like asking a ten-year-old if he liked girls. You gave the answer you were expected to give—a sour look, a turned-up nose. You conformed to type.

Obviously mine is a very limited experience. Not everyone reacted with the same ambiguousness, and rock ‘n’ roll appealed from the first to a huge audience which immediately claimed it for its own. I think that my experience was not isolated, however, because, whatever your outlook at that time, for all the youthful gestures of rebellion, you expected some day to take your place in adult society. You were aware of growing pains and stages that you were going through, and what doubts you had could be smoothed over by the certainty of the future and the reassurances of your elders. If rock ‘n’ roll had had no other value it would have been enough merely to dent the smug middle-class consciousness of that time and throw into confusion some of the deadening rigidity of that world.

For that was what it unmistakably did. To keep a comb in your back pocket was both a declaration of independence and an expression of political solidarity. Here we were, irretrievably middle-class, but what were we doing then in our baby blue jeans, our collars turned up, and torturing our hair into modified DAs? We went to the Big Beat shows, and if we did not we bitterly resented having listened to our parents’ warnings and the humdrum security of our lives. We hung out on

streetcorners and swaggered into the House of Pizza, got thrown out of bowling alleys and movie theatres and buses, picked fights we could never win.

What I think was happening quite clearly was the convergence of two warring cultures. Just as James Dean and Marlon Brando came to represent our unarticulated hurt, just as it was *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Stranger* that gave us our literary heroes—existential ciphers that refused to speak when spoken to—rock 'n' roll provided us with a release and a justification that we had never dreamt of.

The very outrageousness of its poses, the swaggering sexuality, the violence which the radio of that day laid at its door, its forbidden and corrupting influence—that was the unfailing attractiveness of rock 'n' roll. The hysteria of its terms, the absurdity of its appeal—Fats Domino bumping a piano offstage with his belly; Little Richard's outlandish screams and “jungle rhythms”; Jerry Lee Lewis's vocal gymnastics and theatrical virtuosity; Elvis's very presence and Carl Perkins's “Get off of my blue suede shoes”; with Chuck Berry all the while merrily warning, “Roll over

Beethoven”—how could we deny it entrance into our lives? The ease with which you could offend the adult world, the sanctimoniousness of public figures and the turnabout that came with success (“Presley will never appear on my show,” said Ed Sullivan, shortly before Elvis's series of \$50,000 appearances), above all the clear line of demarcation between us and them made it impossible for us to turn our backs and ignore this new phenomenon. So from the first we were hooked. We were addicts without even knowing it. ....

## **2. Albin J. Zak III, “Writing Records: Rock and Roll,” *The Poetics of Rock* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2012)**

The tape recorder saw its most rapid development in Germany in the 1930s. After the war, returning GIs brought these machines home with them, and sound recording in the United States gained a flexibility and convenience far surpassing what disc recorders could offer. Again, although the main motivating force for technological change was the spoken word—in this case, Nazi propaganda—the results were eagerly embraced by those involved with recording music. One of the techniques improved and facilitated by tape recorders was overdubbing, an additive process whereby successive performances are combined or overlaid with one another within the unitary time frame represented by a disc or a piece of magnetic tape, creating the illusion of an ensemble performance. Overdubbing was used from the early 1930s on in film, but the only medium available at the time was the lacquer disc, on which sound quality quickly diminished with successive transfers. Thus the use of overdubbing for recording music was rare, a novelty, like the Bechet recordings. For Les Paul, however, overdubbing seemed like a great opportunity to singlehandedly build records layer by layer, and he set out to find ways of improving the sound quality and increasing the number of possible overdubs. Although he had no formal training as an engineer, Paul was a tireless and creative experimenter, and working in his garage, he managed eventually to devise equipment modifications and recording techniques that allowed him an unprecedented number of overdubs. Using his own disc-cutting lathe made from a Cadillac flywheel, Paul made records containing many more generations of disc transfers without serious degradation than had previously been thought possible. According to his son, Gene, he accomplished this by recording the least important parts of the arrangement first and by minimizing his use of microphones, using them only toward the end of the layering process. Plugging his electric

guitar directly into the recording console eliminated the accumulation of successive layers of room and microphone noise, while saving the most important musical elements for last meant that they would retain the greatest clarity. His breakthrough hit came in 1947: a recording of Rodgers and Hart's "Lover" arranged for eight guitars, all of which he played himself.

Paul acquired a tape recorder in 1948—a gift from Bing Crosby, who in 1947 at Paul's urging had begun taping his weekly radio show (and whose Crosby Enterprises had subsequently become the worldwide distributor of Ampex tape recorders). Paul immediately saw in the recorder an opportunity to record even more overdubs with greater fidelity. This was, however, a difficult proposition. The machine had only one track, and each new recording pass had to be laid over the existing material—rather than simply combining the two, as in the disc method—so that a mistake meant starting the whole process over from the beginning. Paul and his wife and partner, Mary Ford, rose to the challenge—"It made us real pros," he boasted later—and in 1950 they made a recording that contained twelve overdubs. The recording was an intricate arrangement of "How High the Moon," with all parts recorded by Paul and Ford. They followed the same reverse order they had become accustomed to, Ford singing her least important harmony parts first and saving the lead for last. Released on March 26, 1951, it reached the number one spot on *The Hit Parade* in less than a month.

Bruce Swedien, a recording engineer and record producer who has worked for almost half a century with recording artists ranging from Fritz Reiner's Chicago Symphony to Michael Jackson, points to "How High the Moon" as the "one record [that] changed pop music forever. . . . There wasn't a shred of reality in it—and it was wonderful." For Swedien, the record "broke through like a shining light," and it dawned on him that "it was no longer necessary to present popular music in concertlike form." Now a record could take its own form, which would develop in the course of the recording process. In Paul's efforts we see and hear the beginnings of the oral/ literate fusion in the field of conventional music making. Indeed, Paul did not use any musical notation for his elaborate arrangements. He relied instead on oral modes of music making—a combination of memory and improvisation—to create a unique work represented by inscriptions in the iron oxide particles of the magnetic tape. As recording moved away from the "reality" of "concertlike form," the process and its end result became very different from they had been. The process became one of deliberate composition, and its product, an original musical work.

From our vantage point it is easy to appreciate both the technical and the conceptual importance of Paul's innovations for rock recording. In time, they would constitute its normative procedure. But at first his work had little direct impact on rock and roll, an emerging idiom that was drawing from sources far from the centers of cosmopolitan pop, New York and Los Angeles. Though the style in which he and Ford worked was still popular with an older audience, teenagers now had a music of their own and money to spend, and differences of musical style became celebrated in part as markers of generational difference. For his part, Paul, like many other established popular artists, seems to have neither liked nor understood the new music, which he considered inept at best. On the other hand, most musicians and producers associated with what came to be called rock and roll had little interest in constructing recordings systematically. Rock and roll emerged as an eclectic, unruly mixture of various musical styles and idioms—blues, R&B, gospel, country, jazz. And in all of these, records were conceived not as works but as snapshots of live performances.

Even if rock and roll had its roots in live performance traditions, it was nevertheless, and unlike any of its precursors, first and foremost a recorded music. Its rapid rise in popularity was a result not of

live performances but of mass radio exposure, which was fed by records—primarily the new and affordable 45-rpm singles that were the staple of teenagers' record collections. Because of their affordable price, their accessibility, and the sheer numbers of customers, rock singles had a commercial potential that was unprecedented in the music business. A hit single, one song, could turn an unknown musician into a celebrity almost overnight even if, like Elvis Presley he or she had had little or no experience or exposure as a live performer. Records were the life blood of the music, spinning over the air on the radio and showing up in stores and on juke boxes from coast to coast, and their power to generate fame and wealth held an irresistible attraction for musicians and businessmen alike.

Many writers have pointed to this emphasis on records as a key element in the constellation of rock's distinguishing features. As early as 1969, in one of the first historical accounts of rock, Carl Belz made the "fundamental assumption . . . that rock has existed primarily on records. . . . Records were the music's initial medium." While Belz acknowledged that rock was not the first musical idiom to "use records and radio, it was the first to express itself primarily through these . . . media [emphasis in original]." Moreover, with rock, "records became the primary, common bond among artists and listeners." Assuming this to be self-evident, Charlie Gillett's *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll*, which was first published in 1970, goes about telling the story almost entirely in terms of records, weaving together the workings of art and commerce as strands in a single multidimensional cultural process. Writing in the 1980s, Peter Wicke argued, again, that rock "was the first form of music to be distributed in mass quantities on record"; that it "found its basic conditions of existence" in records and in the mass media of "radio, television, and film."; and that it "accepted this fact without compromise as a prerequisite for artistic creativity." The case has been made most recently, and most comprehensively, by Theodore Gracyk, who writes that rock "is essentially dependent on recording technology for its inception and dissemination." For no matter how much or how little electronic mediation is involved in the recording process, it is through records that "artists *announce* and *stipulate* new works."

With the performer's actual presence becoming secondary—at least chronologically—to his or her disembodied sonic presence emanating from loudspeakers, recordings began to take on a different sort of identity. The "artistic creativity" that Wicke refers to went into the creation of a recorded voice. With this change of attitude, recording moved almost inevitably from a process of collecting, preserving, and disseminating to one of making. The aesthetic criterion shifted from the sound of the actual performance to the sound of the recording. When Sam Phillips wanted to audition Elvis Presley, he did not simply want to hear him sing. He left that to guitarist Scottie Moore. It was only after Moore had determined that Presley had "good timing" and "a good voice" that Phillips invited Elvis to his studio to "see what he sound[ed] like coming back off of tape." Presley's recorded voice was to be the central character in a dramatic production, and what concerned Phillips was the transmutation of the young singer's physical presence into an electronic persona.

While the verb "to record" can have a passive sense to it, meaning something like "to register," "to archive," or "to document—all implying the preservation of something that already exists—rock and roll records do not simply capture and make portable an image of a performance. Presenting a transparent representation of some natural acoustic reality was never the point. Records were meant to be distinctive worlds of musical sound with the power to make their way into the consciousness of a mass audience, and the record-making process was a matter of building those worlds. Still, the aesthetic terms inherited from its precursors—especially the expressive spontaneity of unedited performances—stood as guiding principles. In the sessions that he ran at his own Memphis

Recording Service, Sam Phillips was quite conscious of making records. He was willing to use electronic distortion and artificial echo to create distinctive sounds, and he was willing to control the relative levels among the musical parts at his mixing console, but he didn't use the kind of layered construction process that Les Paul did. Rather, he aimed to create a unique sonic setting for a real-time performance that was in itself somehow extraordinary. Recordists in general strive to "bottle lightning," as Quincy Jones puts it, to capture the energy released in the recording process and to use it to imbue the record with a life of its own. In early rock, although the focus was on making records, it was the tradition of live performing that served as the model for producing the "lightning" required to cut the grooves.

Les Paul's success with overdubbing led eventually to the development of multitrack tape machines and recording techniques. In 1954, pleased with the results of his and Ford's efforts but not with the cumbersome recording process, Paul became involved in the development of a machine that would record eight separate parallel tracks on a single piece of tape. He commissioned Ampex—whose engineers had already come up with seven-track flight data recorders for airplanes—to build it, and by 1957 he had the first fully operational Ampex Model 300-8 in his Mahwah, New Jersey, home. One of the chief obstacles the Ampex engineers had to overcome was the time delay between recording and playback that resulted from the gap between the machine's record and playback heads. The delay made synchronized recording with a previously recorded track impossible. They solved the problem by devising a method whereby a single head could provide both record and playback functions simultaneously. With this machine, which Paul dubbed "the Octopus," recording gained an unprecedented degree of control over individual elements. Overdubbing no longer involved real-time mixing with preexisting material; rather, each overdub could be stored separately on its own track and the accumulated tracks mixed together at some later time, when decisions could be reconsidered and further sound processing and balance refinements could take place.

Thus the technology of 1957 already allowed for twice the number of tracks used to create the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* a decade later. *Sgt. Pepper's* is considered a watershed in rock recording in part because of its elaborate multitrack composition. After the mid-sixties, the demand grew for recorders and tape formulations with more and more tracks. Four became eight, became twelve, then sixteen, twenty-four, and so on. But during the first decade of its existence, the possibilities of multitrack recording remained mostly unexplored. Resistance to the new technology ranged from musicians' fears of being put out of work to the machine's \$11,000 price tag and added tape noise. But most importantly there seems to have been a general consensus that the kind of piecemeal recording that Paul and Ford had mastered would diminish the vitality of music making. The only record label to acquire and use the machine extensively in the 1950s as a tool for enhancing record production was the fledgling Atlantic Records, where chief engineer Tom Dowd became one of the first to master the new machine. But the enhancements were in the realm, of balance control and sonic clarity, rather than compositional method. Separate tracks were dedicated to each instrumental section and overdubbing was available as a production convenience; but the focus at Atlantic, as at all other labels, remained on capturing the dynamic energy of complete performances. "It all had to do with capturing the spontaneity of the moment," recalled songwriter and producer Mike Leiber, for in this there "was an interaction that was irreplaceable."

Rock recordists' initial indifference to the eight-track machine is instructive, for it tells us something about their sense of what the artistic project was all about. Although sound recording was used as a creative medium and performances were treated to various kinds of sonic manipulations that altered the sense of literal representation, the musical energy released in the "spontaneity of the moment" was

at the heart of things. To put it another way, while

the rock and roll records of the 1950s were not simply documentary snapshots, neither were they analytic constructs on a par with "How High the Moon." While multitrack recording would eventually be valued as a boon to the artistic process, at first it seemed like a violation of the expressive line. Also, the sensibilities of rock and roll recordists were influenced by the practices that they knew from the various musics they had grown up with and their previous experiences with recording. Bruce Swedien recorded the Chicago Symphony. Sam Phillips recorded early sides by Howlin' Wolf and B. B. King. The Chess brothers in Chicago and the Ertegunns in New York recorded R&B and jazz. In none of these musics was there a precedent for putting the recorded artifact before the live performance. But rock and roll was a nascent thing, and the spirit of exploration was in the air. "Every time engineers went into the studio, we were feeling our way, trying to find out what rock and roll was," recalls Stan Ross, the owner of Gold Star Sound Studios in Hollywood, which was to be the home of Phil Spector's "wall of sound." Thus, even while early rock shared some of the same ideological tensions as other musical idioms about the intrusion of technology into the musical moment, focusing on records made for a greater willingness to experiment with the medium and the process.

Over time, as it became clear to many that multitracking in itself need not diminish the passion of musical performance, recording practices became increasingly elaborate. In fact, the more performers focused on making records, the more aware they became that their performance had to be extraordinary, for the traces that they left on the tape would forever be the persona of the record. The development of the methodical multitrack techniques pioneered by Les Paul, however, represented an increase in the analytic detail of the compositional process rather than a conceptual shift. For although the aesthetic of live musical interaction so prevalent in early rock and roll recording had little place for piecemeal overdubbing, the practice of combining multiple sonic images into a single composite was always part of the recording process. If recordings from the fifties and early sixties are rarely multitrack, almost all are multi-channel. The multichannel mixing console provided several discrete inputs, which could be fed by different sound sources, including separate microphones, added ambience, and tape echo effects. These were combined at the console using its controls. Although the performance was live, the relationships that defined the configuration of the recording were controlled electronically at the console.

The electronic shaping of the performance ensemble's sound represents the other half of the record-making process—what George Martin calls "building musical images." While musicians leave the traces of their emotions, experiences, and the sounds of their musical expression on tape, the composite sound image that we recognize as the musical work is fashioned by recording engineers and producers—"performers" in their own right. They are the musicians' artistic collaborators, and their actions and aesthetic choices, too, are represented in the form of the finished work. Microphones are chosen and placed, balances are set, frequency content is shaped, performances are coached, coaxed, coerced—these are a few of the many techniques used to fashion the sound world of the recording. As such, these techniques generate musical content and are thus elements of compositional craft with their own language and rhetorical practices. Using both technical skill and aesthetic sense, engineers and producers participate in forging the connections that draw together a recording's three principal elements: musical parts (song and arrangement), performances, and sounds. ...

### 3. Bill Millar, "Leiber and Stoller : The Blues (1950-1953) & The Rock 'n' Roll Years," *Let It Rock*, May 1974

JERRY LEIBER AND MIKE STOLLER. They rank alongside Berry as rock 'n' roll's wittiest composers and their influence as record producers has been immeasurable.

As writers they were the first to bring satire and a social conscience to rock; as producers they ushered out the simplicity of an era in which groups were pulled off the streets to "doo-wop" and "doo-wah" into a microphone for three minutes. From these primitive beginnings to monaural overdubbing, the very first eight-track studios and on into the realms of the technological future-shock, Leiber and Stoller have directed all the phases of post-war record production. All this we know and even take for granted.

Their story begins, however, around 1950 when rock 'n' roll was unknown and its tributaries had not long been defined. When rock exploded, Stoller was going band and Leiber was an ageing hipster. It's been said that they wrote "*at* the culture", evidence for which stems as much from the way they looked – bandwagoning shrewdies both as anything their compositions might reveal. Certainly, in the beginning, there was a desperately genuine if not always successful desire to involve themselves in black music one hundred per cent. As many as six years before Presley recorded 'Hound Dog' Leiber and Stoller were steeped in the blues and the first part of their story deals with their work together during those early years.

The preponderance of "I haven't heard such-and-such" is indicative of an ignorance I share with other blues fans. Some of the first records in which Leiber and Stoller had a hand are lost to posterity while BMI. have no trace of many of their early compositions. The lack of interest in currently unfashionable blues artists – Bullmoose Jackson, Roy Hawkins, Helen Humes – has also contributed to our dismally imprecise knowledge of their early work.

Anyone who can tell me, for example, who originally record 'Three Cornpatches' (now revived on albums by Presley and T-Bone Walker) will earn my eternal gratitude.

Well, this is a tentative attempt to document the roots of Leiber and Stoller. I'd stress that it's not merely an academic exercise; some of these early records have been made available recently and none are without interest to those who like their music red-hot and jumping. I'm grateful to Norbert Hess, Michael Lydon and Ron Weiser for some of the quotations used.

#### 1951

From Baltimore, where he was born in 1933, Leiber moved to L.A. in 1945. Three years later, Stoller moved from N.Y.C. to California where, after one high school semester, he enrolled at L.A. City College. Seventeen years old when they met in 1950, both were keen blues fans. Mike played boogie-woogie piano and wrote notes on paper. Jerry wrote lyrics to eight bar blues in his exercise book. They pooled their respective talents.

Leiber also worked at a record store on Fairfax Avenue, where he bumped into Lester Sill, then employed as a promotion man for the Bihari brothers' Modern records. Still, it is said, heard of Leiber's songwriting endeavours and fixed an appointment with the Biharis who fails to show. Mike and Jerry walked off down the street and into Aladdin records who bought a couple of their songs. This apocryphal story fails to explain why the first Leiber/Stoller compositions appeared on Modern.



Mike Stoller: "Early in '51 – I have a pedantic memory for dates the Robins recorded a song of ours, 'That's What The Good Book Says'. The Biharis had a name called 'Taub' which they added to any song whether they had any right to it or not. We'd give them a song as 'Leiber and Stoller' and it would come out as 'Leiber, Stoller and Taub' automatically because someone in the office was told 'Taub' goes on everything just in case there's money there". The Robins' record was a "pretty bad song" according to Leiber "a fucked-up version of a blues and gospel number but the first record we ever got".

They had little difficulty in placing other collaborations. Frank Bull and Gene Norman held a Blues Jubilee Concert during July 1951 and Norman gave them the addresses of those scheduled to appear. Leiber and Stoller toured Central Avenue visiting each performer in turn. If Wynonie Harris or Helen Humes accepted any songs at this time I've yet to trace them, but other artists were interested. Floyd Dixon took 'Too Much Jelly Roll' (Aladdin 3111) while Jimmy Witherspoon made 'Real Ugly Woman' (Modern 821) – both recorded live at Norman's Blues Jamboree. Leiber and Stoller also put lyrics to Lionel Hampton's 'Flying Home' for Amos Milburn (Aladdin 3125) while Charles Brown copped 'Hard Times' (Aladdin 3116). It was Leiber and Stoller's a first hit, selling 80,000 copies and making the national R&B top ten for three weeks in February 1952. They were on the way.

## 1952

Leiber and Stoller have claimed to have written for as many as twenty mainly local bluesman within roughly eighteen months of the 'Hard Times' hit. I've yet to hear, or even hear of, their compositions for Lucky Millinder, Peppermint Harris, Bullmoose Jackson, Roy Hawkins, Helen Humes and Lloyd Price, but their work for Federal is generally more accessible. A subsidiary of King, Federal was launched in 1950 and, as it gathered steam, A&R man Ralph Bass, leaned on Leiber and Stoller for material. They usually supplied four songs per session and went along to the studio to teach the singer the song and tell the band (usually Maxwell Davis) how it was supposed to go.

At Federal they recorded Little Esther (on her own and also in duets with Bobby Nunn and Little Willie Littlefield), Jimmy Witherspoon and, of course, Littlefield as a solo. Many of the Little Esther tracks are now available on a couple of bootleg albums, *The Early Years* (Yorkshir 712) and *Hollerin' And Screamin'* (Yorkshir 713). Just sixteen years of age and straight off seven top ten R&B hits in a row, Esther (the Phillips surname came much later) was already a marvelously mature blues singer. Leiber and Stoller gave her some of their most risqué material and she sang it with delightful gusto. 'Mainline Baby' (Federal 12100) is indescribably funky while the flip, 'Saturday Night Daddy' – a duet with Bobby Nunn – celebrates adulterous sex with a young girl. He's her Saturday night daddy because he's married the rest of the week. "It's a heck of a life" comments Nunn, "one night of pleasure, then six more with my wife", 'Hollerin' And Screamin'' (Federal 12115), another Leiber-Stoller composition for Esther, is as chilling as 'Saturday Night Daddy' is funny but I've not heard her duties with Littlefield.

A popular singer/pianist with a slew of cheerful blues and boogie on Modern, Littlefield was responsible for recording one of the first Leiber and Stoller classics, 'K.C. Lovin' (Federal 12110) better known as 'Kansas City', the title by which it was reissued in 1959 to complete with Wilbert Harrison's million-seller. 'K.C. Lovin'' sold 100,000 mainly on the strength of the rhythm which preserves the expectancy of traveling and the pleasures – women and wine – to be found at the end of the journey. Other compositions were lyrically vivid particularly 'Blood Is Redder Than Wine' (Federal 12101) and the reverse, 'Strikin' On You Baby', which mixes poncing with industrial relations:

*I asked you for a dollar/all you gave me was a dime  
If you cain't treat me right/I'm gonna start a picket line.*

Polydor hope to include some of these on a future Little Willie Littlefield album. With lyrics like these it should have been easy to recognize Leiber and Stoller's talent. "They were just two kids," said Ralph Bass, "I wanted to sign them as exclusive writers but Syd Nathan told me they'll never write another friggin' line. Mike was a serious cat, Lee was a real hot shot."

A week before the first solo Littlefield session, Leiber and Stoller sowed the seeds for a copyright controversy that persists today. On August 13 Willie Mae Thornton recorded 'Hound Dog' (Peacock 1612), a stomping blues with a guttural vocal and brilliant support from the Otis rhythm section. It sold half a million in the segregated race market in 1953 and about eight million worldwide when Presley revived it in 1956. Everyone wanted a slice of the composing royalties. While Mac said she helped compose it. Otis says he re-wrote it. Leiber and Stoller remain unmoved by all other claims. Having seen and heard the witnesses give their evidence I'm inclined to believe Messrs

Leiber and Stoller. Other Leiber/Stoller (plus or minus Otis) songs for Willie/Mac – 'Nightmare', 'I Smell A Rat' (Peacock 1632) – never caused any excitement but then Elvis didn't cover them. He recorded 'Nightmare', but RCA-Victor have never released his version.

Leiber and Stoller are also said to have collaborated with Johnny Otis on a number of songs for Mel Walker – 'Candle's Burning Low', (Mercury 8295) – and Preston Love, who has made some diverting remarks on their attitude towards the blues: "They were little Jewish kids who brought in the typical young white kid's version of black music. It was all corned up, they had dice shootin' in there, watermelon-eatin', dat boy an' all that. It wasn't characteristic true black music and Johnny used to have to moderate the derogatory stuff. Things I had like 'Kissin' Boogie' (Spin 102) and 'Feel So Good' (Spin 103) were changed considerably. They didn't sell – I have the distinction of making a Leiber and Stoller tune that wasn't a hit". Preston Love and Johnny Otis are, of course, as-close-as-this and while it would be wrong to place too much emphasis on their views, some impartial observers like Charlie Gillett have also suggested that Leiber and Stoller got too many of their laughs by making clowns out of black singers. I devote considerable space to the controversy in my book on the Coasters, to be published by W.H. Allen in September.

## 1953

Enter Jack Lewis who had befriended Jerry Leiber when they worked together in the Fairfax record store. Jack subsequently cut his own sides for Modern and Crest, but in 1953 he was a and r man at RCA-Victor. He called in Leiber and Stoller to "kinda be, in effect, producers" for the Robins who had moved to RCA after considerable success on Savoy. "They had various people who came in and dropped out," said Stoller "either armed service or armed robbery, serving time or doing time". A group of modest talents, the Robins were now about to make some indubitably good records and the best of the lot was 'Ten Days In Jail'. Written and directed by Leiber and Stoller, it was their first prison song, a genre they dipped into frequently in years to come. It's a fine group disc which shows too a number of their stock production devices for the first time, particularly where Bobby Nunn's bass monotone echoes Grady Chapman's shouts of "Warden set me free". The contrivance would soon permeate all group novelty records.

Leiber and Stoller handled other acts at RCA including sessions for the saxophonist/singer Big John

Greer and the rumbustious Milt Trenier and his Solid Six. The later record the Leiber and Stoller songs 'Flip Our Wigs' and 'You're Killing Me' (RCA 5487) on which the drummer mimicked a machine-gun. It was the kind of spoof they enjoyed. "That's where their heads were then," recalled Richard Berry who sang lead on the Flairs' 'She Wants To Rock' (Flair 1012), another Leiber and Stoller production in 1953 the Flairs were the most talented of all the Californian R&B groups and Berry too is badly underrated. He looks at the success of Issac Hayes, Barry White... sighs and comments "Damn it all, I bin the talkingest nigger around town for twenty years". Berry went on to talk through the fantastic 'Riot In Cell Block No.9', but his first record with Leiber and Stoller, 'She Wants To Rock', is also more than historically interesting. The group sing with a sledgehammer gusto while the pistol shots, the fair share of rib-tickling lines...all this makes it a firm favourite for any future oldies compilation which Polydor might be planning.

Late in 1953, Leiber and Stoller decided to start their own record company (Spark) and their own publishing company (Quintet). Like everyone else, Bobby Nunn remembers them as "Just two kids outta school. They were living down there in the coloured district down on Pico. I heard 'em say' We're gonna be millionaires in a couple of years'."

© Bill Millar, 1974

#### **4. David Hajdu, *Western Swing to Rock'n'Roll, from Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 110–12.**

Eight years after Basie's record of "Red Wagon," when jump blues was all the rage, Hank Williams—then still a little-known young country singer and songwriter—took the meat of the tune and used it to make a swinging barn-dance number called "Move It On Over." The music of "Move It On Over" was essentially jump, countrified with a fiddle and steel guitar, and the lyrics told a story straight out of the Bessie Smith songbook, about a woman who sends her up-to-no-good man out to sleep in the doghouse. It became Williams's first hit record, number four on the Billboard country-and-western chart—the song that "changed everything" for Hank Williams, in the words of the Williams biographer Paul Hemphill.

In country music of the early postwar period, the jump sound was no anomaly. There was something of a craze for western swing—lively, jazzy, danceable music with a steady 4/4 beat played by small bands on stringed instruments—guitars, fiddles, and steel guitars, sometimes augmented with piano and a horn or two. Performed almost solely by white musicians and singers for white audiences, western swing embraced a form of African American expression—exuberantly, with no hint of parody or irony—and recombined it companionably with the tonalities and lyrical motifs of rural white music. For a few years in the mid- to late 1940s, there were dozens of western swing combos recording and performing around the country, especially in Texas, in the Southwest, and on the West Coast: groups led by Milton Brown (the "Father of Western Swing"), Bob Wills (the "King of Western Swing"), Donnell "Spade" Cooley (a rival "King of Western Swing"), Bob Wills's brother Billy Jack (whose band actually swung harder than his more celebrated brother's), and many others. Spade Cooley, by all accounts, wore his racist-slur nickname with more ease than a black man could ever have summoned. (Cooley's career ended when he murdered his wife after discovering that she had had an affair with Roy Rogers.)

Among the many minor bands playing countrified jump blues in the late 1940s were the Four Aces of Western Swing, an East Coast combo led by the singer-guitarist Bill Haley. A brawny guy born in the Midwest, Haley had a slight resemblance to Superman as he had been drawn in the 1940s, a fact that Haley accentuated by wearing his hair Kryptonian-style, with a lock of bangs curled and

tonicked into an S form on his forehead. To young people, Haley had the look of a matinee fantasy, a singing cowboy superhero.

By the early 1950s, Haley was modestly successful in the Philadelphia area with a western-tinged jump band called Bill Haley and the Saddlemen. The group's repertoire was a mixed bag of country tunes such as "Deal Me a Hand," played with a pulse, and twanged-up renditions of rhythm numbers already recorded by black acts, such as "Rocket 88," the eight-cylinder juke-joint dance record made by Ike Turner and His Kings of Rhythm but released under the name of the singer Jackie Brenston in 1951. Haley and the Saddlemen followed Turner and Brenston with their version within months. A few months after that, Haley and the Saddlemen recorded another rhythm tune, "Rock the Joint," which was based on an earlier hit by a black group, Jimmy Preston and His Prestonians. I should add that Preston had gotten the idea for the song from a record called "Good Rockin' Tonight," by the black singer and bandleader Wynonie Harris, and Harris learned the song from a record by another black singer, Roy Brown, who claimed to have written it.

It was still 1952. Elvis Presley was a seventeen-year-old student at Humes High School in Memphis, and he wouldn't venture into a storefront studio to make his first recording, a birthday present for his mother, for another year. Chuck Berry had just bought a Nick Manoloff instruction book to teach himself guitar chords. Jerry Lee Lewis was seventeen and recently expelled from the Southwestern Bible Institute in Waxahachie, Texas, two years away from recording his first demo. Buddy Holly was sixteen and singing in the high-school choir in Lubbock, Texas. All of them were talented young people soaking in the pop of their day, and what they heard was the sound of rhythm music, a black invention already mixed up with country and western swing.

## 5. Robert Christgau, "Chuck Berry," *The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll*, 1976.

Chuck Berry is the greatest of the rock and rollers. Elvis competes with Frank Sinatra, Little Richard camps his way to self-negation, Fats Domino looks old, and Jerry Lee Lewis looks down his noble honker at all those who refuse to understand that Jerry Lee has chosen to become a great country singer. But for a fee—which went up markedly after the freak success of "My Ding-a-Ling," his first certified million-seller, in 1972, and has now diminished again—Chuck Berry will hop on a plane with his guitar and go play some rock and roll. He is the symbol of the music—the first man elected to a Rock Music Hall of Fame that exists thus far only in the projections of television profiteers; the man invited to come steal the show at the 1975 Grammys, although he has never been nominated for one himself, not even in the rock and roll or rhythm and blues categories. More important, he is also the music's substance—he taught George Harrison and Keith Richards to play guitar long before he met either, and his songs are still claimed as encores by everyone from folkies to heavy-metal kids. But Chuck Berry isn't merely the greatest of the rock and rollers, or rather, there's nothing mere about it. Say rather that unless we can somehow recycle the concept of the great artist so that it supports Chuck Berry as well as it does Marcel Proust, we might as well trash it altogether.

As with Charlie Chaplin or Walt Kelly or the Beatles, Chuck Berry's greatness doesn't depend entirely on the greatness or originality of his oeuvre. The body of his top-quality work isn't exactly vast, comprising three or perhaps four dozen songs that synthesize two related traditions: blues, and country and western. Although in some respects Berry's rock and roll is simpler and more vulgar than either of its musical sources, its simplicity and vulgarity are defensible in the snootiest high-art terms—how about "instinctive minimalism" or "demotic voice"?

But his case doesn't rest on such defenses. It would be as perverse to argue that his songs are in themselves as rich as, say, *Remembrance of Things Past*. Their richness is rather a function of their active relationship with an audience—a complex relationship that shifts every time a song enters a new context, club or album or radio or mass singalong. Where Proust wrote about a dying subculture from a cork-lined room, Berry helped give life to a subculture, and both he and it change every time they confront each other. Even "My Ding-a-Ling," a fourth-grade wee-wee joke that used to mortify true believers at college concerts, permitted a lot of 12-year-olds new insight into the moribund concept of "dirty" when it hit the airwaves; the song changed again when an oldies crowd became as children to shout along with Uncle Chuck the night he received his gold record at Madison Square Garden. And what happened to "Brown Eyed Handsome Man," never a hit among whites, when Berry sang it at interracial rock and roll concerts in Northern cities in the Fifties? How many black kids took "eyed" as code for "skinned"? How many whites? How did that make them feel about each other, and about the song? And did any of that change the song itself?

Berry's own intentions, of course, remain a mystery. Typically, this public artist is an obsessively private person who has been known to drive reporters from his own amusement park, and the sketches of his life overlap and contradict each other. The way I tell it, Berry was born into a lower middle-class colored family in St. Louis in 1926. He was so quick and ambitious that he both served time in reform school on a robbery conviction and acquired a degree in hairdressing and cosmetology before taking a job on an auto assembly line to support a wife and kids. Yet his speed and ambition persisted. By 1953 he was working as a beautician and leading a three-piece blues group on a regular weekend gig. His gimmick was to cut the blues with country-influenced humorous narrative songs. These were rare in the black music of the time, although they had been common enough before phonograph records crystallized the blues form, and although Louis Jordan, a hero of Berry's, had

been doing something vaguely similar in front of white audiences for years.

In 1955, Berry recorded two of his songs on a borrowed machine—"Wee Wee Hours," a blues that he and his pianist, Johnnie Johnson, hoped to sell, and an adapted country tune called "Ida Red." He traveled to Chicago and met Muddy Waters, the uncle of the blues, who sent him on to Leonard Chess of Chess Records. Chess liked "Wee Wee Hours" but flipped for "Ida Red," which was renamed "Maybellene," a hairdresser's dream, and forwarded to Allan Freed. Having mysteriously acquired one-third of the writer's credit with another DJ, Freed played "Maybellene" quite a lot, and it became one of the first nationwide rock 'n' roll hits.

At that time, any fair-minded person would have judged this process exploitative and pecuniary. A blues musician comes to a blues label to promote a blues song—"It was 'Wee Wee Hours' we was proud of, that was *our* music," says Johnnie Johnson—but the owner of the label decides he wants to push a novelty: "The big beat, cars, and young love. It was a trend and we jumped on it," Chess has said. The owner then trades away a third of the blues singer's creative sweat to the symbol of payola, who hypes the novelty song into commercial success and leaves the artist in a quandry. Does he stick with his art, thus forgoing the first real recognition he's ever had, or does he pander to popular taste?

The question is loaded, of course. "Ida Red" was Chuck Berry's music as much as "Wee Wee Hours," which in retrospect seems rather uninspired. In fact, maybe the integrity problem went the other way. Maybe Johnson was afraid that the innovations of "Ida Red"—country guitar lines adapted to blues-style picking, with the ceaseless legato of his own piano adding rhythmic excitement to the steady backbeat—were too far out to sell. What happened instead was that Berry's limited but brilliant vocabulary of guitar riffs quickly came to epitomize rock 'n' roll. Ultimately, every great white guitar group of the early Sixties imitated Berry's style, and Johnson's piano technique was almost as influential. In other words, it turned out that Berry and Johnson weren't basically bluesmen at all. Through some magic combination of inspiration and cultural destiny, they had hit upon something more contemporary than blues, and a young audience, for whom the Depression was one more thing that bugged their parents, understood this better than the musicians themselves. Leonard Chess simply functioned as a music businessman should, though only rarely does one combine the courage and insight (and opportunity) to pull it off, even once. Chess became a surrogate audience, picking up on new music and making sure that it received enough exposure for everyone else to pick up on it, too.

Obviously, Chuck Berry wasn't racked with doubt about artistic compromise. A good blues single usually sold around 10,000 copies and a big rhythm and blues hit might go into the hundreds of thousands, but "Maybellene" probably moved a million, even if Chess never sponsored the audit to prove it. Berry had achieved a grip on the white audience and the solid future it could promise, and, remarkably, he had in no way diluted his genius to do it. On the contrary, that was his genius. He would never have fulfilled himself if he hadn't explored his relationship to the white world—a relationship which was much different for him, an urban black man who was used to machines and had never known brutal poverty, than it was for, say, Muddy Waters.

Berry was the first blues-based performer to successfully reclaim guitar tricks that country and western innovators had appropriated from black people and adapted to their own uses 25 or 50 years before. By adding blues tone to some fast country runs, and yoking them to a rhythm and blues beat and some unembarrassed electrification, he created an instrumental style with biracial appeal. Alternating guitar chords augmented the beat while Berry sang in an insouciant tenor that, while recognizably Afro-American in accent, stayed clear of the melisma and blurred overtones of blues singing, both of which enter only at carefully premeditated moments. His few detractors still

complain about the repetitiveness of this style, but they miss the point. Repetition without tedium is the backbone of rock and roll, and the components of Berry's music proved so durable that they still provoke instant excitement at concerts durable that they still provoke instant excitement at concerts two decades later. And in any case, the instrumental repetition was counterbalanced by unprecedented and virtually unduplicated verbal variety.

Chuck Berry is the greatest rock lyricist this side of Bob Dylan, and sometimes I prefer him to Dylan. Both communicate an abundance of the childlike delight in linguistic discovery that page poets are supposed to convey and too often don't, but Berry's most ambitious lyrics, unlike Dylan's, never seem pretentious or forced. True, his language is ersatz and barbaric, full of mispronounced foreignisms and advertising coinages, but then, so was Whitman's. Like Whitman, Berry is excessive because he is totally immersed in America—the America of Melville and the Edsel, burlesque and installment-plan funerals, pemmican and pomade. Unlike Whitman, though, he doesn't quite permit you to take him seriously—he can't really think it's pronounced "a la carty," can he? He is a little surreal. How else can a black man as sensitive as Chuck Berry respond to the affluence of white America—an affluence suddenly his for the taking.

Chuck Berry is not only a little surreal but also a little schizy; even after he committed himself to rock 'n' roll story songs, relegating the bluesman in him to B sides and album fillers, he found his persona split in two. In three of the four singles that followed "Maybellene," he amplified the black half of his artistic personality, the brown-eyed handsome man who always came up short in his quest for the small-time hedonism American promises everyone. By implication, Brown Eyes' sharp sense of life's nettlesome and even oppressive details provided a kind of salvation by humor, especially in "Too Much Monkey Business," a catalog of hassles that included work, school and the army. But the white teenagers who were the only audience with the cultural experience to respond to Berry's art weren't buying this kind of salvation, not en masse. They wanted something more optimistic and more specific to themselves; of the four singles that followed "Maybellene," only "Roll Over Beethoven," which introduced Berry's other half, the rock 'n' roller, achieved any real success. Chuck got the message. His next release, "School Day," was another complaint song, but this time the complaints were explicitly adolescent and were relieved by the direct action of the rock 'n' roller. In fact, the song has been construed as a prophecy of the Free Speech Movement: "Close your books, get out of your seat/Down the halls and into the street."

It has become a cliché to attribute the rise of rock and roll to a new parallelism between white teenagers and black Americans; a common "alienation" and even "suffering" are often cited. As with most clichés, this one has its basis in fact—teenagers in the Fifties certainly showed an unprecedented consciousness of themselves as a circumscribed group, though how much that had to do with marketing refinements and how much with the Bomb remains unresolved. In any case, Chuck Berry's history points up the limits of this notion. For Berry was closer to white teenagers both economically (that reform school stint suggests a JD exploit, albeit combined with a racist judicial system) and in spirit (he shares his penchant for youthfulness with Satchel Paige but not Henry Aaron, with Leslie Fiedler but not Norman Podhoretz) than the average black man. And even at that, he had to make a conscious (not to say calculated) leap of the imagination to reach them, and sometimes fell short.

Although he scored lots of minor hits, Chuck Berry made only three additional *Billboard* Top Ten singles in the Fifties—"Rock and Roll Music," "Sweet Little Sixteen," and "Johnny B. Goode"—and every one of them ignored Brown Eyes for the assertive, optimistic, and somewhat simpleminded rock 'n' roller. In a pattern common among popular artists, his truest and most personal work didn't flop, but it wasn't overwhelmingly popular either. For such artists, the audience can be like a drug. A

little of it is so good for them that they assume a lot of it would be even better, but instead the big dose saps their autonomy, often so subtly that they don't notice it. For Chuck Berry, the craving for overwhelming popularity proved slightly dangerous. At the same time that he was enlivening his best songs with faintly Latin rhythms, which he was convinced were the coming thing, he was also writing silly exercises with titles like "Hey Pedro." Nevertheless, his pursuit of the market also worked a communion with his audience, with whom he continued to have an instinctive rapport remarkable in a 30-year-old black man. For there is also a sense in which the popular artist is a drug for the audience, and a doctor, too—he has to know how much of his vital essence he can administer at one time, and in what compound.

The reason Berry's rock 'n' roller was capable of such insightful excursions into the teen psyche—"Sweet Little Sixteen," a celebration of everything lovely about fanhood; or "Almost Grown," a basically unalienated first-person expression of teen rebellion that Sixties youth-cult pundits should have taken seriously—was that he shared a crucial American value with the humorous Brown Eyes. That value was fun. Even among rock critics, who ought to know better, fun doesn't have much of a rep, so that they commiserate with someone like LaVern Baker, a second-rate blues and gospel singer who felt she was selling her soul every time she launched into a first-rate whoop of nonsense like "Jim Dandy" or "Bumble Bee." But fun was what adolescent revolt had to be about—inebriated affluence versus the hangover of the work ethic. It was the only practicable value in the Peter Pan utopia of the American dream.

Because black music had always thrived on exuberance—not just the otherworldly transport of gospel, but the candidly physical good times of great pop blues singers like Washboard Sam, who is most often dismissed as a lightweight by the heavy blues critics—it turned into the perfect vehicle for generational convulsion. Black musicians, however, had rarely achieved an optimism that was cultural as well as personal—those few who did, like Louis Armstrong, left themselves open to charges of Tomming. Chuck Berry never Tommed. The trouble he'd seen just made his sly, bad-boy voice and the splits and waddles of his stage show that much more credible.

Then, late in 1959, fun turned into trouble. Berry had imported a Spanish-speaking Apache prostitute he'd picked up in El Paso to check hats in his St. Louis nightclub, and then fired her. She went to the police, and Berry was indicted under the Mann Act. After two trials, the first so blatantly racist that it was disallowed, he went to prison for two years. When he got out, in 1964, he and his wife had separated, apparently a major tragedy for him. The Beatles and the Rolling Stones had paid him such explicit and appropriate tribute that his career was probably in better shape after his jail term than before, but he couldn't capitalize. He had a few hits—"Nadine" and "No Particular Place to Go" (John Lennon is one of the many who believe they were written before he went in)—but the well was dry. Between 1965 and 1970 he didn't release one-even passable new song, and he died as a recording artist.

In late 1966, Berry left Chess for a big advance from Mercury Records. The legends of his money woes at Chess are numerous, but apparently the Chess brothers knew how to record him—the stuff he produced himself for Mercury was terrible. Working alone with pickup bands, he still performed a great deal, mostly to make money for Berry Park, a recreation haven 30 miles from St. Louis. And as he toured, he found that something had happened to his old audience—it was getting older, with troubles of its own, and it dug blues. At auditoriums like the Fillmore, where he did a disappointing live LP with the Steve Miller Blues Band, Chuck was more than willing to stretch out on a blues. One of his favorites was from Elmore James: "When things go wrong, wrong with you, it hurts me too."

By 1970, he was back home at Chess, and suddenly his new audience called forth a miracle. Berry



was a natural head—no drugs, no alcohol—and most of his attempts to cash in on hippie talk had been embarrassments. But "Tulane," one of his greatest story songs, was the perfect fantasy. It was about two dope dealers: "Tulane and Johnny opened a novelty shop/ Back under the counter was the cream of the crop." Johnny is nabbed by narcs, but Tulane, his girlfriend, escapes, and Johnny confidently predicts that she will buy off the judge. Apparently she does, for there is a sequel, a blues. In "Have Mercy Judge," Johnny has been caught again, and this time he expects to be sent to "some stony mansion." Berry devotes the last stanza to Tulane, who is "too alive to live alone." The last line makes me wonder just how he felt about his own wife when he went to prison: "Just tell her to live, and I'll forgive her, and even love her more when I come back home." Taken together, the two songs are Berry's peak, although Leonard Chess would no doubt have vetoed the vocal double-track on "Tulane" that blurs its impact a bit.

Remarkably, "Have Mercy Judge" is the first important blues Berry ever wrote, and like all his best work it isn't quite traditional, utilizing an *abc* line structure instead of the usual *aab*. Where did it come from? Is it unreasonable to suspect that part of Berry really was a bluesman all along, and that this time, instead of him going to his audience, his audience came to him and provided the juice for one last masterpiece? ...

## **6. Norman Jopling, "FATS DOMINO: THE MAN WHO SANG ROCK BEFORE HALEY," *Record Mirror*, 12 January 1963**

His first million-seller was named after himself. Until last year he had more million-sellers than Elvis, who finally caught up with him after a hard struggle. He had more Gold discs before his biggest hit – in 1956 – than after. That hit was 'Blueberry Hill', the first disc was 'The Fat Man' and the man himself is Antoine "Fats" Domino.

When Fats first came on the scene back in 1948 the big trend in pop music was jazz, and watery pops. There was no "vital" music for the kids except some obscure Blues that wasn't commercial enough anyway.

Fats made 'The Fat Man' – he is 16 stone – for Imperial records and it sold a million. Basically it isn't too different to the latest Domino release, but there are differences in the backing, and a slightly different beat.

### LAWN CUTTER

Fats had started his working life as a dollar and a half a day lawn cutter in his native New Orleans. He was one of nine children and had practised his music on an old upright piano. Fats longed to become a musician as the times went by but he was forced to take a factory job to support his family.

At work Fats caught his hand in a machine and gashed it pretty badly. Doctors advised an amputation but Fats wouldn't listen to them. It was imperative to him that he had all his fingers for his piano playing which he loved. So he embarked on a course of exercises and he recovered – but he still carries a scar.

By this time Fats was married to Rosemary, his childhood sweetheart, and she persuaded him to accept several dates at a local road house as a pianist. Fats played there for a time until news of his near-sensational act reached Lew Chudd, president of Imperial records.

After that everything happened. Fats met Dave Bartholemew at Imperial and they became friends. Dave helped Fats pen many of his numbers and they arranged the discs together. They churned out million-seller after million-seller. 'Goin' Home', 'You Said You Loved Me', 'Please Don't Leave Me', 'Goin' To The River' (all 1953), plus many others before 'Blueberry Hill', like 'Thinking Of You', 'I Lived My Life', 'Whole Lotta Lovin' ', 'Love Me', 'All By Myself', 'I Can't Go On', etc.

Then came Bill Haley, and a form of the music that Fats had been singing successfully for so many years completely took over the wishy-washy pop music that had until then been supreme. And still Fats churned out the million-sellers. This time though, they were hits in Britain too, as well as the States.

There was 'Ain't That A Shame', (also a hit for Pat Boone), 'I'm In Love Again', 'Blue Monday', and 'Blueberry Hill'. This was Fats' biggest hit in Britain to date, and it has since been copied many times by other artists.

Then came a lull in Britain at least for Fats. His hits 'Bo Weevil', 'It's You I Love', and 'Please Don't Leave Me', all missed in Britain though hitting in the States.

His 'I'm Walkin' ' hit was already in the U.S. top ten, already having sold a million, was covered after a long time by a young up-and-coming singer called Rick Nelson. He was on the same label as Fats and out of interest they issued the Nelson disc. It shot into the charts and pushed the Domino version out of the charts. And gave Rick another hit to follow 'Teenagers Romance' and 'Stood Up'.

#### SLIPPING

Then Fats started to slip in the States. His discs didn't sell a million, some didn't even make the charts. The same applied to Britain until 'I'm Ready' made it in the States, and 'Margie' in Britain. After that he scored with 'I Want To Walk You Home', 'Country Boy' (his biggest hit ever in Britain) and 'Be My Guest'. There were no more British hits in Britain for Fats after that although his fortunes continued in the States. He racked up hits like 'It Keeps Rainin' ', 'Walkin' To New Orleans', 'Don't Come Knockin' ', 'Let The Four Winds Blow', 'Three Nights A Week', 'Jambalaya' and many others.

Fats still continues to sell well in the States, but not with the impact he used to have. His discs all get into the top hundred, but they don't sell a million anymore.

But considering Fats has already sold 55 million discs I shouldn't think he cares...

© Norman Jopling, 1963

## **7. Don Snowden, “Bo Diddley: His Best: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection,” (Chess/MCA Records, 1997)**

TO PARAPHRASE the titles of two of the 20 Bo Diddley nuggets contained on *His Best: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection* , you can't judge a book by its cover but you sure can tell something about how important a musician is by the artists who do cover versions of his songs.

That's not to imply that Bo Diddley's legacy rests solely on the interpretations of his music by others. The rich body of work contained here offers ample testament to the multiple talents--as singer,

songwriter, guitarist and creator of one of the archetypal rock rhythms--the man born Elias McDaniel displayed on over 20 Chess albums.

But it's also impossible to overlook the impact of both his songs and the trademark Diddley beat on the '60s British rock explosion, from kingpins like the Stones and Yardbirds down to U.K.-legends-but-U.S.-unknowns like Johnny Kidd & The Pirates and the Pretty Things (who took their name from Bo's song). In the U.S., the Doors, Creedence and Quicksilver were only three of the late '60s luminaries who raided the Diddley songbook and one of the figureheads of an entirely different counter-culture--the New York Dolls--did the same a few years later.

But the indirect influence of Diddley's rhythmic imprint--those thundering tom-toms laying down a variant on the old 'shave-and-a-hair-cut-six-bits' hambone rhythm that also cuts close to the clave rhythmic core of Latin music-- was even more widespread. Follow the rock 'n' roll timeline from his '50s peers (Buddy Holly's 'Not Fade Away,' Johnny Otis' 'Willie & the Hand Jive') through '60s and '70s icons (the Who's 'Magic Bus,' Bruce Springsteen's 'She's The One') on to the '80s (the decidedly odd couple of George Thorogood's frat-house anthem 'Bad To The Bone' and Brit popsters the Smiths) and mid-'90s (Iggy Pop's mid-'70s 'Lust For Life' in the memorable opening sequence of the film *Trainspotting*), and you'll find the Diddley Daddy's been in the house and on your CD player for four decades.

But for a man whose name has become synonymous with a particular rhythm sound, that big, thundering Bo Diddley beat actually turns up pretty infrequently on His Best: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection. The drummers on 'Who Do You Love' and 'You Can't Judge A Book (By Its Cover),' probably Bo's two most enduring legacies to the bar bands of the world, both laid down a straight backbeat. But make no mistake, Bo Diddley played body rock--his musical sights were set on the listener's hips from the git-go.

Where the rhythmic emphasis always shines through is in his guitar playing, grounded in right-hand rhythm chops that makes his six-string thing a crucial link in the chain that would later include slews of brilliant soul and funk guitarists. His biggest pop hit, 'Say Man,' found Diddley talking the talk in the street game of verbal insults known as 'signifying' or 'the dozens' that looked forward to hip-hop even as he walked the macho bravado walk of Bo's blues peers Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.

Ironically, Bo Diddley--Bo of the heavy-rimmed black glasses that'd probably get him called a nerd today, Bo of the tartan plaid and black leather gunslinger suits, Bo of the self-made square guitar and sonic noises, Bo the unlikeliest of teen idols--was the rocker who brought the deep blues to white America. While Chuck Berry seduced it with rollicking piano, fluid guitar solos and teenage American dream themes, Bo Diddley was the bridge to the guitar/harmonica sound and hoodoo the voodoo chants of Chicago/Mississippi blues their virgin ears weren't ready for in their undiluted form just yet.

"I'm what you call a black Frenchman, a Creole," Diddley related to Pete Welding on the liner notes to his 1973 compilation *Got My Own Bag Of Tricks*. "All my people are from New Orleans, the bayou country--French, African, Indian, all mixed up. That's where my music comes from, all that mixture."

It makes perfect sense, Bo Diddley and New Orleans--the most Caribbean city of the U.S. and the one place where African drumming survived during and after the slavery era. It was also the home of

what Jelly Roll Morton called "the Latin tinge" and a brass band tradition that spawned generations of drummers whose second-line rhythm fueled early rock 'n' roll and isn't exactly far removed from what everyone now knows as the Diddley beat.

But New Orleans couldn't have exerted a strong direct influence, aside from the blood kinfolk ties, since Ellas McDaniels was whisked away from his birthplace of McComb, Mississippi (just over the Louisiana border) to the bright lights of the big city, Chicago, with his mother's first cousin when he was 7 or 8. Diddley didn't lack for a varied musical environment growing up in Chicago. He took formal violin lessons for several years but he was also sneaking off to Baptist churches to hear, live and direct, the "shout mode" that Bo himself referred to as the foundation of his music in Bo Diddley: The Chess Box.

His early musical influences displayed a broad range, too--the suave crooner Nat 'King' Cole, the raucous, humorous jump blues of Cab Calloway and Louis Jordan, and the down-to-the-bone Delta sound of John Lee Hooker's 'Boogie Chillun.' And when Bo put together a street band originally called the Hipsters and later the Langley Avenue Jive Cats around 1945, the group that was too young to play in clubs at first couldn't ignore the full throttle sounds of electric Chicago blues filtering out to the sidewalks.

Bo and company, by now including soon-to-be-world's-most-famous-maracas player Jerome Green, Billy Boy Arnold on harmonica and Clifton James on drums, had graduated to the club level by 1954. Bo and Billy Boy made a 2-song demo they shopped along Chicago's Record Row with legendary results--run out of Vee Jay, they popped across the street to Chess and straight into a record deal. A week later, Bo Diddley strode into Chess Studios on March 3, 1955 to record his first pair of songs and, as they say, the rest was history.

"There are things--like 'Back In the USA,' 'I'm A Man,' and 'Mojo'--that you know are classics when you cut them," recalled Chess engineer Malcolm Chisholm 10 years ago.

'Bo Diddley/I'm A Man' has to rank as one of the most influential, two-sided debut singles in history. The namesake A-side (technically) began building the Bo myth and introduced the trademark beat as Bo rode Frank Kirkland's tom toms and the maracas to the #1 R&B chart position within two months. 'I'm A Man' was no less explosive, coming straight out of mid-'50s electric Chicago blues with a quintessential coming-of-age boast and archetypal riff flavored by Billy Boy Arnold's harmonica.

And its impact didn't just register on the sales charts--it reverberated around the Chess studios as well. By the end of April, 1955, Little Walter had recorded Diddley's 'Roller Coaster' as a scorching instrumental with Bo on guitar.

During that summer, Muddy Waters laid down his thinly thinly-veiled homage to 'I'm A Man,' 'Mannish Boy,' and upped the macho ante by positioning himself as a 5-minute lovmaker compared to Bo's 60-minute man.

Little Walter also adapted the core riff of Diddley's 'You Don't Love Me' for his 'Hate To See You Go' in August and Bo's prototype here shows how deeply connected he was to the electric Chicago blues of the time. Arnold's harmonica again took the lead, Diddley's guitar dug down deep into Muddy-esque rhythm patterns, Otis Spann contributed a rollicking piano solo and Kirkland pushed this no-nonsense, big boogie like Chess mainstay Fred Below.

But it was Bo's rhythm thing that caught the public ear--witness the #4 R&B chart success of 'Pretty Thing' early in 1956, as the harmonica melded into the arrangement to create one solid wall of Diddley beat. 'Bring It To Jerome' shifted the focus--Bo's electrifying vocal entrance played off Green's chorus chant before downshifting to a more lightly textured sound featuring Arnold's harmonica. 'Diddley Daddy' had already hit #11 on the R&B charts six months before, reinforcing the Bo myth with the Moonglows' backing vocals and a hypnotic guitar drone.

Surprisingly, Bo's chart success stopped then for three year--mysteriously, too, because Diddley cut some of his most memorable tunes between 1957-1959. 'I'm Looking For A Woman' returned to classic blues territory with a high- stepping rhythm anchored by straight rockin' drums as Bo plays the country mouse in search of the big-city woman.

With 'Who Do You Love?,' Bo crafted an enduring lyric archetype on the order of 'Johnny B. Goode' and 'Hoochie Coochie Man'--except this time Mississippi hoodoo was transplanted to the Southwest with 47 miles of barbed wire, cobra snake neckties and whips made out of rattlesnake hide. 'Hey Bo Diddley' maintains the Western motif with its dude (in every sense of the word) ranch fantasy boast supported by great backing vocals (probably the Moonglows, maybe with a very young Marvin Gaye).

The mix on 'Bo Diddley' heavily favored drums over guitar, a sonic scenario reversed on 'Mona' with Bo's right hand trills dominating and a new lyrical stance--Bo the pleading lover, laying out naked emotions--that was the flip side of his usual stud fantasies. That plaintive side also pervaded 'Before You Accuse Me'--its spare arrangement accentuated Bo's bluesy soloing and a street-level take on 'Let he (or she) who is without sin cast the first stone.'

But it was entirely different lyrical approach that brought Bo back for his biggest pop chart success. Reaching #20 pop and #3 R&B in mid-'59, 'Say Man' was all street-corner goofing between Bo and Jerome over an arrangement that clearly brought the profound Latin music influence at the core of Diddley' rhythm trip to the fore. It showed up particularly strongly in Lafayette Leake's piano both here and 'Dearest Darling,' with Bo back in his pleading mode again on the latter.....

© Don Snowden, 1997

## **8. Craig Morrison, "Little Richard," in *Rock and Roll (Facts on File, 2006)***

Little Richard is one of rock and roll's most outrageous characters, and perhaps its wildest and most exciting performer, willing to do just about anything to rile up an audience. He is unpredictable on stage but has been known to stand on the piano, pretend to be struck dead during a show and then come to life singing, and tear off his clothes. His music mixes fervent gospel feeling with rhythm and blues, all set to a rock and roll beat.

Little Richard's fame was secured with the hits recorded, mostly in New Orleans, for the Specialty label from 1955 to 1957. On the road his thrilling, pounding piano and magnificent, powerful voice was backed by a tight band called the Upsetters. Not only did he drive audiences to a frenzy, he inspired artists such as ELVIS PRESLEY, BUDDY HOLLY, and the BEATLES, who sang his songs, James Brown and Otis Redding, who imitated him, Mick Jagger and Paul Simon, who idolized him, and JIMI HENDRIX and Billy Preston, who played in his band.

He was born Richard Penniman and raised in Macon, Georgia, under the oppressive racial segregation then prevalent in the South. He grew up poor, a mischievous boy in a large, religious family. The god-versus-devil conflict that tormented many early rock and roll musicians—the view that one should dedicate oneself to God and not play hedonistic, sinful music like rock and roll—was especially real for Little Richard. As a youth he recognized that he was gay, and that, too, was a source of conflict.

He left home to do music and got his first professional experiences singing with traveling bands and variety shows in which he would sometimes perform in drag. In Atlanta, Richard was influenced by R&B star Billy Wright, “The Prince of the Blues,” and he copied his gospel-style blues singing, entertaining abilities, stage clothes, tall pompadour hairdo (also known as a conk), and use of makeup.

Through Wright’s contacts, Little Richard made, for RCA in 1951 and 1952, his first records. He was backed by Wright’s band, and musically he was still in Wright’s shadow, but he did gain a local hit. A month after his last RCA session, Richard’s father was murdered. Richard returned to Macon, and, as the principal breadwinner for the family, got a job washing dishes at the Greyhound bus station. There, as a way of talking back to his employers without actually saying anything offensive, he came up with the nonsense syllables that open “Tutti Frutti”: “womp-bomp-a-loo-mompa-lomp-bomp-bomp.”

Richard’s piano playing changed to something wilder under the tutelage of S. Q. Reeder, a gay gospel and R&B pianist from South Carolina whose stage name was Esquerita. Esquerita’s late 1950s recordings are some of the most untamed in rock’s history, but by then he was marketed as a Little Richard imitator.

Richard formed a band called the Tempo Toppers that toured the South. In 1953 they recorded without success in Houston, Texas, for the Peacock label. A second session, with Little Richard backed by the Johnny Otis Orchestra, was not issued at the time. The Upsetters were formed next, with two saxophone players, and they, too, went on the road, drawing crowds and building up a reputation. Lloyd Price, who had a big hit on Specialty in 1952 with “Lawdy Miss Clawdy,” saw them play in Macon. He was impressed by the music, and Richard was impressed by Price’s Cadillac. In 1955, at Price’s suggestion, Richard recorded a demo and sent it to Specialty. Label owner Art Rupe eventually bought out their contract from Peacock. He set up a recording session in New Orleans with producer Robert “Bumps” Blackwell. The backup band was composed of the same studio musicians who recorded with FATS DOMINO. The initial songs they cut were unremarkable, but then, during a lunch break at a local club, Richard started showing off at the piano, singing a lewd song. Blackwell saw potential in it, and had Richard sing it to a lyricist who wrote a cleaned-up version. At the end of the session, they managed to get it recorded. “Tutti Frutti” was unlike anything on the market, and was a big hit. Like most R&B or country songs that were released on independent labels and that showed commercial promise, it got redone as pop music by a more established artist. Pat Boone, who already had six hits, covered “Tutti Frutti” and it was an even bigger hit for him, though his recording is now merely a curio, while Richard’s original is world famous.

Richard’s next hit was his biggest: “Long Tall Sally.” There were many more. Soon he was Specialty’s top artist, with such hits as “Jenny, Jenny” and “Keep A Knockin’ ” and some that were redone by others, like “Rip It Up” (also a hit for BILL HALEY AND HIS COMETS), and “Lucille” (also a hit for the EVERLY BROTHERS). In the 1960s, besides the BEATLES’ versions of his

songs, including “Long Tall Sally,” additional Little Richard songs were covered, such as “Good Golly Miss Molly” (by CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL, also Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels), and “Miss Ann” (by Johnny Winter).

Little Richard starred in three rock and roll movies: *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), one of the best of its kind, and two with disc jockey and promoter Alan Freed: *Don't Knock the Rock* and *Mr. Rock and Roll* (both 1957). He toured in the United States and Europe, but during a tour of Australia he had a change of heart. He cut the tour short, and gave up rock and roll for religion. Richard entered theological college, married a religious woman who knew little of his past, and cut gospel songs for various labels. Specialty kept releasing singles from its archives, and some of them were hits. Though he kept reading his Bible, the marriage did not last, nor could he stay away from rock and roll.

His return came during a 1962 tour of England with Sam Cooke. He tried singing gospel, but concert-goers were bewildered. One night, when Cooke did a powerful set, Richard could not stand to see him (or anyone) steal the show. His narcissism won out, and he pulled out all the stops, singing rock and roll and using all his antics. It was during this tour that he met the Beatles and they shared stages in England and in Germany.

In 1964 he returned briefly to Specialty, with Bumps Blackwell again producing. “Bama Lama Bama Loo” gained moderate sales. That year he shifted to the Vee Jay label, where he had one more charting single, and JIMI HENDRIX, then working as a sideman on the R&B circuit, played on a few recordings. For Vee Jay and other labels Richard remade his classic songs and tried soul or contemporary music. Over the next years, as the ROCK REVIVAL gained momentum, he toured often. In 1969 he signed to the Reprise label. With them he made three albums, one with his New Orleans cronies, and had two songs chart. Canned Heat's “Rockin' with the King,” featuring Little Richard on vocals and keyboards, was a moderate hit in 1972. He was his usual outrageous self in the rock revival concert film *Let the Good Times Roll* (1973). In 1976, following the death of one of his brothers, he again left rock and roll for religion, and rejected his homosexuality.

In 1984 the excellent and popular biography *The Life and Times of Little Richard, The Quasar of Rock*, by Charles White, which included much interview material by Little Richard and people who were close to him, brought him back in the limelight and seemed to help him integrate the disparate aspects of his life. In 1986 he sang the theme song for the movie *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*: “Great Gosh A' Mighty” was his biggest U.S. hit since 1958. Also in 1986, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In the 1990s he was given further awards, and his version of “Itsy Bitsy Spider” on a children's disc was so popular that he did a whole children's album for Walt Disney Records: *Shake It All About*. Over the years he has collaborated with many artists, including the BEACH BOYS, New Edition, Living Colour, the Bangles, Philip Bailey, Elton John, and Tanya Tucker. As a celebrity rock and roll star and media evangelist, Little Richard has often been on television for interviews and performances. He has also been hired as a spokesperson in commercials. His songs have graced several soundtracks. Dick Clark called him the greatest rock and roll legend of our time. He is not alone in that estimation.

**9. Abel Green, “A Warning to the Music Business,” *Variety*, February 23, 1955, p. 2.**

There is little doubt that one of the appeals of R&B in the early 1950s was its sometimes coarse and earthy depiction of sexuality, often approached through cleverly deployed slang. While young fans may have flocked to these songs, many detractors within the industry saw R&B “leer-ics” as a dangerous and intrusive presence. *Variety*’s ominously titled “A Warning to the Music Business,” issued under the name of editor-in-chief Abel Green, asks that the music business claim a self-policing responsibility for its products. The editorial is purposefully vague, mentioning neither any specific songs nor artists, nor even R&B itself. But for any reader who had been following other articles and letters within the magazine’s pages, it was clear that the perceived threat extended to renegade disc jockeys, payola, the influence of BMI, and, tacitly, R&B’s obvious racial dimension. *Variety*’s “Warning” proved to be wildly influential, as wire services picked up the editorial, turning it into a national news item. It was followed by two further *Variety* editorials that helped set the stage for the controversies that would accompany rock ‘n’ roll’s explosion the following year in 1956.<sup>1</sup>

Music “leer-ics” are touching new lows and if the fast-buck songsmiths and musicmakers are incapable of social responsibility and self-restraint then regulation—policing, if you will—will have to come from more responsible sources. Meaning the phonograph record manufacturers and their network daddies. These companies have a longterm stake rather than a quick turn-around role. It won’t wash for them to echo the cheap cynicism of the songsmiths who justify their “leer-ic” garbage by declaring “that’s what the kids want” or “that’s the only thing that sells today.”

What are we talking about? We’re talking about “rock and roll,” about “hug,” and “squeeze,” and kindred euphemisms which are attempting a total breakdown of all reticences about sex. In the past such material was common enough but restricted to special places and out-and-out barrelhouses. Today “leer-ics” are offered as standard popular music for general consumption, including consumption by teenagers. Our teenagers are already setting something of a record in delinquency without this raw musical idiom to smell up the environment still more.

The time is now for some serious soul-searching by the popular music industry. This is a call to the conscience of that business. Don’t invite the Governmental and religious lightning that is sure to strike. Forget the filthy fast buck. Nor is it just the little music “independents” who are heedless of responsibility.

The major diskeries, with the apparently same disregard as to where the blue notes may fall, are as guilty. Guiltier, perhaps, considering the greater obligation—their maturer backgrounds—their time-honored relations with the record-buying public.

The most casual look at the current crop of “lyrics” must tell even the most naive that dirty postcards have been translated into songs. Compared to some of the language that loosely passes for song “lyrics” today, the “pool-table papa” and “jellyroll” terminology of yesteryear is polite palaver. Only difference is that this sort of lyric then was off in a corner by itself. It was the music underworld—not the mainstream.

For the music men—publishers and diskeries—to say that “that’s what the kids want” and “that’s the only thing that sells nowadays,” is akin to condoning publication of back-fence language.



Earthy dialog may belong in “art novels” but mass media have tremendous obligation. If they forget, they’ll hear from authority. Seemingly that is not the case in the music business.

Before it’s too late for the welfare of the industry—forgetting for the moment the welfare of young Americans— VARIETY urges a strong self-examination of the record business by its most responsible chief executive officers. A strong suspicion lingers with VARIETY that these business men are too concerned with the profit statements to take stock of what’s causing some of their items to sell. Or maybe they just don’t care. A suspicion has been expressed that even the network-affiliated and Hollywood-affiliated record companies brush things off with “that’s the music business.” This is illogical because it is morally wrong and in the long run it’s wrong financially.

Today’s “angles” and sharp practices in the music business are an intra-trade problem. Much of it, time-dishonored. The promulgation and propagation of a pop song, ever since there was a Tin Pan Alley, was synonymous with shrewdness, astuteness and deviousness that often bordered on racketeering in its subornation of talent, subsidy, cajolery and out-and-out bribery.

In its trade functions no trade paper, VARIETY included, wants to be accused of “blowing the whistle.” But the music business is flirting with the shrill commands of an outer influence if it doesn’t wake up and police itself.

This is not the first time VARIETY has spotlighted the pyramiding evils of the music business as it operates today. One of the roots is the payola. If some freak “beat” captures the kids’ imagination, the boys are in there quick, wooing, romancing, cajoling the a&r men.

Here is where the responsible chief officers of the major diskeries should come in. They can continue to either blind themselves, as apparently seems to be the case, or they can compel their moral obligations to stand in the way of a little quick profit. This has an accumulative force, because their own radio outlets can limit the exploitation of this spurious stuff. Not only the commodities of their own affiliation, but others.

Some may argue that this is a proposal of “censorship.” Not at all. It is a plea to ownership to assume the responsibilities of ownership and eliminate practices which will otherwise invite censorship. In short, chums, do it yourself or have it done for you. You’re not going to get or have it done for you.

1 Abel Green, “Leer-ics: Part II,” *Variety*, March 2, 1955, p. 49 and “Leer-ics: Part III,” *Variety*, March 9, 1955, p. 49.

## **10. Milton Bracker, “Experts Propose Study of ‘Craze’,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1957, p. 12.**

Psychologists suggested yesterday that while the rock ‘n’ roll craze seemed to be related to rhythmic behavior patterns as old as the Middle Ages, it required full study as a current phenomenon.

One educational psychologist asserted that what happened in and around the Paramount Theatre yesterday struck him as “very much like the medieval type of spontaneous lunacy where one person goes off and lots of other persons go off with him.”

A psychopathologist, attending a meeting of the American Psychopathological Association at the Park Sheraton Hotel feared that this was just a guess. Others present noted that a study by Dr. Reginald Lourie of Children's Hospital, Washington indicated in 1949 that 10 to 20 per cent of all children did "some act like rocking or rolling." The study went into detail on the stimulating effects of an intensified musical beat.

Meanwhile, a parallel between rock 'n' roll and St. Vitus Dance has been drawn by Dr. Joost A. M. Meerloo, associate in psychiatry at Columbia University in a study just completed for publication.

Dr. Meerloo described the "contagious epidemic of dance fury" that "swept Germany and spread to all of Europe" toward the end of the fourteenth century. It was called both St. Vitus Dance (or Chorea Major), he continued, with its victims breaking into dancing and being unable to stop. The same activity in Italy, he noted was referred to as Tarantism and popularly related to a toxic bite by the hairy spider called tarantula.

"The Children's Crusades and the tale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin" Dr. Meerloo went on "remind us of these seductive, contagious dance furies."

Dr. Meerloo described his first view of rock 'n' roll this way: Young people were moved by a juke box to dance themselves "more and more into a prehistoric rhythmic trance until it had gone far beyond all the accepted versions of human dancing."

Sweeping the country and even the world, the craze "demonstrated the violent mayhem long repressed everywhere on earth," he asserted.

He also saw possible effects in political terms: "Why are rhythmical sounds and motions so especially contagious? A rhythmical call to the crowd easily foments mass ecstasy: 'Duce! Duce! Duce!' The call repeats itself into the infinite and liberates the mind of all reasonable inhibitions. . . as in drug addiction, a thousand years of civilization fall away in a moment."

Dr. Meerloo predicted that the craze would pass "as have all paroxysms of exciting music." But he said that the psychic phenomenon was important and dangerous. He concluded in this way: "Rock 'n' roll is a sign of depersonalization of the individual, of ecstatic veneration of mental decline and passivity.

"If we cannot stem the tide with its waves of rhythmic narcosis and of future waves of vicarious craze, we are preparing our own downfall in the midst of pandemic funeral dances.

"The dance craze is the infantile rage and outlet of our actual world. In this craze the suggestion of deprivation and dissatisfaction of deprivation and dissatisfaction is stimulated and advertised day by day. In their automatic need for more and more, people are getting less and less."

"The awareness of this tragic contradiction in our epoch," Dr. Meerloo said, "must bring us back to a new assessment of what value and responsibility are."

## Notes

Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972), p. 9.

See specifically *Delusion and Mass-Delusion* (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Monographs, 1949) and *The Rape of the Mind: The Psychology of Thought Control, Menticide, and Brainwashing* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1956). Meerloo would go on to publish his thoughts on dance and rock 'n' roll in *The Dance, from Ritual to Rock and Roll—Ballet to Ballroom* (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1960).

**11. David Hajdu, *Blackboard Jungle from Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 115–16.**

*Blackboard Jungle* taught a generation of teenagers who they were and established the music now commonly called rock and roll as the sound of teen kinship. The trailer for the film began as the movie does, with Bill Haley and His Comets playing on the background track. We see Glenn Ford, dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase, glaring incredulously around the hectic street in front of a big-city school, like a white hunter entering the bush for the first time. Two pairs of boys behind the school-yard gates, one pair of them made up of a black boy and a white boy, do a swing dance, twirling each other around and flipping each other over their hips. “You are now listening to ‘Rock Around the Clock,’” the narrator intones. “This is the theme music from MGM’s sensational new picture, *Blackboard Jungle*.”

The scene cuts to a group of teenagers standing together silently, like a mob on the brink of something bad. A black kid stands next to a white boy sneaking a puff from a cigarette hidden in his cuffed palm. “Many people said the story could not, must not, dared not be shown,” the narration continues. Then we see another set of boys—again, one black (a then-unknown young actor named Sidney Poitier), one white. “It is fiction, but fiction torn from big city, modern savagery,” says the narrator. “It packs a brass-knuckled punch in its startling revelation of those teenage savages who turn big-city schools into a clawing jungle.” Twenty years after the Cotton Club had shut down, the jungle still stood as a white fantasy of black horrors and temptations, set to an irresistible dance beat.

The full effect of these images and the role of “Rock Around the Clock” in relation to them can be understood only in the context of the racial upheaval that was just beginning to rattle America—an erupting set of events so fresh that the newspapers had not yet settled on calling it the civil rights movement. In January 1952, the Supreme Court announced that it would hear the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the same period, Alan Freed was making headlines (his indisputable talent) for integrating pop music, presenting rhythm and blues records made by African Americans to a mixed-race audience of young people. In March 1952, Freed held the “Moondog Coronation Ball,” a rhythm and blues concert that drew some twenty thousand young people—whites and blacks together, at the Cleveland Arena, to dance to black music—and the show was shut down after the first song, performed by Paul “Hucklebuck” Williams, out of fear that the music would lead to a riot. The music wasn’t entirely new—it was still rhythm music and still elementally black—but the audience was changing, becoming more integrated as well as younger and more defiant, and that transformed the way it was taken.

The Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education*, outlawing segregation in the public schools, in May 1954, the same month “Rock Around the Clock” was released. The timing of the two events was a minor coincidence, of course; still, more broadly, racial integration was overlapping with musical integration, and each surely helped advance the other. By the time *Blackboard Jungle* opened, with its images of black and white kids smoking, jive dancing together, and otherwise acting “savage,” the desegregation of the schools—and the larger movement to desegregate America—dominated the news and divided much of the country. *Blackboard Jungle* came across as a testament to the consequences of mixing the races—a nightmare of lawlessness or a dreamscape of overdue freedoms delivered, depending on one’s point of view, race, or age. Rock and roll was not merely its soundtrack but its embodiment: black and white brought together with wild results.

## 12. James Maycock, Chess Records: The Original Blues Brothers, *The Independent*, November 1997

"WOW, YOU guys are really getting it on!" exclaimed Chuck Berry, observing the Rolling Stones cut 'Down The Road Apiece', a track he'd recorded himself just a few years earlier.

It was June, 1964, and this youthful British beat band were happily messing around at the Chess studio in Chicago as their older black musical idols watched on, intrigued. In the background Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williamson argued loudly about a woman from Kentucky. Muddy Waters, whose song 'Rollin' Stone', had supplied the English band with its moniker, even helped them bring in their equipment. Later on, they chatted with Willie Dixon and Buddy Guy.

Many of these Chicago blues legends were thrilled this group of Englishmen with long hair and pale faces were breathing new life into their decade-old songs. Ron Malo, the staff engineer at Chess, who recorded Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley back in the 1950's, helped to sharpen the British band's sound during their session. At the end of their 2 days, the Stones held a press conference outside the studio on South Michigan Avenue. With a hint of the madness they would let loose later on in the decade, it ended with a riot and a Chicago cop growling at them: "Get out of here or I'll lock up the whole goddamned bunch!"

Marshall Chess, son of Leonard, one of the 2 brothers who started the record label in 1947, had helped organise their visit. "At that time we didn't rent out the Chess Studios to outside people," he recalls. "But I was aware of the scene happening in England and I very much wanted to get into that scene myself. I was the same age." He also believes, "They were the same calibre as these great Chess bands." Several years later, Marshall would be managing the Stones and jumping gleefully into their hedonistic way of life. But if it were not for the poverty both his father and grandfather experienced in Poland, they may have never emigrated to America. "They were sleeping inside a house without heat, with a horse to keep them warm in the winter. The whole village moved to Chicago!"

That was in 1928. By the early 1940's, the two brothers, Leonard & Phil Chess, owned several bars and nightclubs in the black district of Chicago – the South Side. The Mocamba was their biggest club with Ella Fitzgerald, Billy Eckstine, Gene Ammons and other jazz stars of the day performing there. During this decade, a mass exodus of black Americans, exhausted by the racist-fuelled poverty of the Deep South, travelled to the booming industrial cities of the north, tempted by the promise of a better, richer, happier life.

But they were careful not to leave their music back in Alabama. The South Side became a bustling, dynamic, sometimes violent, neighbourhood with the blues echoing out of the drinking bars and dance clubs – a reassuring sound for the disorientated black immigrants. But there was a difference to the blues of the North. In Chicago, the rural blues music that black Southerners brought with them became increasingly amplified and refined. The musicians of the Windy City electrified the rural, country blues of the South to create a hipper, urban noise.

In 1947, Leonard and Phil Chess started signing local artists like Muddy Waters to Aristocrat Records – soon to become Chess Records. Their time managing various Chicago clubs gave them a feeling and understanding for what the black urban audience wanted to hear. It was Muddy Waters with his track, 'I Feel Like Goin' Home', that established the Chess brothers and Muddy himself in the black

music business of the late '40's.

With Willie Dixon as in-house producer, Chess Records released a flow of seminal R&B masterpieces from the late 1940's, right through the '50's and into the 1960's. Apart from their label, Argo, which dealt primarily with jazz musicians like Sonny Stitt and James Moody, Chess focused strictly on blues and black rock & roll. 'Rocket 88', recorded by Jackie Brenston & his Delta Cats in March 1951, is now considered the very first rock & roll single.

Their intense focus on these two genres of music resulted in Leonard and Phil Chess declining Sam Phillips's offer to purchase Sun Records, whose roster included an unknown Elvis Aaron Presley. They later claimed, "We didn't consider ourselves a hillbilly label at that time." Nonetheless, it was Sun Records who sent the mighty Howlin' Wolf from Memphis to Chess Records just a few years later. He became one of the defining blues musicians of post-war America.

Marshall Chess, who started working at Chess when he was twelve, remembers the Chicago label as, "An amazing, happy place where there was a lot of laughter. It was full of these crazy, eccentric characters." The brilliant harmonica player, Sonny Boy Williamson II, was just one of the picaresque personalities who recorded for Chess. He discovered that whisky helped in the recording process. But once, after drinking too much, he leant against the studio wall and slid to the floor. Still clutching the microphone, Williamson finished cutting the song in the exact position he fell in.

The success of Chess continued into the Sixties. Their experiments in doo-wop and soul music, with acts like the Dells, Etta James, Billy Stewart and Fontella Bass, were certainly popular but often dwarfed by the might of Motown in Detroit and Atlantic Records in New York. In 1969, the Chess brothers sold the company to GRT for 6 million dollars but kept the publishing rights. Leonard Chess died just months later. Marshall Chess recalls that GRT were, "People from California who had no idea what they bought and ruined it day by day. I was made president and my uncle was actually forced out by them. After about a year, I quit. They wanted to run it like a steel business."

The following year, he was invited to run Rolling Stones Records. He accepted and for seven years worked with the Stones at their most decadent. He produced the band's notorious documentary, *CS Blues*, and was credited as executive producer on seven of their albums. Marshall has good memories of this time: "It was like having a fabulous, hot love affair that cools off at the end. People say, 'Do you still hang out with them?' I say, 'No, do you hang out with your ex-lover?' I loved that period of my life and I learnt a tremendous amount from it. But at the end, I began to realise that it was wearing me down. I was taking five kinds of drugs and heroin was just one of them."

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of Chess Records, MCA have released 36 CDs this year. They're beautifully packaged, digitally remastered and include rare and unreleased songs as well as the pivotal recordings that so radically changed the landscape of 20th century music. The admiration that Marshall Chess still has for Chess Records, today, is palpable. "They put a disc in the Voyager space craft with all the cultural things of the earth on it and they put 'Johnny B. Goode' by Chuck Berry on it. I tell my children it's amazing that your grandfather produced a record and it's representing the earth to aliens." He adds, "I think that's pretty good for immigrants from Poland!"

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### 13. Jeff Tamarkin, "PAT BOONE: BOONE IN THE USA," *Goldmine*, 19 February 1991

LET'S PLAY the numbers game. According to Joel Whitburn's Top Pop Singles 1955-1986, Pat Boone is the fifth highest-ranking artist in the history of the Billboard singles charts. Only Elvis Presley, the Beatles, James Brown and Stevie Wonder were more successful (based on the number of singles charting and their positions). In the '50s, only Elvis was more popular, chart-wise, than Boone. Pat Boone reached the singles charts 60 times, putting him at #8 on that list. Six of those chart singles reached #1, spending a total of 21 weeks in that position, putting Boone in two more Top 10 lists.

So much for the numbers. Throw in the movies, the television appearances, the fan magazines and the collective screams of millions of once-teenaged females and it all adds up to this: Pat Boone was very, very popular in the '50s and the early '60s. It would not be an understatement to say that only Elvis had him licked.

And so, more than three decades later, Pat Boone is wondering why so many have forgotten. The folks behind the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in particular. Boone thinks he deserves, at least, to be considered for nomination to be inducted into that elite club. Perhaps more so, he thinks, than some of the artists already inducted.

Which is why Boone wrote a letter that was published in the Nov. 30, 1990 issue of *Goldmine* and why he now wants to set a few records straight in an interview. "I don't really expect ever to be nominated or elected into that select company," Boone wrote about the Hall of Fame in the published letter. He went on to explain why he didn't think he would be nominated. Chances are he's probably right.

"The 'purists'," he wrote, "the folks who really like the down and dirty, real and raunchy, original R&B/R&R, are not likely to appreciate my records or the part they played in the whole evolution of music." But, he wanted to make clear, his music was rock 'n' roll – by '50s standards, anyway – and it did play a role. Perhaps a very significant role. Perhaps without the likes of Pat Boone some of those artists who currently are in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame never would have been heard by those who voted them in. That is Boone's gripe, and he makes a convincing case.

Still, he's not unaware of how he is viewed by some in retrospect, or that he's got an uphill battle on his hands if he wants to see that reputation changed. "I wasn't Screamin' Jay Hawkins or even Elvis," he wrote, "but I was a gentle rocker."

In a 1976 *Rolling Stone* article, he put it more bluntly. "You know," he told that magazine, "there's something about me that makes a lot of people want to throw up. And I think I know what it is...In some cases, it may be a reaction to my music. In most cases, I think it's a reaction to my lifestyle and the things that I stand for."

Pat Boone's greatest sin, it seems, and the one that has most hurt his rock 'n' roll credibility with the hindsight of a few decades of considerably un-gentle rock 'n' roll, is that he was, and still is, clean-cut. Still, while he understands that cleanliness is not always next to godliness in rock 'n' roll, he blanches when told by this interviewer that even some music encyclopedias use less-than-savory words to describe his early recordings. "Like what?!" he asks, relieved only when told those words aren't necessarily obscene so much as unflattering.

Making his splash initially with "cover" versions of black rhythm 'n' blues records – he himself called his early hits "admittedly...sanitized" and "vanilla" in his letter – Boone was the first acceptable face of rock 'n' roll. He was religious, a family man, a college student even at the height of his success.

Most of all, he was white, and unlike other white rockers of the day, he was never portrayed as wild, didn't sneer or dress like a juvenile delinquent. He smiled a lot and popularized clean white buck shoes. He seemed like a genuine Mr. Nice Guy, sensible, well-groomed, well-reared. He knew where he was going in life and wrote books and magazine articles to help others find their way. Parents liked him. They wanted their kids to listen to Pat Boone's records. No, he wasn't Screamin' Jay Hawkins or even Elvis. Bad kids liked Elvis, good kids liked Boone. If anything, Pat Boone was the original anti-Elvis.

Even today, more than 35 years after he found his first taste of fame, Pat Boone comes off as too good to be true. He's still married to the same woman, he's still a practicing Christian and that college education paid off – he's an intelligent, well-informed, well-spoken man. He doesn't make the gossip pages with a drug or alcohol problem, never is seen with a questionably dressed babe, never utters a "dirty" word in public. There were some trying times, to be sure, but Boone came out a winner.

Even his kids – four daughters, the best-known of which, Debby, had her own brush with success with the 1977 smash 'You Light Up My Life', a #1 single for 10 weeks – are clean-cut, Christian, family-oriented. For years they toured with mom and pop as the Boone Family Singers. Pat Boone is a grandfather now, the kind one imagines driving around with a bumper sticker reading "Ask me about my grandkids." Or who'll tell you about them anyway.

To some, Pat Boone has come to represent everything rock 'n' roll isn't, which is why it may surprise that this grandpa has begun vying for his place in the music's history. Staunchly moralistic and politically conservative, Boone's views on many topics subscribe to those of the so-called religious right. Pick a controversial subject, and it's usually easy to figure out his position on it. Abortion? He's against it. Censorship? Thinks we need some. Madonna? A "talented tart." The rap group 2 Live Crew? "Criminals." He's nothing if not consistent. The Pat Boone of 1957 is largely the Pat Boone of 1991. He even looks like him.

Charles Eugene Boone was born June 1, 1934 in Jacksonville, Florida. His father, Archie, a descendant of the pioneer woodsman Daniel Boone, was a building contractor and his mother, Margaret, a registered nurse. Having hoped for a girl, who they planned to name Patricia, they nicknamed him Pat. A younger brother, Nick (who would go on to hit the charts twice himself in 1957, as Nick Todd), and two sisters, Margie and Judy, completed the family.

In 1936, the Boone family moved to Donelson, Tennessee and, four years later, to Nashville. Boone began singing in public at age 10 and by his teens was entering – and winning – local talent contests. At 13, while in the family barn, just he and the family cow Rosemary, Pat Boone found religion. "I realized that for me the Bible had the answers, that the teachings of Jesus answered all the questions I was asking," he later said. He was baptized that year, but, "I didn't become a good Christian overnight. In fact, I got my last spanking when I was 17."

By the time the spankings stopped, while attending David Lipscomb High School, Boone was on the baseball, basketball and track teams and was a reporter-cartoonist for the school paper. He acted and sang in school plays and was elected not only "most popular boy" but president of the student body.

In his junior year he met Shirley Foley, daughter of country-western singer Red Foley. When they were both 19, on November 7, 1953, the couple eloped.

By that time Boone had his own radio program, Youth On Parade, on Nashville station WSIX and had appeared on Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour on TV (he won top honors for all three of his appearances). In 1954, he also won on The Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts show in New York. That year, Boone recorded his first sides, four pop-style singles issued on the small Republic label in Nashville. They went nowhere and Pat and Shirley Boone moved to Denton, Texas later that year. Boone landed a job on Fort Worth TV station WBAP, for which he was paid \$44.50 a week plus ice cream and cottage cheese from the program's sponsor. "We owned a Bible, a pair of chinchillas and a 1949 Chevy," Shirley told McCall's magazine in 1958. They also added to that collection the first of four daughters, Cheryl (Cherry) Lynn, who would be followed in quick succession by Linda (Lindy) Lee, Deborah (Debby) Ann and Laura (Laury) Gene.

Boone, still planning to teach school and having no plans to become a show business giant, enrolled at North Texas State College in Denton. But his rising regional popularity was difficult to ignore, especially for Randy Wood, owner of Dot Records.

Boone had been introduced to Wood in Gallatin, Tennessee – the label had offices both there and in Chicago – before his move to Texas. At that time, Wood and Boone had a "handshake agreement" to record Boone as soon as appropriate song material came along. Boone expected that would take a few weeks. Wood called eight months later, in February 1955, asking Boone to come north to Chicago to cut a record.

What Boone didn't expect was the kind of material Wood had selected for him: a rhythm 'n' blues song, 'Two Hearts', written by Jesse Stone and Otis Williams and originally recorded by the latter's group, the Charms. With that first session, Pat Boone joined the burgeoning ranks of white pop singers covering black R&B or rock 'n' roll songs. He entered into a world with which he was admittedly unfamiliar.

Boone was no R&B fan when Wood called him to Chicago; he was only vaguely familiar with this new style that was beginning to catch on. He'd heard 'Sh-Boom', a 1954 hit for the white Canadian group the Crew-Cuts, covering the Chords, a black R&B group. But that wasn't enough to make Boone understand what he was supposed to do.

This music wasn't smooth, the lyrics were barely intelligible. Some of the other rhythm 'n' blues songs that were popular supposedly had dirty words in them. Not that he could tell.

Boone studied the Charms' record for hours, getting a feel for the beat and smoothing out the edges. When released on Dot in early 1955, it reached #16, setting off one of the most successful recording careers of the rock era.

But was it rock? To record buyers at the time, Boone says today, it certainly was. His detractors disagree. "He lacked all the essential rawness that characterizes rock 'n' roll and he was essentially an antidote to it," wrote Colin Escott in the liner notes of Jivin' Pat, a 1986 Bear Family collection from Germany. "No one bop-talked in a Pat Boone movie, no tenor sax teetered on the border of atonality on his records and he never looked to be living life close to the edge."

But whatever it was, it was popular. His next single, 'Ain't That A Shame', a cover of the Fats Domino hit, went to #1. The El Dorados' 'At My Front Door (Crazy Little Mama)' followed, making #7. In 1956, the Flamingos' 'I'll Be Home' received the Boone treatment, going to #4; its B-side, Little Richard's 'Tutti



Frutti', was toned down (some might say emasculated) and hit #12 itself, followed by 'Long Tall Sally', another Top 10. Ivory Joe Hunter's 'I Almost Lost My Mind' became Boone's second #1 that same year.

Today, Boone – as well as some R&B aficionados – says that the white covers of black R&B records helped introduce those originators to an audience beyond the black record-buying listenership. While some white disc jockeys, most notably Alan Freed, preferred to play only the original black recordings on the air, most avoided them. (Georgia Gibbs, Teresa Brewer, the Diamonds and the Crew-Cuts were some other white cover artists. What's often unmentioned is that numerous black acts, including the Flamingos and the Moonglows, among many others, were covering songs first recorded by mainstream white pop singers during the same period.)

The covers opened up the airwaves to rhythm 'n' blues songs that otherwise would never have been heard by white listeners, says Boone. And, once those white cover records were heard, he adds, curious listeners sought out the originals, making it possible for the likes of Little Richard and Fats Domino to cross over to the white teenaged audience. Eventually, white radio had no choice but to play the rock 'n' roll originals.

That's one opinion. Another is that the white cover artists, led by Boone, shut out the blacks. With the well-produced, whitewashed cover versions available for airplay, jittery DJs could supply their audience with currently popular tunes without having to resort to playing the raunchier black originals. The cover records sold millions of copies and earned millions of dollars that would otherwise have gone to the black artists (or at least their record labels). It's a debate that has never been settled.

How did the black artists feel about it? That depends on who's being asked, and when. Boone says that Domino and Little Richard, at least, were thankful. Not entirely true, according to Little Richard. At least not at the time.

In the Chuck Berry documentary film, *Hail! Hail! Rock 'N' Roll!*, Berry, Little Richard and Bo Diddley are sitting around discussing the early days. Diddley is recalling that the black stations played R&B while the white stations played pop. "There was a bad omen hanging there when the thing became separated," says Diddley. "R&B became what we were doing, and rock 'n' roll became what the white kids were doing."

"When I started with the 'wop-bop-a-loo-mop-a-lop-bam-boom,' and Pat Boone covered it," says Little Richard, "I was 'woo, wop-boppin' all over the place, and so I remember [Specialty Records owner] Art Rupe says he would put my record on the top stations, and then here come Pat Boone. The white kids wanted mine, 'cause it was real rough and raw, and Pat Boone had this smooth version [imitates Boone's version]. And so the white kids would take mine and put it in the drawer and put his on top of the dresser...I was mad. When Pat Boone covered my record, I was mad, I wanted to get him. I said I'm goin' to Nashville to find him.

"I wanted to get him at that time because to me he was stoppin' my progress. I wanted to be famous and here's this man that came and took my song. And not only did he take 'Tutti Frutti' but he took 'Long Tall Sally'. I wanted to do somethin' about it. Now, in later years, I thought about that and said it was good. But back then I couldn't stand it."

Perception is, perhaps, one reason why Boone's hits aren't remembered as fondly by hard-core

rockers today as those by the pioneers who've already been elected to the Hall of Fame. It is largely true, as Boone wrote in the letter published in *Goldmine*, that he and the other "vanilla" cover artists "introduced the whole idea of this music to a larger audience, and in palatable and acceptable music garb...[They] played a very significant catalyst role in easing the fears across the country and making this music acceptable to mainstream America."

But another reason is that Boone didn't stay with rock 'n' roll very long. After the initial flurry of hits in 1955-56, he more or less got out. The next hits, and all of those which followed, were ballads, movie themes, standards.

Although he recorded other rock 'n' roll songs, including Roy Brown's 'Good Rockin' Tonight' and Big Joe Turner's 'Honey Hush', they weren't hits for him. Only one of Boone's subsequent Top 10 hits, 1962's 'Speedy Gonzales', can be considered rock 'n' roll, and even he admits it was more of a novelty record.

Whether Boone wanted to continue recording rock 'n' roll after those initial hits is moot. The reason he didn't is simply because by then the black artists were breaking out: Berry, Richard, Diddley, Domino and dozens of others were finally breaking through to the white audience. In Escott's liner notes, Boone is quoted: "Eventually, in fact pretty quickly, the Top 40 stations began to play the original versions so that little avenue to hitdom vanished."

There was also a little problem called Elvis. Boone had had a head start, charting for the first time in April 1955. By the time Elvis hit with 'Heartbreak Hotel' in March 1956, Boone had been established, with three Top 10 records to his name. When Elvis arrived, there was no longer any doubt about what white rock 'n' roll sounded like. And it wasn't Pat Boone. ... © Jeff Tamarkin, 1991

#### **14. Jeff Greenfield, "‘But Papa, It’s My Music, I Like It’," *New York Times*, March 7, 1971, pp. HF1, 6.**

TERROR. Perhaps you think you can define it. It is sitting in a jet fighter cockpit, plummeting to a crash landing in a hostile country. It is losing footing on a mountain ledge in the midst of a blizzard. It is walking down a deserted city street in the dead of night, with the sudden, certain sound of footsteps behind you.

No, that is not terror. I will tell you what terror is. Terror is waiting on line at 6:30 in the morning on a school holiday in 1957 for the Brooklyn Paramount to open for Alan Freed's rock and roll revue.

You have been up since 5:30 on your first day of vacation, Christmas or Easter (Hanukkah or Passover in my set). You have staggered into the darkness, found your friend Alan (another normal, neurotic Jewish kid) and weaved your way into the subway. There you pass interminable time, speeding past unfamiliar stops, emerging into the sullen dawn in downtown Brooklyn (down-town Brooklyn?). There, about a block away, is the Brooklyn Paramount, a huge movie palace built to hold the thousands who do not go out to movies anymore. On the marquee are big red letters: "Ten Days Only! Alan Freed's All-Star Rock 'n' Roll Revue!"

You walk to the theater, past the shuttered luncheonettes and cheap clothing stores. There is already a knot of kids waiting on line, even though the doors will not open for 2 hours and 45 minutes. And now you will begin to learn the meaning of terror.

These people are different. They do not look the way I do. They do not talk the way I do. I do not think they were born the same way I was. All of the males are six feet, seven inches tall. The last six inches is their hair, carefully combed into a pompadour. They are lean, rangy, even scrawny (except for one who is very, very fat). They have the hard faces of the Children of the working poor. They read auto specs at night, not college catalogues. They wear St. Christopher medals, white T-shirts with their cigarette packs held in the left sleeve which is rolled up to the muscles. They have muscles. The girls are all named Fran. They have curlers in their hair and scarves tied around their heads. They chew gum. They wear jeans and sweaters, and their crucifixes bounce on their breasts, some of which are remarkable examples of stress under pressure. The conversation is guttural, half-sentences and grunts, with innuendos and veiled hints of lubricity. “Eh, that party, eh, Fran? Remember, heh, heh? Nah, she don’ remember nuthin’.” Fran is giggling, blushing.

There is about these people an overwhelming sense of physical force, the same sense exuded by the students of Ascension High who chased the Jews home from school every afternoon: they hit other people a lot. Every joke, every insult, every question, is followed by openhanded jabs to the face, punches on the arm, slaps which barely miss being punches. It is like watching Leo Gorcey and Huntz Hall in the Bowery Boys movies. At this point, there is only one stark thought in my mind: what in God’s name am I doing here? These people are going to kill me and steal my five-dollars and I will not be found for days. Consequently, the strategy of waiting on line at the Paramount is clear. You do not talk with your friend about your grades on the Social Studies test. You do not talk about where you are going to college. You do not engage in precocious arguments about socialism. You keep your big mouth shut. The vow of silence makes time go slowly, so you look at the posters over the theater entrance: the pictures of the stars blown up on cardboard, the names spelled out in letters glittering from the gold and silver dust. There is Buddy Holly and the Crickets; the Cletones, in white dinner jackets and red slacks; Jo-Ann Campbell, “the blonde bombshell” who wears high-heeled shoes and very tight skirts, and whose biggest hand comes when she turns her back to the audience. If you talk at all, it is in grunts to the others. “Yeah, Frankie Lyman, I saw him—seen him— last year. You heard the new Fats Domino?” You wait for the doors to open, for the sanctuary of the dark theater, for the Terror to go away. What were we waiting for, those dark mornings? The singers and their songs, yes; but there were shows that were clinkers. Alan Freed paid mediocre fees to his talent, splitting the net with his partners and himself. Sometimes he could not pull in the big names, and he was left with headliners who had recorded a single hit that everyone knew would not be repeated. No, it was something else. We waited for Alan Freed and what he was for the children of the 1950’s. And waited because of something in each of us: an unspoken, undetected yearning for a sense of unity; an urge to join and celebrate this music that was ours as a community; an impulse that a decade later swept our younger brothers and sisters out of mainstream America. Alan Freed had come out of Middle America in the mid-1950’s, rising from \$43-a-week obscurity in New Castle, Pa., to regional prominence in Akron, Ohio, and later Cleveland. He took music that had been played only on black radio stations and sold in black neighborhoods—race music, it was called—and played this black music for white kids.

Freed played this music with an infectious on-the-air spirit, emphasizing the heavy afterbeat by slamming a telephone book with the palm of his hand, shouting encouragement to the frenzy of a tenor saxophone, clanging a cowbell. And somewhere between Akron and Cleveland, he chose to label the sound with a term heard again and again in the bluntly sexual lyrics of rhythm and blues, in titles like “My Baby Rocks Me With a Steady Roll,”<sup>1</sup> or “All She Wants to Do Is Rock.” He called it rock and roll. It had a good beat. You could dance to it. The country was finding out in 1954 that Alan Freed knew what the kids wanted to hear. Rock and roll conquered young white

America that year. Slowly at first, then regularly, rhythm and blues songs began selling outside the racial barriers, winning places on mainstream pop music charts. “I Understand” by the Four Tunes; “One Mint Julep” by the Clovers; “Gee” by the Crows; “Cryin’ in the Chapel” by Sonny Till and the Orioles—all sold well. All were copied—“covered” is the polite music term—by white artists who imitated the distinctive arrangements note for note: a legal if shady practice, since arrangements could not be protected by copyright. But despite the imitations, the kids were often buying the original versions. Because those were the versions with the beat.

The first Alan Freed show in New York was during Christmas of 1954, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It grossed \$150,000—an unheard-of sum for live shows. But it was nothing compared to his Labor Day show in 1955 which pulled in \$254,000. Freed, now a \$75,000-a-year disk jockey on WINS, had gone into partnership with the station—which may account for its indifference to his plugs over his radio show—and the 10-day affair netted \$125,000. Disk jockeys all over the country began promoting rock and roll stage shows, and in New York, the seasons were marked by the Brooklyn Paramount—Christmas, Easter, Labor Day, Christmas.

Each night, sprawled on my bed on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, I would listen to the world that Alan Freed created. To a 12- or 13-year-old, it was a world of unbearable sexuality and celebration; a world of citizens under 16, in a constant state of joy or sweet sorrow.

Freed would read “dedications” to the songs from faraway places with strange-sounding names: Bayside, New Dorp, Huntington, Erasmus, Riverdale.

“To John from you-know-who. I want you, but you want her. Listen to the words of this song—and go back to her.”

“To Mike from Fran. Going steady for six weeks. . . and forever.”

“To the kids of Miss Epstein’s class. Good luck—and may our friendships never be broken.”

Somewhere, somewhere there really were candy stores with jukeboxes, where the kids ate Pop’s hamburgers and danced after school the way they did in those Jane Withers movies. Somewhere, there were parties with close dancing (Bill Haley and the Comets cut a song called “Dim, Dim the Lights” which had more sexual implications than “I Am Curious (Yellow)”). Somewhere there were kids who spent their time with each other, touching and laughing and running around to all this music. . .

“Turn that damn thing down!”

My father has always been a fair and gentle man, but in the face of Little Richard or Fats Domino he abandoned himself to rage.

“You’re going to turn your brain to mush!”

Francis of Assisi become Spiro Agnew. My adolescence is a continuing re-play: the door swinging open, the dark, furrowed brow, the flash of anger, the sullen retreat. Like a river of troubled water, rock and roll music was the boundary of a house divided.

Worse, there was a fifth column, a corner of my mind which told me: you know, of course, they’re right. It is crap and your brain is turning to mush. One of the authentic scars of my life—far more vivid than a broken date or a broken zipper—is buying a rock and roll album with my parents

during a shopping trip to Union Square. We walked into a record store, and there it was, on Specialty Records: “Here’s Little Richard.” On a yellow background, a tight shot of a Negro face bathed in sweat, the beads of perspiration clearly visible, mouth wide open in a rictus of sexual joy, hair flowing endlessly from the head.

“Oh my God,” my mother said.

Come on, I thought, let’s just buy it and get out of here, come on. . . “We better play it first,” my father said.

The saleslady smiled indulgently. From the phonograph, ripping through the store, came the shouted opening to “Long Tall Sally”: “Gonna tell Aunt Mary ‘bout Uncle John! Says he got the misry but he has a lotta fun! Oh baby, who-o-oooh baby. . .”

“Jesus Christ,” my father said.

I muttered something vague about “authentic gospel roots. . . tradition of Afro-American. . . folk. . .” but what I was saying inside was something else: look, it’s my music, I like it, and you’re not supposed to listen to it anyway.

And that, after all, is what I was doing on line outside the Brooklyn Paramount on a chilly dawn, surrounded by six-foot, seven-inch hoodlums who were going to kill me. It was a refuge from ridicule, a liberated zone where everyone else liked the same crap I did. In those days before the Beatles, before scholarly studies of rock in *Partisan Review*, before even Presley, Ed Sullivan was not presenting rock and roll stars. They were rarely seen on television outside local teen bandstand shows, and when they did appear it was an embarrassment. They did not belong there, vulnerable to our elders’ outrage. They belonged here—apart from Them and with Us.

This whole sense of self-defense was part of the magic attraction of rock and roll. Night after night, Alan Freed would indignantly answer editorials in the *Brooklyn Tablet* or the *Daily Mirror* that accused rock and roll of filth or fostering juvenile delinquency—the latter an accusation heard with more frequency after “The Blackboard Jungle” reached the screen, opening with the music of “Rock Around the Clock.”

“It’s the one per cent of the bad kids who are making it rough for the 99 per cent of the good kids.” Freed would say, and the theme became part of our cause. When Freed began to make rock and roll movies in the mid-1950’s— with plots out of the I’ve-got-a-great-idea-let’s-put-on-a-dance-and-build-the-new-gym school—he stressed this theme that good kids liked rock and roll music. But the adult anger, the fury, the ban on rock shows in Boston and Bridgeport and New Haven, pulled us into a kind of sect. To journey to Brooklyn was not simply going to a show: it was an act of faith.

Of course, nobody knew that or talked like that at the time. There was no self-conscious Woodstock spirit, no notion that this was a way we could live out our lives. We knew we had to grow up sometime, to be like Them, We were here because. . . well, it had a good beat and you could dance to it.

Actually, my first journey was not out to Brooklyn, but to the safer regions of the New York Paramount on Times Square. Alan Freed had taken a big gamble, breaking the four-month cycle to put on a show during Washington’s Birthday of 1957. To shorten the odds on conquering the citadel of Dorsey, Goodman, and Sinatra, Freed had booked two big acts: Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers, and the Platters. And he chose this occasion for the premiere of his movie, “Don’t Knock the Rock,” with Bill Haley and the Comets and Little Richard.

My friend Alan and I got there about 6:30 a.m. The line already went past McBride's Ticket Service's plate glass window, down 43rd street toward the offices of The New York Times. By the time the doors opened, the line was

blocks long. The show broke all of Sinatra's records. It also broke McBride's plate glass window. The kids danced in the aisles. They stomped so hard to the beat that the Fire Department evacuated the balcony. They cheered the good-guy grown-up in the movie who said, "I don't see anything wrong with the music. I kinda like it." They told Middle America—through pictures in Life magazine—that the conquest was complete.

At about 9 a.m. at the Brooklyn Paramount, a ticket-taker, alone and afraid in a world he never made, edges into the booth. The line begins to rock, slowly, ominously. The doors open. Ushers flank the line, chanting "Admission is \$1.50. Have your money ready please. Admission is. . ."

The enormous, cavernous theater is filled as it has not been since television. The horrible Western or mystery movie begins. The movie ends. Cheers. The newsreel comes on. Groans and boos. The newsreel ends. Cheers. Another newsreel—a feature on pet shows or women's fashions—comes on. Boos and shouts. The newsreel ends. Cheers.

The lights go out. There is movement behind the curtain. Anticipatory shrieks. The announcer: "And now—the Brooklyn Paramount is proud to present—Alan Freed and his Rock and Roll Revue!" Yaaaayyyy!

The lights go on, red and blue and yellow, as the Alan Freed All-Star 18-piece orchestra plays "Night Train," one of Freed's trademarks. The band—as Freed has told us innumerable times—has great stars, sax men Sam the Man Taylor, Big Al Sears, Panama Francis. The song ends and Freed comes out to enormous cheers, grinning widely from a slightly misshapen face, permanent reminder of an auto crash in 1954 and the plastic surgery. His voice is raspy, electrically charged.

"Hiya!"

"Hiiii!"

"This is Alan Freed, the ol' king of rock 'n' roll."

The acts. In a sense, they are all the same. Four or five singers, outlandishly dressed, in flaming red dinner jackets, purple pants, yellow shirts. There are always two mikes—one for the lead singer, one for the rest of the group, including (always) a bass singer who supplies the do-bobba, doo-bobba line, one falsetto, to surround the reedy lead voice with logistical support.

The steps. They defy description. In a tribute to symmetry, the guy on the right puts out his right hand, the guy on the left puts out his left hand, the guy in the middle puts out both hands. Fingers snap and wave, in mirror-image perfection. Now the hands switch, the feet shuffle in tempo. The tenor sax break begins. The singers whirl around; they do splits. They gesture with the words.

"You know"—point out

"In my heart"—point to

the heart "I pray"—

hands together in

prayer

"We'll never part"—hands separate, heads shake no

No group, no matter how big, did more than six or seven songs (although Little Richard, in his last

show before a four-year retirement, was on-stage for 40 minutes). It kept the shows short enough to do six or seven a day, which hiked the grosses. But nobody minded. Few of the groups had been in existence long enough to have a long string of songs, and the more groups that appeared, the better the shows.

And all the while, back at the radio show, a constant hype was kept up by Paul Sherman—the solid, straight, square

d.j. who subbed for Freed. Sherman, whose voice went up 20 decibels during his stint on Freed's slot, would tell us endlessly that "Alan's at the Brooklyn Paramount theater right now, in an un-be-liev-a-ble show, you've just got to go see it." If you were home listening, if you hadn't seen the show, you felt like everybody in the world was at a party except you.

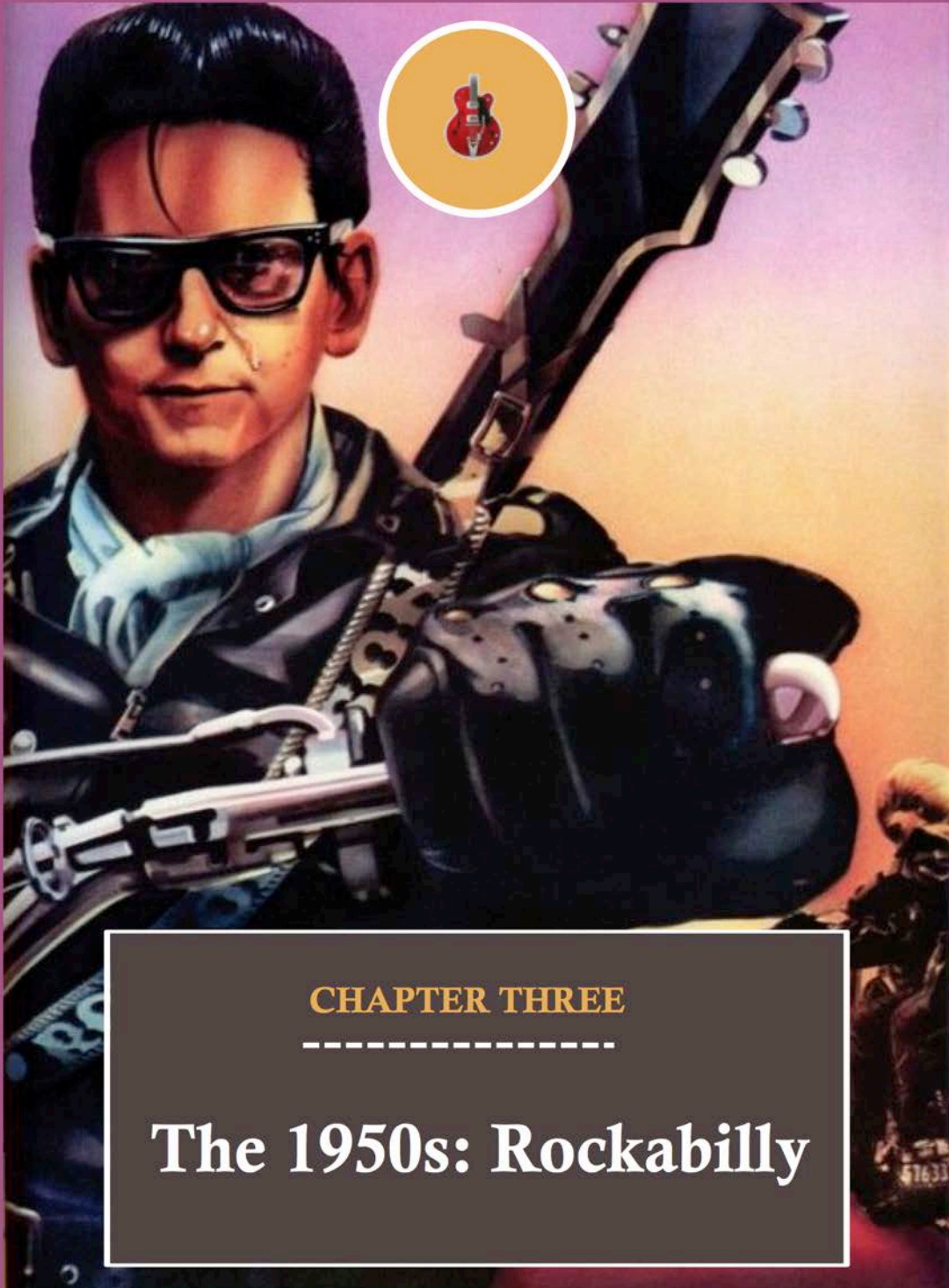
Alan Freed was driven off the air in 1959 in the wake of the payola scandals. He had given himself authorship credit—and a royalty share—on many songs he hadn't really written and, as the best-known jockey, Freed was the scapegoat. He left New York for the West Coast, where he found and lost several jobs. In early 1965, as the Beatles first swept America, Freed was indicted for perjury. He died at 43 of a liver ailment before the month was out.

The Brooklyn Paramount is no longer a theater. It's part of Long Island University. There is nothing there to remind anybody that Alan Freed once existed. In late 1969, I went to the shiny new Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden for a Fifties rock and roll revival. As I approached the entrance, I felt the Terror. The Others were there, a little plumper, a turtleneck or two where T-shirts used to be, but with the pompadours, the grunts, the hostility still in place. They had all married Fran. A lot of them wore American flags and Honor America buttons. I hid my peace button instinctively. Terror does not die easily.

But we went in together and when the M.C. announced that this show was being dedicated to Alan Freed we applauded together, and when the Five Satins came out and sang "In the Still of the Night," we sang with them and stood together and cheered together until they sang it again.

## Notes

1 Greenfield is most likely referring to the blues standard "My Man Rocks Me (with One Steady Roll)," originally recorded in 1922 by Trixie Smith.



CHAPTER THREE

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**The 1950s: Rockabilly**



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2. Sonny Burgess, “Foreward, “ in <i>Rockabilly: The Twang Heard ‘Round the World. The Illustrated History</i> , ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)	92
3. “Elvis Defends Low-Down Style,” <i>The Charlotte Observer</i> , June 27, 1956, p. 1B	94
4. Michael Dregni, “Elvis Presley: Speaking in Tongues,” in <i>Rockabilly: The Twang Heard ‘Round the World</i>	96
5. Nick Tosches, from <i>Hellfire: The Jerry Lee Lewis Story</i> (New York: Delacorte, 1982): 52–63.	99
6. Greil Marcus , “Buddy Holly: The Lost Boy,” in <i>Rockabilly: The Twang Heard ‘Round the World</i>	105
7. Michael Dregni, “Roy Orbison: the Man with the Voice,” in <i>Rockabilly: The Twang Heard ‘Round the World</i>	108
9. Bill Millar, “DOO-WOP: AT THE HOP,” <i>The History of Rock</i> , 1982	111
10. Bill Millar, “FRANKIE LYMON: WHY DO FOOLS FALL IN LOVE?,” Pye Records, 1972	114
11. Bill Millar, “Alan Freed: Mr. Rock’n’Roll,” <i>The History of Rock</i> , 1982	117
12. Richard Goldstein, “Master of Mediocrity,” <i>West Magazine</i> , 1968.	121
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13. Jeff Tamarkin, “DICK CLARK: THE BEAT GOES ON,” <i>Goldmine</i> , 28 December 1990	126
14. Peter Guralnick, “Jerry Lee Lewis: Hang Up my Rock ‘N’ Roll Shoes,” <i>Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock ‘N’ Roll</i> (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)	131

**1. Peter Guralnick, “Boppin’ the Blues: Sam Phillips & the Sun Sound,” in *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock ‘N’ Roll* (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)**

Phillips was the Sun Records in Memphis. The bright yellow label with its eleven Sun beams. Jerry Lee Lewis and His Pumping Piano. Carl Perkins the Rocking Guitar Man. Rufus “Bear Cat” Thomas. And, of course, Elvis Presley, the original Hillbilly Cat. That’s the way the credits read, and it all sounds curiously old-fashioned now. But if the origin of a music can be traced to any one source, for rock ‘n’ roll that source would be Sun. And if there is one man without whom the revolution which took place in American popular music seems difficult to imagine, that man is Sam Phillips.

Phillips, an ex-radio engineer from Florence, Alabama, first got into music in the late forties “when Negro artists in the South who wanted to make a record just had no place to go. Rhythm and blues record men like Jules and Saul Bihari would come down South into Tennessee from the West Coast with a tape recorder and set up a studio in a garage to record the Negro blues singers of the South. So I set up a studio in 1950 just to make records with some of those great Negro artists.”

It sounds a little disarming, but Phillips in fact recorded Howlin’ Wolf, Walter Horton, Bobby Bland, Little Junior Parker, and B.B. King, all at the very beginning of their careers. Memphis, of course, was a hotbed of blues activity at the time; in addition to Howlin’ Wolf, B.B. King, Rufus Thomas, and Joe Hill Louis all had their own radio shows, and there was a relaxed social and musical interchange which was reflected in the music. Phillips leased all his sides to the Biharis, and they appeared on the Modern and RPM labels, until he met Leonard Chess, who was just then starting out on his 5,000-mile promotion and recording swings through the South cutting artists in the field and selling records out of the back of his car. Phillips started supplying Chess with material, too, and it was from the fall-out that resulted from this arrangement that Howlin’ Wolf eventually ended up on both the Chess and RPM labels at the same time. This led to a considerable amount of ill feeling, as well as a lawsuit, with the Biharis signing Ike Turner, just out of his teens but already appearing as house pianist on many of the Memphis sessions, as talent scout and producer. Chess Records spirited Howlin’ Wolf off to Chicago and then concentrated on consolidating their holdings there. Sam Phillips went on to found Sun Records.

Sun Records was, in the beginning, almost exclusively a blues label. It featured local artists like James Cotton, Willie Nix, Dr. Ross, and Harmonica Frank, the Great Medical Menagerist. Phillips kept up a steady stream of blues releases until 1954 when Sun No. 209 featured a nineteen-year-old white singer doing an easy fluid version of Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup’s “That’s All Right” backed, appropriately enough, by a Bill Monroe bluegrass tune. “He’s the new rage,” a Louisiana disc jockey said of him at the time. “Sings hillbilly in r&b time. Can you figure that out? He wears pink pants and a black coat and owns a Cadillac painted pink with a black top. He’s going terrific, and if he doesn’t suffer too much popularity he’ll be all right.”

That was Elvis Presley, of course, and of the ten sides that he cut for Sun five were blues, five were country, and taken together they established a whole new mode in music. It was a synthesis that a lot of people had been groping toward for some time. Bill Haley had already had a couple of hits on

what were essentially white covers of black material. Johnnie Ray crossed over a little bit going the other way. It was a natural enough connection, especially after the fact, but Sam only man to sense the nature of that connection and, perhaps because of his extensive background in blues and “race” music, the only man to exploit it to its fullest.

“Over and over,” says Marion Keisker, Phillips’s secretary, “I remember Sam saying, ‘If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.’ ” With Elvis, Phillips apparently found the key, because following Elvis’s success he had a succession of rockabillys who did just that. All of his major artists were poor whites who had not only lived in constant contact with black people all their lives but had obviously absorbed a great deal of their culture. “The man who taught me guitar was an old coloured man,” said Carl Perkins, the son of a sharecropper himself, who grew up working side by side with blacks every day. “See, I

was raised on a plantation in the flatlands of Lake County, Tennessee, and we were the only white people on it. White music, I liked Bill Monroe, his fast stuff; for coloured I liked John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, their electric stuff. Even back then I liked to do Hooker songs Bill Monroe–style, blues with a country beat.” For Charlie Rich it was just something he picked up in the fields, and Jerry Lee Lewis remembers sneaking off to Haney’s Big House to see B.B. King, Sunnyland Slim, and all the honky tonk pianists. Elvis himself recalled for a British interviewer: “I’d play along with the radio or phonograph. We were a religious family going around to sing together at camp meetings and revivals, and I’d take my guitar with us when I could. I also dug the real low-down Mississippi singers, mostly Big Bill Broonzy and Big Boy Crudup, although they would scold me at home for listening to them. ‘Sinful music,’ the townsfolk in Memphis said it was. Which never bothered me, I guess.”

It all seems prosaic enough in retrospect, but at the time even Sam Phillips must have had his doubts. Elvis hung around the studio for nearly a year before Phillips actually recorded him, and when he did it was not a blues but a sentimental ballad that they initially went into the studio to record. According to legend “That’s All Right” was worked out during a break in the follow-up session, and that’s the way it sounds: easy, unforced, with all the raw vitality and exuberance of some musicians who got together to make music for themselves and their own amusement. And once they got past the problem of a B-side (in this case “Blue Moon of Kentucky,” Bill Monroe’s classic bluegrass tune, which they approached with equal irreverence), they were home free. Sam Phillips brought the acetate down to the very popular Memphis DJ Dewey Phillips (no relation), who played it over and over on his *Red Hot and Blue* show, which was listened to by black and white Memphians alike. With the response that the record got, there was nothing for it but to get “the man of the hour” down to the radio studio for an interview. Elvis was so self-conscious that he hid out in a neighbourhood movie theatre, the Suzore No. 2, but his parents retrieved him and sent him down to the station, where Dewey elicited that it was all-white Humes High School from which he had graduated (“I wanted to get that out,” said Dewey, “because a lot of people listening had thought he was coloured”).

The confusion continued well past the point that the record had achieved widespread local success. “I recall one [rhythm and blues] disc jockey telling me that Elvis [Presley] was so country he shouldn’t be played after 5 A.M.,” said Sam Phillips, “and the country jocks said he was too black for them.” But Phillips, and Elvis, persevered in what amounted to a sustained campaign to democratize American popular culture. At the same time Sam Phillips, for all of his business acumen, seems to have decided that Elvis had cornered whatever market there was for this strange new music, at least

for the moment. When Carl Perkins came in to audition about a month after the record's release ("I still couldn't get over hearing [it]," he told Michael Lydon), Phillips told him, " 'No, boy, I'm not taking nobody.' I said, 'Just ten minutes.' I did some fast things, and he said that was too much like Elvis, but he liked the country material." It was not until he sold Elvis's contract to RCA (another miscalculation of some small proportions, although the \$35,000 he received was helpful in setting up a financial base for the company) that he allowed Perkins to record the kind of music he had been playing around his home town of Jackson for the last couple of years. The result was "Blue Suede Shoes," and it was one of the biggest sellers of all time.

There followed a period of remarkable activity and accomplishment. Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, Jerry Lee Lewis, all achieved national stature while other artists like Sonny Burgess, Billy Riley, Onie Wheeler, and Warren Smith each enjoyed good local success. In Jerry Lee Lewis's case Phillips was once again the reluctant discoverer, and Lewis, who had sold all the eggs from his father's farm to make the trip to Memphis, had to threaten to camp out on the Sun doorstep before getting an audition. Whatever his receptivity, though, Phillips's instincts were always good. He always seems to have gotten the best out of his artists, and they in turn would seem to have fed off of each other's talents. Jerry Lee Lewis, for example, made the bigger hit out of a brilliant adaptation of Elvis's "Mean Woman Blues," which Roy Orbison, another Sun alumnus, was to take almost note for note in a highly popular 1963 version. Elvis covered Carl Perkins's "Blue Suede Shoes" shortly after his switch to RCA; Jerry Lee did a great version of Perkins's "Matchbox," on which he had originally played; and Johnny Cash joined Perkins to write two of Perkins's early hits, "All Mama's Children" and "That's Right." All in all it was a period of extraordinary creativity, on the part of both artists and producer, and I think all these interrelationships can be taken as evidence of the peculiar symbiosis which even today continues to exist among Phillips's widely scattered Memphis artists.

His production methods were instinctive and almost always appropriate. Like Leonard Chess he was one of the first to go for a heavy echo effect, but the overall sound was crisp, clean, and full of life. Also like Leonard Chess, the primary focus was on the artist, and it was in his handling of their diverse talents that Phillips excelled. He sensed not only their particular gift but their potential as well, a potential which in some cases the artist himself did not see.

"I had written 'I Walk the Line,' " said Johnny Cash for the twenty-four-hour radio History of Rock 'n' Roll, "I meant it for a very slow mournful-sounding ballad, and we got into the session, Sam Phillips kept having us pick up the tempo until—I didn't like it at all, the tempo we recorded it at. First time I heard it on the radio, I called him and begged him to not send out any more, to not release it, I didn't like it at all. And he said, Well, let's go ahead and give it a chance. And so we did, and it was the biggest thing I've ever had."

This period of artistic and commercial success was short-lived. Rock 'n' roll died, killed off by the moneymen's need to control the product and the consequent payola scandals; the bigger artists were lured off by the major companies, the rest went their separate ways. Some got into studio work; others disappeared from sight, never to be heard from again. Jack Clement, Phillips's assistant, is a successful Nashville producer. Carl Perkins, after years of alcoholism and semi-obscurity, joined Johnny Cash's troupe, which also employs his old drummer, W.S. "Fluke" Holland as a member of The Tennessee (once Two) Three. Jerry Lee Lewis, of course, was brought down by scandal and then resurrected in the country field. And Elvis remained prisoner to the end, insulated by a retinue of personal retainers and a wall of privacy which was all but impenetrable.

Sam Phillips went on to greater things. He is a man of diversified financial interests and one of the

original investors in the Holiday Inn chain. He maintained Sun Records until the mid-sixties, mostly out of nostalgia, it would seem, and out of loyalty to the few artists who had stayed on with him. His interest had gone out of it, though, and while he has never really gotten out of music altogether, it seems clear that he will never again be as involved as he was when Sun Records was in its heyday. He has left in any case a remarkable legacy, both of black blues and the white adaptation of it which became rock 'n' roll. He has written in fact one of the most astonishing chapters in the history of American popular music, and for this we can only be grateful.

### **Discography:**

*The Sun Records Collection* (Rhino 71780).

*The Blues Came Down from Memphis* (Charly 67); *Blue Flames: A Sun Blues Collection* (Rhino 70962); *Mystery Train* (Rounder SS38).

*The Complete Sun Singles*, Vols. I and II (Bear Family 15801, 15802)

## **2. Sonny Burgess, “Foreward, “ in *Rockabilly: The Twang Heard 'Round the World. The Illustrated History*, ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)**

I never heard the term "rockabilly" back then. Nobody did. Everybody said, "Where'd that term come from?" I don't know. We never really pinned it down, where that term came from. When people asked what music we played, we were rock 'n' rollers. We didn't think about "rockabilly." We were rock 'n' rollers.

It was shocking music to people at the time.

Elvis, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Warren Smith, Billy Riley, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins, Johnny Burnette and the Rock 'n' Roll Trio—we played shows together all over the country. It was wild back then.

Sonny Burgess and the Pacers—we had a real show. We used to have these 50-foot-long cables for our guitars which would allow us to jump off stage and play out in the crowd. We had the cables specially made. One night back in '56, we were playing a show with Marty Robbins, Ray Price, and the Maddox Brothers and Rose at Robinson Auditorium in Little Rock, Arkansas. My guitarist Joe Lewis, our bassist Johnny Ray Hubbard, and I all jumped off the stage and we didn't look before we leaped. Usually stages were about 12 inches up to three foot high. We just assumed this was the same, so we jumped off and there was an orchestra pit and we went down. We must have dropped 10 foot. Johnny Ray's upright bass just came all to pieces. But the show had to go on, and so we climbed back up on stage and kept on playing.

Another time, I tried to dye my hair white. It was black and I wanted to dye it white. Perkins was blue with his blue suede shows. Elvis was pink and black. I wanted a color, too. I was reading about a guy named Shell Scotty, a detective in pulp magazines, and he had white hair with black eyebrows. I thought that would be really cool, different. Me and my wife, Joann, we decided we'd do it but it turned out red. It was really red. We were heading out to California that week to join the tour with [johnny] Cash in '57. So the Pacers and I all got red tux jackets with black shirts, black ties, and black

pants. I had that red tuxedo and got red shoes, red socks, and played a red Telecaster and red Stratocaster. I sure stood out.

My band also had a trumpet player, Jack Nance. Adding a trumpet to the band was actually good for us, because nobody else had a trumpet—they all had saxophones. We wanted a sax player, but couldn't find one. We already had Russ Smith playing drums; Jack Nance was also a drummer but he was also a music major and played a little bit of everything. He had an old trumpet and that's how we wound up with a trumpet player. In clubs, it was fantastic, you could play it loud! It turned out great for us. But Jack would get hit a lot. See, people would reach up to touch us and hit his trumpet and he had false teeth—young guy, but he had false teeth—which put things out of whack.

We were in Truman, Arkansas, one night at the Cotton Club, drove up there in a our old green Cadillac, and we had a big crowd and we was really going strong. Jack and Johnny Ray had got themselves some Prince Albert smoking tobacco and some cigarette papers and they took aspirin tablets, ground them up, and rolled them cigarettes with this aspirin in it. Boy, they got wild. I've never seen anyone do that before or since, but they got wild. Jack was playing that horn so bad, Joe Lewis finally took it away from him. Jack said, "You can't do this—that's the best I've ever played in my life!" We had to send Jack and Johnny home.

Our band also did the bug dance. We got the bug trick from Orbison. He played the Silver Moon in Newport, Arkansas, in 1955 along with Warren Smith, Eddie Bond, and us. He had a guy named Big Jack playing the upright bass and a little guy named Willie playing rhythm guitar; Roy's playing guitar, then he had a mandolin player and a drummer. Anyway, they done this bug dance. Big Jack and the little guy. They'd reach down on the floor and pick up this "bug" and throw it on each other. That's where we got it. So four of us would do it and we outdid them on it. We had four of us, throw it on each other, shake around, try to catch it, and then throw it on the next guy.

Playing those shows on the road became our life. Marcus Van Story was the bass player for Warren Smith. He couldn't wait to get on the road. Our pianist, Smoochy Smith, accused Marcus of hanging his clothes up out on the tree in his front yard two days before he left the house. He loved the road and he put on a show, rolling on his back, playing his bass behind his head.

Warren Smith had a couple good records. As soon as he got "Ubangi Stomp" and "Rock and Roll Ruby" out, he thought he was the star, but we'd blow his ass off the stage because we had a show. It wasn't just a couple songs, it was a show we had.

Orbison was a good guy, and we toured with him a lot. See, the Teen Kings quit him when they got paid for "Ooby Dooby" in '55—it was a big seller; sold about 400,000, and that was pretty big back then. Well, they got their money and Little Willie and Big Jack, they thought they were stars, so they said, "We're going to go back to Texas and become stars ourselves." So they all left Orbison there in Memphis. Now, Bob Neal was booking us all then, so he put us and Orbison with Cash, because Cash was big then in '56, '57 because he had "Folsom Prison Blues" and he just kept getting bigger and bigger and was pulling huge crowds. Orbison traveled with us a million miles and never bought a nickel's worth of gas! We'd get a cheap room in a motel and there'd be four of us, two guys to each bed. And Orbison would pay just \$5 and get a rollaway bed and roll in there with us.

Jerry Lee was different than anyone else who ever came along. I love Jerry Lee's piano playing; he's so good. He's a little bit crazy, but he's all right crazy.

We crossed paths with the Rock 'n' Roll Trio all the time. Johnny Burnette used to come to the Silver

Moon and watch us—always had three or four gals with him. The Trio didn't make much of an impression back then, because there was so much of those little bands back then. But they were nice guys—and they liked to fight. We'd play Memphis three or four times a year, Paul would always come play those deals with us. And years later, we became the Sun Rhythm Section together, an all-star band.

My first record came out on Sun Records in '56, "We Wanna Boogie" and "Red Headed Woman." When Sam Phillips recorded us, he just sat up there and rolled tape. He just let us set up our equipment wherever we wanted to, just like we were on stage. He had that one good mic, an RCA 77, in the middle of the room and we'd all stand around that mic. Sam didn't say anything; he just sits up there and turned that machine on and we'd play like he was the audience, playing like he was 10,000 people out there. We were a-beating and a-banging around in there, just like we do on stage. And he'd say, "Well, go through it again." When he got the one he felt was right and sounded good to him, that's what he put out. He had a talent for putting out stuff that was different, that felt good.

Jerry Lee recorded "Whole Lotta Shakin'" with just him, drummer J. M. Van Eaton, and guitarist Roland Janes on it. Billy Riley was setting around there somewhere, maybe playing bass. In the middle of that song, if you listen real close, J. M. gets off—he tries to take a drum roll and he gets off; he gets out of time but gets back in it real quick. But it sold over 12 million records—hal That was Sam's talent, capturing that.

Nowadays they want it too pretty. Everything's got to be perfect. They have machines that will put you in tune if you sing out of tune or put you back in time. And I think that's where music has lost its soul. There's no feeling to it any more. Back then we didn't have any sort of feeling we were doing anything revolutionary—or we would have put out more records! We weren't even trying to make a dollart—here was no money to be made back then. That wasn't why I was in it, to make money. You had a lot of fun. And you'd meet a lot of gals.

We did it for fun. You felt good playing it. You got your high off the music. You didn't have to have whiskey or drugs. It was just fun, and you'd get high off that music.

### **3. "Elvis Defends Low-Down Style," *The Charlotte Observer*, June 27, 1956, p. 1B**

Elvis Presley weathered a tremendous storm of criticism in the immediate wake of his controversial June 5, 1956, appearance on the Milton Berle television show. As such, it was perhaps to be expected that the singer would eventually defend himself in the press. That moment finally occurred three weeks after the Berle show when Presley, who was on tour in Charlotte, North Carolina, opened up in an interview conducted with the local newspaper. To the charges of obscenity that John Crosby of the New York Herald Tribune and others had thrown at him, Presley responded by calling attention to the double standard that allowed the sexual objectification of actress Debra Paget, who had been on the Berle show as well, to pass without comment. As to the music itself, Presley acknowledged his debt to the blues and musicians like Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup (1901–1974), establishing a mark of authenticity that doubtless held little sway with his critics. On a different note, Presley also expressed his interest in the ballad style of Eddie Fisher and Perry Como, a path that he would pursue on his very next hit, the romantic title song to his 1956 film debut, *Love Me Tender*.

Elvis Presley is a worried man. Some, that is, for a man with four Cadillacs and a \$40,000 weekly

pay check. Critics are saying bad things about him. It has been especially rough during the past three weeks. And that is why he bucked his manager's orders to stay away from newsmen in Charlotte Tuesday until showtime. That is why he refused to stay in the seclusion of his hotel room. At 4:10 he couldn't stand it any longer, and with "Cousin Junior" left the room.<sup>1</sup>

He walked quickly to a restaurant a few doors away for a barbecue, flirtation with a few women and a 30-minute round of pool next door.

"Sure I'll talk. Sit down. Most of you guys, though, been writin' bad things about me, man!"

His knees bounced while he sat. His hands drummed a tattoo on the table top. Eyes, under long lashes, darted from booth to booth, firing rapid winks at the girls who stared at him. "Hi ya, baby," he breathed. And she flopped back in the booth looking like she'd been poleaxed.

"This [John] Crosby guy, whoever he is, he says I'm obscene on the Berle show. Nasty. What does he know?"

"Did you see the show? This Debra Paget is on the same show. She wore a tight thing with feathers on the behind where they wiggle most. And I never saw anything like it. Sex? Man, she bumped and pooshed out all over the place. I'm like Little Boy Blue. And who do they say is obscene? Me!"

"It's because I make more money than Debra. Them critics don't like to see nobody win doing any kind of music they don't know nothin' about."

And he started to eat. The waitress brought his coffee. Elvis reached down and fingered the lace on her slip. "Aren't you the one?"

"I'm the one, baby!"

Presley says he does what he does because this is what is making money. And it is music that was around before he was born.

"The colored folks been singing it and playing it just like I'm doin' now, man, for more years than I know. They played it like that in the shanties and in their juke joints, and nobody paid it no mind 'til I goosed it up. I got it from them. Down in Tupelo, Mississippi, I used to hear old Arthur Crudup bang his box the way I do now, and I said if I ever got to the place where I could feel all old Arthur felt, I'd be a music man like nobody ever saw."

Yep, some of the music is low-down.

"But, not like Crosby means. There is low-down people and high-up people, but all of them get the kind of feeling this rock 'n' roll music tells about."

Elvis says he doesn't know how long rock and roll will last.

"When it's gone, I'll switch to something else. I like to sing ballads the way Eddie Fisher does and the way Perry Como does. But the way I'm singing now is what makes the money. Would you change if you was me?"

Investments? "I haven't got to the place for investments. I put it in the bank, man, because I don't



know how long it will last.” How about the Cadillacs? “Yeah, that’s right, I got me four Cadillacs. I keep two at home and two with me. One pink and one white.” He never reads his fan mail. “I got nine secretaries in Madison, Tenn., to do that. If I meet somebody on the road I want to keep knowing I give ’em my home address.”

Little Rosie Tatsis walked up to the booth and held out a trembling hand. Elvis gave her an autograph. “Look, I’m shaking all over,” she tittered. And the grown-up girls in the next booth swapped long, searching looks.

Elvis fingered the collar of his shirt, opened half-way down his chest.

“Some people like me. There’s more people than critics.” The people who like him, he said, include Eddie Fisher, Como, Liberace, Kate Smith, Bob Hope and Guy Lombardo. And there are more. Lots more.

“When I sang hymns back home with Mom and Pop, I stood still and I looked like you feel when you sing a hymn. When I sing this rock ’n’ roll, my eyes won’t stay open and my legs won’t stand still. I don’t care what they say, it ain’t nasty.”

#### Notes

1 “Cousin Junior” is Presley’s cousin, Junior Smith, who was accompanying him on the trip.

#### **4. Michael Dregni, “Elvis Presley: Speaking in Tongues,” in *Rockabilly: The Twang Heard 'Round the World. The Illustrated History*, ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)**

FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, the need to label Elvis spoke of his fans and critics' urgent need to understand and define the power of his music, which itself lacked a name. On the heels of his first Sun singles, newspapermen and radio disc jockeys were seeking labels, scrounging through what they knew to define this new blast. In 1954 and 1955, they began calling him The Memphis Flash, which denoted some sort of sense of civic pride.

Or they termed him The Boppin' Hillbilly. "Hillbilly" was a popular description, as it spoke of something backwoods and unknown, a mysterious force brewed out there in the beyond, like potent white lightning moonshine, unleashed on the unsuspecting good citizens of the civilized city. Others labeled him The Hillbilly Cat. Or simply The Cat, as at that time there was only one. Soon, they were writing about him as The Pied Piper of Rock 'n' Roll. And as his music seemed the perfect soundtrack for the dawn of the atomic age, he was billed as The Nation's Only Atomic Powered Singer. His early manager, Bob Neal, hung the moniker of The King of Western Bop around his neck. From there, it was little stretch to simply regal him as The King.

They struggled as well to find a name for the music—a label to denigrate it for do-gooders and moral watchdogs; a code name for the adherents to recognize each other. Elvis' audience in the early days was mostly country fans— albeit a younger country fan and, more and more, a female one as well. His music was labeled country bop or hillbilly bebop, blending that sense of backwoods mysticism with the hottest and wildest jazz then making the rounds.

Some few newspaper and magazine writers called it "rockabilly," but it was not common coin back then. Still, it proved a fine term, distinguishing this Southern white country music from the rock 'n' roll perpetrated by Little Richard and Fats Domino in New Orleans, Ike Turner and Jackie Brenston, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley laid down in Chicago, and even the Tin Pan Alley rock 'n' roll of Bill Haley and His Comets.

Others simply called it vulgar, animalistic, jungle music-and worse.

Elvis' rags to riches story is so perfectly American, it's almost pure cliché. He was born in a two-room shotgun house in the poor white section of Tupelo, Mississippi, to Gladys Love and Vernon Elvis Presley. His identical twin brother, Jesse Garon Presley, was delivered stillborn 35 minutes before him—a fact that would haunt Elvis throughout his life. The family attended a Pentecostal Assembly of God church. Here, he was schooled in Southern gospel music, which became a love that never left him.

From a pastor at church, as well as some uncles, Elvis received basic guitar lessons. He had been given the guitar for his tenth birthday, but it was not a present he relished; he had been wishing for a bicycle or rifle. As he later recalled, "I took the guitar, and I watched people, and I learned to play a little bit. But I would never sing in public. I was very shy about it." In November 1948, the family moved to Memphis, living at first in rooming houses and later in a public housing complex known as the Courts. Here, he began practicing guitar regularly under the tutelage of neighbor Jesse Lee Denson. Two other brothers—Dorsey and Johnny Burnette—also lived in the Courts and played music.

His interest in musical styles was expanding as well. He was a constant presence in record stores, listening to recordings on jukeboxes and in listening booths. He favored the country music of Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, Roy Acuff, Jimmie Rodgers, and Bob Wills; expanded his love of gospel music, including Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Jake Hess; and had his ears open to the blues and R&B of musicians from Mississippi Delta bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup, Memphis' own Rufus Thomas, and the up and coming B. B. King. In April 1953, Elvis fought his shyness about performing and competed in a minstrel show talent contest, playing the recent country hit "Till I Waltz Again With You." He loved the bit of attention the performance brought him among schoolmates. Elvis was also developing a distinct sense of personal style. He began to stand out among his high school classmates due to his look: He combed back his hair and styled it with rose oil and Vaseline while also growing out his sideburns. And he had an eye for sharp clothes: He visited Lansky Brothers, a tailor's shop on Beale Street at the heart of Memphis' African American community to dream about the flashy Saturday-night garb.

In August 1953, Presley strolled into the offices of Sam Phillips' Memphis Recording Services at 706 Union Avenue on the corner of Marshall. He carried cash in hand to pay for studio time and a single acetate disc of himself as a gift for his beloved mother. He sang two songs, "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin." Phillips was not impressed by Elvis' singing, but there was something about him that did linger in the back of his mind. Receptionist Marion Keisker asked Elvis what kind of singer he was, to which Elvis responded, "I sing all kinds." When pressed on whom he sounded like, Elvis proudly answered, "I don't sound like nobody." Still, on Phillips' request, she noted next to Elvis' name, "Good ballad singer. Hold."

Elvis tried out for several other local groups, but was consistently turned down. He failed an

audition for the Songfellows, a vocal group. He was rejected by Eddie Bond, the band leader for vocalist Ronnie Smith's group. His acquaintances, the Burnette brothers, never invited him into their band either.

In June 1954, Phillips called Elvis and invited him back to the studio. He had a ballad that he believed would fit Elvis well, a tune called "Without You." Again, the audition was not fruitful. But still, something intrigued Phillips. Phillips dialed up a local guitarist, Scotty Moore, who played in a country band called the Starlite Wranglers. The band seemed to be going nowhere, and Moore was always seeking something new, hounding Phillips for projects. Now, Phillips asked Moore to try jamming with Elvis and see if they could work something up.

On the evening of July 5, 1954, Moore rounded up bassist Bill Black and Elvis and set up in the Sun Studio. They had played together at Moore's house and had a couple ballads, gospel tunes, and country songs they hoped would inspire Phillips. But the session was flat: They went through tune after tune, each one being rejected by Phillips.

As they were taking a break late into the night with their hope mostly gone, Elvis began fooling around, strumming his guitar and clowning his way through an old blues tune, "That's All Right Mama" that Arthur Crudup had first cut back in 1946. It was almost as if he were speaking in tongues. When Elvis played "That's All Right," he was channeling all of the music he had grown up on—gospel, country, blues, R&B, and more. Given his Pentecostal Assembly of God upbringing, glossolalia—the Biblical "gift of tongues" was part of his world. Thus, it was not a stretch to speak in musical tongues.

As Scotty Moore remembered in a 1955 interview, the trio was "just jamming, just cutting up" when it rocked and rolled the old blues number: "We went into this studio primarily for an audition ... Bill [Black] and I only went in with [Elvis] to have just some kind of meager accompaniment with him, so he wouldn't be standing alone in the studio, you know .. we went through two or three different songs, more or less taking a break, having a coffee, or coke, and Elvis started clowning around. Just picked up his guitar and started kibitzing, singing 'That's All Right' and clowning around the studio dancing, just cutting up in general, and Bill picked up his bass, started slapping it, and clowning also ... I joined in with just a rhythm vamp. Sam was in the control room, the door was open. He came out and said, 'What are y'all doing?' Said, 'That sounds pretty good.' We said, 'We don't know .. .' He said, 'Well, see if you can do it again the same way. Let's put it on tape, see what it sounds like.'"

Phillips cut an acetate of the best take and three nights later brought it to Memphis' wildman radio DJ Dewey "Daddy-O" Phillips. Despite the shared surname, the two were related only by a love for music. Dewey spun "That's All Right" on his locally famous Red, Hot & Blue show on radio WHBQ. Listeners instantly began calling in, raving about the performer. Many assumed he was African American, due to both the song choice and the delivery. Over the next two hours of his show, Dewey continued to play the disc while someone went to pull Elvis out of a movie theater for an on-air interview. Dewey began by asking what high school he attended, a not-so subtle point that proved to listeners he was a local white boy who could certainly sing the blues. When Elvis began performing on stage, he developed a nervous tick. He, Scotty, and Bill played.

"That's All Right" was more than just all right—it was the song that jumpstarted rockabilly. The story of the session has become legend: Derived from Mississippi Delta bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's 1946 recording, "That's All Right, Mama" Elvis and the erstwhile Starlite Wranglers created rockabilly ground zero. As Brian Setzer would state decades later, the guitar sounded like a country

musician trying to rock. And doing it. Bill Black's bass was textbook slapping, providing the bottom end and percussion at the same time. The single was released on July 19, 1954.

Elvis almost immediately proved to his bandmates that he was natural showman. Throughout that summer and fall of 1954, the trio played frequently at Memphis' Eagle's Nest club. At each show, Elvis developed his performance. As Scotty remembered, "His movement was a natural thing, but he was also very conscious of what got a reaction. He'd do something one time and then he would expand on it real quick."

And the young women only screamed louder.

Elvis made only one appearance on Nashville's on-air barn dance The Grand Ole Opry, broadcast over WSM-AM radio. The Opry was the bastion of country music correctness, as dictated by many of Elvis' long-time heroes, such as Ernest Tubb. It was a show that often defined country music—and in turn carried with it many rules, from not allowing electrified instruments in the early days to not permitting drums on stage. After Elvis' performance there on October 2, 1954, Opry manager Jim Denny politely told Sam Phillips that his singer was "not bad," but did not fit the show. Elvis and Sam couldn't have agreed more.

Instead, Elvis was booked onto the Louisiana Hayride. Broadcast from Shreveport, Louisiana, over KWKH-AM, the show was well-known for its more adventuresome spirit, serving as a launching pad for future stars like Hank Williams, Webb Pierce, and many more. Here, drummers were indeed allowed, and house drummer D. J. Fontana backed Elvis' trio during their first performance later in October 1954. Fontana would soon make the trio a quartet. With the success of his first Louisiana Hayride show, Elvis was hired for a year's worth of Saturday-night shows. During the weekdays, his new manager, Bob Neal, kept him booked on the road, playing as far as the group could travel before making the dash back to Shreveport.

Between the radio broadcasts and the weekday shows, Elvis's rockabilly was spreading across the South. Along the way, he was outraging moralists, stoking fires of passion in young women, angering jealous teenaged boys, giving concerned parents ulcers, upsetting the country-music old guard, inspiring other would-be rock 'n' rollers, and changing music forever.

"'Blue Moon of Kentucky' came about the same way. After we did 'That's All Right,' Sam said, 'Okay, we have to have a B-side,' and again we went in and everybody was scratching their brains trying to think of songs to try. And this time Bill—again during the break—started 'Blue Moon of Kentucky.' It was originally a waltz. But he started singing it up-tempo in a high falsetto voice, just mimicking Bill Monroe. Elvis knew the song so he started and we all just fell in again.

"Everything we did on Sun was done the same way. We had absolutely no material going in. We'd just go in and start kicking things around. Sam would mention some of the R&B stuff he had done, and we'd try some of that. You know, 'That's All Right' was just something Elvis had heard on the radio and knew, but every session we did on Sun was done the way—just through trial and error until something would just finally click. You didn't know what you'd come out with. And there were a few times when you didn't get anything, and we'd just come back the next day or two."

-Scotty Moore as told to John Floyd, *Sun Records: An Oral History*, 7998

## **5. Nick Tosches, from *Hellfire: The Jerry Lee Lewis Story* (New York: Delacorte,**

**982): 52–63.**

THE MOMENT he heard it, the very moment he heard himself make that song like he had been trying to make it— and he had been trying to make something that was fine; not just something that would seem fine coming from an eight-year-old boy with freckles and stuck-out ears, which he knew he was, but something that would seem fine coming from the nickel machine in one of those drunk-morning juke joints, or from his daddy's Victrola, or from a radio; something that would seem fine coming from any of these, and yet had not, because it was different—the moment he heard it, he abruptly spun around, as if a door had just slammed shut behind him in an empty room, and he looked straight at Uncle Lee Calhoun, who was sitting there in that big chair of his with his potbelly sticking out, looking right straight back at him, and they sat there like that, the two of them, peering at each other from opposite ends of lifelong stubbornness, and they broke into grinning and laughing, each in his own way.

The first song that Jerry Lee could play straight through the way he wanted was the nineteenth-century Christmas carol "Silent Night," and he played it in a boogie-woogie style. Elmo was so proud of his son that he borrowed money against what worldly possessions he had, and he drove to Monroe, that place of tales, and he purchased a used Starck upright piano, and he hauled it back down to Ferriday in his pickup truck, and he dragged it into his home and set it before Jerry Lee.

This was in early 1945. The Mississippi flooded that year, and it was the worst flood since 1927. Downtown Ferriday was inundated, and many of the townsfolk had to evacuate their homes and take refuge in a tent camp at the Lake Concordia levee. The war ended that year, too, just a few weeks before Jerry Lee's tenth birthday. As Lee Calhoun had predicted, cotton prices rose to more than thirty cents on the pound during the following year.

Now that Jerry Lee had a piano, he attended school even less frequently than he had in the past, and he suffered less at home for his poor grades. Both Elmo and Mamie were confident that their son would be a great music-maker, though from the very beginning Mamie hoped and prayed that Jerry Lee would dedicate his talent to the Holy Spirit.

In the summer of 1945, Mamie's elder sister Fannie Sue and her family came to visit from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. At the age of fifteen, Fannie Sue had married a nineteen-year-old man named John Glasscock, who became a Pentecostal preacher not long after the marriage. They had a fourteen-year-old son named Carl, who had been born in Epps, Louisiana, on January 3, 1931. Like most preachers' sons, Carl played piano, and this interested his younger cousin Jerry Lee a great deal. Carl told Jerry Lee that he performed regularly at his daddy's church, but once in a while he leaned a little bit on the boogie and that made his daddy madder than hell. He sat down at Jerry Lee's Starck upright and began to hit some Holy Ghost boogie, and sure enough his daddy shot him a nasty glance from across the room.

"They'd bought an old piano," Carl recalled many years later, after he had become known by a different name, "and moved it in that old shotgun house. It was the sort of piano you'd have trouble giving away. I came in there and played the fire out of the thing. Jerry couldn't play too well then. When we left, he came back to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, with us for the summer. He stayed with us about a month and a half, and he made me play the piano every day. When he left to go home, he could do everything I could do. He just had that knack. He didn't have those big fingers yet—he couldn't hit those octaves—but he knew the boogie. It was great."



Jerry Lee sat at his Starck upright every day for hours at a time. He practiced what some people called boogie-woogie and others called the Devil's music. Two of his favorites in these early years were "Down the Road a Piece," which had been a hit boogie-woogie record in 1940, and "House of Blue Lights," which Jerry Lee learned from a record of piano player Freddie Slack right after it came out, in 1946. He practiced both these songs continuously, and from them he learned to keep a fast, heavy rhythm going with his left hand while he played melody with his right. The more he practiced, the surer the left hand and the wilder the right hand became. Jerry Lee also practiced Jimmie Rodgers songs and Al Jolson songs, which he learned from his parents' records; but these, in Jerry Lee's mind, were more for singing than for the fingers. From the Jimmie Rodgers records Jerry Lee learned to blue-yodel, and from the Al Jolson records he learned the power of vocal audacity. (His favorite Jolson record was "Down Among the Sheltering Palms.") He played old Tin Pan Alley tunes, too, such as "In a Shanty in Old Shanty Town," which had been one of the most popular songs of the Depression; but he took a whip to these tunes and shook them down to boogie-woogie, as he had done with "Silent Night." And he always learned the latest Gene Autry songs, such as "You're the Only Star (In My Blue Heaven)," which also became a reconstructed boogie-woogie song in the hands of young Jerry Lee.

In the autumn of 1946, Mamie Lewis became pregnant for the last time. On July 18, 1947, she gave birth to another dark-haired daughter, whom she and Elmo named Linda Gail. By this time, Elmo had installed electrical wiring in his house. (For water, however, the Lewises still had to go outside to the well.) He purchased a radio, from which Jerry Lee absorbed music of every sort. He listened to the popular dance bands that were broadcast by WWL in New Orleans. He listened to the Mississippi bluesmen whose records were played by WMIS, right across the river in Natchez. On Saturday nights he heard "The Grand Ole Opry," routed from Nashville by way of WSMB in New Orleans. Whatever he heard, he swallowed it, then he spat it out on that old Starck upright.

On the first Saturday night of April, 1948, KWKH in Shreveport, the most powerful Louisiana radio station north of New Orleans, introduced a country-music program called "The Louisiana Hayride," which was patterned after, and in competition with, "The Grand Ole Opry." Jerry Lee was listening to the "Hayride" one Saturday night the following August when a twenty-four-year-old man from Alabama named Hank Williams made his debut. Hank's voice grabbed Jerry Lee and sent shivers through him, as the Holy Ghost had sent shivers through others he knew. He had already made up his mind that Jimmie Rodgers and Al Jolson were the two greatest singers who ever were. Now he placed this new Hank Williams fellow right up there with them. Hank became the most celebrated singer on "The Louisiana Hayride," and Jerry Lee listened for him every Saturday night, wondering what he looked like and resolving that he must someday meet him. Occasionally Hank Williams would get drunk and out of hand.

Horace Logan, the man in charge of the program, would fire him. Jerry Lee would listen to the show for Saturday night upon Saturday night, wondering where Hank had gone to; then, always, Hank Williams would return, saying, "Howdy, neighbors, it's mighty good to be back." Jerry Lee went to the Starck upright and practiced whatever songs he heard Hank sing. The best one of all, he thought, was "Lovesick Blues," which Hank first sang on the "Hayride" sometime after Christmas. It was an old song, copyrighted in the spring of 1922. The lyrics had been written by Irving Mills, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, and the music had been composed by a vaudeville pianist named Cliff Friend. The song had been recorded several times in the twenties, and in 1939 it was cut by an Alabama-born country singer named Rex Griffin, from whose record Hank Williams had learned the song. But

Hank let everyone believe that the song was his. To Jerry Lee's thinking, it was a perfect song, a song that both Jimmie Rodgers and Al Jolson might have recorded. Listening to Hank sing it, Jerry Lee knew that he must ask Hank, on that day when they met, where he stood on Jimmie and Al. Eventually Hank's fame grew too large for the "Hayride" to contain him, and in the spring of 1949 he moved north to the "Opry." Jerry Lee followed him with a turn of the dial.

Jerry Lee's cousins Jimmy Lee Swaggart and Mickey Gilley had also been working at the piano. All three boys now performed occasionally at the Assembly of God meetings, as Brother Culbreth had once said they would. Of the three boys, Jerry Lee was by far the best, but Jimmy Lee showed a prodigious gift as well. Unlike Jerry Lee, however, Jimmy Lee devoted most of his talent to the Lord, who had claimed him as a vessel, and did not spend much time practicing worldly music (although, if you took the words away, there were more than a few Pentecostal hymns that would not sound foreign coming from the nickel machine in the wildest juke joint). But, sometime after his thirteenth birthday, Jimmy Lee began to backslide, and he and Jerry Lee began to make forays into the slow river of dark night.

On Fourth Street, in the black part of Ferriday, there was a wooden nightclub called Haney's Big House. It was owned and operated by a colored man named Big Will Haney. In those days segregation in the Deep South was a two-way street, and whites were no more welcome in black clubs than blacks were in white clubs. At Haney's Big House the only whitefolk allowed were the disc jockeys from WMIS in Natchez, and they were set off and restricted to a table at the side of the stage.

The finest bluesmen in the South came to Haney's Big House. There were old, established piano players, such as Sunnyland Slim and Big Maceo. There were younger men who had just begun to make names for themselves, men like Muddy Waters, who just a few years back had been working in the cotton fields across the river. There were wild new dance bands, such as Roy Milton and His Solid Senders, Memphis Slim and His House Rockers. Then there were some very young men in their teens and twenties whom no one had yet heard of—men such as Ray Charles, Bobby Bland, and Blues Boy King. The late forties were the most exciting years of black music, for it was then that rock 'n' roll was being born. Old rhythms merged with new, and the ancient raw power of the country blues begat a fierce new creature in sharkskin britches, a creature delivered by the men, old and young, who wrought their wicked music, night after dark night, at Haney's Big House and a hundred other places like it in the colored parts of a hundred other Deep South towns. The creature was to grow to great majesty, then be devoured by another, paler, new creature.

It was to Haney's that Jerry Lee and Jimmy Lee, blond and pubescent, did sneak. In the *Concordia Sentinel*, the weekly newspaper published in Ferriday, there was a column called "Among the Colored," which Jerry Lee examined every Friday when the paper came out to see who would be coming to Haney's Big House the following week. He and Jimmy would steal away from their homes and bicycle down to the bad part of Fourth Street.

"We'd go down there," Jerry Lee recalled years later, after the Big House had fallen. "We'd go down there and sell newspapers and shine shoes and everything, and we'd keep on doin' it until nobody was lookin', and then we'd work our way through the door, y'know. And them cats is so drunk they couldn't walk. And, man, we'd sneak in there and old Haney, he'd catch us. He'd say, 'Boy, yo' Uncle Lee come down heah and *kill* me and you both!' And he'd throw us out. But I sure heard a lot of good piano playin' down there. Man, these old black cats come through in them old buses, feet

stickin' out the windows, eatin' sardines. But I tell you, they could really play some music— that's a guaranteed fact."

On some nights Jerry Lee and Jimmy Lee snuck out but did not go to Haney's. They broke into stores downtown and robbed them. Whenever they did this, they would stop by the police station the next day and ask Police Chief Harrison if there was any news about the thieves. "Well, boys," he would say, "we ain't got 'em yet, but we're on their trail." They would ask the chief how many men he figured were involved. "It's a gang of 'em," he would say. The boys began scheming a big heist as they went about their night thieving. Under one full moon they stole some scrap iron from Lee Calhoun's backyard. They later sold it back to him, and this may have been the only time Uncle Lee was taken in a transaction. Another night they busted into a warehouse at the edge of town, expecting to find all manner of worldly spoil. Instead they found more rolls of barbed wire than they had ever imagined to exist— nothing but rolls and rolls of barbed wire. Jimmy Lee took a roll of it, but discarded it on the way home.

Then one night Jerry Lee went off into the dark without his cousin, and he busted into a store and took some jewelry, and he got caught. This cost Elmo and Uncle Lee a few hundred dollars to straighten out, and it convinced Jimmy Lee that the Holy Ghost was giving him one last chance to vessel-up.

Not long after this incident, Elmo moved his family out of Concordia Parish, south to West Feliciana Parish, where he had been offered a good-paying construction job in Angola, at the state penitentiary.

Angola had once been a great cotton plantation. In 1869 it was purchased by Major Samuel Lawrence James, who transformed the plantation into a brutal, profit-making prison, which he personally operated until his death in 1894. At the turn of the century, the state of Louisiana purchased the Angola prison from the Major's heirs, running it in much the same cruel way as the old Major himself had. Prisoners were shackled, underfed, horsewhipped, and forced to slave-farm cotton on the prison's rich bottomland. In 1946 Governor Jimmie H. Davis, who had been elected to office two years before largely on the basis of his song "You Are My Sunshine," instituted a long-range program to modernize and humanize Angola. Part of this plan called for the removal of all women prisoners from the penitentiary. Another part called for the construction of a new receiving station, classification center, and hospital; and this was the part of Governor Davis's program that brought Elmo Lewis and his family to Angola in 1948.

The Lewises moved into wooden quarters outside the walls of the penitentiary. Jerry Lee and his little sister Frankie Jean attended a slat-patched old school along with the children of the other laborers. It was at this school that Frankie Jean learned to read and write. On the few occasions when Jerry Lee showed up for class, he was relieved to hear no mention of Columbus and his loathsome ball.

Now, Jerry Lee at this time had neither use nor liking for any girl-creature too young to wear an undershirt, and he regarded his sisters not so much as kin or even flesh, but rather as dark-haired, wailing thorns. Frankie Jean was the greater of the thorns, for she was larger than baby Linda Gail and she not only wailed but also spoke. One afternoon Jerry Lee had him an idea. It was the finest idea he had devised since the invention of the great compromise.

His mother had been pleading with him all day to take Frankie Jean outside and play with her.



Finally he inhaled through his teeth and dragged the thorn from the house, letting the screen door slam weakly behind him. Frankie Jean climbed into her baby sister's stroller and commanded Jerry Lee to take her for a ride. It was then that he had his idea.

He pushed Frankie Jean for a long while, across dirt and grass and stones, toward a hill that dynamite and steam shovels and bulldozers had recently cleft in twain to make way for a new road. He pushed her to the top of this progress-ravaged hill, to the edge of this barren cliff that God never made. He peered into the chasm, to the moved- mountain rubble many feet below. Then he gave the stroller one final push and heard the scream of the thorn.

The stroller teetered, then plummeted from the cliff. It smashed against a jutting rock and burst into a noisy shower of flesh and hardware. Chrome, cheap wood, and pink tatters sprayed outward and downward in myriad wild trajectories. And in the middle of this crashing, splintering tumblement: the spinning, wailing thorn. It was a glorious sight, and Jerry Lee beheld it.

When he returned home alone, his mother asked where Frankie Jean was. He did not reply, so she asked him again.

"A chicken hawk," he answered. He unscrewed the lid from a jar of peanut butter and stuck in the two longest fingers he had. "Biggest one I ever seen. Snatched her up like a poor little chicklin' hen and carried her off." He squinted upward and raised his hand, the one with the peanut butter on it—raised it toward the heavens and moved it in a long, slow arc, like an Indian in a movie. "Stroller and all."

Frankie Jean entered the house, bleeding and bruised and wailing from the abyss. Mamie grabbed a broom handle and took it to her son until he, too, was bruised; but he would not wail. Frankie Jean did not smile again until she was twelve years old, when she was married.

For a long time after this, there was enmity between Jerry Lee and Frankie Jean. One day Jerry Lee brought home a grasshopper with a broken leg. He fashioned a splint from a match stick and tied it to the insect's leg with black thread. Then he set the grasshopper on the floor—and out leaped Frankie Jean, upon it with one small foot, reducing the creature to an unholy stain.

On a certain night Jerry Lee pretended an armistice and offered to tell Frankie Jean a bedtime story. Frankie Jean lay in bed, and Jerry Lee leaned back beside her and folded his hands behind his head. He closed his eyes.

"Once upon a time, there was this little girl and she was comin' after me." Then he was silent. Then he said, "She's comin' after me." Then he was silent. Then he said, "She's comin' after me." He continued this for some time in the darkness. Frankie Jean was frightened and she pleaded with him to stop, to tell the story right. But all he said was, "She's comin' after me." Frankie Jean knew that Jerry Lee had nosebleed problems, so she drove her little fist straight into his nose and made it spurt blood—made it spurt blood all down his shirt, all over the bed, all over the floor of that little wooden house. They came together like pit dogs, and Elmo separated them.

Some girls, older girls, were not thorns. At Angola thirteen-year-old Jerry Lee discovered romance, and their names were Nell and Ruth. He never forgot those first girl friends, as he never forgot that Starck upright.

Elmo had hauled the piano to Angola, and Jerry Lee continued to make his boogie every day. But here Jerry Lee encountered new distractions: Nell and Ruth, of course, and football. The boys at the slat-patched school in Angola formed a team, and Jerry Lee, who was small but fast and a good receiver, became a running-back and the star of the team. The girls idolized him, and he did too. He loved to watch them press their knees together, watch their eyes cloud like hothouse grapes when they talked to him after the games. One afternoon Jerry Lee was running with the ball toward the thirty-yard line. A *big* sonofabitch came at him, and Jerry Lee leaped sideways into the wintry air. When he came down, he busted his hip and tore his thighbone from his pelvis.

The doctor at Angola put him in a cast from the waist down, and Jerry Lee cursed the hog that ball had been made from. For two months he had to be carried to and from the Starck upright. Because of the cast on his right leg, he was forced to play the piano with that leg stuck out at an angle. He became so used to playing like this, with that leg stuck out, that he continued to sit at the piano in this odd way for the rest of his life. Frankie Jean was assigned the chore of placing a pillow beneath Jerry Lee's busted leg after Elmo had deposited him on the piano stool. She sometimes raised his leg higher than she had to, until he screamed with pain. "I'll kill you, girl, I'll kill you," he would say, then wince into his boogie with wrath.

Elmo packed his family and left Angola in the summer of 1949, returning to Ferriday, to a bigger house, on the Black River. By the end of that summer Jerry Lee knew that he could make music as fine and wild as anything he had heard at Haney's Big House. He was ready to turn professional, and he did. 1982

## **6. Greil Marcus , "Buddy Holly: The Lost Boy," in *Rockabilly: The Twang Heard 'Round the World. The Illustrated History*, ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)**

BUDDY HOLLY WALKED into the room sideways. In terms of pure power he can't stand up to those with whom he's most often linked as a pioneer of rock 'n' roll: Elvis Presley, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry. He recorded nothing as immediately overwhelming—nothing that so forced an absolute confrontation between performer and listener as "Hound Dog," "Tutti Frutti," or "Johnny B. Goode." The most musically extreme record of Holly's time was Little Richard's "Ready Teddy": Elvis can't keep up with Little Richard's version, but Holly, despite guitar playing that almost changes the sound of the song entirely, can't keep up with Elvis.

Buddy Holly shied away from the violence implicit in rock 'n' roll as it first made itself known, and from the hellfire emotionalism on the surface of the music. He was a rockabilly original, but unlike Gene Vincent—or Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, or Sun label wild men like Billy Lee Riley and Sonny Burgess, who after the release of his "Red Headed Woman" dyed his hair red and bought a red suit and a red Cadillac—Holly looked for space in the noise. He built his music around silences, pauses, a catch in the throat, a wink.

"That'll Be the Day" may be a very hard-nosed record, but its intensity is eased by its brightness—by the way it courts the prettiness that took over later Holly tunes like "Everyday," or even "Oh Boy" or "Rave On." "Hound Dog" aims for the monolithic, and falls short; "That'll Be the Day" is all pluralism, fully realized. The singer is acting out his role in a dozen accents; like Rod Stewart combing his hair a thousand ways in "Every Picture Tells a Story," he's talking to the mirror,

rehearsing what he's going to say, writing it down. He's saying it on the phone while the phone's still ringing at the other end, going over how perfectly he said what he meant to say after he's said it, savoring the memory. Holly is reaching for Elvis's roughness, but even as he does so he communicates doubt that he can carry it off—or that anyone should.

And that's why "That'll Be the Day" is a more convincing record than "Hound Dog"—as Bobby Vee put it, thinking back to first hearing the record on the radio in Fargo, North Dakota, in 1957, when he was 14-year-old Bob Veline: "To me it was the most original, fresh, unique record I ever heard—and I was right, it was."

Holly could be utterly sure of his self-doubt; Elvis couldn't be as sure of his arrogance, and so he muffles it with a self-mocking laugh. In that part of himself that was addressing "Hound Dog" to the world at large, to the world that mocked him, you can hear Elvis meaning every word of "Hound Dog"; in the part of himself that was addressing the woman in the song, he's just kidding. Buddy wasn't kidding on "That'll Be the Day." Holly's performance is tougher—just as "Well ... All Right," a 1958 single with no orchestration other than acoustic guitar, bass, and fluttered cymbals, is tougher still. Holly's almost frightening sincerity was cut with playfulness, a risk-free sense of fun, and an embrace of adolescent or even babyish innocence that was likely as calculated as his famous hiccups. Without that innocence and playfulness, his sincerity could have led him to take himself so seriously that today his music might sound hopelessly overblown; without his sincerity, many of his songs would now sound moronic. Instead he so often struck a perfect balance.

"Anarchy had moved in," Nik Cohn wrote of the '50s in *Awopbopaloobop Alopbamboom*—the first good book on rock 'n' roll, the book Cohn first called *Pop from the Beginning*. "For thirty years you couldn't possibly make it unless you were white, sleek, nicely spoken, and phony to your toenails—suddenly now you could be black, purple, moronic, delinquent, diseased, or almost anything on earth, and you could still clean up." What Buddy Holly was saying, what he was acting out, was that you could also be ordinary.

A photograph was taken in Lubbock, Texas, in 1955, on the occasion of Elvis Presley's second visit to Buddy Holly's hometown. In this picture, Elvis, surrounded by teenage girls and boys and children, looks bigger than anyone else: taller, wider, taking up more psychic space. Even with a dumb, open-mouthed look on his face, you can feel his glow. On Presley's far left, just peeking into the frame, is an 18-year-old Buddy Holly, the only male figure (among 30-odd people in the picture) wearing glasses, somewhere between geek and nerd, looking curious. You would never pick him out of this crowd—or would you? No, probably not: there's no aura around his body, no portent in his posture, not even any obvious desire in his eyes. Just that curiosity: but even as he pokes his head forward for a closer look, he holds his body back. His curiosity is a form of hesitation, a drama of doubt. That quality of doubt is what gives the Buddy Holly in this picture the interest he has—and the longer you look at the picture, the less stable it appears to be. Who can identify with who? Who would want to identify with the nobody? But who can really identify with the god—and in this black and white photo, no matter what the expression on his face, it's plain a god is in the room. Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, sharing the same time and space—they're both magnets, Elvis the black hole, Holly merely earthly gravity. It was Buddy Holly's embodiment of ordinariness that allowed him to leave behind not only a body of songs, but a personality—as his contemporaries Elvis, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis did, and Carl Perkins, Danny and the Juniors, Larry Williams, Fats Domino, the Monotones, Arlene Smith, or Clyde McPhatter did not. The personality was that of the guy you passed in the hall in

your high school every day. He might be cool; he might be square. He might be the guy who slammed your locker shut every time you opened it, but the guy who did it as a laugh, as a version of a pat on the back, a "Hey, man." He might be the guy who got his own locker slammed shut in his own face, and not in fun. Whoever he was, he was familiar. He was not strange; he was not different; he did not speak in unknown tongues, or commune with secret spirits.

"That'll Be the Day" was written by Buddy Holly and drummer Jerry Allison. It was recorded by the band on February 25, 1957, at Norman Petty's famed Clovis, New Mexico, studio—one of the great rockabilly-producing studios after Sun and the Nashville Quonset Hut. The tune was later one of the first demoed by the Quarrymen in far-away Liverpool, a skittle group that later changed its name in honor of the Crickets to become the Beatles.

Except that he did. "Well ... All Right" is not just a good song, or a great recording; with a quietness that is also a form of loudness, the drum sticks moving over the cymbals like wind on water, the feel of death in the lack of any physical weight to the sound, the sense of a threat in every promise, "Well ... All Right" is also the casting of a spell, but no one ever seemed less like a sorcerer than Buddy Holly.

"An obvious loser," Nik Cohn said. "He was the patron saint of all the thousands of no-talent kids who ever tried to make a million dollars. He was founder of a noble tradition." What Cohn is describing is how the gawky, wide-eyed Buddy Holly who Gary Busey summoned up for *The Buddy Holly Story* in 1978—someone who looks as if he's about to fall down every time he does that Buddy Holly move where he folds up his knees like a folding chair—is as believable as the cool, confident, hipster Buddy Holly that Marshall Crenshaw plays at the end of *La Bamba* in 1987, performing "Crying, Waiting, Hoping" on that last stage in Clear Lake, Iowa, then waving Ritchie Valens onto the plane: "Come on—the sky belongs to the stars."

If Holly looked like an ordinary teenager, on the radio he came across as one. His presence on stage, on the airwaves, seemed more accidental than willful. From his first professional recordings, the mostly muffled numbers cut in Nashville in 1956, to the Clovis, New Mexico, sessions produced by Norman Petty in 1957, on through the soulful solo demos he made in New York in late 1958 and into the next year, the most glamorous element of Holly's career was the plane crash that ended it—on February 3, 1959, leaving his 22-year-old body in an Iowa cornfield along with those of 17-year-old Ritchie Valens and 29-year-old J. P. Richardson, the Big Bopper.

So Buddy Holly entered history differently from other rock 'n' roll heroes—and, somehow, his ordinariness has carried over into the way in which one might encounter people whose lives brushed his. Some years ago, on a panel in New Orleans, David Adler, author of *The Life and Cuisine of Elvis Presley*, shocked me and everyone else in the room with the story of how, during his research in Tupelo, Mississippi, he met a woman who was in the Presleys' one-room house when Elvis Presley was born—and he believed her because of the way she described how the shoebox containing the still-born body of Elvis's twin Jesse Garon was resting on the kitchen table.

A gasp went up. We were in the presence of someone who had been in the presence of someone who had been present when an event took place that ultimately would change the world—and leave all of us present in that world different than we would have otherwise been if this event had not taken place.

But nothing like that feeling attaches itself to the story I heard when, without asking, I found myself listening to a woman tell how, missing Buddy Holly's last concert as a 12-year-old because no one

she knew was vulgar enough to go with her, she asked a friend to drive her to the site of the crash before the morning light was up, and how men with stretchers were still there when she arrived. Or listening to a woman who lives down the street from me in Berkeley describe how, as a girl, she witnessed the collision of two planes over Pacoima Junior High School, Ritchie Valens's alma mater, in 1957, a disaster that killed three students and that, at least until he climbed onto that Cessna at the little airport in Mason City, Iowa, left Ritchie Valens determined to stay out of the air if he could. Or listening in an Italian restaurant in New York in 1995 when, as if he'd never told the story before, Dion DiMucci quietly went through the details of the life-threatening conditions he and everyone else endured while traveling the upper Midwest on ruined buses for the Winter Dance Party tour in January and February 1959, and why he nevertheless gave up his seat on the plane that night. Or listening in San Francisco in 1970, as Bobby Vee told the story of how, when the news of the plane crash reached Fargo Senior High School the next morning, with everyone geared up for the show that evening, just over the state line in Moorhead, Minnesota, Bob Veline and his high school band, which lacked a name and had not yet played a single show, answered the call of the local promoter and, after rushing out to buy matching angora sweaters and 25-cent ties, and naming themselves the Shadows, took the stage that night along with those who were left.

Thus did he begin to tell his own part of the greater rock 'n' roll story: a story that—as Bob became one of various post-Holly Bobbys, made over on "the terms of Holly's anybodyness, with anything that made this particular anybody unique air-brushed out—took the form of such first-rate teen-angst classics as "Take Good Care of My Baby," "It Might as Well Rain Until September," "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," and, in 1962, as a shameless tribute, or an honest thank you, Bobby Vee Meets The Crickets. The plane crash gave Bob Veline his big break; as he saw it, it also gave him a legacy to honor, a mission to fulfill.

Because of the way Buddy Holly died—cut off in the bloom of youth, with his whole life ahead of him, chartering a plane because his clothes were filthy from the bus and he wanted to look good on stage, because he wanted to sleep for a few hours in a warm bed, and do a good show—he immediately became a mythic figure. A queer mythic figure: a mythic figure you could imagine talking to. One you could imagine listening to what you had to say. ...

## **7. Michael Dregni, "Roy Orbison: the Man with the Voice," in *Rockabilly: The Twang Heard 'Round the World. The Illustrated History*, ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)**

Roy ORBISON'S LEGACY is forever tied to ethereal vocals and wistful lyrics of the sort introduced with "Only the Lonely," released in 1960. Coming across as a sophisticated take on Bill Monroe's "high lonesome" sound, Orbison's singular voice perfectly complemented his modern ruminations on loss and loneliness. Heavyweight arbiters like working-class millionaire Bruce Springsteen and self-styled hipster Tom Waits have famously name-checked the pride of Wink, Texas, as a primary influence.

Such was the power and popularity of his 1960s work that Orbison's Sun recordings with his band the Teen Kings, all made in 1956 and 1957, are often treated as a collective footnote. Disassociate yourself from Orbison's later pop masterpieces, however, and take a moment to spin his early rock chestnuts like "Mean Little Mama" with its growled title, quavering vocal delivery, and chiming guitar break. The big drum sound propelling "Rock House," a re-read of Elvis' take on "That's All



Right," is an utterly libidinal racket underscoring the power of a road-tested outfit that had honed its chops in the roadhouses of west Texas. The touchstone of Orbison's Sun catalog, however, is "Ooby Dooby"/"Go! Go! Go!" The former was a rave-up penned by two of Orbison's frat brothers at North Texas State. Orbison and the Teen Kings' late-1955 recording of the track in Clovis, New Mexico, at the studio of Buddy Holly's manager, Norman Petty, convinced Sun boss Sam Phillips to lure Orbison and his band to Memphis. In terms of pure energy, the platter known as Sun 242 rivals anything released on the label.

Even during his tenure at Sun, hints of Orbison's future fragile balladry were evident. "Domino," the tale of a JD archetype credited to Phillips, is as close as he came to menacing, but the excitement that prevails among Orbison's Sun cuts is enough to grant him a pass on Inspiration Point fodder like "A True Love Goodbye." A series of personal tragedies and a career downturn dogged Orbison in the late '60s. By some accounts, he began revisiting his early work around 1970. Whether Creedence Clearwater Revival's amped-up reading of "Ooby Dooby" on their stellar *Cosmo's Factory* LP of the same year triggered Orbison to reexamine his roots is open to speculation. Certainly, though, it confirmed that rock's next generation hadn't entirely forgotten the seminal work of the unassuming Texan with the Colonel Sanders horn rims.

**Michael Dregni, "Richie Valens: The Little Richard of San Fernando Valley" and "Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran: Black leather Rockabilly," in *Rockabilly: The Twang Heard 'Round the World. The Illustrated History*, ed. by Michael Dregni (Voyageur Press, 2011)**

RICARDO ESTEBAN VALENZUELA REYES—better known as Ritchie Valens—was a Mexican American rockabilly based in the San Fernando Valley.

Like Eddie Cochran, he recorded at Hollywood's Gold Star Studios, but his singles and LPs would be released on the Del-Fi label.

Valens tragically died in the February 3, 1959, plane crash that also killed Buddy Holly and J. P. Richardson, the Big Bopper. Ritchie Valens' eponymous debut LP was released posthumously in March 1959 on Del-Fi Records.

Ritchie Valens' version of the traditional Mexican song "La Bamba" became an American Top 40 hit despite the Spanish-language lyrics. The song is a classic Son Jarocho style from Veracruz and named for a dance.

Valens added the rock 'n' roll beat, backed by session musicians, including famed drummer Earl Palmer and bassist Carol Kaye. John Ritchie Collection "Donna" was written in tribute of Ritchie Valens' high-school sweetheart, Donna Ludwig. Released in 1958, it reached #2 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart the following year, becoming Valens' highest-charting single.

**GENE VINCENT AND EDDIE COCHRAN ROARED ONTO THE ROCK 'N' ROLL SCENE FROM OPPOSITE COASTS.**

Elvis and the other rockabillys mostly came out of the Deep South, but the spirit spread far as they toured and as Elvis's new tunes were released by RCA-Victor to a wide audience. Now the sound waves reverberated everywhere. Rockabilly had gone national. From the East Coast, Vincent became

Capitol Records' contender to Elvis' crown. He recorded initially in Nashville, but in just his first year on the scene he was cutting tracks in Hollywood. Cochran, although born in Minnesota, made his mark from Los Angeles' Gold Star Studios on Liberty Records. In 1960, the duo left the United States to further spread the good word. Touring Great Britain, their music and their style left an indelible mark on rock 'n' roll fans there. It was an image that did not fade away as rockabilly died. Rockabilly continued to burn bright in Europe, sparking a revival years after both Cochran and Vincent's untimely deaths.

Kicking up Born Norfolk, GENE VINCENT WAS FAR FROM being a one-hit wonder, yet his first hit single, "BeBop-A-Lula," was so perfect, so cool, so quintessential that it became the single song he was associated with forever after. ... In July 1955, he suffered a terrible motorcycle accident that shattered his left leg. Doctors sought to amputate, but he refused and the leg was eventually saved. Yet tire crash left him with a permanent limp, the need for leg braces at times, and chronic pain for the rest of his life, which he would seek to drown in painkillers and alcohol. It would also fuel his later legacy as a black-leather-jacketed motorcycle rebel.

Discharged from the Navy due to his injury, he began to play country and rock 'n' roll music around Norfolk. He transposed his name to Gene Vincent, and formed a band called the Blue Caps from a nickname for Navy sailors. His early cadre included bassist "Jumpin'" Jack Neal, drummer Dickie "Be Bop" Harrell, and rhythm guitarman Ervin "Wee Willie" Williams. They soon won a Norfolk talent contest organized by local WCMS radio DJ Bill "Sheriff Tex" Davis. Inspired by the band's theme song, "Be-Bop-A-Lula," Davis took over managing the show....

"Be-Bop-A-Lula" was released by Capitol in June 1956, surprisingly selected by Capitol producer Ken Nelson as a B-side to "Woman Love." But this flip-side single soon became the hit. The song was successful simultaneously on three u.s. charts: it peaked at #7 following a twenty-week ride on the Billboard pop chart; #8 on the R&B chart; and #5 on the country list. In England it reached #16. By April 1957, Capitol boasted that more than 2 million copies had been sold to date. At the same session as well as four follow-up sessions in June 1956, Vincent and the Blue Caps also cut **their classic sides** "Race With The Devil," "Bluejean Bop," and "Crazy Legs." But they would never again have a hit like their first one. ...

Despite his matinee idol looks and penchant for cardigan sweaters, Eddie Cochran was the figure of 1950s teenage rebellion personified. His most famous song, "Summertime Blues" was a bold and brash cry, perfectly captured, pent-up teen frustration and desire. With his follow-up "C'mon Everybody," he took the themes further, sending out a call to arms to get up dance to rock 'n' roll.

Far beyond many of his contemporary rockabillys, Cochran was a consummate musician and performer. He wrote much of his own material; was adept at engineering his sound in the studio, experimented early on with multi-tracking and overdubbing; could both croon out a ballad and scream through a rocker; played a virtuosic and purposeful guitar; was a true rock 'n' roller with all the moves on stage; and performed in several Hollywood films. Had he survived past his 21st year, who knows what future awaited. Born in Albert Lea, Minnesota, he was named Edward Ray Cochran. His parents had migrated north from Oklahoma, and he often later proudly told interviewers that he himself had been born an Okie. In 1955, Cochran's family moved to west to Bell Gardens, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. He would be based from California for the rest of his career. ...

Based on some of his first rock 'n' roll recordings, Hollywood producer Boris Petroff in 1956 invited Cochran to appear in the big-budget rock 'n' roll comedy film *The Girl Can't Help It*, starring

quintessential 1950s blonde bombshell Jayne Mansfield. In the movie, Cochran sang "Twenty Flight Rock" with true rocking swagger, punctuated by stop-time interludes, and a Memphis-style hiccupping vocal. His performance caught the eye of producers from Los Angeles-based Liberty Records.

Cochran began recording in Hollywood's Gold Star Studios, soon becoming a proficient session musician and studio producer. In 1957, he was featured in a second film, *Untamed Youth*, with another platinum blonde, Mamie Van Doren. He also scored his first hit, "Sittin' in the Balcony," which peaked in March 1957 at #18 after thirteen weeks on the charts. This was followed by the singles "Drive-In Show" and the great "Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie."

In summer 1958, Liberty released "Summertime Blues," which Cochran co-wrote with his manager Jerry Capehart. The song became his highest-charting hit during his lifetime, reaching #8 on August 25, 1958, on the Billboard pop charts. The song hit #18 on the British charts as well. During 1958 and 1959, Cochran was often on the road, playing package tours across the United States and Canada, often headlining shows with Gene Vincent.

Britain for a long run of package shows that ran from Scotland to Wales to England. The tour was a screaming success, opening the eyes of overseas fans to the wonders of rock 'n' roll. On Saturday, April 16, 1960, just before midnight, Vincent, Cochran, and Cochran's fiancée, songwriter Sharon Sheeley, were riding in a taxi after a late show on their way back to London and shortly, home to the United States. Traveling through Chippenham, Wiltshire, on the A4, the taxi crashed into a lamp post on Rowden Hill. Cochran was thrown through the windscreen, and was taken to St. Martin's Hospital, Bath, where he died at 4.10 p.m. the following day of severe head injuries. Both Sheeley and Vincent survived the crash. Cochran's body was flown home, and he was buried on April 25, 1960, at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Cypress, California.

"Last night, Eddie Cochran rocked and he rolled and finally the cows came home. By the time he strummed his last notes on that big, beautiful orange Gretsch 6120 guitar, the audience was worn out and went home satisfied that they had seen the best rockabilly anywhere."

- The Los Angeles Times

## **9. Bill Millar, "DOO-WOP: AT THE HOP," *The History of Rock*, 1982**

White vocal groups of the Fifties embraced a variety of styles and sounds, ranging from adult pop groups (the Ames Brothers, the Four Aces, the Hilltoppers), through shameless pop-rockers who covered the R&B hits of the day (the Crewcuts, the McGuire Sisters, the Diamonds) to a vast army of teenage singing groups who naturally absorbed black vocal mannerisms.

Some, like the Skyliners and the Belmonts, rivaled the best black harmony groups but, before the emergence of such quartets, white doo-wop was synonymous with plagiarism and what might be termed 'sham-rock'.

The king of sham-rock was Bill Randle, a Cleveland disc jockey who discovered the Crewcuts and the Diamonds, the two most successful doo-wop groups of the entire decade. Alan Freed's arch-rival, Randle took the Crewcuts to Mercury records in 1954. Originating from Toronto, the group



had previously been known as the Canadaires and comprised: John Perkins (lead), Pat Barrett (tenor), Rudy Maugeri (baritone) and Ray Perkins (bass). The Crewcuts covered a variety of R&B hits including those by the Chords ('Sh-Boom'), the Queens ('Oop Shoop'), the Penguins ('Earth Angel'), Nappy Brown ('Don't Be Angry') and Clyde McPhatter ('Seven Days'). They notched up 11 Top Twenty hits in two years.

Like the Crewcuts, whose career they so closely followed, the Diamonds also came from Canada where Ted Kowalski (tenor), Phil Letitt (baritone) and Bill Reed (bass) attended the University of Toronto. In 1954 they auditioned for CBC-TV's *Now Is Your Chance* and met David Somerville, who joined them as lead singer. After a couple of flops on the Coral record label they approached Randle, who placed them with Mercury and picked their songs, including the Teenagers' 'Who Do Fools Fall In Love'.

The Diamonds had a safe, successful formula from which they rarely strayed, grabbing songs which had just broken onto the R&B chart, recording them quickly with a slicker production and selling millions of copies to people who had never heard the originals. Between 1956 and 1961 they ripped off R&B hits by the Willows ('Church Bells May Ring'), the Clovers ('Love Love Love'), the G-Clefs ('Ka Ding Dong'), the Heartbeats ('A Thousand Miles Away'), the Gladiolas ('Little Darlin') the Rays, the Solitaires and the Danleers.

### **R&B versus royalties**

The Crewcuts and the Diamonds looked like rock'n'roll groups and, superficially, sounded like rock'n'roll groups. All they lacked was the feel and creativity of the black groups they squeezed off the pop charts. But while these cover versions suppressed black performers, they also brought royalties to black songwriters who preferred a million-selling pop hit to an R&B hit which reached less than 10 per cent of the record-buying public.

Most of the better white groups came from the Northeast — New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania. There was a depth to the East Coast vocal group tradition that the rest of the country lacked. The Orioles, a black group, enjoyed a string of Top Ten R&B hits between 1948 and 1953. Hugely popular in New York, they left a solid heritage to which kids of all races could aspire. Generally, the East Coast produced the best black vocal groups.

R&B band leader Johnny Otis remarked: 'On the East, they have such nice harmonies, musically, artistically ... but dear friends like the Penguins, the Medallions and those other West Coast groups were horrible. I used to talk to my bassman and my trumpet player and we used to say, "There must be something here in the water that causes that".'

The direct influence of these great black singing units was, then, one reason why white groups on the East Coast were so good. But equally important was social and racial background. White groups from the West Coast were usually over-privileged kids who sang and surfed in equal proportions. From the Four Preps through the Fleetwoods to the Beach Boys, theirs were pretty, summery sounds.

White doo-wop's best exponents sprang from lower status minorities. By WASP standards, 'white' is really a misnomer since it was the Italian, Hispanic and Polish kids who took to the subways in search of the perfect echo. Many of the Puerto Ricans, next to the blacks the lowest on the social

scale, were recruited from street gangs and black/Puerto Rican combinations, like Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, were not uncommon.

Of all these ethnic groups, the Italians were the most important. From New York, the Three Chuckles, led by Teddy Randazzo, brushed the charts with 'Runaround' (Number 20 in 1954), 'Two Times I Love You' (1955) and 'And The Angels Sing' (1956). In a similar vein, the Four Lovers from Newark, New Jersey, made the Hot Hundred with 'You're The Apple Of My Eye' (1956); some years later they re-emerged as the Four Seasons.

### **Coast-to-coast chorus**

By 1957, white doo-woppers were coming from all over the country. The Crescendos, from Nashville, Tennessee, grappled with 'Oh Julie' (Number 5) and the Silva-Tones from Texas enjoyed a smaller but oft-recorded hit with 'That's All I Want From You'. The year 1957 also saw the emergence of the Del-Vikings, a racially-integrated unit who hit with 'Come Go With Me' and 'Whispering Bells'.

Danny and the Juniors were one of the most successful, if not the most talented of white groups. They topped the charts with 'At The Hop' in 1958, proclaimed that 'Rock And Roll Is Here To Stay' (Number 19 in 1958) and reached the Hot Hundred with another seven records. Formed in Philadelphia, the group, comprising Dave White, Frank Maffei, Joe Terranova and lead singer Danny Rapp, took their material to Artie Singer, a vocal coach who owned Singular records. Singer liked 'Do The Bop', changed the title on the advice of Dick Clark (of *American Bandstand*) and copied the piano introduction from 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On'. After the group appeared on *Bandstand*, ABC-Paramount bought the master and 'At The Hop' sold a two-and-a-half million.

Dick Clark was equally responsible for the fortunes of the Crests, an integrated group with an Italian-American lead singer, Johnny Maestro, whose creamy tenor reached the Hot Hundred on 10 occasions between 1957 and 1960.

After 'Sweetest One' (on Joyce) they signed to George Paxton's Coed label and went to Number 2 with 'Sixteen Candles'. Dick Clark, who bought the publishing rights, plugged the Crests repeatedly, but their success owed something to their talent and was not entirely manufactured.

The progress of white vocal groups gathered momentum throughout 1958. Many of the hottest sellers — the Playmates ('Beep Beep') and the Kalin Twins ('When') — were immediate anachronisms with sickly and contrived orchestrations. Others, including the Aquatones' 'You' (Number 21), the Elegants' 'Little Star' (1), Dion and the Belmonts' 'I Wonder Why' (22), the Teddy Bears' 'To Know Him Is To Love Him' (1) and the Slades' 'You Cheated' (42) retain a charm and freshness which permits repeated listening.

### **White to black**

The story of the Slades from Austin Texas, does much to undermine the belief that white groups cribbed all the best R&B discs. They went to the Domino record label where they cut 'You Cheated' written by lead singer Don Burch. The disc was covered by the Shields, a black Los Angeles aggregation whose imitation far outsold the original.

In 1959 the contribution to the white doo-wop bonanza was a mixed as before. Despite insipid

harmonies, the Fleetwoods, a trio from Olympia, Washington, racked up 11 hits between 1959 and 1963. The Impalas (an integrated group with three Italians and a black lead singer) hit Number 2 with 'Sorry I Ran All The Way Home' while the Mystics, the Passions and the Fire-flies brought 'Hushabye', 'Just To Be With You' and 'You Were Mine' to the charts. Pittsburgh's Skyliners, famous for a stunning lead singer in Jimmy Beaumont and a massive, much-revived hit, 'Since I Don't Have You', are often regarded as the most sophisticated of white doo-woppers.

Recorded for Al Capozzi's Calico label, 'Since I Don't Have You' (Number 12 in 1959) was the first successful R&B oriented disc to use a string section. Dreamy orchestrations accompanied the group on records for Colpix, Cameo and Atco, all of which were notable releases.

White doo-wop reached epidemic proportions between 1960 and 1962 when the Hot Hundred was riddled with discs by the Innocents, the Roommates, the Classics, Donnie and the Dreamers, the Capris, the Regents (who recorded the original 'Barbara Ann'), the Chimes, the Tokens, Rosie and the Originals and a dozen of others, including integrated teams like the Marcells and the Time-Tones. A New Jersey craze for acappella (unaccompanied) singing provided white doo-wop's final, pure but short-lived gasps during 1963-64.

### **Salute to a sound**

The English invasion halted white doo-wop overnight. Apart from the occasional throwback (for example, the Casinos who scored with 'Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye' in 1967), the style was simply wiped out of existence. Vito and the Salutations mourned its departure with the unsuccessful 'Liverpool Bound': 'I don't wanna hold your hand/I just wanna go diddle it did, diddle it did, dip dip dip ... !' When Americans recovered from the Beatles, indigenous ethnic groups had lost the doo-wop touch. Vocal/instrumental combos — the Standells, the Kingsmen and many more — regurgitated black music in less attractive ways.

The subject-matter of white doo-wop lacked variety and the lyrics were often poor. Ignoring the candid language of earlier black groups, love and desire were rarely expressed by sexual metaphor. Lyrics were romantic, sugar-coated and coy, filling a need which groups like the Osmonds satisfied in the mid-Seventies. But white doo-wop groups often used four- or five-part harmony to its best advantage, and some of the lead singers were superb: in Jimmy Beaumont (Skyliners), Dion Di Mucci (Belmonts) and Johnny Maestro (Crests), the idiom produced the finest vocalists of their generation. Allowing for a self-conscious lack of humour, these were exceptionally talented singers by any standards.

There was keen edge to their voices, a purity of tone which escaped many of the black singers they idolized. And despite the increasing segregation of R&B radio playlists, most of the nationally successful white doo-woppers dented the R&B chart with their first hit; as new and totally unknown performers, R&B stations simply couldn't tell what colour they were. © Bill Millar, 1982

## **10. Bill Millar, "FRANKIE LYMON: WHY DO FOOLS FALL IN LOVE?," *Pye Records*, 1972**

Black vocal groups once sang for enjoyment on street-corners throughout ghettos in each of the big American cities. Late into the night they harmonised together, sublimating a frustration which

exploded by day.

Zip-gun safely stored in the cistern, a Harlem teenager could leave his decaying tenement and join others for an *acapella* session in a dingy pool-hall or on a deserted subway platform. Street-corner talent-spotting became the normal way for a group to obtain a record contract. An audition from the guy who crossed the road to listen might mean gifts for all the folks and a shiny Cadillac. As groups proliferated the age at which they turned professional took a nosedive. They called themselves The Classmates, The Juniors, The Sixteens, establishing a solidarity between themselves and their audience. Many were too young to sign contracts and their parents, scarcely knowing what it was all about, signed for them. A million-seller or a string of dismal failures could follow. Either way, the group was soon back in the ghetto, tossed aside like an empty cigarette packet. The Teenagers made a greater impact than most but their case-history was typical of the era and their origins were not unusual.

Seventy per cent of America's two million Puerto Ricans live in New York; long before the boogaloo, *salsa* and Spanish soul, teenage blacks and young Latinos had shared musical enthusiasms, particularly mambo and heavy doowop. Two Puerto Ricans, lead vocalist Herman Santiago (born 18th February 1941) and baritone Joe Negroni (born 9th September 1940), met up with Jimmy Merchant (born 10th February 1940), a tenor from South Bronx, and Sherman Garnes (born 8th June 1940), a bass singer from Washington Heights. This quartet, variously known as The Couple de Villes or The Premiers, exercised their vocal chords among the hallways of the drab, five-storey monoliths on 165th Street. They also attended Edward W. Stitt Junior High where Frankie Lymon first asked to sing with them.

Born in Washington Heights on 30th September 1942, Lymon was raised in a ramshackle apartment with half a dozen relatives including a sister and three brothers. Their father sang with The Harlemaires and encouraged his sons to sing in a junior gospel group of the same name. Louie, Timothy and Howie sang very much like Frankie and all three joined vocal groups – The Teenchords (on Fire, Juanita and Fury) The Fascinators (unissued demos) and The Lovenotes – in the wake of their brother's success. Howie died of pneumonia before he could record and while Frankie learned to play bongos in a family mambo group he was quickly brutalised by his environment – hustling at six, working in grocery stores at ten and smoking reefers before he started grade school. In 1954 he encountered The Premiers who were practising their harmonies in the Stitt auditorium where Lymon also went to school. Richard Barrett, leader of The Valentines and talent scout for George Goldner's Rama and Gee labels, heard the group's rehearsals and took them to his employer, a one-time dance instructor who'd recorded Latin music prior to exploiting the teeming vocal talent on New York's streets. Santiago switched to first tenor at the insistence of Goldner who preferred Lymon's voice and in 1955 the group were taken to Manhattan's Bell Sound studios to record 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?', a song of obscure authorship originally titled 'Why Do Birds Sing So Gay?'. Merchant and Garnes invented the diverting bass introduction while Lymon came up with the melody.

'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?' by The Teenagers, a name bestowed on them by the record's saxophonist, Jimmy Wright, was held over until 10th January 1956 when its release coincided with the initial mass acceptance of rock'n'roll. Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Carl Perkins had their first top-twenty records; The Teenagers joined these stalwarts at the top of the ladder, remained in the Hot 100 for five months, topped the British hit parade (and the R&B charts) and sold two

million copies throughout the world.

Lymon was snatched out of high school without a diploma and the group embarked on a continual whirlwind of TV dates, dee-jay hops and package tours. For a brief period, eighteen months at the most, it was impossible to live in America without hearing The Teenagers. 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love?' (no. 7), 'I Want You To Be My Girl' (no. 17), 'I Promise To Remember' – a cover of Jimmy Castor and the Juniors' 'I Promise' (Wing 90078) which peaked at no. 57 – and 'ABCs Of Love' (no. 77) established a short-lived musical revolution. Barely influenced by the blues or Tin Pan Alley (none of the group was older than sixteen), they pioneered a fresh and distinctive variety of rock'n'roll, a boisterous sub-division of doowop less sophisticated than its predecessors. The kiddie-lead syndrome, with its juxtaposition of high tenor and dark brown bass, was instant fun. Anyone could do it and almost anyone did; *Bim Bam Boom* No. 12 lists over seventy groups who featured a black soprano voice on the threshold of puberty. Wordless noises (oom ba bah doom, bah bah doom, ba bah durb durb) assumed a poetry of their own while the lyrics, set in a high-school context, often descended into pre-natal goo:

*The time went by so very slow I wanted to see that girlie so  
We had a Coke and furthermore I carried her books up to the door She said "I'll see you later"  
Then my heart skipped a beat  
Chills ran from my spine to my feet  
I kissed her under the moon above  
And that was the start of a Teenage Love*

'I'm Not A Juvenile Delinquent', from the film *Rock Rock Rock*, broke the formula. Written by Bobby Spencer of The Cadillacs (he also wrote 'My Boy Lollipop'), this twee and moralising slab of social comment failed to register in the States but reached the top dozen here. By then Spencer had sold his song to publisher Morris Levy who helped inaugurate Roulette records.

If The Teenagers' sound was largely unsusceptible to successful white cover versions, the absence of these was no guarantee to economic survival; like most of their contemporaries, the group was ultimately destined for the reject pile. After seven singles – the A-sides of each are included here together with 'Baby Baby', another tune which bombed in the US but climbed to no. 4 on British charts – George Goldner promoted dissension by recording Lymon on his own or issuing records without crediting the group. His first solo hit, the horrendous 'Goody Goody' (no. 22 in 1957), was recorded during The Teenagers' tour of England and it featured a home-grown vocal group under the direction of Bill Shepherd and Norrie Paramor. Much disgusted, The Teenagers recorded with new lead singers including Billy Lobrano who appeared on 'Flip Flop' (Gee 1046) and 'Momma Wanna Rock' (Roulette 4086). Despite further sides on End and Columbia (Leiber and Stoller's western spoof 'The Draw') they returned to obscurity. Minus their internationally famous child prodigy, they'd no potential and very little work. Joe Negroni recorded with The Diablos on Jubilee in 1966 and, in the Seventies, The Teenagers re-grouped for rock-revival shows with Pearl McKinnon of The Kodoks imitating Lymon's lead; following imprisonment and heart surgery, the bass singer Sherman Garnes died during 1977.

Roulette, who had absorbed George Goldner's labels, persevered with Frankie Lymon but, as the barely recognisable vocal on 'I Put The Bomp' reveals, his voice had broken and he wasn't a novelty anymore. Apart from 'Thumb Thumb' most of his solo singles were stamped "Not commercial", before they were in the shops. The Roulette album, *Rock'n'Roll With Frankie Lymon*, was,

nonetheless, delicious and the best of its twelve tracks appear on side two. Mature and confident, he storms through ten classics of the Fifties previously popularised by Thurston Harris, The Hollywood Flames, Ricky Nelson, Elvis Presley, The Rays, Little Junior Parker, Nat King Cole, Annie Laurie, The Coasters and Larry Williams (we've omitted his versions of 'Diana' and 'Wake Up Little Susie'). As revivals go they're just fine; compared to the adolescent doowop for which he's generally best known, they're plainly astounding. 'Little Bitty Pretty One', taken from the album, was a minor hit two years after it was recorded (no. 58 in 1960) but nothing else sold and Roulette chose not to renew his contract.

In 1961 Lymon was literally picked up out of the gutter and made to undergo a drug cure in Manhattan General Hospital. New managers, Bob Redcross and Sammy Bray, tried to reconstruct a career and, with guidance from Dizzy Gillespie, Lymon took dancing lessons, learned to sing in six languages and became a jazz drummer. His efforts, including solitary singles on Twentieth Century Fox and Columbia, went unnoticed. The world didn't hear from Lymon again until 1964 when he was convicted on a narcotics charge. Now mainlining, the habit was costing him \$75 a day. In February 1968 he was in the news again. With a recording session lined up, he flew into New York from Augusta, Georgia where he was stationed at Camp Gordon with the US Army. The following morning, 28th February, his body was discovered on the bathroom floor of his grandmother's apartment. A syringe lay nearby and the West 153rd Street precinct confirmed that death had been caused by a heroin overdose. Thrice-married Frankie Lymon – an international celebrity commanding \$5,000 a week at the age of 13 – was dead at 26. His last disc, 'I'm Sorry' and 'Sea Breeze' on Big Apple, was released posthumously.

This album, which includes many tracks generally unavailable for twenty years, is a belated memorial to both sides of a remarkably precocious talent.

© Bill Millar, 1972

## 11. Bill Millar, "Alan Freed: Mr. Rock'n'Roll, "The History of Rock, 1982

ALAN FREED, the man responsible for giving rock'n'roll its name, was many things to many people. To some, he was the original Mr Clean, an innocent 'good guy', who opened up hitherto-segregated airwaves and made an unparalleled contribution to the advancement of black popular music.

This was the sympathetic impression conveyed by the Floyd Mutrux 1978 bio-pic, *American Hot Wax*. 'He brought us rock'n'roll,' said Mutrux. 'I didn't want to say bad things about a guy who started all that.' To others like Alexander Walker, the London *Evening Standard* film critic who met the volatile disc jockey during his heyday, Freed was a pathetic figure, an ignorant crook who accepted kickbacks from any promoter willing to pay his price.

Of Welsh-Lithuanian descent, Freed was born on 15th December 1921 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania; his family moved to Salem, Ohio, when he was four. Freed described his childhood as 'normal' although his surroundings were far from affluent. He showed some musical talent, wanted to become a concert trombonist and, at high school, organized a dance-band which he called the Sultans of Swing after the famous Harlem jazz orchestra. At Ohio State University, he enrolled for a course in journalism but switched to mechanical engineering to please his father. 'One day,' he told Vic Fredericks in 1957, 'I peered through the window at the campus radio station and that was it – I was

gone.'

### **Divorce and the Draft**

On leaving college, Freed was drafted into the US Army Signal Corps, but was discharged when he contracted double mastoiditis. The infection left him with damaged hearing: 'Please don't say that's why I like rock'n'roll,' was his stock comment on his condition. After many auditions for work as a radio announcer (CBS told him to forget it because of his grating Midwest accent), Freed took a 17-dollars-a-week job with radio WKST in New Castle, Pennsylvania; from 1943 to 1950 he drifted from one station to another, usually as a sportscaster or disc jockey playing classical records.

Freed married in 1944 and soon had two children. The 13-hour day he was working on Akron's WAKR radio in the late forties was not conducive to family life, however, and the couple agreed on a divorce in 1949. The following year, while working on Cleveland's WXEL-TV, Freed married 39-year-old Jacqueline Hess.

It was in Cleveland that Freed met Leo Mintz, proprietor of the city's Record Rendezvous shop. Mintz had observed that white teenagers were buying unusually large numbers of rhythm and blues records and encouraged Freed to give black music airplay on the radio programme the disc jockey had on Cleveland's powerful 50-kilowatt WJW station. Freed introduced 'Moondog's Rock'n'Roll Party' in June 1951. He had re-christened rhythm and blues to avoid the racial stigma he thought inherent in the classification, and the new phrase 'rock'n'roll', long-used as a sexual metaphor, now described the music he played. 'It was more Leo's idea than mine,' Freed later admitted.

Broadcast from 5 pm to 6 pm and 11.15 pm to 2 am from Monday to Friday and from 11.15pm to 3 am on Saturdays, the programme was an instant success. Freed howled his way through the theme tune (Todd Rhodes' 'Blues For Moon Dog'), introduced each disc in a hoarse jive patter and accompanied the beat by slapping his palm on a telephone directory. Soupy Sales, the station's morning host, later remarked: 'In fact, Freed was always drunk but it was alright ... he could handle it.'

Prompted by his abnormally high ratings, Freed staged his Moondog Coronation Ball with black stars the Moonglows and the Dominoes at the 10,000-capacity Cleveland Arena. On 21st March 1952, a racially mixed crowd of 25,000 showed up and broke down the doors – the first rock'n'roll riot. Freed had sold 18,000 tickets in advance, and the disc jockey was to continue to double as concert promoter throughout the Fifties.

In April 1953, at the height of his Cleveland popularity, Freed drove his car into a tree after a late broadcast. His face required 260 stitches and 12,000 dollars' worth of plastic surgery, but five weeks later he resumed his broadcasts from a hospital bed. That same year, he plugged the Orioles' record, 'Crying In The Chapel', the first R&B record to make the pop Top Twenty. The day after Freed's repeated spins, the disc sold 30,000 copies in Cleveland; that so many copies were readily available appears evidence of some prior agreement. Dubious financial arrangements seemed confirmed when, years later, it was revealed that Jerry Blaine, owner of the Orioles' Jubilee label, held the mortgage on Freed's house.

### **Rockin' the East Coast**

In 1954, Freed's WJW show was taped for WNJR in Newark, the city in which he staged his first East Coast live concert on 1st May; it was a sell-out. News of Freed's popularity spread to New York where he joined radio WINS for a salary of 25,000 dollars a year. Programme director Bob Smith hired Freed without knowing whether he was black or white. 'Moondog's Rock'n'Roll Party', which ran from 7 to 11 pm, six nights a week, was first aired on WINS on 8 September 1954, but another Moondog – a blind Manhattan street percussionist – sued Freed over the use of the name and the show became simply 'Rock'n'Roll Party'. In January 1955 Freed staged his first New York concert at the St Nicholas Arena; the audience was 70 per cent white and 30 per cent black. The following Easter he brought a show to the Brooklyn Paramount; this one, featuring the Moonglows and the Penguins, became the prototype for the many Easter, Labor Day and Christmas shows which followed.

During the late Fifties Freed's Paramount concerts broke box office records on several occasions, grossing as much as 300,000 dollars over the 12 days between Christmas and the New Year. There were usually six or seven shows a day with 15 acts on the bill. Police patrolled the aisles and *Billboard* reported an Alcatraz-like atmosphere, while *Variety* magazine thought it akin to having an aisle seat for the San Francisco earthquake. On top of his take (involving sums previously unheard-of for a promoter), Freed formed and directed his own band, which recorded for Coral; the label paid Freed 25,000 dollars a year. He also taped weekly shows for stations in Baltimore, St Louis and, in he attracted no fewer than 4,000 fan clubs – mostly on the US East Coast – and presided over legions of New York label owners, promotion men and publishers' representatives, most of whom helped swell the Freed coffers with 'gifts' of jewellery, booze and – what was later held to be most damning of all – cash payments.

### **Freed on film**

In 1956, Freed starred in the films *Rock Around The Clock* and *Don't Knock The Rock*. Portraying himself as a paternal friend to the nation's youth – helping them and rock'n'roll to conquer all adversity – Freed seemed wooden and not in the least charismatic. But in making these two films, and also *Rock, Rock, Rock* (1957), *Mister Rock'n'Roll* (1957) and *Go Johnny Go!* (1959), Freed enjoyed the genuine friendship of his co-stars. When Earl Carroll of the Cadillacs (who appeared in *Go Johnny Go!*) was asked whether Freed was really Mr. Sincerity, he replied, "The man is beautiful, just beautiful...he was a fair man and he kept me with food on the table quite a few times. He was for real."

Another artist who held Freed in high regard was Chuck Berry, who stated: "He was a brother, you know. The record company gave it to him, but he never dreamed anything." Freed's name appeared among composing credits to 'Maybelene' and the Moonglows' 'Sincerely' although he did not write either; but, on the other hand, Chuck Berry and the Moonglows appeared in his films and monopolized his turntable. The Moonglows, whose name tied in with the Moondog show, made their first record for Freed's Champagne label and he introduced them to their subsequent labels, Chance and Chess. Freed was in many ways an ambivalent figure, for as well as promoting rock'n'roll he made a small fortune out of it; many artists received a considerable reduction of their due royalties because Freed's name appeared on songwriting credits, but on the other hand, his sponsorship helped the records succeed.

It's important to note that Freed never pushed a record he didn't like. Not only did he give exposure to Fats Domino, Little Richard and other stars, he also played obscure R&B and rockabilly songs,



making short-lived stars out of Billy Brooks, Mac Curtis, Barbie Gaye (who sang the original 'My Boy Lollipop') and dozens of black vocal groups. He refused to play Pat Boone or the Crewcuts and attacked disc jockeys who preferred their pale imitation cover records. 'They're anti-negro,' he told Vic Fredericks. 'If it isn't that, what is it? Oh, they can always excuse it on the grounds that the covers are better quality, but I defy anyone to show me that the quality of the original 'Tweedlee Dee' [LaVern Baker] or 'Seven Days' [Clyde McPhatter] is poor.'

### **King in his castle**

Beyond the artists he sponsored so assiduously, Freed did not make friends very easily. 'His ego was huge' said radio programme director Bob Smith. 'He was an impossible individual on a personal basis.' Freed's style offended many. He lived in a 16-room stucco mansion overlooking Long Island Sound in an exclusive district of Stamford. By 1957 his fear of automobiles made him something of a recluse and the station equipped his home with remote broadcasting facilities. Some of the more sophisticated record men disliked Freed's vulgarity and took umbrage at having to visit 'His Majesty, the King in his Connecticut Castle', as Atlantic's Jerry Wexler once put it. If there was one luxury Freed lacked it was a press agent to tell him how to present the correct image.

On 3rd May 1958, Fred compered the 'Big Beat Show' at the Boston Arena, with Jerry Lee Lewis topping the bill. To prevent dancing in the aisles, police turned up the lights. Apologising to the audience, Freed was alleged to have said, 'Hey kids, the Boston Police don't want you to have a good time.' In the city-wide orgy of violence that followed, a score of Bostonians were beaten, stabbed and robbed.

Rock'n'roll was banned not just in Boston, but in Maine, Connecticut and New Jersey. Indicted under anti-anarchy laws, Freed was charged with wickedly and maliciously inciting both a riot and the unlawful destruction of property. The charges were dropped after 17 months of judicial argument, leaving Freed with legal fees which ensured his bankruptcy. WINS had not supported him during the crisis and he left the station in disgust. In addition, the Brooklyn Paramount refused to play host to further Freed concerts. Popularity among teenagers could not save the DJ from establishment wrath.

Freed moved to wabc where he began presenting the 'Big Beat Show'. Within weeks, a probe into rigged television quiz shows had widened into public examination of payola. In November 1959, Freed was dismissed from wabc after refusing to sign an affidavit denying that he had ever received bribes in return for playing records. The defiant disc jockey informed the press that what broadcasting called payola, Washington called 'lobbying' – a comment that did little to endear him to the establishment. After testifying before the Harris Subcommittee on Legislative Oversight (the payola hearings'), Freed was arrested in New York State on 26 charges of commercial bribery totalling over 30,000 dollars. In December 1962, having pleaded guilty to some of the charges, he received a six-month suspended sentence and a 300-dollar fine.

In 1959 Freed had begun working for kday radio in Los Angeles in an attempt to revive his career, but in 1964 he was charged with income tax evasion on 47,920 dollars received between 1957 and 1959. Ten months later on 20th January 1965, he died of uremia in a Palm Springs hospital at the age of 42. He left a third wife, Inga, and his four children by earlier marriages.

Freed deserves to be remembered for his adventurous – even imprudent – efforts on behalf of the music

he loved. His early non-segregated dances often defied local custom and his partiality to black artists was not universally popular. His short-lived 'Rock'n'Roll Dance Party' show on cbs-tv, cancelled when the cameras caught Frankie Lymon jiving with a white girl, also enraged the segregationists. Later, Freed went on the same television channel to defend Jerry Lee Lewis' controversial nuptials ('these Southern boys marry young') and he often appeared to condone delinquency ("They're not bad kids, if the theater gets a few broken seats, that's their problem'). Whatever

Freed's personal frailties, he did far more than most whites to popularize black music. 'He died,' said the *New York Post*, 'depending on whether you get an uptempo version or a slow blues, of either a broken heart or too much whiskey.' And *Cashbox* added that 'he suffered the most, and was perhaps singled out for alleged wrongs that had become a business way of life for many others.'

© Bill Millar, 1982

## 12. Richard Goldstein, “Master of Mediocrity,” *West Magazine*, 1968.

WAY BACK there—in 1952—WFIL-TV in Philadelphia had a hassle on its hands. The disc jockey–host of its popular daytime “Bandstand” show had been charged with participating in “improper activities.” That was a key phrase of the fifties. Just its utterance in tocsin tones, or its appearance in erect black headlines brought a not unpleasant chill to the nation’s collective spine. Mouths salivated, ears perked up, and eyes read on.

Lest anybody wonder what sort of “improper activities” this broadcaster had indulged in, the authorities were holding in abeyance a member or two of the show’s teen-age regulars, FEMALES! It was, in short, the kind of scandal everyone loved in those days—a vaguely plausible one.

As the story broke, WFIL found itself in the same boiling water that was later to solidify everything diverse in America into a hard-boiled egg. The station’s brass scanned the industry for a replacement. They were looking for someone with a face like Bromo-Seltzer, whose very appearance would neutralize the doubts parents everywhere felt about their kids and their times. They wanted someone who could project, with utter certainty, the spinach culture of the fifties: it was hard to swallow, but good for you.

They found him on television, in Utica, New York. He had already made the big jump from a nearby radio station where he hosted a seven hour daily dose of pop music. He was—as one reporter later attested—“a solidly built square-shouldered lad, with an Arrow-collar profile and a deep portentous voice.” There were no skeletons in his split-level closet, just a lot of two-button jackets and ties. At five, he had published a neighborhood gossip sheet; at six, he owned a sidewalk peanut-butter restaurant. President of his high-school class, he sold brushes door to door and built chicken crates at 52 cents an hour in college. His classmates at Syracuse University voted him “the man most likely to sell the Brooklyn Bridge.”

Richard Augustus Clark II almost did!

They loved him from the start at WFIL. “To many mothers,” wrote one copybopper, “the afternoon show has brought a sudden closer relationship with their children. ‘He’s sort of a big brother who sets a good example,’ one father commented. ‘Since Bandstand, kids have insisted on wearing jackets

and girls have cooled it on too-tight sweaters.’ Parents applauded.”

So did the rating services. Shortly after Clark took over, Philadelphia’s Bandstand became the highest-rated pre-dinner TV program in any major American city. Before you could say “Better buy Bird’s Eye,” the show was syndicated over the ABC network. At its peak, “American Bandstand” ran on 105 stations, reaching over 20 million teenagers. It became a springboard for variations on the stiffly stylized rite of adolescent dancing; it nurtured the Calypso, the Circle, the Stroll, and a bouffant ballet known in lingua franca as “Phillie style.” It rocketed the southside Italian ghetto-dubbed “Brotherlylovesville” by the promo men—into national prominence. Superstars sat on their stoops combing their pompadours and waiting to be found. Under the knowing aegis of Dick Clark’s associate, Bob Marcucci, they sometimes were.

Fabian (né Fabian Forte) was discovered at a record hop; he walked in and all the girls started screaming. “That was enough for us,” explains Clark. “You don’t look for a singer. The person who is the star has that magic thing, and that’s all that matters. Fabian was always a far better actor than anything else.”

In his leopard-skin shirt, very open at the throat, Fabian appeared on “American Bandstand” to grunt songs like “Tiger” and “Turn Me Loose.” He was an echo-chamber Frankenstein, created in the recording studio. On TV, he merely mouthed the words to pre-recorded tracks. That Fabian couldn’t sing was irrelevant; he worked in an image medium, and his audience squealed with a special delight when he fluffed his lines. Informality and ecstasy, the two pillars of teen culture in the fifties, had little to do with synchronization.

“American Bandstand” made superstars of a galaxy of tousled crooners from South Philadelphia, who dropped a few vowels from their names in a gesture of showbiz Americanization, and went on as Connie Francis, Frankie Avalon, or Bobby Rydell. While they sang or signed autographs, the Bandstand regulars strolled, bopped, and went steady. Their look was copied verbatim and Clark delighted in displaying a bulletin board filled with photos of studied look-alikes. That was the kind of rapport Bandstand thrived on. For the first time, after-school America was experiencing instant identity.

Books away and televisions on, they danced under the klieg lights or clapped their hands hypnotically. “We like Beechnut spearmint gum,” they chanted in unison, fingering beads and badges inscribed with the holy word “IFIC.” A skinny kid in a sequin-speckled suit bellowed into a dead mike; he looked like a cheap engagement ring but everyone screamed anyway. Old folks, busy conforming, called it “conformity.” But a viable, visible sub-culture had been born on “American Bandstand” and Dick Clark—the guy in the plastic surgeon’s mask—had shown us how easy a delivery it could be.

“I don’t make culture,” he insists today. “I sell it. A myth has grown up over the years that I have something to do with what becomes popular. Generally, I reflect what’s going on early enough to make a profit on it. It’s not my business to interpret.”

He sits in a comfortably padded chair in his office on Sunset Boulevard. It is fifteen years after Dick Clark first climbed on the Bandstand bandwagon and over 2500 miles from Brotherlylovesville. He is pudgier now around the cheeks. There are off-camera wrinkles above his brow. But he still speaks like a disc jockey; in conversation, he announces each idea as though it were a new record. He seems to be wearing the same necktie he has used every day of his career. But he has worn the two-button wash-and-wear uniform well, and he is not about to part with it. All that distinguishes Dick

Clark from the nice-guy mold are his fingernails—cut and polished to perfection. But who can deny a successful guy his manicure?

“I’m getting older and wiser, but I stay the same,” he says. “My clothing changes according to the style for my age, but my relationship with kids doesn’t. I was too old then to be a playmate, and too young to be a father. It’s still that way. I’m constantly called upon to explain kids. It’s a peculiar thing for me because I don’t make believe I’m a kid. I’m an observer and a presenter.” His eyes twinkle like a busy switchboard. “I’ve made a career out of being non- controversial.”

Dick Clark gives an interview the way he runs his career. Everything he says is instantly screened. Opinions are followed by the inevitable warning, “You’d better not quote me on that.” He is especially wary of the press. “People who write use me as a scapegoat,” he confides. Not always. When Clark first joined the panoply of television’s host-celebrities, the fourth estate had nothing but praise. “He has become a symbol for all that is good in America’s younger generation,” burred one writer. “Dick’s acts of kindness are a legend,” chortled another.

Legend they truly were. As the first man to achieve a nationwide audience of doting, solvent teenagers, Clark was the virtual dictator of Tin Pan Alley in 1959. While his patronage did not assure a hit, it helped many a gold record along the way. “When I recorded ‘Venus,’” singer Frankie Avalon told one interviewer, “Dick got behind it and it sold 1.5 million copies. He’s the greatest.” Frankie Avalon was not the only one to stand in awe. A congressional sub-committee then involved in probing graft within the record industry soon took a lively interest in Dick Clark’s enterprises. To put it as tactfully as Richard Augustus II himself would, he was suspected of confusing aesthetic with financial judgment. In fact, it was not long after Frankie Avalon’s tribute appeared that Rep. Peter F. Mack of Illinois called Clark “Top dog in the payola field.”

With a press turned gleefully hostile, Dick Clark entered the halls of Congress to testify. As the Associated Press described it on April 29, 1960: “Dick Clark suavely swore today that his hands were never dirtied by payola.”

Soberly, he insisted his investments were neither improper nor uncommon, and staunchly accepted an ultimatum from ABC to divest himself of all outside interests. With a little soap and water behind the ears, Dick Clark was clean.

America acquitted, or at least forgave, Dick Clark. True, he was no longer the white knight riding off into a kinescopic sunset. But the scandals of the fifties had taught us not to demand propriety from our leaders, only cleverness and poise.

Dick Clark’s calculated cool helped him survive. He developed a tough, arrogant honesty about his work. His interviews were peppered with knowing asides. “I don’t think Hollywood knows any kids,” he told the Los Angeles *Times*, “because, by the time they get here, they aren’t kids anymore.” When asked why he had decided to return to television as a dramatic actor, he forsook the stock answer about art and fulfillment, and quipped, “I decided if I wanted people to continue knowing who I am, I’d better figure out how many different ways I can poke my face on TV.” And he added without a trace of the bashful elan which once accompanied such observations: “I always seem to play the nice, clean-cut fellow who turns out to be a louse.”

Like Richard Nixon, Dick Clark had realized that the only humility we require from the defeated is pragmatism. We are able to accept idealism only from a winner. All-American boys who tarnish

soon find themselves coming on as though innocence were a kind of virginity they have lost long ago, in some brothel of the soul. No longer quite clean-cut, Dick Clark's dignity had become that of the successful entrepreneur. It was his only remaining claim to grace and he has lived off it ever since.

He is anything but washed up today. Though he never left the periphery of the scene, there are signs that he is inching toward its center again. He says he has moved to Los Angeles because it is "the most youth-oriented city in the nation," and his camera crews can be seen canvassing the freeways and taco stands in search of the Now. Not long ago the Los Angeles Free Press discovered Clark's pop-squad shooting a film called "Love in Haight." If the hippy thing fails, there is always Country-Western music. (Clark owns a station and produces a show called "Swinging Country.") With the perennial success of patriotic monologues on records, Clark has a new single called "Open Letter To the Older Generation." And his partner of long standing, Bob Marcucci, is reactivating the old Chancellor label, which once showcased the brightest bellows of "American Bandstand." To mark its grand re-entry, Marcucci plans to introduce a new singer from old South Philadelphia called Bobby Jason. He makes his recording debut with an updated version of "Venus," the song Dick Clark once helped Frankie Avalon sell a million and a half copies of.

If Bobby Jason clicks, Clark can do it again. His production company is one of those showbiz complexes geared to thrive behind pasteboard properties. From a carpeted cottage on Sunset Boulevard, Clark runs the largest personal-appearance packaging agency in the world (it employs a staff of 40 and handles upwards of 300 one-night stands a year). Right now, its most important clients are the Monkees. Their association with Dick Clark seems inevitable. His genius has always been making gravy from raw meat, and convincing a hungry public that his gruel is healthier than the real thing.

"The name of the game is show business," Clark shrugs. His clients always play it well. The Monkees dab honesty make-up on their faces, and come on real. They wear musicianship like a tiara. "Their show is full of exuberance," Clark insists. "They do four or five costume changes, and it lasts a full hour. They don't do a fast fifteen minutes like our British friends."

Few subjects provoke as carping a response from Dick Clark as the English rock invasion. No wonder; what finally ended his pop dictatorship was not scandal or boredom, but the Beatles, with a little help from their friends. Though Clark goes easy on the Beatles ("Their major accomplishment," he thinks, "was getting the older generation interested in rock") he calls the folk-rockers who followed them "the greatest danger to pop music." What he objects to most is their repudiation of show business. "They get so involved in being admired by the people around them," he explains, "that they forget about the audience."

Clark's emphasis on commercialism (the audience first!) is understandable; he reigned in the age of the pop professional, who fit his personality to the function at hand. But the Beatles ushered in an era of the musician-idol, who sang and spoke his own thoughts. They were the first to prove that a rock performer could be his own image-maker. In the fifties, folk-rock singers Simon and Garfunkel found it necessary to call themselves Tom and Jerry, and act accordingly. But after the Beatles, they used their own names, and made it—as they felt it.

The new naturalness dethroned Dick Clark. The folk-rockers were amateurs in a sense which must have enraged him; they emphasized individuality over role, making their style impossible to assemble as a pop commodity. Dick Clark could create a celebrity, but not a Bob Dylan.

In 1965, with a galaxy of rock subversives carving up the world into fan clubs, Clark found himself in the same kind of situation that had spawned him ten years before. Rock 'n' roll was again a puzzling, even threatening, phenomenon to adults—so hairy that they sometimes had it banned. It is no accident that the Beatles and the Rolling Stones began in conscious imitation of pre-Bandstand rock idols whose black-and-blue sweat-music turned kids on and put adults uptight.

In the mid-fifties, teenagers occupied a prominent place in the headlines as hoodlums-saints not fit to be seen below the waist. The teen-hero had a lean and hungry look. His hair curled down over the bridge of his nose like a Sicilian grape arbor. His motorcycle jacket glittered with the reflected glory of a hundred brass studs. His parents thought he was a killer, but his girl knew he was a rebel without a cause, oppressed from all sides. If James Dean brought the teenage ethos of rumbling, bumbling sensuality to the screen, the hit parade was filled with its musical extensions: a yielding, yearning ecstasy that was almost antithetical to the Mickey Spillane adult culture of the time. Dick Clark made his mark by castrating this teen hero. He substituted romance for sex, neckties for leather jackets, and swirling dance-curlicues for grinding. His music—with its Little League lushness—was accepted by adults as bad, but safe. Nobody ever banned Frankie Avalon. Even the fuzz approved. Said one official of the New York Police Department, “Dick Clark acts as a tranquilizing pill on youngsters.”

He has been offering the same musical Miltown ever since. In the post-Bandstand years, his clients have maintained an uncanny sameness. Even when longhaired, they are happy, reverent kids with watermelon eyes and cantaloupe voices. Like Paul Revere and the Raiders, a cream-puff combo Clark found in the Pacific Northwest, they are costumed players, calculated to reassure everyone that the kids are all right (i.e. obedient).

For a while, repeated exposure on a daily pre-taped Clark package called “Where The Action Is” helped to establish the Raiders. In tight, taut britches and Revolutionary War frock coats which never hid their thighs, they romped and bounded past the cameras like the Three Stooges in Colonial drag. An early anti-drug sermon called “Kicks” brought them to the attention of disc jockeys during a spate of baffling psychedelic-code-songs. By once more exploiting the fears of adults, Dick Clark tried to sell the Raiders to the young as their own.

“We almost made it that time,” he reflects today. But with the cancellation of “Where The Action Is,” the group has all but faded, except on the vanity tables of pre-teens where they remain enshrined. Clark’s other “Action” properties have met similar fates; we will probably never again get a chance to worship at the feet of Keith Allison (who was discovered when he happened by an “Action” set only because he looked like Paul McCartney. “Later,” Clark explains, “we found out he could sing”).

Later, we found out he couldn’t!

Can Dick Clark do it again? Will we commission him to perform another hysterectomy? His scalpel is raised, his anesthesia ready for admission whenever we choose to breathe. If he does succeed in 1968, it will be because we need him. Dick Clark is a master of mediocrity, and Americans have a strange affection for the banal. It shows most during times of stress. In the prime spinach-years of “American Bandstand,” we were all afraid of excellence. We wanted, more than anything, to be alike. Today, when that sameness had been smashed, we wonder if the center can hold together at all. If it cannot, Dick Clark will emerge in every field from pop to politics.

He leans back in his leather chair, feet firmly planted in California carpeting, and observes, "I'm one of the world's great finger-pointers." Then, with the grace of a man who knows when to be modest, he adds, "You'd better not quote me on that."

1968

### 13. Jeff Tamarkin, "DICK CLARK: THE BEAT GOES ON," *Goldmine*, 28 December 1990

THE MOST AMAZING thing about Dick Clark is not that "America's Oldest Living Teenager" still fits that role at age 61. It's not that he's one of the most successful (and wealthiest) people in show business. It's not even the fact that nearly all the great (and plenty of not-so-great) artists in the history of rock 'n' roll have appeared on his *American Bandstand*. The most amazing thing about Dick Clark is that he can't dance. He's admitted it. Dick Clark has two left feet.

Beginning August 5, 1957, the Monday afternoon when he took over as host of the longest-running variety program in television, Dick Clark brought dancing into millions of American homes, first on a daily basis and then weekly. For over three decades, thousands of well-scrubbed kids appeared before the *American Bandstand* cameras to dance the Stroll, the Twist, the Bump, the Fly, the Jerk, the Hully-Gully the Frug, the Loco-Motion, the Philly Dog, the Madison, the Monkey and the who-knows-what to many more thousands of records. But Dick Clark never joined them. Not that he had the time to; he was too busy creating an American icon. And an empire.

In 1990 *American Bandstand* no longer exists. Clark finally took himself off the show more than a year ago and describes its current status as "in limbo." That hardly makes him an idle man, though. His Dick Clark Productions puts its stamp on dozens of television, radio and film projects every year and Clark's pace is no less hectic than it was during *Bandstand's* heyday: he hosts specials, such as the annual *New Year's Rockin' Eve* and the *American Music Awards*, a nightly *Jeopardy*-like game show (*Challengers*), and his ever-smiling face graces myriad other programs. He has a lot to smile about — his hard work has paid off to the tune of a personal fortune estimated at more than \$100,000,000.

While his story isn't quite rags-to-riches, Clark didn't get to where he is through luck or laziness. Always an ambitious workaholic, his career has been marked by smart moves, his eye sharply focused on trends in popular culture and how best to package them for the masses. Clark has often said that he doesn't make culture, he sells it. And no one in the entertainment industry is a better salesman.

Richard Wagstaff Clark was born November 30, 1929 in Mount Vernon, New York, the son of Richard Augustus Clark, a sales manager for a cosmetics company, and Julia Clark. An older brother, Bradley, was killed in action during World War II. "For almost a year," Clark later wrote in his autobiography, *Rock, Roll & Remember*, "I dealt with it by eliminating the outside world as much as possible." One of the ways he escaped was by listening to the radio. "It seemed so romantic to stay up all night and play records and get paid for it," he wrote.

After graduating from A.B. Davis High School in 1947, Clark and his family moved to Utica, New York; his uncle had purchased the nearby radio station WRUN and the elder Richard Clark was hired as sales manager. At the same time, Dick Clark was hired — he ran the mimeograph machine, stuffed envelopes, distributed memos. Before long, he was reading weather reports and the news.

When the summer ended, Clark began attending Syracuse University, taking radio and advertising courses. He quickly landed a spot on the campus radio station, WAER, and, in his senior year, moved over to local station WOLF.

Clark graduated college in June 1951, a B.S. degree in business administration in hand, and promptly discovered television, taking a newscasting job at the small WKTV in Utica. Even then, there was no doubt where he was headed. "He was full of ambition," station manager Michael C. Fusco told the *New York Post* years later. "When I hired him he told me frankly he only intended to stay a year. I hated to lose him, but he was much too good for a station our size."

Clark kept his promise and in 1952 relocated to Philadelphia, working first as a summer replacement announcer at radio station WFIL, where he hosted *Dick Clark's Caravan Of Music* program. That June he married his high school sweetheart, Bobbie Mallery.

In September of that same year WFIL's television outlet, channel 6, launched a new program, *Bandstand*, to replace its afternoon movie program, which had been bombing. Bob Horn, a DJ on WFIL radio, had been hosting a program called *Bob Horn's Bandstand* and convinced the TV station management that the concept could transfer well to the budding new medium. With Tony Mammarella producing, *Bandstand* hit the TV airwaves in October 1952, Horn introducing guest Dizzy Gillespie and cutting to musical film clips between artist interviews.

It wasn't quite the right formula, though. Horn took a cue from a radio program called *The 950 Club*: bring in kids to dance to the music. The station bit, assigned Horn a partner, Lee Stewart, and the program became an instant success. The kids would dance to current hits, introduce themselves and say what school they were from, and critique the records they heard.

Bob Horn is credited with having introduced the Rate-A-Record segment of *Bandstand*, and it was during his tenure that the immortal line, "It's got a good beat and you can dance to it," was first heard. (Trivia note: the lowest-rated song ever on *American Bandstand* was 'The Chipmunk Song', which rated a 35, the lowest score a record could earn on the show. It went on to sell a million copies.)

Stewart left the show in 1955 and Horn was dismissed the year after that, following an arrest for drunk driving. In July 1956, Mammarella offered the job to Dick Clark, whose radio program, not so coincidentally, had also taken on the *Bandstand* name in the meantime. Clark debuted on July 9, 1956. One other thing had also changed: the music. Now kids were dancing to something called rock 'n' roll.

The number one song on *Bandstand's* "Teenage Top Ten" the day Dick Clark took over as host was 'Stranded In The Jungle' by the Jayhawks. Clark was by no means a fan of rock 'n' roll music, admitting he didn't "understand" it at first. But he grew to enjoy it and, in short time, to be able to smell a hit.

As the program grew in popularity, so, too, did Clark's power within the music industry. Radio stations jumped on records that the *Bandstand* kids liked, and promo men from record companies constantly shoved 45s in his face.

Clark didn't allow himself to be bullied into playing a record, though. And more importantly, he didn't



allow airplay on the show to be bought, a point that would save his career a few years later.

*Bandstand* was not strictly a rock 'n' roll show, however. Pop singers such as Tony Bennett and Al Martino were just as likely to make a guest appearance as any rocker, and country and jazz artists were featured as well.

Nor was *Bandstand* segregated. While black artists had been featured on the show literally since day one, the dancers were all white kids until Dick Clark insisted on integrating. "Look, it was just too painfully obvious that rock 'n' roll — and by extension *Bandstand* — owed its very existence to black people, their culture and their music," he told Michael Shore in the book *The History Of American Bandstand*. "It would have been ridiculous, embarrassing *notto* integrate the show."

*Bandstand* had become more popular than WFIL had ever imagined; what began as a time-filler for afternoon off-hours had become a magnet for local teenagers. Some of the kids who danced regularly on the program were becoming well-known in their own right. They received mail at the station. Lines formed outside the studio doors every day, kids hoping to make it inside to appear on the show. *Bandstand* was now the highest-rated afternoon TV show in any American city. Clark thought the show might be of interest to viewers outside of the Philly area. He wasn't the only one: clone shows sprang up in other cities.

Clark's enthusiasm wasn't immediately shared by network execs, one of whom was heard to proclaim, according to Clark himself, "Who the hell would want to watch kids dancing in Philadelphia?" But the numbers spoke the truth and in June 1957 the ABC-TV network agreed to give Clark and his program a five-week trial run, allotting 90 minutes a day. On August 5, *Bandstand* became *American Bandstand*.

Some 67 stations carried *American Bandstand* that first day as Dick Clark played records, introduced guests Billy Williams and the Chordettes, and the kids danced.

The critics were not impressed. "As a sociological study of teenage behavior, the premiere was a mild success," said *Billboard*. "As relaxation and entertainment, it wasn't...A local smash, the series isn't going to help Philadelphia's reputation nationally as a quiet town."

What resulted, of course, was not only the national success of *American Bandstand*, but the elevation of Philly's status to that of a barometer for national music trends. Not only was it important which records Clark played and the teens liked; being a performer *from* Philadelphia could guarantee a measure of success. The so-called teen idols — Bobby Rydell, Frankie Avalon, Fabian, et. al. — became teen dreams immediately, largely due to their exposure on *Bandstand*. Local black performers such as Chubby Checker, the Orlons and Dee Dee Sharp (many of whom were signed to the Philly-based Cameo-Parkway labels) would later find national success. But just being on *American Bandstand* was a boost, and virtually every important early rock 'n' roll artist, save Elvis (and later the Beatles), appeared on the show.

So, too, did more than a few who didn't find success. Shore's *Bandstand* history book contains a complete listing of Top 100 songs lip-synched by the original artist on the show (artists never sang live until much later in the program's history, and even then nearly all mouthed the words to their

records), but there are plenty of air dates where no artist is listed, generally meaning that day's guest's record wasn't greatly aided by the artists's appearance.

Dick Clark has always maintained that there was nothing he — or anyone else — could do to make a bad record a hit, that it was in the grooves; the kids either liked it, and bought it, or they didn't.

That didn't stop some of his colleagues in the broadcasting industry from trying to "help" a record along — accepting a little payola in the form of green paper or material goods from someone with a vested interest in seeing the record do well.

The payola scandal of 1959-60 was one of the darker episodes in rock music's history. For reasons that remain somewhat unclear — yet all *too* clear — the U.S. government decided to crack down on the practice at that time. It was rampant, if illegal, and the government wanted it stopped.

The roots of the payola hearings can be traced to the establishment of BMI (Broadcast Music Inc.) in 1939 and its rivalry with ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers). Although too complex a situation to be discussed within the confines of this article, the culmination of the war came in the mid-'50s when BMI became the target of criticism (and lawsuits) not only from ASCAP but various songwriters' associations, whose oldline Tin Pan Alley songwriters felt threatened by the new rock 'n' roll industry, which relied on its own writers.

That, and the perceived threat of rock 'n' roll in general by the nation's adults, led to the antitrust subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee in Washington investigating the so-called payola practice. Looking for a way to stop rock 'n' roll — and, they hoped, BMI — the subcommittee began holding hearings on payola, a common practice in the music industry for a hundred years. If they could prove the rock 'n' roll disc jockeys were accepting gifts in return for playing records, they could get rid of that national threat led by Elvis Presley and his greasy-haired legions.

The scandal brought down more than one broadcasting career, most notably that of pioneering rock 'n' roll disc jockey Alan Freed. Freed, then working for powerful New York radio station WABC, had refused to sign an affidavit saying he'd refused to accept payola, or bribes, for playing records over the air. He was convicted, fined and given a suspended sentence but his career was virtually ruined by the incident. He died a broken man in 1965.

Clark says in his book that he had, of course, been approached by promo men eager to hand him cash in exchange for favors. When called before the subcommittee, he even admitted that he *had* accepted gifts, including cash, a fur and jewelry for his wife — but *never* as a payoff to push a record. In addition he had invested a sizable chunk of his even more sizable income in music business-related concerns since his career took off in 1957. Clark was already a multi-millionaire by the time the payola hearings came about, and as far as the House was concerned, there had to be some shady business behind his good fortune. There had to be something wrong with a guy making all that money off that disgusting "music."

On May 2, 1960, it was Clark's turn to go to Washington. Grilled by politicians with little schooling in music or the industry, he answered one absurd question after another. Basically, what their poking around -boiled down to was that Clark *had* to be accepting bribes or he wouldn't be playing such trash; he'd be playing Frank Sinatra, or Mantovani, anything except rock 'n' roll.

Clark held his ground. He played what the kids liked, he played hits, he didn't take money. He defended his business interests, listing 33 of them from music publishing to stuffed animals. "You say you got no payola, but you got an awful lot of royola," said Rep. Steven B. Derounian (R-N.Y.). "I seek to provide wholesome recreational outlets for these youngsters whom I think I know and understand," Clark said. When it was all over, Clark was cleared. He divested himself of all music-related business interests, throwing away an estimated \$8 million in the process. One congressman called him a "fine young man."

*American Bandstand* prospered throughout the '60s. In 1964, as the Beatles — Clark missed the call on them, didn't see any potential — and their British compatriots came along, the show moved to Los Angeles. Eventually, the daily show was dropped in favor of a weekly program.

Clark, who had established Dick Clark Productions early in his career for the purpose of diversifying, created new TV programs, including the music shows *Where The Action Is*, *Happening* and *In Concert*, and funded films, among them *Because They're Young* and the 1968 San Francisco hippie exploitation classic *Psych-Out*. Later films (many of them for television) included *Elvis* and *The Birth Of The Beatles*. He's hosted the successful radio programs *The Dick Clark National Music Survey* and *Dick Clark's Rock, Roll And Remember*.

Clark has been enormously successful outside of the music arena as well, creating the game show *\$10,000 Pyramid* (later doubled to \$20,000 and then raised another five grand), *TV's Bloopers And Practical Jokes*, *The Golden Globe Awards*, *The American Music Awards*, *The Country Music Awards* and countless specials. He's been known to have regular programs running on three networks simultaneously.

And Dick Clark has lent his name to records, books and videos (culled from old *Bandstand* episodes). The bottom line is the bottom line for Dick Clark: will it sell? If it will, and it falls within the scope of what he considers good entertainment, Clark is likely to take on the project. Not everything his hands have touched has turned to gold, but enough has to keep him from worrying where tomorrow's dinner will come from.

In 1959 he began taking artists on the road on "Caravan of Stars" tours, promoting dozens of top names of the day and bringing integrated concerts to some places that had never seen any — in Atlanta, the Ku Klux Klan dropped by to see if they could stir up a little trouble when Sam Cooke was presented on an otherwise all-white bill.

Clark's open-mindedness toward music has never faltered. While he admits falling out of step during the late '60s — the San Francisco era left him on the outside looking in — Clark has always embraced the new. His personal taste has never played a part in any decision determining the music he's booked — if there's interest in it, he'll book it.

Looking over the listing of *Bandstand* guests during the '70s and '80s, one marvels: disco, punk, pop, jazz, rap, everyone from Aerosmith (1973) to Janet Jackson (1982), Los Lobos (1985) to the Sugarhill Gang (1981), Bobby Sherman (1971) to Madonna (1984), have appeared on the show.

Dick Clark isn't a man who dwells on the past. Although he admits in the following interview that of all he's done he is proudest of *American Bandstand*, he is an entrepreneur with an eye on what's next, not what's come and gone. He is acutely aware of his own place in the history of twentieth century popular culture and modest in spite of it. "The greatest thing about the '50s was that

nothing happened," he once told a reporter.

That, of course, is not true. Rock 'n' roll happened, and Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* was there to bring it into millions of American living rooms, making sure that it would never go away.

© Jeff Tamarkin, 1990

**14. Peter Guralnick, "Jerry Lee Lewis: Hang Up my Rock 'N' Roll Shoes," *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'N' Roll* (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)**

I don't wanna I ain't gonna  
Hang up my rock 'n' roll shoes Jerry Lee Lewis ca. 1961

I

"Oh, I coulda been a great songwriter," Jerry Lee Lewis admits with no reluctance at all. "I reckon I coulda been one of the greatest. I still write some, I just don't record any of them. Because I prefer to concentrate on my entertaining instead."

It's the kind of statement you'd expect from Jerry Lee Lewis, self-proclaiming, boastful, spoken with a theatrical flourish and a certain wry amusement. There is an arrogance in his demeanour which is familiar from his act, and indeed offstage as well as on he is the same unlikely mixture of brash egotism and bubbling irrepressible charm. You can like it or loathe it, it's all the same to Jerry Lee, because Jerry Lee Lewis is going to change for no man. There is one difference, though. For this interview Jerry Lee Lewis is nervous, bored, this man who commands a stage as if it were his private domain is, in his own home, restless and apprehensive as he submits to what he considers the tyranny of more irrelevant scrutiny, more useless questions. He slouches opposite me, wearing cut-off shorts and a gaudy Hawaiian shirt, looking jaded and a little paunchy around the middle. There he is, my idol, Jerry Lee Lewis, drumming his fingers and offering something less than candour in his responses. ...

"Well, you see, I always liked Moon Mullican, Merrill Moore, a lot of them old boogie woogie piano players, I never knew who half of them were. All those old records I used to listen to—'Drinkin' Wine Spo-dee-o-dee,' 'House of Blue Lights,' 'Hey Ba-Ba-Re-Bop'—you know, all them kind of sounds I used to hear back home in Louisiana when I was growing up. And I used to hear people like B.B. King, too, blues singers, I never did know their names. Well, anyway a lot of them songs must have been recorded before I was born. When I heard it it sure sounded good, though.

"I started to play when I was eight years old. I played a lot in church, you know, listened to a lot of things. Well, that was the Holiness Church, Assembly of God, and I went to Southwestern Bible School near Dallas in Waxahatchie (don't ask me to spell that). I wasn't really studying to be a preacher, but I was in the church for quite a while. Yeah, I used to sing, and we travelled around quite a bit, I done some preaching. We sang it with a beat, yeah we always sang it with a beat. Oh sure, I was performing on the stage way back then, I had my act then, of course it was not quite as polished then as it is now, it was just more naturally good. I hadn't had the chance to really polish it up at that time."

The first piano he played, a Starck upright, has been preserved for posterity, holes in the keyboard and all. His father, Elmo, who himself played guitar and encouraged his son in his musical career,

tells the story that Jerry Lee was as good within six months of the time he started playing as he would ever get, a story which says something for his natural genius and indicates somewhat the nature of that genius. For his playing evidently found its own resolution even at an early age and quickly fell into the same patterns which dominate his style today—a brilliant explosive and altogether distinctive mix of country and barrelhouse blues which has changed not at all since his first recordings some fifteen years ago.

“Well, I used to hang around Haney’s Big House, that was a coloured establishment where they had dances and such. Oh Lord, that burned down, I don’t know how many years it’s been gone. But anyway Haney was this little coloured fellow, and we was just kids, we wasn’t allowed in. So we’d slip around to the back and sneak in whenever we could. I saw a lot of ’em there, all those blues players. No, it wasn’t such a big deal like it is today. Somebody wanted to go down, it wasn’t no big thing just because it was a coloured place. Of course we was about the only ones down there. Me and my cousin, Jimmy Lee Swaggart.

“Anyway, I’d go down there, sometimes I’d go alone and I’d hear them, catch a riff that I liked and go home and do a little picking myself. Yeah, I was playing guitar, violin and drums in addition to my piano back then. Sure, I still pick ’em up sometimes, just for a little variety.

“I started working, well, my first record didn’t come out until 1956, that was when I first started making it really big, so to speak. But I’d been playing before that at the Wagon Wheel in Natchez, Mississippi, for about six years, ever since I was fifteen years old. Oh, we played all kinds of music. Pop, I guess you’d call it, yeah pop. I worked with some people I knew from back home, Mr. Paul Whitehead, a blind fellow, he played piano, trumpet and accordion. And I played drums at the time. Or on the weekends I’d switch to piano and he’d play accordion, ’cause we had a man named Johnny Littlejohn who’d come in and play the drums. It was just a regular night club, you know, it wasn’t no exclusive place, it wasn’t plush, just a regular place. Oh, we had a few knock-down drag-outs every once in a while, but it never did bother me. I was raised up on that.

“Well, you see, that’s where I got ‘Whole Lotta Shakin’.’ I picked it up from Johnny Littlejohn, heard him doing it one night and then I started doing it. But it was never done like that before. I think originally it was done by Big Mama Thornton.\* She done it before she done ‘Hound Dog.’ I inquired on it over at Hill and Range because there was some dispute over the writers’ royalties. If I’d known that at the time I would have gotten some of it for myself. Because actually I wrote quite a bit of it myself. At least I thought I did.

“Well, how I come to Sun, I was just a kid trying to get a start. I’d been to all the other record companies and I’d been turned down. I’d been to Shreveport, to the Louisiana Hayride, and I was turned down. So I came to Sam and Sam, he started out, he had B.B. King at one time, all them cats. When I auditioned I sang everything from Muddy Waters blues to ‘Silent Night.’ The first thing I had recorded was a little tune I had written long before called ‘End of the Road.’ And, of course, that old Ray Price tune, that was the A side. There was just drums and piano on that record.”

The first song, “Crazy Arms,” was a minor hit that showed off all the familiar Sun production techniques. It had built-in echo, solid musicianship, real feeling for the music, and a finely controlled frenzy. On the label it read Jerry Lee Lewis and His Pumping Piano, a designation that would stick right through to the end. The first record indicated that Jerry Lee Lewis was going somewhere, but it was the second, recorded by Jack Clement in a single take at the tail end of a session, that established him overnight as chief claimant to Elvis Presley’s throne and that was to become his trademark. “We

came in and recorded the song, and we ran through it once just to get the level on it," he recalled for the twenty-four hour radio History of Rock 'n' Roll. "Jack Clement was handling the controls. We took one take on it, and that was the take that we released on the record." "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On" went to the top of the pop, r&b, and c&w charts, like "Blue Suede Shoes" and "Don't Be Cruel" before it and nothing since. "They're the onliest ones that did it," muses Jerry Lee today. "For a while I thought that woman was like to do it with 'Ode to Billy Joe,' but she didn't." It is one of the achievements of which he is proudest, and one which he always mentions to interviewers.

"Whole Lotta Shakin' " went on to sell six or seven million copies, and Jerry Lee was thrust into the national limelight with appearances on Ed Sullivan and Steve Allen and rock 'n' roll tours which he headlined. He insists that he was not unprepared for this, that his act was as explosive then as it is today. Others remember it a little differently, however. "Jerry, when he started he was people-shy," Carl Perkins told Michael Lydon, recalling their first tour together. "Johnny Cash and I were on tour with him in Canada, his 'Crazy Arms' was just out, and he'd sit at the piano with just one corner of his face showing and play Hank Williams tunes. He came off one night in Calgary, moaning, 'This business ain't for me, people don't like me,' and John and I told him, 'Turn around so they can see you, make a fuss.' So the next night he carried on, stood up, kicked the stool back and a new Jerry Lee Lewis was born. And we regretted it because he damn near stole the show. Four nights later he was top of the bill." And an observer who was present at his first Memphis appearance, a Mayor's Charity Day concert at Ellis Auditorium which featured Onie Wheeler, Warren Smith, Carl Perkins, and Billy Riley, claims that Jerry Lee was the low point of the show. "Well, you know, it was just pitiful. I don't know whether it was his long blond hair or the way he talked or what, but we all thought he was a queer or something, he just looked like a sissy. Why, he just about got booed off the stage."

"I first came to Memphis, I'd do just about anything. I even cut a session with Carl Perkins. I'd just finished up a session myself, and he was coming in to cut some stuff, so I just played on one or two of his numbers. I got paid fifteen dollars, and I don't even remember the name of the song. (" 'Your True Love,' " interjects Myra. "And they flat know who's playing on it.")

"Oh yeah, we're all good buddies still. Carl's a good fella. I done my first tour with Carl and Johnny Cash. No, Elvis had just left Sun. When I come to Sun he was already giant. I don't know, we were all doing our thing, it was all friendly enough, but everyone did his own thing. I see these guys quite often every now and then. Last time I saw Elvis I was fooling round with him at the International Hotel in Las Vegas about a year ago. Oh, we was singing and cutting up. You know, Elvis has kept himself pretty isolated, though. Too much if you ask me. Me, I like to get out and hunt and fish with the boys, I'm going to do just what I damn please. And you know, I make just as much money as any of those guys. I can guarantee you that.

"Me and Elvis? For a long time, you know, we were just matching each other, record for record, price for price, show for show. The newspapers made a big deal about it, I never paid that much attention, but one time, I don't know what magazine it was—Look, I think—they had a full page on me and a full page on Elvis right opposite each other. For a long time it was pretty hard to figure just who'd be number one, we was matching each other like that, tit for tat.

"Well, I had a whole string of hits. After 'Whole Lotta Shakin' ' there was 'Great Balls of Fire' and 'Breathless' and then me and another fellow wrote 'High School Confidential.' Then we had, oh let me see, 'Break-Up' and then that Ray Charles thing and then I got in the country field of music. And I just keep rockin' on. Now we got twelve Number One records in a row, and you just better believe it."

## II

That, of course, does not exactly tell the whole story. ... To repeat a story that has become stale already from too much repetition: in 1958 Jerry Lee Lewis married his thirteen-year-old second cousin, Myra Brown, and, when the news broke just prior to his first English tour, took his young bride to England and flaunted her, seemingly without a second thought, in front of his British fans. The result was predictable enough. The papers had a field day, the tour was unceremoniously cancelled, and Jerry Lee Lewis was washed up as a rock 'n' roll star. Three years later, it's true, he did have that hit, but he was blacklisted for all intents and purposes for the next ten years. ...

He is in addition, of course, a highly visual act. Like Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Elvis, all the old-time rock 'n' rollers, he perfected the art not only of deliberate outrageousness but of creating a distance between himself and that outrageousness which permits him to be extravagant and to make commentary on the proceedings all at the same time. He wraps his legs around the microphone, he entertains effortlessly with a wiggle of the finger and a quizzical grin, he regards his audience with a certain curiosity and an appetite which has yet to be satisfied. Then, in a finish which has become his trademark, he kicks back the piano stool, shakes his blond hair forward, hitches up his pants and with a studied laziness begins a slow grind. He may play a couple of notes with his foot or he may sit down on the piano; his hands hover high above the keyboard, then, swooping down, race up and down the keys performing tricks, while he is endlessly entertained by the audience's enjoyment of him. At the finale the guitarist is on his amplifier, the drummer is perched precariously on the drums, and Jerry Lee Lewis roars from on top of the piano in a climax that creates an instant of pure theatre which could never be fully anticipated or exactly re-created. It's a combination of showmanship and calculated hysteria which is somehow saved from the realm of the ridiculous by Jerry Lee's whole-hearted commitment to the moment. For, while there is an element of self-parody implicit in the act, Jerry Lee Lewis always takes himself seriously enough to insist upon absolute attendance. I've seen him shush a blonde ("Honey, will you kindly quit your yakking? There's lots of our loud numbers where you can do all the talking you want. But this here's a real sad song and you ought to listen.") and stop a couple from dancing with the admonition, "I'm the show." Because he is, and he knows he is, a condition which is essential to the born entertainer.

Like The Rolling Stones, he was in his time the bad boy of rock, and he remains to this day a perennial reminder of a certain type of adolescent rebellion. When he appears on the Ed Sullivan Show he has his hair tousled by Ed; he shows up at the Country Music Awards in tuxedo and sneakers; and when Tom Jones, a longtime fan, gives him some national exposure he returns the favour by throwing a well-intended duet on a medley of his hits into total disarray. There is a puckish grin on his face as he perversely alters the familiar rhythms of "Whole Lotta Shakin'," leaving Jones looking foolish and confused. "I cut his ass," he proclaimed proudly to John Grissim of Rolling Stone. "And he knows it, cuz I taught him what he knows. Love him like a brother. But I don't want him to forget who the old master is."



CHAPTER FOUR

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The 1960s: Soul, Girl  
Groups, Motown, R&B



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**1. Dave Headlam, “Gospel to 1950s and 1960s vocal groups, and 1960s soul,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. by Allan Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)**

Gospel, like jazz, has a mixed-race heritage, with parallel streams of black gospel, from Thomas A. Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, and the Johnson Gospel Singers and Dorsey Trio from the 1920s, and white Christian gospel, starting from James D. Vaughan, who published his *Gospel Chimes* songbook and organized The Vaughan Quartet, the first white, all-male, professional gospel quartet, in 1910. These two tracks continue to the present day. In the 1940s, as jump blues took on a wider audience, Mahalia Jackson had a gospel million seller on the Apollo label with “Move On Up a Little Higher” and in the 1950s signed with Columbia to become a crossover success. Elvis Presley, who solidified the move to white r&r, also ushered in the contemporary white gospel sound, with “His Hand in Mine” (1960), demonstrating the gospel source of his vocals in the process. The r&r era features two important developments in black music styles. First, black vocal groups, based in gospel “Jubilee” quartets, jazz vocals, and popular groups of the 1940s, created the “doo-wop” and more up-tempo r&r vocal styles that predated the mass crossover appeal of solo r&r. Second, black solo artists, particularly Ray Charles and Sam Cooke, appropriated gospel elements into r&b, and r&b elements into gospel, to create soul music. In the 1960s, both solo artists and vocal groups developed soul, which combined r&b, gospel, and popular styles in Detroit’s Motown, Memphis’ Stax and from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, Fame, then took two routes: a more sophisticated, orchestral sound in Philadelphia smooth soul leading to the crossover disco styles; and a harder rhythmic edge as funk in James Brown’s music.

The elements of gospel featured and appropriated were:

- the *a cappella* style vocal groups, originating in Jubilee quartets;
- the call-and-response “preaching” style drawn from the church;
- the showman aspect of costumes and dance routines from the church;
- the syncopated dance rhythms of the hand-clapping and body-shaking rituals of church participation; and,
- the virtuosic use of ornamentation in solo singing, particularly in female solo voices.

While gospel music flourished in cities alongside blues, in Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia, and a tradition of white Christian music existed alongside black gospel for much of the century – as white folk and c&w existed alongside black blues – the appropriation of gospel was largely by black artists. Only relatively recently have white singers found a mass pop audience using gospel styles. If the guitar is the quintessential blues instrument, the voice is the gospel instrument. Gospel expression stems from worksongs, church singing, camp and revival meetings, and encompasses spirituals and other religious styles including the choral jubilee singing. The rhythm of gospel is a vocal rhythm, in the tradition of church preaching, where hand clapping sets the beat. The vocal style and body rhythms of gospel are difficult to emulate: whereas there have been many white blues guitarists, there are few white gospel singers of similar stature. Singers, particularly female, of jazz, blues, and gospel, borrow from one another yet are distinctive in the approach to articulation, the bend in the pitch, the continuity or break in the release, the amount of breath in the sound, and the inflections of the lyrics.

The male vocal groups in the 1940s were one of the initial gospel-related venues for black performers to cross over to the larger pop audience. The Soul Stirrers, formed in 1934, were recorded by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1936, but later began singing newly composed gospel songs

with lead singer Rebert H. Harris. Harris ad-libbed in syncopation against the group, setting the stage for the 1950s style, and his successor Sam Cooke. Cooke became a sex symbol in gospel, eventually moving into pop and soul music, following the move of many of the black vocal groups who wanted to cash in on the r&r audience. From initial religious subjects, these groups changed to sing songs with lyrics about idealized romance and teenage love, wearing suits and performing snappy dance numbers for audiences, and changing their names – for instance, the Royal Sons to the “5” Royals in 1952, and the Gospel Starlighters to the Famous Flames, featuring James Brown.<sup>17</sup> A few groups featured lyrics more characteristic of blues, such as the Royals (later Midnighters) with their “Annie” series from 1954 and the Dominoes’ crossover hit, “Sixty Minute Man” of 1951. Eventually, however, most of these vocal groups, which evolved into the “doo-wop” vocal groups of the 1950s (many of which were recorded by Bobby Robinson of Harlem including the Orioles, the Ravens, Mellow Moods, and myriad other names grouped into birds, insects, flowers, and cars) projected an innocence that represented an appropriation of the vocal style of gospel but with a loss of its passion or meaning. The simplified musical form, using the progression I–VI–IV–V–I became as ubiquitous as the twelve-bar blues form.

In a seminal doo-wop recording, the black vocal group the Chords, singing in harmony over a standard combo of saxophone, guitar, bass, piano, and drums, recorded “Sh-Boom” in 1954 in New York City for the Atlantic “Cat” label. The song included “Sh-Boom” and “da-da-da” in the accompanying parts, influenced by jazz scatting and the nonsense lyrics of jump blues, a bass voice solo line along with offbeat guitar riffs, and a heavy sax solo. Appearing on the pop charts, it was covered in Chicago by a white Canadian vocal quartet called the Crew Cuts on the Mercury label. The new version added an orchestra and choir background, along with a walking bass section. The Chords were on to something new, the Crew Cuts were reminiscing on the swing era; typically, however, the Chords went to no. 5 on the pop charts, then were not able to re-create their success and faded, but the Crew Cuts made it to no. 1 and sold a million records and had a run of hits.<sup>18</sup>

Following “Sh-Boom,” vocal group music dominated radio in the 1950s, becoming a crossover phenomenon. While the doo-wop groups had always been somewhat vacuous in their lyric content, the Coasters achieved chart success with straight parody recordings by Lieber and Stoller, who were part of the rising production teams for records, which led to Phil Spector and George Martin in the 1960s. Lieber and Stoller epitomize the Tin Pan Alley-like songsmith tradition that persisted in the development of r&r; like Irving Berlin and George Gershwin before them, these writers were white and Jewish and felt an affinity for black music, writing new songs using black music elements, and working with record labels and producers to create hit songs “in the style of,” such as “Hound Dog” written for Big Mama Thornton but a hit for Elvis. Their parody records had a fast shuffle beat, nonsense lyrics, and “yakety” sax chorus, in songs like “Yakety Yak” (1958) and “Charlie Brown” (1959). The Platters were another successful group, lasting from the 1950s to the late 1960s, one of the few black vocal groups with no. 1 hits on pop charts in the late 1950s. The Drifters, formed in 1953 with lead singer Clyde McPhatter, who had a gospel background, transformed in 1958 to a group name with changing personnel – forerunners of continuing phenomena in the 1960s – recording commercial r&b, with violins instead of guitars and influencing Motown. These groups used various strategies, from vocal purity, pop instrumentations and schlocky arrangements, suits and funny hair-dos, to humor, to cross over to the white audience. The level of vocal ability on many of the vocal group recordings is astounding, however, and shows a wide variety of influences.....

With the rise of r&r in the mid-1950s, the male and emerging female vocal groups turned to up-tempo vocal r&r songs. The laid-back lyrics and emotion were replaced by a youthful urgency, evident in songs like “Why do Fools Fall in Love,” by Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers in 1955. The fast rise and fall of many vocal groups is exemplified by Lymon’s ascent into stardom at age thirteen, then descent into drugs and death at age twenty-five in 1968. As was customary at the time, many of the songs by the black groups were covered by white vocal groups, with some appropriation of styles, but the original groups were already so bland in their subject matter and pure vocal quality that the white groups often didn’t have far to go in their versions.<sup>20</sup> As the decade progressed, following the example of Ray Charles, vocal groups began to add some urgency and meaning – soul elements – to their styles, culminating in the vocal groups of Motown and others, including the Staples Singers, a Chicago family band of bluesy gospel with hit songs on gospel, r&b, and soul charts through the 1970s.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, “girl” groups joined the male doo-wop and r&r vocal groups. Singing songs written by production teams such as the Brill Building writers from New York (the Shirelles, Chiffons, Shangri-Las, Ronettes, Chantels, Marvelettes, Crystals, Ikettes) and the Holland-DozierHolland writing team of Motown (the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas), these groups had huge hit records but mostly came and went quickly. The singing on these records is generally very pop-oriented, with the grain of the voice muted for a generic sound. As Ray Charles did with doo-wop male groups, Aretha Franklin reinfused the female groups with the gospel elements of soul in her Atlantic recordings in the mid-1960s.

Solo black singing at the beginning of the 1950s was dominated by the style of Nat King Cole, a singer with a beautiful tone and classical control of pitch and timbre that was sufficiently appealing to a mass audience that Cole had his own television show (1956–57). Times were, though, still so dangerous that he was dragged from the stage and beaten at a 1956 concert in Birmingham Alabama by the White Citizens Council in a backlash against r&r, since he represented “nigger” music.<sup>21</sup> In the mid-1950s, “Brother” Ray Charles, black, blind, a heroin addict during his greatest recordings, added gospel vocal and musical elements to an r&b style developed by working with Guitar Slim in New Orleans – gospel piano licks and a backing female chorus (the Raelettes) that responded to Charles in the manner of a church choir following the preacher – and so initiated soul music, linking the spiritual with the sexual. The new style, songs like “I Got a Woman” and “Hallelujah, I Love Her So,” and the breakthrough hit, “What’d I Say,” was controversial, and Charles was criticized for violating the sanctity of the church with the music of the devil, in a continuance of the confrontation between these two forces found throughout the history of blues and gospel.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1960s, Charles moved from Atlantic to R.C.A. Victor, and into an eclectic mix of styles that included c&w and pop, as well as gospel and r&b.

Ray Charles’ “I Got a Woman” (1953), is a shuffle r&b tune with the usual elements, the Texas “lope” and Kansas City swing, but the vocals add the gospel element, with its wide range and embellishments, particularly toward the ending, with the “she’s all right” repetitions imitating gospel endings. Charles reportedly improvised new lyrics to a gospel tune and developed the song from a combination of r&b and gospel elements. Charles’ biggest hit, “What’d I Say” from 1959, came from an improvised interchange between the singer, backing group, band, and audience: the preacher with his congregation. The Wurlitzer electric piano dominates an opening outlining the blues form with solos over a Latin drum beat. The r&r feel of the opening is supplemented with answering choir and brass entries, but gives way to a gospel dialogue, “unnnh-hunnnh” patter, over Charles’ moans, cries, and gospel feel, with “shake that thing” and “I feel alright” expressing his passion for the body instead of the Lord.

Charles, covered by Presley among others, incorporated gospel elements into r&b, while Sam Cooke began from gospel and added pop and r&b elements. Both these singers, and James Brown, followed the gospel vocal styles of the Reverends Julius Cheeks and Claude Jeter; these two sang in church and jubilee quartets (1940s) and Cheeks perfected a hard-shouting style in the Sensational Nightingales while Jeter featured his falsetto in the Swan Silvertones.<sup>23</sup> After singing gospel in the Soul Stirrers (1950), Cooke released a secular song, "Lovable," under the name of Dale Cook, then, "You Send Me," a no. 1 pop and r&b hit on Keen records in 1957. His success at crossing over to the white pop and black r&b audiences invoked condemnation by his gospel audience, but he continued, establishing a record and publishing company, Sar and Kags music, until his death in 1964.

The female counterpart to both Charles and Cooke was "Lady Soul," Aretha Franklin, following in the footsteps of her father, Rev. C. L. Franklin, who had recorded over seventy albums of preaching and singing with Chess Records. In 1967, Franklin moved from an unsuccessful stint at Columbia singing pop and jazz to Atlantic, where her recording in the Fame Studios of Muscle Shoals ("I Never Loved a Man"), then New York – with the same white southern musicians – reasserted the female element from the gospel tradition in soul, recalling influences Clara Ward, Roberta Martin, and Mahalia Jackson, and crossing over to the pop charts in the process. Franklin's range and fluency is evident on "Do Right Woman, Do Right Man," where, over a gospel piano and organ, she builds her musical and lyric argument slowly, leading to powerful but understated climaxes with backing choir. She wrote many of her songs, yet many hits were written by whites – "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" by Brill Building writers Carole King and Gerry Goffin, and "Chain of Fools" by Don Covay, for instance, continuing the legacy of Lieber and Stoller. However, her recording of Otis Redding's "Respect" – no. 1 on both the pop and r&b charts – created an anthem for the black movement and set the tone for the age in terms of feminism and the musical style of mixed-race southern soul topped by a distinctive black voice: the blues and gospel reconciled. In 1972, her double LP of gospel, *Amazing Grace*, went to no. 7 on the pop chart in a remarkable crossover. Her mix of gospel, soul, and funk, backed by the Sweet Inspirations including Cissy Houston, inspired Whitney Houston, Patti LaBelle, Anita Baker, and the more recent Erykah Badu, among many others.

In the 1960s, soul music dropped its r&b basis in the blues form to take on a new harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary in manifestations from the Stax/Volt labels in Memphis and Fame label in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, the Vee-Jay label in Chicago, and the Motown/Tamla labels in Detroit. From Memphis and Muscle Shoals, both distributed by Atlantic Records, the passion of gospel and the jump blues/jazz band instrumentation of r&b combined with the southern white honky-tonk influences of many of the local session players in racially mixed house bands. The result was the records of Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Jackie Wilson, Aretha Franklin, and others, with their distinctive rhythmic drive, instrumental setting, and gospel-derived vocals. Stax, with multiracial house band "Booker T. and MGs," notably combined the talents of black and white musicians, backing almost exclusively black stars, to become a major force in the music of the 1960s. It was begun in 1959 by whites Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton in Memphis, adding black executive Al Bell in 1965. With Atlantic's distributorship and production from Jerry Wexler, hits from William Bell, Otis Redding, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, Isaac Hayes, and even instrumental records like "Green Onions" followed. Redding was the star, from Macon, Georgia, and he was ambitious composing, arranging, and (in one of the rising number of examples of black musicians influenced by the white music of the 1960s) listening to the Beatles and Bob Dylan. With

his success at Monterey he was poised for the mass white market, but he died in a plane crash in 1967, his posthumous folk-like no. 1 hit, "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay" hinting at a new fusion of soul and c&w.

Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals was started in 1958 by Tom Stafford, Rick Hall, and Billy Sherrill. They added writers and players Dan Penn and Spooner Oldham, and singers Etta James, Arthur Alexander, Jimmy Hughes, Percy Sledge – whose hit "When a Man Loves a Woman" defined the sexual tension characteristic of soul music – Wilson Pickett, Arthur Conley, and, most famously, Aretha Franklin. As with r&r and r&b, British fans took on soul music, with tours by the big singers, magazines, clubs, and, of course, appropriations, as in the Beatles album *Rubber Soul*. While the British took over r&r, however, they fell short imitating soul; the Beatles, among others, could not reproduce the soul sound.

The rise of soul alongside rock music is seen in the history of Atlantic records, the distributor for the Stax and Fame labels. Like many labels, such as Chess from the Polish Chess Brothers and Modern Records from the Lebanese Bihari Brothers, Atlantic Records was started by first generation Americans of immigrant parents. Formed in 1947 by Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun, sons of a Turkish Ambassador, and including Herb Abramson and later Jerry Wexler (1953), Atlantic used the talents of music director Jesse Stone, engineer Tom Dowd, and top studio musicians to record black jazz, r&b, and r&r, appealing to the r&b audience with slick production and effective distribution. Atlantic's production, all-white owners, producers, arrangers, mixed race writers and studio musicians, and black stars, represents the recording industry set-up for the chart-topping r&b songs in the 1950s. In the 1960s, Atlantic became the distributor for Stax/Volt and Fame and so aided and profited from the enormous success and influence of soul music.

Atlantic's r&b and soul recordings included Joe Turner, Sticks McGee, Clovers, Ruth Brown, Ray Charles, LaVern Baker, the Drifters, the Coasters, Clyde McPhatter, Solomon Burke, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Rufus Thomas, Albert King, Otis Redding, and others. With the changing climate in the 1960s, however, when racial boundaries were re-established in the recording world, Atlantic moved more to white imitation models, like Bobby Darin and Sonny and Cher, then to the white rock groups, like Cream, Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, and even the Bee Gees, whose music was based on the styles of the black musicians that the label had previously recorded. In Chicago, the labels on "Record Row," including Chess and Vee-Jay, moved into soul recordings in the 1960s, featuring Etta James, Fontella Bass, Curtis Mayfield and Jerry Butler of the Impressions, and producer Carl Davis. The smooth soul sounds played on the black radio station W.V.O.N, continuing into the mid-1970s with groups like the Chi-Lites. Mayfield, along with Isaac Hayes, were instrumental in the evolution of the 1970s "blaxploitation" movie soundtracks like *Superfly* and *Shaft* that provided a brief moment of mass interest in black film. This music, along with James Brown's funk, has been the most influential and the source for most of the digital samples in rap music.

Motown from Detroit and later Los Angeles was an evolution of 1950s vocal groups tailored to appeal to the mass white audience, with an urban, sophisticated, show-business atmosphere. Impressed by the songwriting from the "Brill Building" writers in the early 1960s – Bobby Darin, Neil Sedaka, Neil Diamond, Carole King and Gerry Goffin, and others – and in the spirit of "professionalism" in pop music, Motown founder Berry Gordy worked initially with Jackie Wilson to create a hybrid black pop style. By careful sculpting of the grain in the sound and balancing of elements drawn from black sources with pop appeal to the white audience, Gordy then founded Motown (1959), which came to be known as "Hitsville, U.S.A." Gordy and others were so

successful in integrating black music into pop that for two years in 1963–65, the Billboard charts did not list a separate national r&B chart.<sup>24</sup>

The Motown lineup included groups such as the Marvellettes, Miracles, Temptations, Diana Ross and The Supremes, Gladys Knight and the Pips, the Jackson 5, Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells, Martha Reeves and Vandellas, Velvettes, Four Tops, Smokey Robinson, and writers Holland/ Dozier/Holland among others, while Gordy's methods included creating a finishing school for his performers with instructions on deportment and control of media exposure. Critics of Motown accused Gordy of bleaching out the "blackness" of his performers, but Motown produced hit music slickly produced, varied in instrumentation, celebrating love, dancing, soul, funk, pop, memorable tunes, and celebration. There was even a little protest thrown in to reflect the times, for instance, in "What's Going On," Marvin Gaye's protest song with the memorable James Jamerson bass line and "War" by Edwin Starr in a quintessential protest statement.<sup>25</sup> Into the 1970s, Motown artists were part of the move to electronic and psychedelic soul, funk and disco, anticipated by the Chambers Brothers (a black hippie group with a white drummer and their 1967 hit "Time Has Come Today"), in tunes like "Papa was a Rollin' Stone" from the Temptations which incorporated the Isaac Hayes "Shaft" wah-wah guitar and echo effects. Michael Jackson, the most famous of Gordy's protégés, came to symbolize the combination of white and black, pop and soul, elements, and is perhaps the extreme consequence of Gordy's attitude. Jackson, the "King of Pop," left Motown for Epic records in 1976, and with his surgically created white features superimposed on music with gospel and blues elements carefully muted, created a massive crossover appeal, highlighted by his dancing style and videos and adorned by his marriage (then divorce) to Elvis Presley's daughter and his purchase of the Lennon–McCartney songbook.

The vocal urgency and syncopated dance rhythms of gospel along with top-notch r&b house bands came together most clearly in the music of James Brown. Combining a Little Richard-style act with other theatrics from Joe Tex and a pleading version of Ray Charles gospel/soul, Brown started as a singer with the Gospel Starlighters then the Fabulous Flames, and recorded the hit "Please, Please, Please" in 1956 for King records. With his *Live at the Apollo* in 1962 which reached no. 2 on the pop charts, Brown became "Soul Brother Number One."<sup>26</sup> Building on his traveling road show and hot bands, and following Bo Diddley's rhythmic focus and recasting of African rhythms, with "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" of 1965, Brown moved to a rhythmically charged vamp as the basis for the whole song, minimizing elements of melody and harmony: soul changed to funk. A new guitar style emerged, influenced by Stax's Steve Cropper, aping the "hit" of a brass section, and the bass and drummer, players like Bootsie Collins and Clyde Stubblefield, became the lead players. A succession of hits, "Cold Sweat," "I Got The Feeling," "Sex Machine" and others followed, influencing all forms of black music. Examples include Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye at Motown (notably with Gaye's *What's Going On* of 1971 and Wonder's *Inner Visions* of 1973, with the funky, inspirational "Higher Ground," subsequently covered by the Red Hot Chili Peppers), and leading to Sly and The Family Stone, George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic, and Curtis Mayfield's and Isaac Hayes' versions of 1970s funk.

## Notes

17 Oliver (1986) and Heilbut (1997); Malone (1974: 226) notes the c&w influence on gospel, as in the 1948 song "Gospel Boogie," by white group, the Homeland Harmony Quartet.

18 Miller (1999: 67–78); Clarke (1995: 370–1), and Belz (1972: 26–7).

20 See Guralnick (1986: Ch. 1); Miller (1999: 76–7) calls vocal covers a "switch."

21 Clarke (1995: 414).

The father of gospel, Dorsey, set the standard for this confrontation: he started as blues singer Georgia Tom, singing sexually charged blues of the twenties, but became the Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey, writing gospel standards “Peace in the Valley” and “Take my Hand, Precious Lord” and becoming a leading publisher of religious songs. See Heilbut (1997: Ch. 2). Broughton, Ellingham, Muddyman, and Trillo (1994: 632) note the gospel saying “The Devil Stole the Beat” for this phenomenon. Heilbut (1997: Ch. 7)

24 Belz (1972: 180).

25 George (1987).

26 And the “Godfather of Soul,” and “The Hardest Workin’ Man in Show Business.”

**2. Robert Palmer, “Sam Cooke’s Night Beat,” in Anthony DeCurtis, ed., *Blues & Chaos: The Music Writing of Robert Palmer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009); originally published as liner notes, *Sam Cooke, Night Beat*, RCA, 1995 reissue.**

I COULD tell from all the way across the local newspaper’s marbled lobby that something was wrong with my friend who worked in the coffee shop. She was going about her usual business, wearing the uniform dress and disposable apron our Little Rock newspaper deemed appropriate for “kitchen help,” but there was a look of profound sadness on her face instead of her usual radiant smile, and her eyes were brimming with tears. And there was something else about her, something she’d never let me see before: maximum anger, held in check under maximum pressure. I thought of a song, Sam Cooke’s “Laughin’ and Cryin’.” “I keep on trying to hide my feelings,” he sang, “trying to hide my soul.” My friend was trying hard.

It was the winter of 1964, my friend and I were both in our teens, but in certain ways we were strangers. She was, as far as I knew, the newspaper’s only black employee; I worked part-time after school, moving immense rolls of newsprint around the basement. What we had in common, the whole basis of our friendship, really, was music. It was all we talked about when we got together on coffee breaks or after work. We each had our individual heroes and solid senders, our “wait-till-you-hear-this” discoveries, but when it came to naming the greatest of them all, we were in complete agreement: Sam Cooke ruled.

And now my friend was telling me, “They shot Sam.” Who shot him, I asked, knowing there was only one Sam that meant that much to her, or to me. “I don’t know,” she said, no longer able to hold back her tears. “They said— who cares what they said. SAM COOKE IS DEAD.” And with that she straightened her dress, wiped away the tears, and went back to work, serving hamburgers and Cokes to people who were utterly unaware that anyone of importance had passed. Most people who grew up in the 1960s remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard of the Kennedy assassination; the day I recall with preternatural clarity is the day we lost Sam Cooke.

Cooke meant many things to many people. To some, he was the most gifted pop vocalist of his time; no more, no less. He was a spellbinding performer; my friend and I had seen him play in Little Rock a few short months before his death, and we weren’t just captivated, we were utterly entranced and illuminated, along with everyone else. It was the gritty, soulful sort of show captured on *Live at the Harlem Square Club*, chock full of hits, most of which Cooke himself had written, arranged, and in effect produced. But seeing him that night was more like going to church than



going to an R&B show.

I didn't realize at the time that from 1950 to 1957, before he'd ever made a pop or R&B record, Sam Cooke was already a star in the world of black gospel music as lead singer with the Soul Stirrers, one of the most popular and respected groups of its time. Many of his earlier pop fans, after he made the switch to secular music with his spectacular first hit, "You Send Me," had seen him sing in their own church or town hall; some resented his abandoning gospel for the more lucrative world of pop, but many more cheered him on. Whether the text was addressed to "my Lord" or "my baby," people continued to attend Sam Cooke shows expecting to "have church," and church, at its most inspirational and transcendent, is what he gave them.

His music was so spiritually resonant and nurturing, it preached so eloquently and prayed for a better day with such contagious fervor, that it could penetrate the deepest despair, find a glimmer of hope even in the heart of darkness. After far too many disappointments and casual indignities had bruised the spirit and sapped the will, Sam Cooke's music could actually make life seem worth living again.

And he was inspirational in other ways. While paying his bills playing R&B shows on the "chitlin circuit," he was slowly and methodically working up a more "uptown" presentation he could take into a Las Vegas hotel or a major club like New York's Copacabana. His first attempt at playing the Copa was a disaster. Cooke learned from the experience and returned to the Copa in triumph. Similarly, he started his own record label, SAR, as another step in the crossover of pop and gospel music—a crossover Cooke first conceptualized, then worked to make a reality. He was one of the first popular artists to take a firm stand against the segregation of concert audiences by race—and the first with enough earning power, determination, and sheer charisma to have his way and make it stick.

White record buyers were largely unaware of this side of Sam Cooke, but to many black musicians and would-be record-business tycoons, Cooke was a hero and a role model. The battles he fought were their battles as well, and he opened doors many more black Americans would walk through in the coming years.

Much of what Sam Cooke meant during his tragically foreshortened career is history now. Thankfully, the music remains. The best of his singles, collected on *The Man and His Music*, are as original and virtuosic as one could wish. He wrote most of them, gave his arranger Rene Hall specific rhythm section, horn, and string parts to orchestrate, and served as de facto producer at all his sessions, whether for his own records or for releases by other artists on his SAR roster. The problem with the best of Cooke's own recordings is simply that there aren't enough of them. There are the singles; his earlier gospel recordings with the Soul Stirrers (Cooke at his very best, according to many aficionados); and two splendid live albums, one from the Copa and one, considerably more muscular, from a black dance hall in Miami, the Harlem Square Club.

But when Cooke was making records, singles were the name of the game. Even the Harlem Square album went unreleased until more than twenty years after Cooke's death. In those days, an "album" was usually one of several hit singles and a lot of "filler." In Cooke's case, the "filler" was often Broadway-style tunes and standards for which he seemed to have little natural affinity. He could certainly hit the note, as the more carefully chosen and sympathetically arranged standards on the albums handily demonstrate. What is lacking in the less successful album tracks is some evident emotional connection between the singer and his material. What isn't lacking—but should be—is overdone orchestrations and chirpy "pop" vocal choruses, which only made matters worse.

This brings us to *Night Beat*, an anomaly in the Cooke discography. Backed by a superbly supple and attentive soul combo, Cooke sang his heart out on these informal, late-night recording sessions from winter 1963. There isn't even a hint of filler. The result is a vocal tour de force, and just under the music's gracefully melodious surface, the emotional waters run deep.

The remarkably consistent mood of the album is a 2 A.M., last-call sort of feeling. It's a blues mood, but the diversity of the songs—from spirituals to bluesy ballads to Cooke's sophisticated gospel-rooted originals—and the singer's ability to make every song his own, regardless of genre, keep it from becoming a "blues album."

Above all, this is a *Sam Cooke* album—his greatest, according to many. Of all his records, it's the one you'd put on to show the uninitiated what an extraordinary vocal musician and communicator the man was. It's also by far Cooke's most intimate album, sounding for all the world like you're sitting in a dark, late-night bar listening to a man pour his heart out. Even as he worries and embellishes the lines about "trying to hide my feelings, trying to hide my soul," he's revealing, not hiding. We can only speculate as to what masterworks Cooke might have given us if he'd had the time and the opportunity to make more of his own albums in his own way, with only himself to satisfy.

Thankfully, we do have one such album, this one, and a glorious album it is.

Even Rene Hall, the bandleader, arranger, and session musician from New Orleans who worked with Cooke throughout the singer's career, speaks for his former associate in tones bordering on awe. "I rate him as being a genius," says Hall, "as a person who was able to create as he did with no formal musical training whatsoever. He could hum a part to you, and what he would hum would be in perfect sequence with the orchestrational concept. Or Sam would tell me, 'I want the bass to play this,' and hum the part, and he was never musically incorrect. I never had to say, 'Sam, this isn't the right note for the bass'; it just never happened. He could hear the entire orchestra, the string lines, the bass lines, the horn lines, the backing singers' lines. And as a spiritual singer, he had never dealt with these things before. Cliff White [Cooke's longtime guitarist] would hear Sam do things and think they'd never work, like the way he went from major to minor chords in his version of 'Summertime.' Things like that, Cliff was going, 'Jesus Christ!' and then he'd do what Sam asked for, not believing that it would work, and when he tried it, it did. Even at the beginning of his career, just before he left the Soul Stirrers, he was trying to cut his first pop session, but he said he didn't get the feel of the songs. Then he told me that if I showed him a few chords on the guitar, he said, 'Maybe I can come up with a tune.' So I showed him three chords, and on the three chords he learned, he composed 'You Send Me.' He said, 'Man, this is gold; I can write a lot of these things.' I consider something like that a gift, a special talent."

Cooke was such a protean musical figure that even though he can legitimately be considered the original soul singer, the first successful gospel artist to understand and effectively utilize hard gospel elements in a deliberately "pop" context, this reputation rests on a relatively small part of his recorded output. Certainly his training and his most enduring stylistic orientation were in gospel, and Cooke-penned singles like "Shake," "Another Saturday Night," "Soothe Me," and "Bring It on Home to Me" were among the first and deepest soul hits.

But as Rene Hall observes, "Sam had a very strange ear, different from even gospel singers. Because most gospel singers deal in sevenths—like blues-type changes—and Sam dealt in sixths. Like you hear him do his yoo-hoo-hoo, that's sixths. I had played jazz, and we did a lot of sixths and ninths

and so on, but it was strange for me to hear that from a gospel singer...because Sam wasn't actually singing proper gospel, he was singing a pop concept of his own. The entire concept or approach to melody that Sam used was completely original. Even when he did a standard tune, and he did quite a few standards in his day, he would approach them with his original version of the melody."

Cooke altered melodies the way a jazz musician will, as a way of personalizing a tune. He drew on gospel, blues, and related idioms for his basic stylistic orientation, but while his melodic embellishments had a gospelish fluidity and timing, the intervals he sang were more common in jazz than in gospel or blues—more sixths than sevenths, as Rene Hall put it.

What does it all add up to? None of our tired old genre clichés is inclusive enough to describe, let alone contain, the artistry of Sam Cooke. It's great American music—Sam Cooke music, a genre in itself. It may not have the special emotional relevance for you that it has for me, but I'm sure it will get to you, too, in its own way. Because as soon as you put on *Night Beat* and hear Cooke's first mellifluous tones, riding nothing but a light bass, an occasional tap on the snare drum, and his own sovereign command of rhythm and inflection, something magical begins to happen. Cooke and his musicians—who include pianist Ray Johnson, organist Billy Preston, lead guitarist Barney Kessell, alternating drummers Hal Blaine and Ed Hall, bassist Cliff Hils, and Cliff White and probably Rene Hall on rhythm guitar—are going to take you to church.

Just stand back and let the man sing. 1995

### **3. Greil Marcus, "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES: THE BEST OF GIRL GROUP ROCK," *Let It Rock*, May 1974**

GIRL GROUP ROCK flourished between 1958 and 1965, and though, with the passing of the Brill Building and the coming of the sophistication of the soul beat, the tradition thinned out, it's still around.

I don't mean Shirley Alston puffing her way through greatest hits medleys on late-nite TV, the Three Degrees flashing pubic hair inside their latest offering, or even an authentic throwback like Spring – I mean the songs are still in the air, and sometimes even on the air: they're at the heart of the Dolls, all over any John Lennon vocal, and of course there's Bette Midler, and Bonnie Raitt.

"Group" is merely a convention; the crucial word is "girl". Tina Turner's 'River Deep – Mountain High' doesn't fit, because that is a *woman* singing. Raitt and Midler sing as women too, not girls, but it seems to me they look for some of that crazy, blind innocence and simple joy when they take on the classic girl-group songs. Tina Turner explodes the genre.

The girls were usually black, always urban, and the groups featured one completely distinctive lead singer and more or less replaceable back-ups (they met in high school, posed in their prom dresses). If they weren't teenage, they sang as if they were. They neither wrote songs nor played instruments; all needed a producer for the identifiable, striking sound that was the first necessity of any girl group record. The music wasn't R&B or soul – it was straight rock, simple but embellished and ornamented, aimed right at Top 40, not the black charts. Against the basic sound the best singers came up with a style that took full advantage of the producer's art, but still went beyond it – sailing over the rhythmic commotion or the elegant piano line that put the first hook in. The producer grabbed you, but it was up to the singer to win your heart. Almost none of them prospered outside of the care of the one

producer who developed their talents in the first place – the relationship was that dependent. Even Arlene Smith, with the greatest voice and phrasing of all, failed after leaving George Goldner; she even bombed with Phil Spector, who on paper should have been perfect for her. So girl group records were very personal, very fragile – based in the relationship of a young girl and an older man (white, until Berry Gordy) who put her on a pedestal and more than likely kept her in thrall.

It sounds insufferably sexist, and the soul of the records bears out that it was. The oppression of the process has to be the source of much of the acute pain and desire these discs convey so powerfully. From one point of view, they're all about one girl's wish to be free, to break loose, and the impossibility of making it. But paradoxically, instead of smoothing out the emotions of the singers, as producers do so often, here they intensified them, because, well, that is rock'n'roll. Or was. So personality came through with real force, and the singers lived, for two minutes, with all the life they had.

The songs most often celebrated a shadowy male figure of wondrous attractiveness, but he took on reality only as a function of the vitality, commitment, and musical invention 'of the girl singer (no coincidence that this same rock 'n'roll era saw the decline of the male singer and his replacement by thin, asexual teen-types unworthy of the girl group fantasy – girls not only replaced male singers as the strongest figures in the music, the fantasies of their songs trivialized the current male personae. Except in a couple of vaguely social-protest lyrics on Crystals records, where the hero is poor and downtrodden (a type who reappears in 'Leader Of The Pack' and 'Society's Child', is reversed in 'Brother Louie' (a boy group song), and stood on his head in 'The Boy From New York City' – where he has grown up to be a pimp), this male vision simply *is*. He is so mythical, in fact, that when the Crystals meet him in 'Da Doo Ron Ron,' even though he makes her heart stand still *somebody else* has to tell her that his name was Bill – he's too cool to talk. The only male parallel is the Safaris' pretty but rather soppy 'Image Of A Girl'. Hair colour, height, clothes, walk, such details are almost always missing – to the point where the following dialogue crops up in the Shangri-las' 'Give Him A Great Big Kiss':

*What colour are his eyes?*

*I don't know, he's always wearing shades*

Silva Thins! I suppose it represents some kind of death of innocence in the genre that 'The Boy From New York City' is replete with the minutiae the other songs lack – we find out about everything off this one, down to the contents of his wallet – as if here, the archetypal girl has given up on the image of the boy and finally has to get down to business.

For the most part, as lyrics, these songs do no more than vary the Search-For-Perfect-Love and the Attempt-To-Bring-It-Home-To-Meet-Mom-And-Dad. What makes the songs matter, beyond this rather timeless theme, is their beautiful construction, their unbelievable desire, their lust, their staggering demand for life, all riding on the voice of a single girl pushed by her sisters in the chorus (that classic line from 'Heatwave', as the Vandellas shout to Martha, "Go *ahead*, girl!"). The chorus is interesting in its own right, growing from the transcendent oo-whas of the Chantels, to the side-comments of the later groups, to 'Leader Of The Pack' – where, questioning the leader and forcing her to tell her tale, the chorus was positively Greek.

These songs make up the only authentically female genre in rock 'n'roll – so far. In a sense, they all go right back to Shirley Goodman's weird and unbelievably erotic 12-year-old vocal on 'Let The

Good Times Roll.' Some people think that when Bette Midler sings these songs, she means them as camp, but she doesn't (or didn't a year ago): girl group rock is part of her soul music, and the mad energy and excitement she throws into her favourites are her way of getting to their love, and their heartbreak, her way of blending experience with their innocence. This is simple stuff, but as with most simple stuff, the complexity is just that much more powerful when it finally rises to the surface.

The Chantels: 'I Love You So' and 'If You Try' (1958 – 'I Love You So' reached No.42 on the Billboard charts; 'If You Try' was a cut from their LP on End). ... Rosie & The Originals: 'Angel Baby' (1960 – #5)... The Shirelles: 'Tonight's The Night' (1960 – #39)... Carla Thomas: 'Gee Whiz (Look In His Eyes)' (1961– #10)... Claudine Clark: 'Party Lights' (1962 – #5)... The Marvellettes: 'Beachwood 4-5789' (1962 #17). ... The Crystals: 'He's Sure The Boy I Love' (1963 – #11). ... The Crystals: 'Da Doo Ron Ron' (1963 – #3)... The Chiffons: 'One Fine Day' (1963 – #5)... Martha & The Vandellas: 'Heatwave' (1963 – #4)... The Ronettes: 'Be My Baby' & 'The Best Part Of Breaking' Up' (1963 – #2 & #39)... Lesley Gore: 'You Don't Own Me' (1963 – #2)..... Dusty Springfield: 'Wishin' & Hopin'" (1964 – #6). The Ronettes: 'Walking In The Rain' (1964 – #23)... Darlene Love: 'Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)' (1964 – from Phil Spector's Christmas album – on a single, but not on the charts)....

Well, there's plenty more: Diana Ross and her masterpieces, 'You Can't Hurry Love' and 'You Keep Me Hangin' On'; the later Supremes' 'Stone Love' (Jean Terrell on lead – here they're celebrating the powerful masculine figure as usual, but this time he turns out to be the President and the song is a plea for his support. But it *sounds* like a love song, and if when Jean sings, "Ain't got no other," you think she means no other lover, when in fact she means no other *ideology* – "stone love 'tween my brothers and sisters" – it could matter less). There's the Shangri-las, great but overrated by critics because their concepts are so perfect for criticism. A dozen other groups; even old Sue Thompson. And how could anyone leave out 'The Loco-Motion', 'Today I Met the Boy I'm Gonna Marry', or *your* favourite?

#### 4. Charlie Gillett, "GOSPEL: SOUL SOURCES," *Record Mirror*, 30 August 1969

ON STAGE at the Apollo, Harlem: standing at one microphone, an immaculately dressed man dramatically insists his love. At the second mike, four men bend towards each other, sing a phrase in harmony, step back and spin into an intricate flowing movement as the lead singer takes a line by himself, but comes swooping back in time to echo his last phrase.

Behind them, poised, seemingly somehow to control what they do without any obvious signs or instructions, stands the guitarist; near him, the organist and drummer.

The scene doesn't change much from week to week. The names and faces are different, and the number of singers in the groups ranges from three to eight. But the pattern is formalised now, and the audience expects a similar routine from every group.

#### **PATTERN**

Some of them have chosen to emphasise particular stylised movements, moving together in an evidently predetermined pattern: James Brown's Famous Flames seem always to know what each other is doing despite the variety of their movements; Shep and the Limelites have long shirt cuffs showing beyond their jacket sleeves, which they tug in unison, letting their cuff-links catch the spotlight (understanding the hypnotic effect of flashing light long before anybody thought of using a

strobe light).

Other groups improvise more clearly (or spend a lot more time rehearsing a choreography so complicated that it seems to be spontaneous); the Temptations have few rivals in the way they break into individual patterns and yet come back together on time to hit their harmonies right.

But no matter what the movements, the groups' sounds share the same inspiration of Southern church music. Usually, the influence is indirect; the songs have been adjusted to a context of love for woman instead of God, and the sophisticated harmonies reflect arrangements worked out in recording studios. But sometimes, the group retains connections with religion, calls itself a "gospel group" and sings solely religious songs.

## **TOURING**

They are just as much professional singers as the popular music groups, touring the States throughout the year, and often have little or no relationship with a particular church; off stage they dress well, live well, as any other entertainer does; on it, they use the same techniques to create excitement that popular singers like Jackie Wilson and James Brown use, the same falsetto shrieks, the same hysterical collapses.

The effect of a good gospel group is the most exciting experience contemporary music can offer; working fantastically hard to get the audience involved, they run down the aisles, grasp waving hands, leap back on the stage, dance, march, all the time declaring their absolute devotion to God. It's enough to make a man religious. Among the best visual acts are the Gospelairees and James Cleveland. The Gospelairees are eight men, younger than some of the most famous groups like the Five Blind Boys and the Dixie Hummingbirds, each one of them apparently good enough to be a successful solo singer if he chose. On stage, they really work.

James Cleveland is more conservative, concentrating the audience's attention on what he's saying by standing still and just singing; his act also features two or three young singers, who look to be about 14 or 15 years old, whose voices are far more pure and beautiful than any popular singer at present making records. Presumably most of them are never heard of once their voices break; Cleveland just picks up another singer he's heard about, singing in some local church choir.

Gospel music suffers much more than soul music does when it gets recorded, because with no visual distraction the listener is painfully aware of the unimaginative musical accompaniment most of the singers have. Even worse, for the non-religious listener, is the depressing, repetitive self-satisfaction of people who've got the message and want you to know.

## **BEAUTY**

There are, however, some records which manage to get through to the non-believing listener, through their sheer beauty or by having more careful arrangements. The Edwin Hawkins Singers craftily took both precautions, and created a mood in 'Oh Happy Day' that Phil Spector would have been proud to have produced.

But, as the group's singer Dorothy Morrison said, that was pop gospel, and not really representative of contemporary gospel styles. Much more typical is the selection on a recent Island LP *The Unfolding of the Book of Life* (LP-993).

British record companies are not generally renowned for the quality of their compilations, so that this one is particularly remarkable for the care which has been taken in putting it together. James Hamilton did it, listening with an ear which was probably more sensitive to sounds which might interest a soul collector than to messages of particularly impressive religious theory. The result is a

fascinating collection of tracks which almost all relate in some way to a well-known singer, style or song.

In the exceptionally helpful sleeve notes, James gives the important warning against too hastily-drawn conclusions that well-known soul songs were lifted from the gospel songs on this LP; quite often, the gospel song was recorded later, and sometimes both were recorded in the same year, in which case who knows which came first?

All the tracks are taken from the Houston company, Peacock/Songbird. But this is one of the most important gospel companies so that the range is as wide as any compilation could be, from raucous preaching (something like James Brown at his roughest) to lyrical solos as Sam Cooke would have done them, and smooth harmonies by groups sounding like the Impressions.

The changing moods of the many singers give the album a much more varied character than any which feature a particular group or singer; hopefully, Island will get round to releasing *Volume 2*, whose titles are listed on this sleeve, but which has not yet reached the shops (or even, I suspect, the pressing plant).

## TEDIOUS

Various other gospel records have been issued over the years, some by Vocalion from the same Peacock/Songbird sources that this Island album used. Some are tedious, but the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi should interest anybody who wonders where the harsh style of Wilson Pickett came from. The only other Southern gospel company of comparable size to Peacock is Nashboro, in Nashville (whose rhythm and blues label, Excello, is better known here).

President bravely put out six LP's by the label's six major gospel stars a year or so ago; after listening to James Hamilton's compilation, I discovered that a track on President's Harold Boggs LP has the line. "I've been a Christian too long to stop now," which isn't too far from the title of Otis Redding's best ballad.

But a more consistently interesting LP was *The Soul of the Consolers*, which is at various times reminiscent of the Righteous Brothers and the Staple Singers (another "pop gospel" group, currently recording for Stax). The best track, 'Someone Must Answer' was also a President single.

The kind of education which these LP's provide will enable better appreciation of soul singers, showing some to be more original than is generally appreciated in this country, and others to be more derivative than we knew. Sam Cooke can only seem increasingly important, and indirect evidence of his work was recently made available in this country for the first time in Soul City's LP, *Double-Barrelled Soul*, featuring the Simms Twins and the Valentinos who recorded for Cooke's Star label in 1961-2.

Untouched by the twist beat and screeching girl groups which ruined most records at that time, these tracks are lively and varied, including two R & B top ten hits, 'Lookin' For a Love' by the Valentinos and 'Soothe Me' by the Simms Twins, and also a song the Coasters would have been proud to do, 'I Gopher You', done here by the Simms Twins.

Incidentally, for those to whom the names of gospel groups mean something, the following are represented on *The Unfolding of the Book of Life*: The Mighty Clouds of Joy, The O'Neal Twins, The Gospelairens, Inez Andrews and the Andrewettes, The Gospel Commanders, The Jackson South-ernaires, The Sunset Travellers, The Williams Brothers and Sisters Lee Ida Brown, The Biblical Gospel Singers, The Kansas City Melodyaires, The Pilgrim Jubilee Singers, The Gospel Challengers, The Bethlehem Baptist Church Choir, The Mighty Redeemers and The Seven Souls.

## 5. Simon Barber, “The Brill Building and the creative labour of the professional songwriter,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, ed. by Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (Cambridge University Press, 2012)

The Brill Building is an eleven-story Art Deco-style office building located in New York City that has played an important role in popular music since the pre-World War II era, particularly as a home to music publishers and songwriters. By the early 1960s, the Brill Building housed more than 160 businesses operating in the music industries, and it is this period in its history, and the history of a neighbouring music publishing company called Aldon Music, that is the focus of this chapter.<sup>1</sup> As suggested by the title of this piece, sustaining a career as a professional songwriter is a precarious form of work.

However, from the Tin Pan Alley era to the present day, the friendly competition of the office environment has served as a productive context for songwriters in all manner of genres. For non-performing songwriters particularly, the organised approach to songwriting practised at companies like Aldon Music was key to nurturing ongoing success during the early 1960s, and it is no coincidence that similar modes of work can also be observed at successful labels and production houses like Motown, Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, and latter-day enterprises like Xenomania and The Writing Camp. ...

### Historical context

Situated north of Times Square at 1619 Broadway on the northwest corner of Broadway and West 49th Street, the Brill Building was established in 1931 as the Alan E. Lefcourt building. It later came to be named after the Brill brothers, who owned a clothing store at the site and from whom the space had originally been leased. During the depression, the Brill brothers rented office space to music publishers, songwriters, composers and other agents, some of whom had ties to Tin Pan Alley, a historic centre of music publishing activity situated further downtown.

Through the years, tenants at the Brill Building have included music publishers like the T. B. Harms Company, Mills Music Inc., Famous Music, and Hill & Range, as well as performers like Cab Calloway, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and Nat King Cole.

The structure of the Brill Building is an example of ‘vertical integration’; that is to say that publishers, songwriters, arrangers, producers and performers were located in such proximity, that the entire process of writing a song, arranging it, transcribing it, recording a demo, pitching the song to a label or artist, and contracting a ‘plugger’ to take the song to radio, could all be done in-house. Indeed, there are stories of songwriters who would start at the top of the Brill Building and visit every publisher on the way down until a song found a home, sometimes with more than one company.<sup>5</sup> Although the Brill Building is widely recognised as the epicentre of this kind of activity, a great deal of work took place at another office building across the street from the Brill Building, a block away at 1650 Broadway on 51st Street.<sup>6</sup> It was for a music publishing company at 1650 Broadway called Aldon Music, founded in 1958 by Al Nevins and Don Kirshner, that songwriting teams like Goffin and King; Sedaka and Greenfield; and Mann and Weil wrote many of their most celebrated songs.

Nevins and Kirshner were music industry entrepreneurs who recognised the cultural impact of rock ‘n’ roll and hired a coterie of young songwriters to create music for the growing market of teenage music consumers.<sup>8</sup> With eighteen writers on staff by 1962, Kirshner and Nevins essentially recreated



the Tin Pan Alley mode of production by hiring talented songwriters and providing them with cubicles to work in and pianos to write songs on. At Aldon Music, the songwriters were encouraged to make demos of their songs, and take an active role in the production of records.<sup>9</sup> In addition to simplifying the production process and reducing costs for music publishers and record labels, this gave songwriters the opportunity to develop their skill sets and their careers. Indeed, many of these employees became arrangers, producers and performers too (often recognised as ‘singersongwriters’). With the popular 45 rpm single as their target format, the songwriters of 1650 Broadway ‘wrote records’ that would speak directly to young people.<sup>10</sup> As such, 1650 Broadway is typically understood as a more dynamic environment than the Brill Building at 1619 Broadway, and one that was not as readily mired in the traditional cultures of Tin Pan Alley.<sup>11</sup>

As a predominantly white, Jewish workforce, these young songwriters imbued their work with progressive political and racial sensibilities. Their songs, which were typically recorded and performed by African American women organised into ‘girl groups’, were variously inspired by the sounds of ‘classical music, jazz, doo-wop, African American music and Afro-Cuban music’.<sup>12</sup> Typically organised into two-person teams, writers like Carole King and Gerry Goffin; Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller; Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield; Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil; Burt Bacharach and Hal David; Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman; Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, and others, helped to define what is often described as the ‘Brill Building sound’.<sup>13</sup> This was a sound that, until The Beatles arrived in America in 1964, dominated the charts, incorporating Latin rhythms, and progressive approaches to arranging, particularly through the use of string sections.<sup>14</sup>

Emerson argues that these young tunesmiths were the ‘last gasp in the grand tradition of the Great American Songbook’ and should be understood as the ‘heirs of Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin and Harold Arlen’.<sup>15</sup> Collectively, these songwriters are responsible for a pop canon that has lasted more than fifty years and includes such titles as ‘Will You Love Me Tomorrow’, ‘Some Kind of Wonderful’, ‘The Loco-Motion’, ‘Stand by Me’, ‘Be My Baby’, ‘Chapel of Love’, ‘Leader of the Pack’, ‘Save the Last Dance for Me’, ‘Viva Las Vegas’, ‘Twist and Shout’, ‘Magic Moments’, ‘Calendar Girl’, ‘Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen’, ‘Breaking Up is Hard to Do’, ‘Saturday Night at the Movies’, ‘On Broadway’, ‘You’ve Lost that Lovin’ Feelin’’, and many others.<sup>16</sup> ...

As an economic model, the vertically integrated structure of the music businesses at 1619 and 1650 Broadway enabled close professional and personal relationships between songwriters, producers, publishers and promoters, ensuring the best opportunities for the records they produced. The strategies inculcated by Aldon Music to encourage the creation of new material increased opportunities for commercial success and developed the professional skill sets of its songwriters. As members of this ‘songwriting school’, the songwriting teams were motivated to compete with each other in a collegiate environment, striving to write the hit single that would afford them cuts on future albums. The philosophies and work routines adopted, including the necessary grind of writing ‘slump songs’ and regular collaborations outside of their established partnerships, were just some of the methods that provided them with continued success during the early 1960s.

Though the arrival of The Beatles in America (and the ‘British Invasion’ in general) is often used to symbolise the relegation of Brill Building songwriters, it should be understood that when The Beatles arrived in New York in 1964, Lennon and McCartney were ‘continuing and reinforcing the traditions of the professional songwriter’ and that they were inspired by the sounds they displaced from the charts.<sup>57</sup> In addition to being fans of Goffin and King, and occasionally covering their

songs, Lennon and McCartney's approach to rhythm, structure, chords and melody was not dissimilar to that of the Aldon crew, particularly between 1963 and 1966.<sup>58</sup> Even in the throes of Beatlemania, America was not immune to the charms of pop singles sung by girl groups; Motown's Supremes achieved five consecutive number-1 hits between the summers of 1964 and 1965. Indeed, Fitzgerald argues that Motown 'updated and replaced' the Brill Building model for success in this genre, and the statistics bear out this claim, showing that Motown's Holland-Dozier-Holland equalled the success of Lennon-McCartney in 1965 and bettered them in 1966, by scoring twice as many top-10 hits and top-40 entries.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, it should not be understood that organised approaches to songwriting were outmoded during this period, but that the underlying similitude of songwriting and production across different genres continued despite the ebb and flow of individual careers. Motown was, as Fitzgerald puts it, 'kind of a black Brill Building'.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, founder Berry Gordy was directly inspired by the Aldon Music model and told Don Kirshner of his intention to build a company like Aldon Music in Detroit.<sup>61</sup> Through its attention to a star-focused system, its round-the-clock studio practices, quality control meetings and emphasis on melodic songs married with social and political commentary, Motown blossomed, and sold millions of records to teenagers engaged by soul music. Just as Motown was an exclusive team of people brought together to produce songs through a series of structured processes, so too Xenomania, the British pop music production team behind number-1 hits for acts like Girls Aloud and Sugababes, benefits from this approach.<sup>62</sup> In the five decades since the sounds of the Brill Building dominated the charts, the routines and methods adopted by the music publishers and songwriters of that era have become part of an ongoing legacy furthered by those who continue to engage with organised approaches to the art of songwriting.

## Notes

Today, the Brill Building is home to fewer music-related businesses, most notably Broadway Video, a production company operated by the television and film producer Lorne Michaels, and the offices of singersongwriter Paul Simon. A 2013 article by David Dunlap noted the decline of music industry tenants, but described a renovation plan designed to attract technology and music-related companies to the building. David Dunlap, 'Half Empty but Full of History, Brill Building Seeks Tenants', *The New York Times* (24 July 2013). Available at: [www.nytimes.com/2013/07/25/nyregion/half-empty-butfull-of-history-brill-building-seeks-tenants.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/25/nyregion/half-empty-butfull-of-history-brill-building-seeks-tenants.html) (accessed 23 February 2015).

Kim de Laat's 2015 article on managing conflict and reward in professional songwriting teams provides a detailed study of the 'doubly uncertain' nature of this career path. See also work in production studies: Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, John T. Caldwell (eds.), *Production Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Alan Betrock, *Girl Groups: The Story of a Sound* (New York: Delilah, 1982). p. 39. See also: Mary Rohlifing, "'Don't Say Nothin' Bad About My Baby": A Re-evaluation of Women's Roles in the Brill Building Era of Early Rock 'n' Roll', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 13/2 (1996), p. 104.

1697 Broadway at 54th Street, next door to the Ed Sullivan Theatre, is another site of activity that extends this misnomer even further geographically.

Aldon Music existed from the first week of April 1958 until 1963, the period between the emergence of Elvis Presley and the arrival of The Beatles in the United States. See Rich Podolsky, Don Kirshner: *The Man with the Golden Ear: How He Changed the Face of Rock and Roll*

(Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2012), p. xi.

Kirshner, whose first foray in the music business was discovering and managing the singer Bobby Darin, learned the music publishing business from Leiber and Stoller at the Carnegie Deli on 7th Avenue (Podolsky, Don Kirshner, p. 21).

Podolsky, Don Kirshner, p. 4.

Brill Building-era writers such as Mike Stoller, Jeff Barry and Neil Sedaka have elucidated a conceptual approach to writing specifically for this format ([www.sodajerker.com/podcast/](http://www.sodajerker.com/podcast/)).

Ken Emerson, *Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building Era* (London: Fourth Estate, 2006), p. 22.

*Ibid.*, p. xi.

Although he is rarely contextualised as a Brill Building songwriter, Barry and Greenwich often wrote with producer Phil Spector, whose ‘wall of sound’ production style is symbolic of this period. Other key figures of the time include Jack Keller and Bert Berns.

Doc Pomus described the sound as ‘Jewish Latin’ (Emerson, *Always Magic in the Air*, p. 125–6).

Emerson, *Always Magic in the Air*, p. xii.

As an indication of the perennial nature of some of these songs, in the four decades following its creation, Mann and Weil’s ‘You’ve Lost that Lovin’ Feelin’” was broadcast in the United States more than ten million times.

Inglis, “‘Some Kind of Wonderful’”, p. 222.

Fitzgerald, ‘When the Brill Building met Lennon-McCartney’, p. 69. 59 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

*Ibid.*

Podolsky, Don Kirshner, p. 165.

Available at: [www.sodajerker.com/episode-68-miranda-cooper](http://www.sodajerker.com/episode-68-miranda-cooper) (accessed 23 February 2015).

## **6. Gerald Early, from *One Nation Under a Groove* (New York: Ecco Press, 1995), pp. 74–88.**

IT IS one of the least recognized facts of American popular culture that the Middle West—an area that runs from, say, Cincinnati to Kansas City, from Detroit to Oklahoma City, from Chicago to St. Louis, from Alton, Illinois, to Little Rock, Arkansas—is responsible for most black popular music in America. From Scott Joplin to Miles Davis, from Charlie Parker to Jimmy Rushing, from Curtis Mayfield to Sam Cooke, from Jimmy Blanton to Donny Hathaway, from the Isley Brothers to Brother Joe May, the Gospel Thunderbolt of the Midwest, this area was pivotal in the development of virtually every style of black music. The Middle West is where jazz came in the 1920s when King Oliver and Louis Armstrong migrated to Chicago. It is where blues became a formalized 12-bar musical pattern at the turn of the century, in places like St. Louis and Evanston, and where it became electric with the coming of the great post-World War II bluesmen like Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, Buddy Guy, Elmore James, B. B. King, and Little Walter. It is where jazz redeveloped and redefined itself as swing in Kansas City in the 1930s and it is where Charlie Parker emerged from the Jay McShann band to reshape jazz as bebop in the 1940s. Illinois native Miles Davis made jazz cool in the 1950s, and Missourian Chuck Berry reinvented Rhythm and Blues as a youth music that a white deejay from Cleveland, Alan Freed, was to call Rock and Roll. From Coleman Hawkins to Screamin’ Jay Hawkins, from Joe Turner to Tina Turner, from Milt Jackson to Michael Jackson, from Roland Kirk to Bobby Watson, the Middle West has been a central, even mythological, location for black popular culture and black popular music. And the three principal musical cities in this area have been

Detroit, Chicago, and Kansas City.

From Detroit alone, after World War II, came such talents as Yusef Lateef, Thad, Hank, and Elvin Jones, Della Reese, Little Willie John, Tommy Flanagan, Kenny Burrell, Jackie Wilson, Barry Harris, Donald Byrd, Aretha Franklin, Paul Chambers, Roland Hanna, Alice Coltrane, and Charles McPherson, as well as, of course, the talent that came out of Motown after 1959. Why did Detroit become such a hothouse of musical talent after the war? It is difficult to pinpoint a precise answer but part of it lies in the intense emphasis on musical education among Detroit blacks. It is a common myth that blacks learn about music in their churches and like all myths it has a considerable amount of truth. Yet black secular music education provides as much, if not more, training for blacks who seek a music career than churches do. For instance, Ralph Ellison, in writing about jazz guitarist Charlie Christian, describes music education in the black Oklahoma school he attended: "...harmony was taught from the ninth through the twelfth grades; there was an extensive and compulsory music-appreciation program, and...a concert band and orchestra and several vocal organizations."

At the turn of the century, E. Azalia Hackley, a light-skinned black woman from Detroit who was trained as a soprano, adopted the musical education of black youth as her mission; she was called "Our National Voice Teacher" in the black press and was wont to stop for 15 minutes during her recitals and give her audiences lessons in musical appreciation and voice training. From Hackley's instructorship to that of such storied black Detroit public-school music teachers as Ernest Rodgers, Orville Lawrence, and James Tatum, Detroit black youth have been reared in a vibrant musical atmosphere in their public schools. The annual E. Azalia Hackley Program featuring black composers and black classical performers started in 1943, and such noted black Detroit performers as Rogie Clark, Robert A. Harris, and Charles Coleman (also music critic for Detroit's black newspaper, the *Michigan Chronicle*) have been featured in various years. Indeed, an aspect of black music education that is not as written about as it should be is how much blacks, in their schools, are exposed to classical European music, marching-band music, and pseudo-classical show tunes, and how much these forms of music have been traditionally enjoyed in the black community and not necessarily by the black bourgeoisie only. Blacks have often found some of these forms as attractive, as much a part of their cultural language—as they rightly should—as the musical forms that are more expressive of their own African-derived aesthetics and sensibilities, and this has influenced overall the shaping of their popular music.

Consider this fact about Motown: The three major early groups of the company—the Supremes, the Temptations, and the Miracles—were put together and rehearsed at their high schools. They were not church groups; in fact, the members did not attend the same church, and in various autobiographies there is little talk about the influence of the black church in their music. For instance, Smokey Robinson speaks about the influence of Sarah Vaughn, and Mary Wilson singles out the McGuire sisters, Doris Day, and Patti Page as her personal favorites when she was growing up (an indication, among other things, that the popular-culture broadcasting devices—radio and television—not only exposed white audiences to black music but, just as important, exposed black audiences to white music, and that black musical taste could be just as pedestrian as the white mainstream or that white mainstream tastes ought not to be routinely stereotyped and dismissed more so than black tastes are subject to be). Black music has been equally a product of secular and sacred forces and impulses. One finds this is true equally of Ray Charles, who became closely tied with the secularization of black gospel although he never learned his craft in a black church but rather at the school for the blind he attended and on gigs, and of Michael Jackson who, true to his Motown roots, also put a great deal of

gospel fervor into his music but who had “music class and band in the Gary [Indiana] schools” where he grew up.

Here are two undeniable facts: First, Motown could not have happened without a strong public-school music- education program in Detroit, even if many of its performers were musically illiterate. The session musicians, the arrangers, and often the producers were not, and nearly all of them were trained in the public schools of Detroit. Moreover, the performers themselves received some musical training and exposure to music in school, which in many instances turned out to be highly influential. Second, Motown could not have happened anywhere else but in the Middle West, despite the fact that the greatest number of R and B independent labels were located in Los Angeles. (This is not where the greatest number of black artists originated or honed their craft, and as blacks were mostly shut out of both the movie industry and Las Vegas during the Cold War period of 1945 through 1960, Los Angeles was not an especially supportive environment in many respects.) For it was in the Middle West, finally, until 1970, despite New York doo-wop and the Brill Building, Philadelphia with the Twist, the Italian teen idols, and Kenny Gamble’s record store at 15th and South Streets, or the proliferation of record labels in Los Angeles and a bopping Central Avenue down South Central Way, where the creative crucible of black music existed.

*But Motown would not have succeeded without a crossover rise in the interest in black music, particularly in postwar Rhythm and Blues. Several factors conjoined to make this possible: First, after the war, big bands and swing were passé, particularly because big bands were no longer economically feasible. Ellington and Basie, veritable institutions and the most important big bands in American music history, continued to produce new and exciting music, but most black bands disappeared, and those white swing bands that continued, with the exceptions of Stan Kenton, Buddy Rich, and Woody Herman, became, in effect, fossilized “oldie” acts.*

Second, the invention and growing popularity of the electric bass changed entirely how popular music was conceived; contemporary popular dance music eventually was built around the sonic phenomenon of the electric bass. Electric instruments generally tended to find their first practitioners among black musicians because they were usually regarded in white mainstream circles as being freakish, novelty items. After blacks have created a system of playing these instruments the better to reinvent their own music, white musicians will then begin to use them extensively and create further innovations.

Third, the popularity of white covers of black Rhythm and Blues in the 1950s conferred a kind of respectability and mystique on the black versions, which led many white teenagers to seek out the real thing in curiosity and in quest of hipness (as was shown in Alan Freed’s *Mister Rock and Roll*, for instance). These same white teenagers helped fuel the entire youth culture movement and many of them wound up figuring in the civil rights movement, in part because of their exposure to this music. Teens, with more expendable money, became a real presence in the mass marketplace in the 1950s. What made Motown possible was not that Elvis Presley covered R and B but that Fats Domino, in the end a more significant artist, not only crossed over with R and B hits in 1955 but with a Country and Western tune, “Blueberry Hill.”

What was indeed far more radical than the Presley success in the mid- and late-1950s was the prominence of three black male romantic balladeers and show-tune singers—Johnny Mathis, Nat King Cole, and Sammy Davis, Jr., by the end of the decade. Davis made it big in the 1956 Broadway show *Mr. Wonderful*, which was specifically written for him by Jule Styne. Cole, enjoying many years of crossover success since 1948 with “Nature Boy” and “Mona Lisa,” had a short-lived

television variety show in 1956 (although the show was unable to find a single national sponsor). By then he had become one of the most successful ballad singers in American popular-music history.

Mathis broke big with “Wonderful, Wonderful,” in 1958, made an album of standard romantic ballads in 1959 entitled *Open Fire, Two Guitars*, and became not simply a successful singer but, with youthful good looks and slick hair making him appear, to white and black taste, a bit exotic like an Indian, he was, in short order, a teenage heartthrob among both black and white girls. He appeared on his album covers more in idealized and stylized drawings and photographs than virtually any other black male artist of the period. Indeed, in *Life Magazine’s* 1958 feature on Rock and Roll, whose “most numerous fans are girls aged 8 to 16”—an article, in effect, about teen idols—Johnny Mathis is the only black singer mentioned, and with an accompanying photograph, especially surprising as Mathis’s singing style was not remotely Rock and Roll.

Black male singers found it difficult to make it in romantic balladry because of the open sexual appeal needed for the music to go over with women listeners. The entire white commercial music establishment frowned upon, and felt great unease about, making a black male a legitimate sex symbol. Indeed, the fear of miscegenated sex appeal explains, in part, why such true black Rock and Roll artists as Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, or Little Richard were not promoted as were lesser white teen idols. The other factor was age, as many black male artists associated with Rock and Roll, like Berry and Domino, were considerably older than the white girls who were crazy about their records. But the success of Mathis, Cole, and Davis—which came about in part because the black male as sex symbol was making his presence felt in popular culture in the 1950s—was an enormous breakthrough that helped ease the way for Motown artists, although the first genuine black male Rock and Roll teen idol would be Twist King Chubby Checker, who did not record for Motown. (Interestingly, Checker, in an emergency for Dick Clark’s “American Bandstand” show, covered R and B performer Hank Ballard’s “The Twist” for a huge crossover hit in 1960, the first time a black crossed over by covering a black R and B tune, creating a dance craze in the process.)

Checker’s youth and manner, and his lack of reputation as an aggressively sexual R and B artist, put the song over for white mainstream audiences, including adults. Gordy had never been a fan of Ballard’s more salacious material, such as the mid-1950s hits, “Work with Me, Annie” and “Annie Had a Baby,” and with his unerring sense for cultural trends, starting with the comic book industry’s self-imposed, self-regulatory code of 1954 to rid itself of exposed breasts and horrific violence in the name of protecting America’s youth, he made sure that in crossing over, Motown’s music never brought with it R and B’s more debauched element of good-timing jungle bunnies in the ghetto.)

The fourth factor that made crossover possible was the breakup of the music entertainment industry, caused by the decline of big bands and of the power of the Hollywood film in the 1950s due to the growth of television. New York Tin Pan Alley composers no longer reigned supreme. The major record labels—Columbia, RCA Victor, and Decca (soon to be MCA)—were being challenged by trend-setting small independent labels. Most R and B was recorded for small independent labels, as was a good deal of early Rock and Roll, bebop and soul jazz. Specialty in Los Angeles, King/Federal in Cincinnati, National and Atlantic Records, both in New York, Sun Records in Memphis, Apollo Records in New York, Chess Records in Chicago, Modern Records and Imperial Records in Los Angeles, and Savoy Records of Newark, New Jersey, are just a few of the companies that proliferated like mushrooms in the dark seeking local black music after World War II. As Arnold Shaw pointed out near the end of his book, *The Rocking 50s*, a comparison of the top pop songs of 1939 and 1959 found that in 1939, the Top Ten pop discs were made by only three

companies—all located in New York—whereas in 1959, 39 companies produced Top Ten records and these were located in ten states. Popular music in America was truly becoming regionalized and more open. Moreover, the music that was most likely to attract adventuresome kids, the music that the majors had white artists covering, was the music of the small independent label.

By the time Gordy started Motown in 1959, he was not thinking, as many indie owners were, that having a white cover of their own R and B was the ultimate mark of success. Gordy was thinking not only that the Motown publishing catalogue would be covered—which it has been much to Gordy's fabulous enrichment—but that Motown recordings would stand up as pop hits on their own, without benefit of covers, which has turned out to be true as well. This is how Motown changed American culture: by Gordy's insistence that *his* performers be able to sell the company's songs to whites and that *his* performers be able to play at the better-playing white venues.

Gordy's objective always was to reconfigure what was meant by pop music, to reiterate in his approach that pop was as black as it was white. In this regard, perhaps the most remarkable album the Supremes made was the 1967 issue *The Supremes Sing Holland, Dozier, Holland*, wherein the group sang the songs of their producers, who happened to be, at that time, the hottest songwriting team in America. A black pop group legitimated the music of a black pop writing team and HDH's songs legitimated the Supremes. Nothing quite like this had ever happened in American popular culture before. (Ella Fitzgerald's 1957 *Duke Ellington Songbook* comes close.) And to emphasize the point, four months later Motown released the next Supremes album: *The Supremes Sing Rodgers and Hart*. They had been authenticated as a significant interpretative and stylistic group of singers, and HDH was on par with the great songwriters of Tin Pan Alley and the American musical theater.

Regarding Gordy's vision of reshaping and exploding the racial underpinnings of pop music, he took advantage of his time and place: From the early 1960s fascination with folk music, to the mid- and late-1960s quest to acknowledge the sources of popular music in urban electric blues and early forms of 1950s doo-wop, R and B, and rockabilly, there was a search for authentication and authenticity in pop music despite (or perhaps because of) its contrivance and its falsity—the sheer artistic and emotional vacuity of much of it. This “authenticity” is a service that blacks have learned to provide for American popular culture, though what was really being authenticated was the separation of black music as “race records,” which was largely a political act to keep black music (and black artistic expression, generally) understood popularly as a marginal phenomenon. Motown changed this with its huge success, moving black music, largely on its own terms, within the popular-music mainstream, negotiating, with considerable aplomb, the enterprise of authenticating itself as youth music, while acknowledging, even celebrating, the R and B sources of African-American music, reaffirming, in an astonishing cultural wave, the innovative power of R and B as a pop music. The deep complexity of the quest for authentication in popular music lies in the extraordinary happenstance that all cultural innovations are subject to cooptation by a mainstream that tends to “normalize” or nonspecialize the innovations for mass consumption. These societal instances of reinforcing marginality while thwarting it by erasing its existence as a threat produces, ultimately, in differing ways, among both the elites and the masses, an urge for more authentication and innovation. This is the elementary dynamic of creation in a capitalist culture. Within a little more than a decade, from 1945 to 1959, from, say, Louis Jordan to Ray Charles, the first wash of “authentic” black music, R and B, began beneath bourgeois moral (this is dirty music), political (this music promotes race mixing and disturbs the status quo) and commercial pressures (this independent music is undercutting the power of the major record companies) to experience its own dilution and decadence, moving from a marginalized but artistically rigorous avant-gardism into an

orthodoxy of mediocrity.

That, as much as anything, made possible the success of Motown (and to a lesser degree its rivals Atlantic and Stax) in the 1960s era of renewed authentication, and the quest for authentication was made all the more vigorous because black people—with a revitalized political consciousness and momentous political agenda that for the first time in American history had a huge impact on the culture at large—desired it so very much.

In the 1960s the only other force in black American popular music that rivaled Motown as an authenticator was James Brown, the Godfather of Soul himself. As Bruce Tucker, coauthor of Brown's autobiography, points out, Brown was not a product of Stax, Atlantic, or Motown, but a sort of freelance presence in black music in the 1960s; and after 1965, when he became a pioneer in funk—or a kind of extremely rhythm-based, almost antisong, rifflike dance tune, he began to undermine Motown's "crossover" influence through new groups like Sly and the Family Stone and through his influence on a wide variety of established black artists, including Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix (during his Band of Gypsies phase), Herbie Hancock, and Motown's own producer Norman Whitfield, who all began to formulate tunes in the studio based on musicians playing counterriffs on an improvised bass riff. In other words, in the late 1960s, and certainly by the early 1970s, during the height of the black power and black pride movement, many younger blacks thought Motown sounded too "white," too crossover, and not authentically "black" enough, but this was not actually a realization that grew from Motown's "sound" as much as from its marketing success and the growing tendency for young whites to co-opt Motown as their own cultural authentication. Young blacks felt simply that this music "cannot authenticate them and us, too and still be our music," as one black collegian told me back in 1972. Interestingly, Hendrix, Davis (in his electric phase from 1970 to 1975), and Sly Stone—mentioned above as three artists influenced by the funk innovations of Brown—were also influenced by the pop crossover innovation of Motown, and each had a large crossover audience. And each, in his distinct way, became entangled in the limitations of both funk and crossover, in ways that both Brown and Motown avoided, becoming in the end hideously costumed minstrels unable to escape the cultural entrapment of black "rhythm" as a stigma of stereotyped black male sexuality and clownish showmanship that became an artistic cul-de-sac. (Black life and music in America has been sullied by its two most striking characteristics: rhythm and fervor, two musical and psychic features that whites have convinced themselves that they intrinsically lack, so much the better that they might have a neurotic need for the Negroes in their midst who supply them in abundance! Motown and Brown built their music on both rhythm and fervor, but Motown managed to transcend them so that both became in Gordy's vision assertions of Negro soul and 1982 1995

**7. Ronnie Spector with Vince Waldron, *Be My Baby: How I Survived Mascara, Miniskirts, and Madness or My Life as a Fabulous Ronette* (New York: Harmony Books, 1990), pp. 49–55, 104–8.**

Sandwiched between rock 'n' roll's supposed decline at the end of the 1950s and the rejuvenating arrival of the Beatles on America's shores in 1964, the explosive rise in popularity of early 1960s girl group music has often been trivialized and overlooked within mainstream histories of rock. And to the extent that rock histories have celebrated girl groups like the Ronettes, it has often been to praise the innovations of their Svengali-like male producers or the songwriting teams that provided them



with their hits.<sup>1</sup> Lead singer Ronnie Spector of the Ronettes speaks from the perspective of the performer in the two following passages from her 1990 autobiography *Be My Baby*, offering a little-seen window into the complex creative processes and inordinate power relationships behind the girl group phenomenon. In the first excerpt, Spector describes the genesis of the group's breakout hit, "Be My Baby," recorded in 1963 at Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles. The second excerpt rejoins the Ronettes in 1965, at which point their career was already in a state of decline (they would break up the next year). Reading these two passages from *Be My Baby*, it is hard to believe that Ronnie Spector (born Veronica Bennett, 1943) and her producer, Phil Spector (born 1940), were separated in age by only three years. Even though the two were romantically involved during the Ronettes' meteoric rise to success, Spector held a firm control over the young singer, inserting her as the final jigsaw puzzle piece in his celebrated "wall of sound." Ronnie would eventually marry Spector in 1968 only to divorce him in 1974.

When we returned from California, the Ronettes went right back to work. Even though our Colpix singles had all flopped, we were always in demand as a live group. By 1963, all three of us were out of high school and playing with rock and roll variety shows like Clay Cole's Twisterama Revue. The following we developed at those shows—along with the fans we made at Murray the K's Brooklyn Fox revues—were all that kept us going before we met Phil.

Even before we ever had a hit record, we had a hard core of fans who followed us from show to show, and for some reason, a lot of them seemed to be gay men or lesbians. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was because we were half-breeds, and the gay crowd sensed that the Ronettes were outsiders just like they were.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reason, there was something about our style that spoke to a lot of gay people, because they've always been there for us. Even today I meet gay guys who saw the Ronettes at the Cafe Wha or the Bazaar in the Village, and they can still name every song we did at a show that happened twenty-five years ago.

In that long stretch before "Be My Baby," our live shows were the only place our fans could hear us. Even after Phil recorded our first song out in California, he refused to release it. When I asked him when "Why Don't They Let Us Fall in Love" was coming out, he answered without missing a beat. "Never," he said.

I was shocked. I thought it was a pretty good record. But Phil just shook his head. "It's a good song," he told me. "But it's not a number-one record."

By this time I really believed that Phil actually could predict a number-one song, and I thought that was fantastic. "I'm still working on your first million-seller," he teased, "and it's almost finished. If you're a real nice girl, I might let you come over to my house to hear it."

I'd never been in a penthouse before—Phil's or anyone else's. So naturally, when I walked in I couldn't resist peeking into all the closets and poking around behind all the closed doors. I opened one door and was surprised to find a bedroom where six or seven pairs of women's shoes were scattered all over the floor. When I asked Phil who they belonged to, he nearly turned pink.

"Will you stop snooping around where you don't belong?" he snapped. I think it was the first time I ever saw Phil lose his temper.

"Okay, honey," I said. "I'm sorry." He must've noticed the hurt look in my eyes, because he

softened his tone immediately.

“Those are my sister Shirley’s shoes,” he explained. “She stays here sometimes when she’s in New York. Now,” he said, changing the subject, “why don’t you go into the other bedroom and watch TV? Jeff and Ellie are going to be here any minute to work on the song, and we don’t want to be disturbed.”

Phil was still very hush-hush about our relationship at that point, and he didn’t want his writing partners to know I was there.<sup>3</sup> I didn’t complain. I was too thrilled. I thought it was the greatest thing in the world to be sitting in the bedroom while my boyfriend wrote my first hit record in the next room. But what did I know? I also believed those were his sister’s shoes spread out all over the floor.

If I had any doubts, I was too busy listening to what was going on in the living room to worry about them. I put my ear to the wall and tried to hear what Phil, Ellie Greenwich, and Jeff Barry were singing. It was hard to hear the words over Ellie’s piano playing, but when they came around to the chorus, I could hear all three of them loud and clear. “Be my, be my baby,” they sang. “Be my baby, now.” I thought it was catchy, and I couldn’t help wondering if that was what a number-one record sounded like.

Phil and I rehearsed that song for weeks before he would let me fly out to California to record it. But when that morning came, I knew the words to “Be My Baby” backwards and forwards.

I got up really early so my mother and I could catch the plane. Since I was going to sing lead, Phil wouldn’t need Estelle and Nedra to do their backgrounds until later, so they stayed behind in New York for a few more weeks. I remember the morning I left, Estelle stuck her head out from under the sheets and said, “Don’t forget to fill out the airplane insurance forms when you get to the airport.” Airport insurance was a big thing with my family. Whenever one of my uncles would drop me off at the airport, it was always straight to the insurance stands.

My mother and I got in a cab, and I sang “Be My Baby” all the way out to LaGuardia. I wanted to be so perfect, I couldn’t rehearse it enough. I even made my mother wait in the airport bathroom with me while I sang through it a few times more. We must’ve stayed in there a little too long, because by the time we got out we’d missed our plane.

Then my mother did something I’d never seen her do before. She sat down and sighed. Right there in the airport waiting room, she just let out a big sigh like she was real tired all of a sudden. “Ronnie, sit down here with me,” she said, patting the brown cushion of the airport couch. “I think you’re at the age where you can go out there and sing ‘Be My Baby’ all by yourself now, so I don’t think I’m gonna go all the way out there to California with you this time.” Then I kissed her goodbye and got on the next plane all by myself.

When I landed in California, Phil picked me up at the airport in his big limousine and drove me straight to Gold Star Studios. Gold Star’s Studio A was old and really tiny, but that was the only place he ever recorded anymore, because he knew he could get sounds out of that room that he couldn’t get anywhere else. It had something to do with the acoustics. The room was so small, the sound seemed to bounce off the walls, creating a natural echo that made every song recorded there sound fuller.

And Phil loved that, because he was always experimenting with ways to make his sound as big as possible. Instead of having one guitarist playing rhythm, he would have six. Where someone else might use one piano, Phil would have three. He'd have twin drum sets, a dozen string players, and a whole roomful of background singers. Then he'd record everything back on top of itself to double the sound. Then he'd double it again. And again. And again and again, until the sound was so thick it could have been an entire orchestra. That's what Phil was talking about when he told a reporter that his records were like "little symphonies for the kids."

Watching Phil record the background music for "Be My Baby," I finally understood what he meant when he stopped me that time and said, "That's it! That's the voice I've been looking for." He knew from the first second he heard me that my voice was exactly what he needed to fill in the center of this enormous sound. Phil had been trying to construct this giant wall of sound ever since he got started in the record business, and when he heard me, he knew my voice was the final brick.

I was always surprised at how much Phil used me when he had singers like Fanita James and Darlene Love around. When I'd hear them singing with those great big gospel voices, I'd start to wonder what was so special about my little voice. But I have to give Phil credit. He loved the way I sang, and he knew exactly what to do with my voice. He knew my range. He knew my pitch. He even knew which words sounded best coming out of my mouth. He knew that "Be My Baby" was a perfect song for me, so he constructed the whole record around my voice from the ground up.

It took about three days to record just my vocals for "Be My Baby." I was so shy that I'd do all my vocal rehearsals in the studio's ladies' room, because I loved the sound I got in there. People talk about how great the echo chamber was at Gold Star, but they never heard the sound in that ladies' room. And, between doing my makeup and teasing my hair, I practically lived in there anyway. So that's where all the little "whoa-ohs" and "oh-oh-oh-ohs" you hear on my records were born, in the bathroom at Gold Star.

Then, when I finally did go into the studio, I'd hide behind this big music stand while I sang, so Phil and Larry Levine wouldn't see me with my mouth all popped open when I reached for a high note. I'd keep the lyric sheet right in front of my face, and then, after I finished a take, I'd peep out from behind my music stand and look through the window to see how Phil and Larry liked it. If they were looking down and fooling with the knobs, I'd know I had to do it again. But if I saw they were laughing and yelling "All right!" or "Damn, that little girl can really sing!" I'd know we had a take. Since my approach to each song was completely up to me, watching Phil and Larry react afterward was the only real feedback I ever got.

Recording at Gold Star in those days was like one big party. Phil always got the best musicians in town to play at his sessions, guys like Hal Blaine, Nino Tempo, Leon Russell, Barney Kessel, and Glen Campbell. Jack Nitzsche did all of our early arrangements, and the guy was a genius. Then there was Larry Levine, who engineered all our songs. Phil had so many good people working for him that it really was a joy to go into work.

But the biggest fun of all came when it was time to lay down the background vocals, because Phil always invited everyone in the whole studio to join in. If you were standing around and could carry a tune, you were a background singer in Phil's wall of sound. And everybody Phil knew seemed to show up the day we did the backgrounds for "Be My Baby." Darlene Love was there, and we had Fanita James from the Blossoms, Bobby Sheen from Bob B. Soxx and the Blue Jeans, Nino Tempo, Sonny

Bono—who was Phil’s gofer in those days—and Sonny’s girlfriend, who was a gawky teenager named Cher.

I have to be honest—the first time I saw Cher, I thought she was a hooker. It was in a hotel room where I was supposed to meet Phil for a rehearsal. She and Sonny were already in the room sitting at the piano when I walked in. And when I saw this skinny young kid with her long black hair and thick mascara, I just assumed she was a call girl from the hotel. Then Sonny introduced her as his girlfriend, and I was so embarrassed, I just had to laugh. After a few minutes I could tell that she was really just a sweet kid, and we got to be friends.

We would meet in the bathroom at Gold Star to tease our hair. Sitting over the sink, we would share black eyeliner and gossip. We were about the same age, and we both had stars in our eyes, so it was only natural that we would hit it off. I had fun with Darlene and Fanita and the other girls who sang for Phil, but I never felt like I could talk to them the way I did with Cher. I was probably closer to her than to anyone outside of my family in those days. And as time went on, Cher and I began to see that we had a lot more in common than just bangs and makeup.

Sonny always acted extremely jealous of Cher. And when I got out to California, I started to notice that Phil could get pretty possessive of me, too. Neither of them liked for us to go off on our own. But Phil seemed to trust Cher, so she and I spent a lot of time together while Phil and Sonny worked in the studio. We’d go shopping together, or we’d spend the day at the movies. Other days we’d just drive around in Cher’s little red MG, looking at all the strange sights of Hollywood.

As soon as we finished “Be My Baby,” I flew right back to New York, where the Ronettes were scheduled to start a two-month tour of the East Coast with Joey Dee and the Starlites. One of our first stops was Wildwood, New Jersey. I’ll always remember that town, because that was where we heard “Be My Baby” for the first time. It was one of those moments that changes your life forever.

Nedra, Estelle, and I were sleeping late in our motel room on the Saturday morning after our first show in Wildwood. In those days all three Ronettes would share one big bed, and Mom or Aunt Susu would usually sleep in the other one. By the time I woke up that morning, Mom had already gone out to get breakfast, so I walked over and turned the TV on to find “American Bandstand,” which we woke up to every Saturday, just like every other teenager in America. You would turn it on even if you were still half-asleep, because you didn’t want to miss the latest records.

Even though I was barely awake, I could hear Dick Clark talking about how this next record was guaranteed to be the hit of the century. I couldn’t wait to hear what this thing could be. Then I heard “boom-ba-boom-boom”—the drumbeat that starts off “Be My Baby.” Even though I was sitting up in bed, I was convinced that I’d fallen back asleep and was only dreaming that Dick Clark was playing our record on “American Bandstand.” But if I was dreaming, Estelle and Nedra were having the same dream, because they sprang upright in bed and started staring at the TV, same as me. After that I nearly passed out right there in that motel room.

We sat there for about a minute watching all those happy teenagers dancing to our record. Then Nedra and I ran out to the terrace to tell Joey Dee and the guys, who were all swimming around in the pool.

“Hey, guys!” I yelled. “Get up here. Dick Clark’s playing our record!”

It was like we couldn’t really believe that this was happening unless we had witnesses.

Joey and the guys ran up the stairs just in time to catch the end of our song. Then they hugged us, and we hugged them. And then we all laughed and sang and enjoyed what it feels like to be on top of the world.

A few minutes later Phil was on the phone. He was as surprised as we were to see the record taking off so fast—or so he said. He told us the Ronettes would have to leave Joey Dee's tour immediately so we could get back to New York to promote the record. Of course, Joey Dee wasn't very happy to hear that. But he didn't want to stand in our way, so he finally did let us out of the tour.

Even after the Ronettes' slump began in 1965, I didn't get too concerned. Phil had just scored the biggest smash of his career with "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," by the Righteous Brothers, and he was still as hot as ever. So I figured it was just a matter of time before he turned his attention back to my career.

It wasn't like he could ignore me. I'd practically been living with him since he moved into the mansion on La Collina. Whenever I came out to California, that is. Which actually wasn't that often in 1965, since the Ronettes had personal appearances booked solid throughout the year.

And I was having so much fun onstage with the Ronettes, I didn't have time to worry about our failing recording career. I still had my audience, and I could tell by their applause that they still loved me. Before long, though, I think Phil even grew jealous of them.

We did one of our biggest shows ever in late November, when Phil put us in *The Big T.N.T. Show*, which was a concert he produced in Hollywood that was being filmed for release as a movie. Phil was the orchestra leader for a lineup that included some of the biggest names in rock, including Ray Charles, the Byrds, and the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. Of course, Phil had to be in complete control whenever he produced anything, and this show was no exception.

When the technicians asked us to do some of our act during rehearsal, we ran through our routine just to give the camera guys a basic idea of what we did. We didn't give them a full performance, because we wanted to save that for the show. But Phil was in charge—and he wanted to make sure everyone knew it—so he stopped us in the middle of the rehearsal and started barking out orders at us like we were in the chorus or something.

"Hold it, girls," he commanded. "You're just walking through it. I'd like you to start again, and this time, I want you to do it just like you're going to do it tonight."

That was ridiculous. We'd been doing the same basic routines ever since we started at the Brooklyn Fox, but our act always changed a little bit each night, depending on the audience response. The only thing you could be sure of was that we never ever did exactly the same show twice. But Phil insisted, so we went ahead and played our entire act to this empty theater.

"That wasn't so hard, was it?" he called out after we finished. "Do it *exactly* like that tonight."

That night we did our act the same way we always did it—flat out crazy. I shimmied around the stage and danced wherever the feeling took me. The crowd was up for grabs, but I think it was too much for Phil.

The director and all the cameramen told us how exciting it was, and the other acts all said the nicest

stuff. But Phil hated it. He came up to me after the show, steaming mad. “What did you think you were doing out there?” he shouted. I hated it when Phil got like that, but I knew the only thing I could do was humor him until the mood passed.

“What’s wrong?” I asked. “Was there something wrong with our routine?”

“It was all wrong,” he snapped. “It looked completely different tonight than it did this afternoon.” “But there was no audience then,” I explained. “You know I always play the house.”

“*Play the house?*” he exclaimed. “You were all over the place. Out of control.” That was a big thing with Phil. If I lost control in front of a crowd, he hated it because that meant that I was out of *his* control.

“And on top of everything else, you came in off key!” He could only ever criticize my singing for technical reasons, because he knew I didn’t read music, so I couldn’t argue. “Don’t bother coming to the party after the show,” he ordered. “I don’t want to see you there!”

I went straight back to my hotel room and cried. I suppose I could’ve gone to the party anyway, but I never even considered it. I just couldn’t go against Phil’s wishes in those days. I was like a little Japanese geisha girl walking five paces behind her master. Phil couldn’t control what I did once I got out onstage, but that wasn’t a problem he had in our personal life.

Of course, he dominated me most of all in the recording studio. After the hamburger incident with Sonny Bono, I knew Phil didn’t want me getting too friendly with the other singers and musicians at Gold Star.<sup>4</sup> He never really came out and said so—he didn’t have to. He had more charming ways of getting me to do what he wanted.

Once when I was doing backgrounds with a bunch of people at Gold Star, this big fat singer named Olla got me laughing. She was always saying something that cracked me up, and this time I was doubled up with laughter when I happened to catch a peek at Phil, who was smiling at me from behind his glass window in the control room. “Ronnie,” he said, waving me into the booth. “Come on in here.”

When I got there, Phil pulled up an old wooden stool and motioned for me to sit down on it. Then he turned back to work at the mixing board. “Uh, Phil?” I asked. “What was it you wanted?”

“Nothing, really,” he admitted, looking a little embarrassed. “I just felt like I could use some inspiration in here.”

It was such a sweet thing to say, and so flattering. Up until then, Phil had always tried to keep up the illusion that our relationship was purely professional. But by inviting me to sit next to him in the control booth, he was admitting to the whole world that I was someone special. I sat straight up on that rickety old stool and felt like a queen.

From then on I always sat in the booth with Phil. He seemed to really enjoy having me in there with him, and it made me feel like a privileged character. Phil would make jokes about whoever happened to be standing on the other side of the glass, and they were especially funny because no one could hear them but me and Larry Levine.

And I also got to watch Phil at work, which was always a thrill. He would sit there in his booth

with the speakers blasting so loud I thought he must have been going deaf. But then he would hear something in the mix that no one else could, and he would motion for Larry to stop the tape. One time I saw him point to the end violinist in a row of ten and say, “You. Sounds like you’re a little flat. Check your A string.” The guy checked his tuning, and Phil was right. It was amazing.

A lot of people have asked me how Phil created his wall of sound, but to understand Phil’s sound, you have to understand Phil. The wall of sound was really just a reflection of his own personality, which was very extravagant. When Phil made a record, he might start out with the same basic tracks as everyone else—drums, guitars, bass, and vocals. But then he’d always add in more sounds, because he wanted his records to be as extravagant as he was. He didn’t have any use for a record unless it was at least ten times bigger than life. Phil was one guy who believed that *more* is more.

When he walked into a recording studio, Phil was always looking for a new rule he could break. He wasn’t afraid to try anything. I remember there was this little meter on the tape machines that told you how loud the volume was, and it had a needle that would go into the red zone whenever the sound got too loud or distorted. Well, everyone in the record business lived in fear of making that needle go into the red—but not Phil. Sometimes I think he was only really happy when he was in that red zone.

After being in the studio with Phil for a time, it was only natural that you’d get caught up in his madness. Everyone who worked for him did. With Phil as our inspiration, we’d try to push ourselves as hard as he pushed himself. When I’d sing a lyric, I’d close my eyes and try to feel the truest emotion I could find. And I’d keep pushing myself until I got there. Then Phil would add that sound to the sounds of all the other singers, musicians, and engineers. And the result would be a wonderful combination of textures and personalities and genius that people started calling the wall of sound. You can say what you want about Phil Spector, but no one who was there at Gold Star can ever forget the music we made. No one had ever heard anything like it before, and they’ll never hear anything like it again.

As much as I loved hanging around the booth with Phil, it wasn’t long before I started to miss being out in the studio with the crowd. But the first time I tried to leave the booth and join in on the fun in the studio, Phil made it clear that my place was with him and only him.

“Where are you going, Ronnie?” Phil asked when I got up from my stool. “I’m just going out to sing a few of these backgrounds with the guys.” “No, no, no,” he said. “I don’t want you doing that anymore.”

“But, Phil,” I argued. “Everybody sings backups.”

“Not you, Ronnie,” he said. “Your voice is too distinctive. It comes right through.”

“Well,” I suggested, “maybe I could just go ‘ooh,’ real low.” But Phil wouldn’t budge. So while everyone else was laughing and joking and smoking cigarettes, I’d sit there watching them in silence from behind my glass wall.

## Notes

In recent years there have been some attempts to redress this imbalance as scholars have directed more emphasis to how girl groups and their singers provided a strong point of identification for adolescent female audiences. See in particular, Susan J. Douglas. “Why The Shirelles Mattered,” in *Where The Girls Are: Growing Up Female With the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 83–99, and Jacqueline Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Throughout her autobiography Spector refers to all of the Ronettes (herself, her sister Estelle,

and their cousin Nedra Talley) as half-breeds. Spector's mother was part "black and Cherokee," and her father was white; Nedra's father was Spanish. At that time Spector was still married to his first wife, Annette Merar. Ronnie had left to get a hamburger with Sonny Bono during a lull in a recording session without informing Spector. In her absence, Spector proceeded to go into a rage and trash Gold Star Studios.

## **8. Douglas Wolk, "James Brown," from *Live at the Apollo* (New York: Continuum, 2004): 1–14.**

TODD GITLIN, ON THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 24, 1962, IN HIS BOOK *THE SIXTIES*

"Time was deformed, everyday life suddenly dwarfed and illuminated, as if by the glare of an explosion that had not yet taken place."

### **DIONYSUS LIVE AT THE APOLLO**

In the fall of 1962, the Apollo Theater's stage area appeared to its audience as a box, twice as wide as it was tall. The worn-down wooden planks of the stage floor were perpendicular to the audience. Originally a burlesque house, Hurtig & Seamon's Music Hall, the Apollo had "turned black" in 1934, as risqué stage shows fell to a city crackdown and vaudeville lost the last of its territory to the talkies. Located "in the heart of friendly Harlem," as its ads said, at 125th Street off Eighth Avenue in Manhattan, it booked star acts to play for a solid week, in front of the toughest and most devoted crowds they'd ever face. By the early '60s, the Apollo was well established as the crown jewel of the "chitlin circuit"—the network of small and large halls, mostly in the South and on the East Coast, where black artists would play to black audiences, touring as hard as they could bear.

Standing on the stage of the Apollo at a sold-out show on the night of October 24, 1962, screaming, James Brown would have looked out and seen 1500 people screaming back at him in the audience, split between the floor and the balconies. The walls behind them were a dark crimson; the balconies were decorated with the laurel wreaths that are the emblem of Apollo the god, recalling Daphne, who became a laurel tree to escape his lust. Most of the audience thought there was a good chance they'd be dead within the week.

That night, on stage at the Apollo, James Brown made a new kind of pop record, based on the force of a single, superhuman will, and built around performance itself, even more than performances of particular songs. *Live at the Apollo* is one of the most *charged* albums ever made—electrical arcs fly between Brown and his terrified, ecstatic, howling audience.

Brown has built the structures of the album around himself, so that he can break free of them. Every word and note that *doesn't* come from him, beginning with the opening incantation and ending with the chorus that ends the record, is ritualized, precise, formally scripted; his own performance is unrestricted and overwhelming, an explosion about to take place at the intersection of lust and terror. The moment of sexual abandonment (and erotic abandon) was the subject of all of James Brown's great songs in those days. He sings as if his lover leaving him would be the end of the world, which is also a way of singing about the end of the world. The song ceases to be the song, and becomes James Brown. "Supernatural sounds emanate from him," as Friedrich Nietzsche wrote about man under the charm of the Dionysian. "He is no longer an artist; he has become a work of art."

It cost two dollars to get into the Apollo, and you could stay all day if you wanted to.



WHAT MIKHAIL POLONIK, THE SOVIET PRESS OFFICER AT THE UNITED NATIONS, TOLD AN AMERICAN OFFICIAL THE EVENING BEFORE THE EVENTS RELATED IN THIS BOOK

“This could well be our last conversation. New York will be blown up tomorrow by Soviet nuclear weapons.”

## THE ALBUM

*Live at the Apollo* doesn't say “Live at the Apollo” anywhere on its front cover. The cover painting, by Dan Quest, is an indistinct, chunky watercolor of a crowd clustering around a marquee that looks a little like the Apollo's, framed by a white border; the only other sharp lines belong to something that's presumably a car passing by the front. The type on the marquee says “The Apollo Theatre (*sic*) Presents—In Person! The James Brown \*\*\*Show\*\*\*.” The marquee's side panel adds “James Brown” and, below that, “Voted No. 1 R&B Star of 1962.” The back cover explains that the vote came from a national poll of disc jockeys, although which national poll has never been clear.

On the original front cover, a King Records logo bulges out of the top right-hand corner of the painting. “Vivid Sound,” declares a banner within the car shape down at the bottom—a tag-line that King put on many of its LPs in 1963 and 1964. (“That was just advertising,” King's former chief engineer Chuck Seitz says. “Matter of fact, we were doing a lot of stuff with primitive equipment. Our main console was handmade.”) The back cover's banner type reads “James Brown ‘Live’ at the Apollo,” which is the title that caught on.

The title of the album has never quite stabilized, actually. When the Solid Smoke label reissued it in 1980, it was retitled *Live and Lowdown at the Apollo, Vol. 1*. (The Solid Smoke version is a real oddity, if you can track a copy down: unlike most stereo copies, which let the vocals and instruments overlap, it was mixed with the vocals all the way on one side and the instrumental parts all the way on the other. The company also released a DJ edition, which keeps “Lost Someone” in one piece on side 2, and displaces the long medley to the first side.) And where did that “lowdown” come from? Possibly from Marva Whitney's JB-produced 1969 album, *Live and Lowdown at the Apollo*. The Polydor CD that came out in 1990 is *James Brown Live at the Apollo, 1962*, to distinguish it from his three later *Apollo* albums. At least that's what it says on the spine—the disc itself is labeled as *The Apollo Theater Presents, In Person, The James Brown Show*. The 2004 edition is *James Brown Live at the Apollo (1962)*. For the purposes of this book, it's *Live at the Apollo* or LATA, but call it what you like.

## HOW IT HAPPENED

In 1962, you could've gathered from James Brown's record sales that he was a reasonably successful R&B act—no Ray Charles or Jackie Wilson, certainly, but a solid, dependable singles artist, along the lines of, say, Bobby Bland. Where Brown really shone, though, was in performance. Constantly on the road and a scenery-chewing showman, he'd built up a huge following as a live act; for a few years, he'd been traveling with a full band and a supporting revue.

Brown got the notion in the fall of 1962 that a recording of his live show, along the lines of Ray Charles's 1959 LP *In Person*, would be a good idea. King Records president Syd Nathan, in one of a

string of legendarily awful judgment calls that his business miraculously survived, thought it was a terrible idea, and declared that nobody would ever buy it; he refused to fund a recording. King wasn't one of those big East Coast labels with a big promotional budget, it was an independent operation based in Cincinnati. It was in the business of putting out hit singles, and as far as Nathan was concerned the only reason anybody bought R&B albums was to get the singles, which of course wouldn't appear on a live album.

So Brown made his own arrangements to turn his show into a record. He spent \$5700 recording the album; instead of going for the usual deal with the Apollo where he would be paid a percentage of the door after expenses, he rented out the theater, and arranged for its employees to wear uniforms for his weeklong engagement there—the ushers wore tuxedos. The James Brown Revue opened at the Apollo on Friday, October 19, and ran through the following Thursday, October 25.

### GETTING READY

On the night of October 22, President Kennedy had made a televised appearance announcing a U.S. naval blockade of Cuba, which began at 10 A.M. on the 24th: the Atlantic Fleet was told to shoot, if necessary, at Russian cargo ships bound for Cuba. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara had predicted on the evening of the 23rd that some sort of “challenge” might well happen within 24 hours. American stores, that week, were full of panic buyers, stockpiling food and supplies, but also buying appliances: they were not ready to have their lives end without a dishwasher or a television.

### WHAT THEY WERE STOCKING UP ON IN THE RECORD STORES

According to the local Top 40 station WMCA, the best-selling record in New York City stores the week of October 24, 1962, was the Contours' “Do You Love Me.” Nationally, it was Bobby “Boris” Pickett's “Monster Mash.”

### THE NO. 1 HIT ON RADIO MOSCOW

That would be the statement, repeated every half-hour on October 24, that the naval blockade would “unleash nuclear war.”

### WEDNESDAY MORNING

John F. Kennedy held a meeting with his cabinet at 10 A.M. Robert McNamara told him that the Navy's procedure upon encountering Russian submarines would be to drop “practice depth charges” to get them to surface. Robert Kennedy wrote, later that day, that his brother's “hand went up to his face & covered his mouth and he closed his fist. His eyes were tense, almost gray.”

In a flat in London, Sylvia Plath wrote her poem “Cut,” with its images of a thumb wound transformed into a military nightmare: “Out of a gap / A million soldiers run / Redcoats, every one.”

At the Apollo, Hal Neely, the coordinator of the Brown recording project and James Brown's longtime business partner, possibly assisted by Tom Nola, set up microphones to tape that day's performances on a big rented AMPEX tape machine.

### WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

October 24, 1962, was U.N. Day, and at 3:00 in the afternoon, as the James Brown revue was already well underway, there was a gala concert in the United Nations General Assembly Hall, about four

miles southeast of the Apollo. Yevgeni Mravinsky conducted the Leningrad Philharmonic with violinist David Oistrakh, and a gala reception was held for the musicians afterwards, or at least as gala as possible under the circumstances. Secretary-General U Thant, meanwhile, was desperately trying to convince the American and Soviet governments to cool down their aggression for a few weeks; he made a statement to the Security Council that “the very fate of mankind” was at stake.

*The Manchurian Candidate* played in theaters for the first time.

The Soviet Union launched Sputnik 22, a space probe intended to fly past Mars. As it was going into Earth orbit, it exploded. American “early warning” radar systems in Alaska detected the debris; for a few minutes, NORAD observers thought it was the start of a nuclear ICBM attack. NORAD’s Command Post logs for the day are still classified.

### WEDNESDAY EVENING

CBS showed a special at 7:30: *The Other Face of Dixie*, about public-school integration in the South.

At the Countee Cullen Library at 138th and Lenox in Manhattan, a documentary on lunchroom sit-in demonstrations was screened at 8:00.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at Harvard Law School’s Forum on “The Future of Integration.” Across the street from him, Todd Gitlin and the Harvard peace group Tocsin organized a rally with Stuart Hughes and Barrington Moore, Jr.; both drew over a thousand spectators. “Until the news was broadcast [on Saturday the 27th] that Khrushchev was backing down,” Gitlin wrote in *The Sixties*, “the country lived out the awe and truculence and simmering near-panic always implicit in the thermonuclear age.”

### AMATEUR NIGHT

The crowds to get into James Brown’s show at the Apollo stretched around the block, by all reports. Wednesday nights were, and still generally are, amateur nights at the Apollo; the amateurs were always featured at the beginning of the 11:00 show. You’d rub the stump of the “Tree of Hope,” someone would announce what song you’d be performing, and you’d have a cruel and hungry audience waiting for you. If you were less than stellar, it was the hook for you—the comedy “stagehand” Porto Rico would chase you off the stage. If you were Sarah Vaughan or Ruth Brown, winning at amateur night was the first step to stardom. If you weren’t, it didn’t generally make much of a difference. But the amateur night audiences were screamers—the final show Wednesday would have the most enthusiastic audience response, and the most warmed-up band, of the week.

(There is a long-circulating tale that James Brown competed in amateur night sometime in the ’50s, in a shirt and shoes that stage manager Sandman Sims lent him. Brown vehemently denies it in his autobiography, *The Godfather of Soul*, and it does sound like one of those stories that’s way too good to be true.)

Immediately before the amateur-night show, at 10:52 P.M., President Kennedy’s staff read him a cable from Premier Khrushchev, to the effect that the American blockade was “an act of aggression which pushes mankind toward the abyss of a world nuclear-missile war,” and that he would not tell Soviet ships to comply with it.

Meanwhile, the Strategic Air Command went to DEFCON 2, the highest level of military alert it had

ever reached; DEFCON 1 would have been nuclear war.

## STAR TIME

*Live at the Apollo* begins *in medias res*, cutting into the middle of a speech. “So now ladies and gentlemen it is *star time* are you ready for STAR TIME?” announces Lucas “Fats” Gonder, the James Brown Orchestra’s organist and the show’s emcee. At this point, the show has already been going on for a good hour or so. “Star time” doesn’t mean “seeing James Brown for the first time”—he’s already spent quite a bit of time on stage—it means the part of the show where he comes up front and sings.

Here’s what probably happened in that night’s late show between the amateur-night feature and Star Time (suggested by Alan Leeds’ copious notes):

The James Brown Orchestra almost certainly opened the show with a short instrumental set—songs like “Suds” (a composition credited to drummer Nat Kendrick, featuring a ringing guitar hook from Les Buie) and “Night Flying.” Sometimes Brown played on the band’s instrumental recordings, sometimes he didn’t, but they tended to appear on albums with titles like *James Brown Presents His Band and Five Other Great Artists*. The opening set, though, would have been the band playing without Brown, which they still do even now. The band was on a riser at the back of the stage, in two tiers. The front of the riser was decorated with a musical staff, with notes running all the way across it; the horn section (trumpeters Lewis Hamlin, Jr., Roscoe Patrick and Teddy Washington, saxophonists William Burgess, Al “Brisco” Clark, Clifford “Ace King” MacMillan and St. Clair Pinckney, and trombonist Dicky Wells) stood behind waist-high music stands with pictures of saxophones on them. Hamlin, who was celebrating his 32nd birthday that day, was the musical director of the band in those days—the 1990 CD of LATA misspells his name as “Louis Hamblin.”

The Orchestra was followed by the Brownies, a dancing chorus who’d joined the revue in September 1961, before which they’d been called the Hortense Allen Dancers. At the time of the Apollo show, they included Helen Riley, Rusty Williams and Pat Perkins, and probably a couple of others; there’s a publicity photo of them wearing feathered headdresses, feathered right (but not left) wristbands, feathered bikini bottoms and feathered boots, along with bikini tops that are some kind of advanced (but featherless) sartorial disaster. They’re posed in front of a Mondrian-style geometrical backdrop, grinning like they’re in on a secret. The picture is captioned in awkward Letraset lettering: “THE BROWN IES DANCING DOLLS FEAT WITH JAMES BROWN SHOW.” (The Brownies don’t appear to be the same people as the Brownettes, who recorded a JB-produced single a few years later.)

Then James Brown himself came on and sat in for a few instrumentals with the band, first on organ (starting with “Mashed Potatoes U.S.A.,” a single that had been released earlier in October), then on drums (“Doin’ the Limbo” and “Choo-Choo (Locomotion)”). The Apollo held a dance contest during this segment of the show; there exists a single, blurry photograph of it, with three sharply dressed teenagers doing the mashed potatoes at the front of the stage, while the rhythm section grooves and the horn players look expectantly at Brown, who’s sitting at the organ.

Several hundred miles away, President Kennedy called Robert McNamara, who assured him that U.S. armed forces would be ready to invade Cuba in seven days.

2004

**9. Stanley Booth, "The Memphis Soul Sound," *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 8, 1969.**

BEFORE THE altar at the Clayborn Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Memphis, Tennessee, there are three white coffins. Outside, in a freezing drizzle, hundreds of people with umbrellas are trying to shove past the ones who have stopped at the church entrance to buy the glossy 8 × 10 photographs being sold there. The photographs show six teenaged boys, one of them white, the rest Negro, looking like a team of bright young pool hustlers in silk suits with short, double-breasted jackets and black shirts with long roll collars. The name of the group is printed at the bottom: THE BAR-KAYS.

The photographs cost a dollar, but inside you are given an eight-page illustrated Program. "OBSEQUIES," the cover announces in gothic print, "of the late Carl Cunningham, Jimmy Lee King, Matthew Kelly." Then there is another of the Bar-Kays' promotional pictures, with no indication which of them is which. Everybody knows that Carl is the one smiling in the center, and Jimmy is the one with glasses, kneeling down front. Matthew is not in the picture, because he was not a Bar-Kay, but the Bar-Kays' valet.

James Alexander, the plump boy standing at the left, was not on the plane that crashed a week earlier, killing several people, including the Bar-Kays' employer, singer Otis Redding. Ben Cauley, with a lip goatee, kneeling opposite Jimmy King, was the only survivor. The other two Bar-Kays are in Madison, Wisconsin. Phalon Jones, with the nicely processed hair, is at a local funeral parlor, and Ronnie Caldwell, the lanky white boy, is still in Lake Monona, where the crash occurred.

Inside the Program, on facing pages, there are individual photographs and biographical sketches of Jimmy King and Carl Cunningham. Jimmy, the group's guitarist and leader, "constantly sought to produce the degree of excellence in his performance that would bring kings to their feet and comfort and solace to men of lowest degree." Carl was a drummer, and "the music which poured from his soul reached the hearts of thousands of souls around the world.

The rhythm of his drums still beats out a melody which lingers on and on." Matthew, the valet, is not pictured, but does receive his own, rather stark, biography: "His formal education began in the Memphis School System and continued until God moved in heaven and pronounced that his pilgrimage through life had ended."

The old-fashioned church, with tall stained-glass windows and an overhanging semicircular balcony, is packed to the walls with mourners. A very fat nurse is on duty, and pretty girls in ROTC uniforms are acting as ushers. As the white-gloved pallbearers come down the center aisle, the Booker T. Washington High School Band, seated up in the choir-loft, begins a slow, shaking rendition of "When Day Is Done," and all the relatives, friends and fans of the Bar-Kays stand in silent tribute.

In a square on Beale Street, just a block away, the figure of W. C. Handy, molded in brass, stands in the rain. Since the Civil War there have been many funerals of young men who died in the pursuit of their music. In the old days they died of train wrecks, shooting scrapes, or unmentionable diseases. Now there are other hazards, but the ritual, the honor, remains the same. At the Clayborn Temple, an usher with creamed-coffee skin dabs at her long-lashed eyes, and somehow you cannot help thinking that the Bar-Kays might have lived out their lives and become old men without

achieving anything to equal this glorious traditional celebration.

The official eulogy is presented by one of the church elders, a white-haired gentleman who speaks briefly and eloquently, and closes with a memory: “When I was a boy on Beale Street, we had no electric streetlamps. It was the era of the gaslight, and every evening towards dark the lamplighter would come along in his cart. Frequently night would overtake him as he proceeded slowly down the street, so that as you looked after him, he would vanish in the blackness, and you could not see where he was, but by the glowing light of the lamps, you could see where he had been.

“Now these boys have gone from us into the darkness where we can no longer see them. But when we hear a certain melody and rhythm, when we hear that *soul sound*—then we will remember, and we will know where they have been.”

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*The early blues musicians were relatively unsophisticated performers, playing unamplified guitar, harmonica, and such primitive instruments as the jug and the tub bass. Professional songwriters, like W.C. Handy, and early recording companies, such as Vocalion and RCA Victor, capitalized on the initial popularity of the blues. But the Depression brought an end to the profits, and the Memphis music business did not revive until after World War Two, with another generation of blues men. They played amplified instruments and for the first time attracted a sizable white audience. A record producer has labelled the early blues “race” music, but the wider appeal and newly added heavy back beat caused the music of Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and Howlin’ Wolf to be called rhythm and blues.*

Elvis Presley in his earliest recordings combined the music of the country whites with rhythm and blues, and therefore probably deserves to be remembered as the first modern soul singer. As one contemporary soul musician has said, “Country and western music is the music of the white masses. Rhythm and blues is the music of the Negro masses. Today soul music is becoming the music of all the people.”

Presley’s reign was followed by a period of weak, derivative rock and roll, lasting from the late ’50s through the early ’60s, until the advent of the Beatles. The Beatles themselves, in the beginning, were not essentially different from the better white pop groups, such as Dion and the Belmonts. But the progress of their music toward greater complexity prepared the way for public acceptance of the candid lyrics and experimental techniques that have always been part of the Memphis sound.

The “new freedom” enjoyed by the pop community was present on the 1920s’ recordings of Furry Lewis and Cannon’s Jug Stompers; it was there on the early Sun records of Elvis Presley and Howlin’ Wolf; and it exists now on the Stax/Volt recordings of Sam and Dave, Otis Redding, and the Mar-Keys. The Mar-Keys, whose rhythm section records alone under the name Booker T. and the MGs (Memphis Group) work as the Stax/Volt house band. The Bar-Kays were hired and trained by Stax to be the road band, because the Mar-Keys, almost constantly busy recording with the company’s artists, limit their public engagements to weekends and special occasions, such as Otis Redding’s appearance last summer at the Monterey Pop Festival.

At the festival, that celebration of the psychedelic/freak-out/blow-your-mind pop culture, it was sometimes difficult to tell the musicians from the dervishes. The Who exploded smoke bombs and demolished their instruments onstage. Jimi Hendrix, having made a variety of obscene overtures to

his guitar, set fire to it, smashed it, and threw the fragments at the audience. But, as one journalist put it, “the most tumultuous reception of the Festival” went to Otis and the Mar-Keys, all of them conservatively dressed and groomed, succeeding with nothing more than musicianship and a sincere feeling for the roots of the blues.

These basic qualities have characterized Memphis music from the beginning, but they had never before raised it to such a position of leadership. In the next few months, Otis would be voted the world’s leading male singer by the British pop music journal *Melody Maker*. The same poll would rate Steve Cropper, the Mar-Keys’ guitarist, fifth among musicians. *Billboard* magazine named Booker T. and the MGs the top instrumental group of the year, as did the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS), and the National Association of Radio Announcers, which also selected the MGs’ hit single, “Hip Hug-Her,” as the year’s best instrumental recording. NARAS voted Carla Thomas, a Stax vocalist, the most promising female artist of the year. The US armed forces in Vietnam named her their favorite singer.

Earlier in the year, Otis, the Mar-Keys, Sam and Dave, Carla Thomas and other Stax/Volt artists had completed a successful European tour, out of which came a series of powerful live recordings. The Beatles wanted to record an album at the Stax/Volt studios, but security problems made it impossible. The album was to have been produced by guitarist Cropper, who, according to George Harrison, is “fahntahstic.”

The technical ability possessed by the Memphis musicians can be acquired, but their feeling of affinity with the music seems to be inbred. The Memphis soul sound grows out of a very special environment.

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*The Mar-Keys, and Booker T. and the MGs, are listed as honorary pallbearers on the Programme, along with the Heat Waves, the Tornadoes and the Wild Cats. The Bar-Kays were protégés of the Mar-Keys, and the relationship was like that between older and younger brothers. Carl Cunningham had grown up at Stax, having been a fixture in the place since the day he came in off the street with his shoeshine kit. Stax bought him his first set of drums.*

Now Booker and two of the MGs were sitting down front in a side pew, just behind the families of the dead Bar-Keys. I had seen none of them since the crash, and when the eulogy ended and the band began to play the recessional, I slipped down the aisle to where they were seated. Booker, at the end of the pew, saw me first. Booker has a college degree and drives a Buick. One gets the impression that he has never made any sort of mistake, not even an inappropriate gesture. As I approached, he extended his hand, the one nearest me and nearest his heart. We squeezed hands silently, and then he passed by, followed by Steve Cropper. Steve looks like a very young Gary Cooper. He produced the records of Otis Redding, who was to be buried the next day. Steve is an enigma. He shook my hand briefly but warmly and said, “How’s it going?” He is white, as is bassist Donald “Duck” Dunn. Duck, short and plump, seems more of a good ole boy than anyone at Stax, but he is the only one who has been influenced by the hippies. When he came back from Monterey he let his red hair and beard grow, and now, with his little round belly and cherry-like lower lip, he looks like a blend of Sleepy, Happy and Dopey. We shook hands and walked together up the aisle. At the front door Duck reached into his pocket for a cigarette and said, in the manner of Southern country people who express their greatest sorrow as if it were an annoyance hardly worth mentioning, “Been to one today, got to get up and go to another one tomorrow.”



*Two weeks before, Otis Redding and Steve Cropper had been sitting on folding chairs, facing each other, in the dark cavern-like grey-and-pink studio at the Stax/Volt recording company. Stax is located in a converted movie theater in McLemore Street in Memphis, next to a housing project. The marquee is still there, with red plastic letters that spell “Soulsville, USA.” The sign was changed once to read “Stay in School,” but the kids from the project threw rocks at it, so it was changed back again.*

Otis Redding grew up in a housing project and left school at fifteen, but now when he came to the studio he was in a chauffeured Continental. Still, he had not forgotten who he was, where he had come from. The boys from the project knew this, and called Otis their main man. When he got out of the long white car and started across the sidewalk, he took the time to say, “What’s happening?” to the boys in bright pants, standing at the curb.

*“I was born in Terrell County, Georgia, in a town called Dawson. After I was one year old we moved to Macon. I’ve stayed in Macon all my life. First we lived in a project house. We lived there for about fourteen years. Then we had to move out to the outskirts of the city. I was going to Ballard Hudson High School, and I kind of got unlucky. My old man got sick, so I had to come out of school and try to find some kind of gig to help my mother. I got a job drilling water wells in Macon. It’s a pretty easy job, it sounds hard but it’s pretty easy. The hardest thing about it is when you have to change bits. They have big iron bits that weigh 250 pounds, and we’d have to change them, put them on the stem so we could drill—that was the hardest thing about it.*

“I was almost sixteen at this time, just getting started singing. I used to play gigs and not make any money. I wasn’t looking for money out of it then. I just wanted to be a singer.

“I listened to Little Richard and Chuck Berry a lot. Little Richard is actually the guy that inspired me to start singing. He was from Macon, too. My favorite song of his was ‘Heebie Jeebies.’ I remember it went, ‘My bad luck baby put the jinx on me.’ That song really inspired me to start singing, because I won a talent show with it. This was at the Hillview Springs Social Club—it’s not there any more—I won the talent show for fifteen Sunday nights straight with that song, and then they wouldn’t let me sing no more, wouldn’t let me win that five dollars any more. So that...really inspired me.

“Later on I started singing with a band called Johnnie Jenkins and the Pinetoppers. We played little night-club and college dates, played at the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech. Then in 1960 I went to California to cut a record, ‘She’s All Right.’ It was with Lute Records, the label the Hollywood Argyles were on. It didn’t do anything. I came back to Macon and recorded a song I wrote called ‘Shout-bama-lama.’ A fellow named Mickey Murray had a hit off the song recently, but it didn’t sell when I did it. It kind of got me off to a start, though, and then I came to Memphis in November 1961.

“Johnnie Jenkins was going to record, and I came with him. I had this song, ‘These Arms of Mine,’ and I asked if I could record it. The musicians had been working with Johnnie all day, and they didn’t have but twenty minutes before they went home. But they let me record ‘These Arms of Mine.’ I give John Richbourg at WLAC in Nashville a lot of credit for breaking that record, because he played it and kept playing it after everybody else had forgot about it. It took nine months to sell, but it sold real good, and—and I’ve just been going ever since.”

Otis is playing a bright red dime-store guitar, strumming simple bar chords as he sings: “Sittin’ in the mornin’ sun,  
I’ll be sittin’ when the evenin’ comes—”



The front of the guitar is cracked, as if someone has stepped on it. As he sings, Otis watches Steve, who nods and nods, bending almost double over his guitar, following Otis's chords with a shimmering electric response.

“Sittin’ in the mornin’ sun—”

“But I don’t know why he’s sittin’,” Otis says, rocking back and forth as if he were still singing. “He’s just sittin’. Got to be more to it than that.” He pauses for a moment, shaking his head. Then he says, “Wait. Wait a minute,” to Steve, who has been waiting patiently.

“I left my home in  
Georgia, Headed for  
the Frisco bay—”

He pauses again, runs through the changes on his fractured guitar, then sings: “I had nothing to live for, Look like nothing’s gonna come my way—”

“I write music everywhere, in motels, dressing rooms—I’ll just play a song on the guitar and remember it. Then, usually, I come in the studio and Steve and I work it out. Sometimes I’ll have just an idea, maybe for a bass line or some chord changes—maybe just a feeling—and we see what we can make out of it. We try to get everybody to groove together to the way a song feels.”

When Steve and Otis have the outlines of a song, they are joined by the rest of the MGs. Booker and Duck come in first, followed by drummer Al Jackson. Duck is telling Booker about his new stereo record player. “I got me a nice one, man, with components. You can turn down one of the speakers and hear the words real clear. I been listening to the Beatles. Last night I played *Revolver*, and on ‘Yellow Submarine,’ you know what one of ‘em says? I think it’s Ringo, he says, ‘Paul is a queer.’ He really does, man. ‘Paul-is-a-queer.’ bigger’n shit.”

Booker sits at the piano, Duck gets his bass, which has been lying in its case on the worn red rug, and they begin to pick up the chord patterns from Steve and Otis. Al stands by, listening, his head tilted to one side. Duck asks him a question about counting the rhythm, and Steve looks up to say, “In a minute he’ll want to know what key we’re in.” Duck sticks out his lower lip. He plays bass as fluently as if it were guitar, plucking the stout steel strings with his first two fingers, holding a cigarette between the other two. Booker sits erect, his right hand playing short punctuating notes, his left hand resting on his left knee. Otis is standing now, moving around the room, waving his arms as he conducts these men, his friends, who are there to serve him. He looks like a swimmer, moving effortlessly underwater. Then something happens, a connection is made in Al Jackson’s mind, and he goes to the drums, baffled on two sides with wallboard. “One, two,” he announces. “One-two-three-four.” And for the first time they are all together, everyone has found the groove.

The Mar-Keys drift into the studio and sit on folding chairs behind another baffle, one wall of which has a small window. They listen, sucking on reeds, blowing into mouthpieces, as Otis and the rhythm section rehearse the song. When Steve calls, “Hey, horns! Ready to record?” they are thrown into confusion, like a man waked in the middle of the night. They have nothing to record; there are, as yet, no horn parts. Steve and Otis develop them by singing to each other. “De-de-da-dee,” Steve says. “De-de-da-daaaah,” says Otis, as if he were making a point in an argument. When they have the lines they want, they sing them to the Mar-Keys, starting with the verse part, which the Mar-Keys will forget while learning the parts for the chorus. After a few tries, however, they know both parts, and are

ready to record. "That feels good, man, let's cut it."

During the rehearsal, one of the neighborhood kids, wearing blue jeans, an old cloth cap, and Congress basketball sneakers with one green and one yellow lace, has slipped into the studio. He sits behind a cluster of microphones, unnoticed by Otis, who passes directly by him on his way to the far corner of the room, where he strikes a wide, flat-footed stance facing a wallboard partition. Otis can hear but cannot see Al Jackson, holding one stick high as if it were a baton, counting four, then rolling his eyes toward the ceiling and starting to play.

After "Dock of the Bay" was recorded, Steve and Booker added guitar and piano fills. The song boomed into the studio from a speaker high on the rear wall, and Booker played precise little bop, bop-bop figures, while Steve followed the vocal with an almost quivering blues line. The speaker went dead, then the engineer's voice came: "Steve, one note's clashing."  
"Sure it is," Steve tells him. "It was written to clash." Which, in point of fact, is not true, since nothing has been written down so far. "Let's do it once more," Steve says. "We can do that bridge better. I can. First part's a groove."

Inside the control room, Otis and Duck are talking. "I wish you all *could* go with me to the Fillmore on Christmas," Otis says.

"Man, so do I. I got some *good* fren's in San Francisco. We could rent one of them yachts." "I *got* one already. Three bedrooms, two baths, sumbitch is nice, man."

"My ole lady's kill me," Duck says.

When the recording is finished, Steve and Booker come into the control room, followed after a moment by the little boy in Congress sneakers. The tape is played back at a painful volume level. Steve and Otis stare deep into each other's eyes, carrying a kind of telepathic communication. The little boy, looking up at the speaker the music is coming from, says, "I like that. That's good singin'. I'd like to be a singer myself."

"If you got the feelin', you can sing soul. You just sing from the heart, and—there's no difference between nobody's heart."

"That's it," Otis says when the record ends. "That's a mother," says Booker.

*Nearly every man at Stax dresses in a kind of uniform: narrow cuffless pants, Italian sweaters, shiny black slip-on shoes. But now, standing in the lobby, there is a tall young Negro man with a shaved head and full beard. He is wearing a Russian-style cap, a white pullover with green stripes, bright green pants, black nylon see-through socks with green ribs, and shiny green lizard shoes. In a paper sack he is carrying a few yards of imitation zebra material, which he intends to have made into a suit, to be worn with a white mohair overcoat. His name is Isaac Hayes. With his partner, David Porter, Hayes has written such hit songs as "Soul Man" and "Hold On, I'm Comin'" for Stax singers Sam and Dave. Porter, dressed less spectacularly in a beige sweater and corduroy Levis, is sitting at a desk in the foyer, not making a phone call.*

"Come on," says Hayes. "Let's go next door and write. I'm hot." "I can't go nowhere till I take care of this chick."

“Which chick is this?”

“You know which chick. You think I ought to call her?” “What the hell do *I* care? I want to go write.”

“Well, she’s occupying my mind.” “Let’s go, man, let’s go. I’m hot.”

Porter shrugs and follows Hayes to an office next door where there are three folding chairs, a table littered with old issues of *Billboard* and *Hit Parader*, and a baby grand piano with names and initials carved into it. Hayes sits down at the piano and immediately begins to play church chords, slow and earnest. As he plays he hums, whistles, sings.

Porter hums along. He has brought with him a black attaché case, and now he opens it, takes out a ball-point pen and several sheets of white typing paper, and begins writing rapidly. After about three minutes he stops, takes a pair of shades from his pocket, puts them on, throws back his head, and sings: “You were raised from your cradle to be loved by only me—”

He begins the next line, then stops. “Don’t fit, I’m sorry.” He rewrites quickly and starts to sing again. Then Hayes stops playing, turns to Porter, and says, “You know what? That ain’t exactly killing me right there. Couldn’t we get something going like: ‘You can run for so long, then you’re tired, you can do so and so —’”

“Yeah,” Porter says. “Got to get the message in.”

The door opens, and a small man wearing a black suit, black hat and black mustache comes in, leading a very thin girl in an orange wig. “You got to hear this,” the man says, nodding toward the girl, who is visibly shaking. “Are you nervous?” Hayes asks her. “Just relax and enjoy yourself. Don’t worry about us. We just two cats off the street.” The girl smiles weakly and sits down. Porter is writing “Forever Wouldn’t Be Too Long” across the top of the page. Then,

My love will last for you  
Till the morning sun finds  
no dew 'Cause I’m not tired  
of loving you—

He stops, puts down the pen, and yawns: “Naw, I had something flowin’ in my mind.”

“How long you be working?” the man in the black suit asks. “How do I know?” Hayes says. “We don’t observe no time limits.

“Yes,” says Porter, “Hayes will probably be here all night. He don’t observe no time limits.”

Hayes laughs, Porter stomps his right foot once, twice, Hayes strikes a chord, Porter closes his eyes and shouts: “Cross yo’ fingers.” He sings, bouncing, the chair squeaking, getting louder and faster, as if he were singing a song he had heard many times, and not one he was making up in an incredibly fluent improvisation. The girl smiles, then breaks into a giggle. When Porter stops, he groans. “Man, we should’ve had a tape-recorder, I’ll never get that feeling again. Damn! That’s a hit! ‘Cross Yo’ Fingers!’ That’s a hit title!” He turns back to his writing paper and begins to reconstruct the lyrics.

Hayes looks at the girl. “So you’re a singer?” She gulps and nods. The wig, high heels, a tightly belted

raincoat only make her seem thinner and more frightened. “Would you like to sing something for us?”

She swallows and nods again. They pick a song, a key (Hayes asks, “Can you sing that high?”), and she begins to sing. At first her voice trembles, but as she sings it grows stronger. She shuts her eyes and moves softly back and forth, as her voice fills the room. Porter stops writing to watch her. She is so frail looking that one expects her to miss the high notes, but she hits them perfectly each time, as her voice swells, blossoms. Finally she stops, on a long, mellow, vibrating note, opens her eyes, and gulps.

Porter applauds. “Wasn’t-that-beautiful,” he says. “Where did you go to high school?”

Hayes asks the girl. “Manassas.”

“Man—I went to Manassas. How’d you escape the clutches— When did you graduate?” She looks away and does not answer.

“Haven’t you graduated? How old are you?” The girl mumbles

something.

“What?”

“Seventeen,” she whispers.

“Seventeen? A voice like that at seventeen? Old Manassas. Damn, you can’t beat it.” Hayes begins singing the Manassas Alma Mater song. Porter joins in. They get up and start to dance. Porter takes the girl’s hands, and she joins him, singing and dancing. They all whirl around the room, as the man with the mustache closes his eyes and smiles.

*Stax’s only current rival in success is American Studios, on Thomas Street in North Memphis. American has recorded hits by artists as various as Wilson Pickett, the soul singer; Sandy Posey, the country-pop singer; King Curtis, the funky tenor player; Patti La Belle and the Blue Belles, a girls’ singing group; Paul Revere and the Raiders, a white rock group; and the Box Tops, a band of Memphis teenagers whose first record, “The Letter,” outsold even the “Ode to Billy Joe” to become the year’s number one pop single.*

There is no sign outside American, but no one seeing the long sweep of charcoal-gray exterior would expect the place to be anything but a recording studio. American was created in 1962, when a Stax engineer, Lincoln “Chips” Moman, left and formed his own company with Donald Crews, a farmer from Lepanto, Arkansas. Moman, who started out as a house painter, has been described as “the living embodiment of the Memphis Sound.” He has tattooed on his right arm the word “Memphis,” on his left a big red heart. Although he produces most of the records cut at American, he has a reputation for never being at the studio. Donald Crews, who has never produced anything that could not be grown in rows, is almost always there, and he greeted me as I came in. “Used to be a receptionist around here,” he said, “but she took to singin’, and now we don’t have one any more.” With a wave he indicated two gold records on the wall. They had been awarded to Sandy Posey, the ex-receptionist, for her first two recordings, “Born a Woman” and “Single Girl.”

I told Crews that I was writing about the current revival of the Memphis sound, and I wanted to understand it better. He told me that he wanted to, too. “The music business is a mystery to me,” he said. “We’ve had good luck with it—had more than twenty records in the charts this year—but I don’t know how we done it. Only thing I’ve noticed is, down here we’re all independents. All the Memphis studios have been Memphis owned. In New York, or even Nashville, they’re spending Warner Brothers’ money, or CBS’s money, but when we produce a record down here, it comes out of our

own pockets. That makes a little difference. Who you ought to talk to is one of our producers. I believe Dan Penn is in his office upstairs.”

I found Penn, a young blond man wearing blue jeans and bedroom slippers, at his desk playing a ukulele. He told me that he had come to Memphis from Vernon, Alabama, after working for a while as staff guitarist in a studio at Muscle Shoals, because he wanted to produce hit rock and roll records. One of his first was “The Letter.”

“Dan,” I said, “what is it about Memphis?” “It ain’t Memphis,” he said. “It’s the South.”

“Well, what is it about the South?”  
“People down here don’t let nobody tell them what to do.” “But how does it happen that they know what to do?”

He twirled the ukulele by the neck, played two chords, and squinted at me across the desk. “I ain’t any explanation for it,” he said.

Downstairs, I was stopped by a little Negro boy wearing Congress basketball shoes. He looked even scruffier than the one who had been at Otis’s session. “You Wilson?” he asked.

“What?”

“You name Wilson?”

“No,” I said.

“I thought you was Wilson.”

“Sorry,” I said, and started out the door.

“Hey,” the little boy said, “take this.” It was a small grey business card, with an address and the inscription, “Charisma Project.”

I was outside before I thought to wonder where the boy had gotten the card. It was a coincidence, because I was headed for the Charisma Project, but he could have found the card at any of a dozen places. James Dickinson, the Project’s founder, has worked at nearly all the local studios. Under his direction the Project has created theater, recordings, and the annual Memphis Blues Festival, which in recent years has given work to some of the finest old Delta musicians. Dickinson alone in Memphis combines the talents of a musician, songwriter, producer and historian. And it was Dickinson who gave me, at last, a definition of soul.

*The front office of the Charisma Project, located in an old white house on Yates Road in East Memphis, is crowded with sound equipment and antique instruments—a zither, a pump organ, a bass recorder, a drum with one head bearing a hand-painted view of Venice. Dickinson said that his involvement with Memphis music began after an incident which took place when he was twelve years old. “I was downtown with my father. We came out of the Falls Building into Whiskey Chute, and there it was—Will Shade, Memphis Willie B., Gus Cannon, and their jug band, playing ‘Come On Down to My House, Honey, Ain’t Nobody Home But Me.’ I had had formal piano lessons since I was five years old, and all of a sudden here was this awful music. I loved it instantly. I had never known that music could make you feel so good. I started seeking out soul musicians, learning what I could from them. My first teachers were Piano Red, Butterfly Washington and, a little later, Mance Lipscomb.” By his late teens Dickinson was fronting his own band, sharing billing with such early giants of rock as Bo Diddley.*

He spent several years playing organ, guitar and piano at recording sessions in Memphis and Nashville, but since the formation of the Charisma Project he has concentrated on events such as the Blues Festival and on producing records. “Memphis is the center of American popular music,” Dickinson said. “The market goes away at times, but it always comes back, because music that is honest will last. You hear soul music explained in terms of oppression and poverty, and that’s certainly part of it—no soul musician was born rich—but it’s more than that. It’s being proud of your own people, what you come from. That’s soul.”

I’m a Soul Man  
Got what I got the hard way  
And I’ll make it better each  
and every day I’m a Soul Man

The Porter and Hayes song had just become the nation’s number one hit, earning a gold record for Sam and Dave, who would be singing it in Memphis on Saturday night. With Carla Thomas, they were to headline the twentieth edition of the Goodwill Revue, a charity music concert sponsored annually by radio station WDIA.

In 1948 WDIA became the nation’s first radio station with programming exclusively for Negroes. WDIA described itself then as “The Black Spot on Your Radio Dial—50,000 Watts of Black Power.” Now the station has broadened its focus, and the word “Soul” has been substituted for “Black.”

From the beginning WDIA has been involved with projects to aid the community it serves. Proceeds from such events as the Goodwill Revue help to provide and maintain boys’ clubs and recreational centers in poverty areas, Goodwill Homes for juvenile court wards, and a school for handicapped Negro children. Perhaps because of its strictly philanthropic nature—many artists perform without pay, and all WDIA employees, even those who perform, must buy a ticket—the Goodwill Revue has become a sort of love feast of the soul community.

In an annual message to the station’s friends, the general manager said, “In sponsoring these shows, WDIA is merely providing you with a means of expressing your own generosity.” But this year the station was also providing the audience with an opportunity to enjoy its own music at a time when there was more reason than ever to be proud of it.

In previous years, the first half of the program, traditionally reserved for gospel music, has been at least as important as the latter, secular half. But the audience has grown steadily younger and less interested in the old-time religion, and now the gospel groups play to a half-empty house. The Revue was being held in the Mid-South Coliseum, and a scanty crowd, sitting on wooden folding chairs, their feet resting on cardboard matting laid out over an ice-hockey floor, listened coldly to the Evening Doves, the Harmonizing Four, the Gabriel Airs and the Spirit of Memphis Quartet. Only one group, the Jessy Dixon Singers, led by tall, handsome, white-gowned coloratura Aldrea Lenox, created much enthusiasm, with rousing, stomping choruses of “Long As I’ve Got King Jesus, Everything’s All Right.”

During the intermission, nine Negro policemen who had been sitting behind the big, roll-out stage took their folding chairs and went out front, where they could hear better. The Coliseum was nearly filled to its capacity of 14,000 for the opening acts (dancers, minor singing groups) of the Revue’s second half, but the audience did not come to life until the appearance of a great figure in the history

of soul music—Muddy Waters. Wearing an iridescent aquamarine/sapphire silk suit, huge green-and-white jewelled cuff-links, and matching pinky diamonds, Muddy walked onstage, sang the opening bars of one of his earliest recordings, and was greeted by a roar of welcoming applause.

I got a black cat bone, I got a mojo tooth  
I got a John the Conqueror root, I'm gone mess  
with you I'm gone make all you girls lead me  
by the hand  
Then the world will know I'm a hoochie coochie man

The loudspeaker system crackled and spluttered while Muddy was on, but everyone knew the words. During the performance of the next singer, Bobby Bland, the first four rows to the right of the stage began to sway together and to sing, or hum, along with the music, long-held notes in four-part harmony, even anticipating the chord changes. The four rows were filled with the Teen Town Singers, a group of “about sixty talented youngsters” from high schools and junior colleges in the Memphis area, some of whom each year are given scholarships from Goodwill Revue revenues.

*When Carla Thomas was eighteen, she was a Teen Town Singer. That year she wrote and recorded a song called “Gee Whiz,” which made the top ten on the popularity charts, and made her a star. She has seldom been without a hit since, and now as a mature artist she is known as the “Queen of the Memphis Sound.”*

Her material has matured with her, but her first song at the Revue went back to the beginning. She stepped into a pink spot, a big, beautiful, brown girl wearing a white brocade dress flowered with pearly sequins, and sang one of her early successes, “B-A-B-Y.” The Teen Town Singers sang along on every note, inspired by the knowledge that any of them might become Royalty of Soul.

When Carla’s father Rufus Thomas, a WDIA disc jockey with several record successes of his own (his hit, “Walking the Dog,” created one of the dance crazes of the ’60s), joined her for a duet, the atmosphere—was like that of a family reunion. Rufus and Carla sang, “Cause I Love You,” the first song Carla ever recorded, and the first hit, however small, to come out of the Stax/Volt studios. The audience loved it, clapping on the afterbeat, and they might not have allowed them to leave the stage if Sam and Dave had not been scheduled to appear next.

Sam Moore and Dave Prater, along with Carla and the other Stax artists, had taken soul around the world, and now they were bringing it back as number one, the world’s most popular music. Their singing combines all the historical elements of soul music—gospel, blues, rhythm. “They’ll go to church on you in a minute,” a Stax executive has said, and it is an apt description of what they did at the Revue.

With their band, in black pants and turquoise balloon-sleeved shirts, strung out across the stage behind them, Sam and Dave, dressed all in white, singing, dancing, shouting, exhorting the congregation like old-fashioned preachers, created a sustained frenzy of near-religious ecstasy. “Now doggone it, I just want you to do what you want to do.” “Put your hands together and give me some old soul clapping.” “Little louder.” “Little bit louder.” “Do you like it?” “Well, do you like it?” “I said, Do you like it?” “Well, then, let me hear you say YEAH!”

It was nearly midnight when, with their coats off, shirts open and wringing with sweat, they got around to the song that seemed to say it all, for soul music’s past, present and future.

So honey, don’t you fret

'Cause you ain't seen  
nothin' yet I'm a Soul  
Man

The next night, Otis Redding, the King of Memphis Soul Sound, and the Bar-Kays, who would have helped to shape its future, would be dead. It would be, as the Beatles called it, "a bitter tragedy." But the strength of soul music has always been the knowledge of how to survive tragedy. Remembering another great soul star, Otis Redding once said, "I want to fill the silent vacuum that was created when Sam Cooke died." Now Otis's death has left an even greater vacuum. But someone will come along to fill it. He may even be here already, walking down some street in Memphis, wearing Congress sneakers.

1969

## 10. Norman Jopling, "Aretha Franklin: Lady Soul," *Record Mirror*, 18 May 1968

SOME PEOPLE are going around saying that Aretha Franklin is the Queen Of Soul, many people are buying her records, and one person (show compère Johnnie Walker) even said that she was the best coloured girl singer ever to make records.

Now it isn't every girl singer who is fortunate enough to have these things said about her or happen to her, whether you go along with them or not. After chasing around and about the metropolis, I tracked Aretha down to her hotel (in the Penthouse Suite) and asked her a few questions, some of which she answered in length and detail, others which received a mere smile of reply.

As her voice is her fortune, does she do anything to protect it?

"I do vocalistics, if that's what you mean. I was afraid that when I came to Europe I'd end up with laryngitis for the whole trip but I've been lucky this time. My voice changes as I change climate – it goes down about two octaves when I come to a climate like this" (Aretha had been not too happy about our weather, in fact she was welcoming quitting our shores to go back to the USA).

How did she feel when her first record for Atlantic, 'I Never Loved A Man', began to shoot up the US charts, after she had been singing so long without a hit?

### 'RESPECT' POTENTIAL

"To tell the truth, I never expected that song to be a hit. I was surprised. I could see more potential in 'Respect', in fact I can say I knew that would be a hit song. Sometimes I can't get a song right in the recording studio though. We usually work things out beforehand, not like the Memphis studio where they don't plan things like that, but can end up with a master. We usually know what we're going to do. I sing and the musicians kind of fit things around me.

Two of my favourite songs incidentally are 'Rock-A-Bye' which was on Columbia, and 'Chain Of Fools'."

Accompanying Aretha was Ted White, her manager and husband. I asked Aretha if it helped to have Ted as a manager.

"Oh yes. I don't have to worry about the business side. As he's my husband I know I can trust him! I just worry about the singing."



Ted explained that although Aretha had no hits when she was on Columbia (CBS here), there was no question of Aretha's style being "suppressed" by that label.

"I'd call it more of an exploration by Columbia. They gave Aretha the chance to sing all sorts of things", he explained.

"But it was more kind of 'easy listening' as they say in *Cash Box*," said Aretha. "I started off there with more powerful material – very similar to the kind of thing I'm recording now with Atlantic – and went on to slower music. But I can say that my big records and my success has been due to the backing which Atlantic have put behind me. I can say that I wouldn't have had these hit records if it wasn't for Atlantic, and their organisation."

Aretha reads a lot of newspapers, not too many books, and likes mostly simple things and straightforward people. What did she think about British audiences and how do they compare with their US counterparts?

"I thought maybe they'd like me," she smiled. "But I never expected this, truly. It was so wonderful. My American audiences are pretty mixed. I get all sorts of people, old and young. It's nice. I don't record with my band though, we use Atlantic musicians."

Did Aretha look back much on old times when she wasn't so successful? Did she enjoy them?

"Oh, we had good times right enough. I was in a group, a gospel group with my sisters Erma and Carol. Carol is with me here as part of my backing group. We split up and went our separate ways, to do different things. My big ambition later on when I was with Columbia was to have a big record. Ted and I have written quite a few songs – but the name on the label credits would be 'White' – we write under my married name. I like writing, and don't confine myself to just the words, or just the music. But I don't particularly write songs with myself in mind."

Ted White explained that they had recently founded the Aretha Franklin Foundation, which gave to charity, and this was an activity Aretha had long been interested in. Aretha's father still sings gospel and has recorded over thirty gospel albums for the Chess label. Aretha's favourite female vocalists are Judy Garland, Shirley Bassey and Clara Ward. And she digs Charles Aznavour – she even wants to cut an album of his songs when she gets the chance.

I asked Aretha that as she'll undoubtedly be singing in many years time, would she still be doing numbers like 'Respect' and 'Think' (her latest single)?

"No, I shouldn't think so," she laughed. "Music changes, and I'm gonna change right along with it."

© Norman Jopling, 1968

**11. David Hajdu, "Ray Charles: Unchained Heart," *The New Republic*, December 13, 2004.**

IN MARCH 1962, Atco Records issued a harbinger of the 2004 winter movie season: the album *Bobby Darin Sings Ray Charles*, in which one of two popular singers famous for crossing multiple genre lines paid homage to the other. Hollywood delivered Jamie Foxx as Charles in Taylor Hackford's screen biography *Ray* (which was called *Unchain My Heart* prior to its release), followed by Kevin Spacey in a self-directed Darin bio called *Beyond the Sea* (which should have been titled *Bobby*). In the former, we see Charles, early in his career, imitating both Nat "King" Cole and the suave blues singer Charles Brown. "I can mimic anybody I hear," he explains in the film. Of course, Ray Charles found a genuinely distinctive and profoundly influential voice of his own, and he employed it to monumental effect for decades, as the absence of a record called *Ray Charles Sings Bobby Darin* reminds us. When Darin took up rock 'n' roll, abandoned it for swing, and then dropped that for folk and country, he subordinated himself to each type of music; he shrank to fit every style he tried. Charles, by contrast, drew from all those genres and others, subsuming them into his own musical personality; he grew with every genre he absorbed.

The muscular and sensual music of Ray Charles was in the air again, in part because of the new movie and all the talk about Foxx's uncanny performance, and also because Charles's last album, *Genius Loves Company*, a collection of duets with contemporary pop stars and other big-name singers released not long after Charles's death from liver disease that June, proved to have enough of the intended crossover appeal to become a bigger hit than Charles had had in many years. Suddenly nostalgic for Charles, I bought a small pile of CD re-issues of his early albums on Atlantic, which I had only on vinyl LP. (Some of his best output, recorded for ABC Records between 1960 and 1973, is not available on CD; Charles retained ownership of the masters and always focused on touring and making new recordings, rather than on his past work.) "He's really popular lately," the thirtyish man at the checkout counter said as he rang up my sale. Noticing that one of the CDs in the stack was titled *The Genius of Ray Charles*, he asked earnestly, "Is that true? Was he really a genius?"

If the Atlantic marketing people were the first to say so, no one except Charles himself ever came forth to argue otherwise. Frank Sinatra called Ray Charles "the only true genius in our business" and demonstrated his admiration by emulating Charles on the gutsier recordings he started making in the mid-1960s. If not for Charles, we would surely not have "That's Life" and its ilk. (Whatever the merits of that music, it is striking for Charles's effect on the generally impenetrable Sinatra.) Nor would we have the countless rock artists, from Mick Jagger to Bruce Springsteen, who have aimed to convey an earthy authenticity by singing in a raw, volatile growl. Nor, arguably, would we have the very art of soul music, which Ray Charles virtually invented by combining traditional gospel music with postwar rhythm and blues.

Charles, who had been raised in merciless poverty in the rural South, would always take pride in his status as "raw- ass country." He was far too humble about his musical achievements and uncomfortable with his longtime sobriquet. As he told David Ritz, the co-author of his memoir, *Brother Ray: Ray Charles' Own Story*, which appeared in 1978, "I never came up with that 'genius' tag. Someone else did. I don't like the genius business. It's not me.

Erroll Garner was a genius. Art Tatum. Oscar Peterson. Charlie Parker. Artie Shaw. Dizzy [Gillespie] was the genius.... I learned it all from others."

Before he went blind at the age of seven (from an undiagnosed disease that he later believed was glaucoma), Charles had had a bit of musical coaching from a boogie-woogie piano player who ran an all-purpose shop near his saltbox house in the backwoods of northern Florida. His sole formal training came at the state-run St. Augustine School for the Deaf and the Blind, where he learned to read and

to write music in Braille and to play classical studies on the piano and the clarinet. Upon the death of his mother when he was fifteen, Charles quit school and started pursuing work as a jazz pianist. After a few years of apprenticeship, he headed for the city by bus, making Seattle his destination of choice because it was the farthest city from his hometown in the continental United States.

All the pianists Charles said he admired most—Garner, Tatum, and Peterson—had an orchestral approach to the keyboard. Their conceptions are epic, layered with ornament and intensely dynamic. That's not the way Charles played (at least not on record, nor in his known performances); to the contrary, he was a forceful but disciplined pianist who tended to limit himself to laying down a rhythmic foundation for his own vocals. His contrapuntal work was mainly chordal, and the obbligato lines that he would play were imaginative but sparse, like those of Nat Cole or Hank Jones. Even on instrumentals, such as "Doodlin'" and "'Deed I Do" on his non-vocal jazz albums, Charles played with the discretion of a sympathetic accompanist.

It's his singing that was orchestral. The proof of Charles's genius lies not in the breadth of his influence but in the depth of his music, and he was a singer of almost otherworldly originality and emotive power. His phrasing was naturalistic and seemingly spontaneous, yet the lyrics invariably swung to a pulse. Verses exploded with surprise: he might stop dead and then whisper a few words or break into a whoop. Apparently lost in ecstasy, he would burst into a giddy falsetto or interject a conspiratorial aside: "Looky here...." Although the gravelly texture of his voice is immediately recognizable and has been widely imitated, he could conjure a considerable range of timbres, and he used them commandingly, often playfully. On his familiar rendition of "America the Beautiful," from 1972, he begins the second chorus like a choirboy, crooning in a sweet tenor, and then appears to change characters: now a preacher, he hurls out the words in fiery bursts.

Charles's vocal intonation was so complex and nuanced that he could make a world out of a note. He rarely sang any note dead on pitch, but preferred to work in shades of microtones around the center. Often he would sing near the top end of notes—almost sharp but not quite, to conjure a sense of yearning or, when he pushed the effect, a feeling of teetering on the emotional brink. At other times he would hang toward the bottom of a note to evoke melancholy or to set the listener up for a subtly uplifting glissando at the end of a phrase.

One of the secrets of Charles's potency as a singer is the extraordinary sensitivity under the powerhouse surface of his presentation. A brawny, square-jawed man from the backcountry with a rough-hewn voice, Charles was also a person of delicate temperament, prone to crying jags. He generally drank milk because his stomach was too sensitive to tolerate tap water. "I know that men ain't supposed to cry, but I think that's wrong," he said in his book. "Crying's always been a way for me to get things out which are buried deep, deep down. When I sing, I often cry. Crying is feeling, and feeling is only human. Oh yes, I cry." When, in 1979, the state of Georgia proclaimed his recording of Hoagy Carmichael's "Georgia on My Mind" the official state song, Charles stood in the chamber of the state legislature and bawled. "I felt kind of stupid standing there crying," Charles later recalled, "but I couldn't help it."

The same unfettered emotionality permeates his music, not only ballads such as "What'll I Do," "You Don't Know Me," and "Born to Lose," but also many up-tempo numbers such as "Just for a Thrill" and "Let the Good Times Roll," which have something—a gentleness at their heart—that prevents their essential bravura from seeming overly aggressive. Country singers such as George Jones and Italian American crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett share this counterbalancing combination of conspicuous tenderness and conspicuous toughness, though few, perhaps

none, to the extremes of Ray Charles.

The tension between elements in opposition also informs Charles's lasting creation as a composer and arranger: the union of sacred music and carnal sensibility that came to be known as soul music. An interpretive artist by inclination, Charles became a songwriter (of sorts) by necessity when, in the early 1950s, he began recording in earnest and had trouble finding material that suited his impulses. (Bob Dylan, about a decade later, took up songwriting for a similar reason: as he once observed, no one else was creating the kind of songs he wanted to sing.) Charles, who recalled the fervor of gospel music from his youth, sought a musical vehicle with the capacity to express the roiling passions of adulthood and decided to adapt the former to the latter purpose. (Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of gospel music, composed bawdy secular songs as well as hymns, but his two sets of works are largely unrelated, musically and lyrically.) Charles took gospel pieces, presumably in the public domain, and modified the lyrics: "This Little Light of Mine" became "This Little Girl of Mine"; "Talkin' 'Bout Jesus" became "Talkin' 'Bout You"; "You Better Leave That Liar Alone" became "You Better Leave That Woman Alone," and so forth. Even "What'd I Say" and "Hit the Road, Jack," while not derived from specific sacred tunes, drew expressly upon the call-and-response tradition of the gospel style.

Charles's method offended traditionalists, including the blues singer Big Bill Broonzy, who grouched that "he's mixing the blues with spirituals. I know that's wrong....He should be singing in church." Some radio stations banned "What'd I Say" for the sexual suggestion in Charles's groans, but the music rang true because it was utterly true to its singer, who was far more interested in matters of the flesh than in matters of the spirit. It carried no ethical compromise for Charles. "If Mama gave me religion, the religion said, 'Believe in yourself,'" he told David Ritz. "Jesus was Jewish, and if he couldn't convince his own people he was the messiah, why should I be convinced?" The musical amalgam that Charles created had the passion of gospel, but no piety—indeed, no reverence for anything but the earthiest sort of love. In this regard, it was an inspiration to generations of soul singers profoundly concerned with the body, from Marvin Gaye to Prince (who has conflated the divine with the hardcore throughout his career).

In the 1950s, few African American men dared to present the overtly sexual package that Charles offered to black and white men and women. Billy Eckstine, the boyishly handsome singer and bandleader who had outdrawn Sinatra at the Paramount and outsold him on records for a time, was nearly banished from show business in 1950 after a photograph in *Life* magazine showed him surrounded by worshipful fans—all of them young, white females. (Prior to Charles and Eckstine, most African American singers who appealed to white audiences survived by playing "cute," like Louis Armstrong and Fats Waller, or exuded the sex appeal of a Sunday-school teacher, like Nat Cole; either way, they appeared unthreatening to women of any color.) Charles prevailed, no doubt, because of his blindness; his Ray-Bans shielded him. Had he had the same chiseled good looks, swayed his body in time with the same intensity, sung the same licentious songs, and made eye contact with the white women in his audiences, his obituaries might have been published fifty years sooner.

Oddly, though, the dark-glass barrier between Charles's eyes and ours always made the experience of seeing him uncommonly intimate. We are accustomed to watching performers' eyes for innumerable signals. How can we tell what the person is thinking and feeling when the window to the soul is closed? We turn to the body. I saw Charles in concert half a dozen times, once from the distance of a few feet at the Blue Note in New York. My memories are of his shoulders, bobbing

from side to side; his hands and arms, locked in place as he blocked chords on the piano; and his right leg, kicking out from under the piano in time. Rarely does one attend so closely to the body of someone other than a lover, apart from when watching dance performances, during which one can also see the dancers' eyes.

Charles ended up having two careers: one prior to his arrest in Boston in 1964 for heroin possession, and one beginning the following year, when he voluntarily detoxed in a Los Angeles hospital. To acknowledge the higher level of innovation and greater vitality in the first period is neither to endorse hard drugs nor to deny the occasional spikes of glory in Charles's last four decades. His commercials for both Coke and Pepsi ("Uh huh") were delightful; his uncharacteristically lugubrious reading of "America the Beautiful" at the Republican Convention in 1984 was less so. His recording of *Porgy and Bess* with Cleo Laine in 1976 had enough fine moments—particularly Charles's singing on "Summertime"—to excuse the project's mimicry of the landmark Louis Armstrong–Ella Fitzgerald version. Five of the six country albums that he made in the 1980s are embarrassments, though the one of duets with George Jones, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, and others is spirited and shows Charles in far stronger form than *Genius Loves Company*.

... Last works are often just occasions for mourning, beyond the scope of criticism, and in this instance I say so be it. Ray Charles made two hundred fifty other recordings, and they are much more than relics.

2004

## **12. Barney Hoskyns, "THE SOUL STIRRER: SAM COOKE," MOJO, January 1995**

FEW ENTERTAINERS have fallen quite so far from grace as Sam Cooke did when he died, 30 years ago, at the Hacienda Motel in south-central Los Angeles.

Whatever the doubts and suspicions surrounding the shooting – and there are still many – it is hard to see it as a martyr's death. Yet think of Sam Cooke and you think: Grecian good looks, irresistible charm and style, and a voice that rings out like a glorious, golden peal, cooing 'You Send Me' down the corridors of eternity.

For the best part of 15 years, Cooke was an archangel, a black American hero. Jerry Wexler called him "the best singer who ever lived, no contest". He was the first teen idol the gospel field produced, and he was instrumental in laying the foundation for the gospel-rooted style of R&B that became known as "soul music". At least a part of the tragedy of his death is that he never got to make the music he should have made: caught in the limbo period between '50s R&B and '60s soul, he was constantly obliged to tailor his music to the white pop market he thought he needed to survive.

"When I listen to him, I still can't believe the things he did," said Jerry Wexler, who wanted to sign Cooke to Atlantic Records. "It's always fresh and amazing to me. He has control, he could play with his voice like an instrument, his melisma...I mean, nobody else could do it. Everything about him was perfection."

Perfection is certainly what you hear when you listen to 'Jesus Wash Away My Troubles' or 'Pilgrim

Of Sorrow' or 'Bring It On Home To Me' or 'A Change Is Gonna Come': two masterpieces from his gospel period and two soul classics from the first half of the '60s. No-one has ever quite sung with the verve and panache of Sam Cooke, a man conveying all, as Peter Guralnick wrote, "with a flick of the eyebrow, the tiniest modulation of tone". Probably no- one ever will.

\*

BORN IN THE MISSISSIPPI blues hotspot of Clarksdale in 1931, Sam Cooke grew up as the fourth child of Charles and Annie May Cook (Sam added the 'e' years later).

Charles Cook worked as a servant in a Victorian mansion belonging to a rich white family, and when he wasn't working for them he was working for the Lord, preaching to local Baptist congregations. Unsurprisingly, Sam showed musical promise from the earliest age: both the Reverend and Sam's brother L.C. remembered him singing to a bunch of sticks he'd planted in the ground under an old pecan tree, in the back yard of the family home on Seventh Street. Sam would explain to his siblings that he was practising for his future audiences.

When the Depression wiped out his employers, Charles Cook joined the unending procession of black men heading North to the stockyards of Chicago. It wasn't long before his family followed him, to settle in the inner city of Bronzeville, where he'd already become an assistant pastor. In 1939 his offspring formed their own gospel group, the Singing Children, with Sam restricted to harmonising in a fledgling tenor voice behind teenagers Charles and Mary. The thriving gospel scene in Chicago – home to Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson and the famous Soul Stirrers – was a contagious one. ...

When The Soul Stirrers approached Sam in 1950 to ask if he'd be interested in taking over from their departing leader R.H. Harris – quitting, significantly, because "the moral aspects" of gospel were "just falling out of the water"

– the 20-year-old naturally jumped at the chance.

"Sam did it in a different way," said S. Roy Grain, the Soul Stirrer who effectively doubled as the group's manager. "He didn't want to be that deep, pitiful singer..." The observation neatly encapsulates just what made the rookie Cook stand out from the throng of ecstatic gospel screamers on the circuit – men like Archie Brownlee of the Five Blind Boys Of Mississippi, Kylo Turner of the Pilgrim Travelers, and the Soul Stirrers' own Paul Foster.

In the words of J.W. Alexander, the Pilgrim Traveler who would go on to play a big part in the Sam Cooke story, "If they understand you, you can come up behind the screamers and always get the house". Sam may have been slim and boyish – "that pretty child", people called him – but he brought a new grace to the business of testifying and it made some of the vein-popping veterans look passé.

Sam's first few years on the road with the Stirrers were relentless. Ten months of the year were spent travelling the gospel highway usually with all five Stirrers wedged into one car and surviving on bread and bologna. But as people began to accept the successor to righteous "old man Harris", the touring began to pay off. "I had a wonderful time, a wonderful life," Sam recalled later. "I was doing the thing I liked best and getting paid for it." Teenage girls who'd sat giggling at the back of the church now pressed forward to the front in a state of feverish excitement, digging the cocksure self-assurance that reflected the transition from the '40s to the prosperous '50s and paralleled the rise of such secular stars as Sonny Til and Clyde McPhatter. ...

But the best was saved for last, on the Specialty sessions Sam recorded with the Stirrers early in 1956: masterpieces such as 'Jesus Wash Away My Troubles', 'Touch The Hem Of His Garment', the poppy 'Wonderful' and the harrowing 'Pilgrim Of Sorrow'. The airy grace and jewel-like precision of his singing on these songs remain unsurpassed in either gospel or soul. And 'Were You There?', his very last gospel side, sounds like a last desperate testimony from someone who knew he was going over to the other side – the sinners' side – for good. "Were you there when they pierced him in the side?" Sam all but shrieks, for once sounding closer to Archie Brownlee than to R.H. Harris.

That Sam Cook knew he was about to "cross over" to the land of pop godlessness is pretty clear. And urging him on was the very man Art Rupe had hired as Specialty's A&R man: ex-bandleader Robert Bumps Blackwell, who'd produced the big Little Richard hits the label was currently enjoying. "Bumps said I had the voice, the confidence and the equipment to work as a single [sic] and that I ought to give it a try," Sam remembered. "Making a living was good enough, but what's wrong with doing better than that?"

Bumps had seen Sam's sex appeal up close during a big Soul Stirrers show at LA's Shrine Auditorium. "My initial impression was, This cat should be pop," he recalled. He thought it ludicrous that a gospel singer could have two illegitimate children – as Sam Cook did by now – and yet not record a pop song without incurring the opprobrium of the gospel community. As Bobby Womack recalls, "In those days everybody who sang gospel believed that if you switched over to popular music, something bad would happen to you." ...

In April 1957, Sam sent Bumps six songs on tape featuring just him and his guitar, among them 'I'll Come Running Back To You', 'I Don't Want To Cry' and a little throwaway thing called 'You Send Me'. Bumps listened to the songs but decided to concentrate on a pop arrangement of Gershwin's 'Summertime' that he felt sure would be a hit. Unlike J.W. Alexander, Bumps seemed to be thinking "housewives" as much as "teenagers". With arranger Rene Hall doubling as a rhythm guitarist, the recently-arrived New Orleans sessionman Earl Palmer on drums, and a white vocal group by the name of the Pied Pipers, he and Sam went into the studio to record 'Summertime' and some of the songs on Sam's tape. ...

Sam spent the summer living in Bumps Blackwell's apartment while Keen's new A&R man searched in vain for material that might suit him. Finally, in desperation, Bumps pulled his Specialty masters out of the cupboard and played them for his new employers. Keane and Siamis flipped out when they heard 'Summertime' and 'You Send Me' and insisted on releasing them. By September it was clear that 'You Send Me' was the sidle everyone wanted to hear.

The record – the debut release by "Sam Cooke" – wound up selling 80,000 copies in Los Angeles alone. Not even the predictable threat from a white cover by Teresa Brewer was enough to stop the original 'You Send Me' soaring all the way to Number 1. Pop fluff it might have been, but Sam sang it with a creamy, dreamy wistfulness that registered instantly with millions of American teenagers. The hook was irresistible, moreover. "Sam would say, Keep going back to the same thing and repeat it...you get a melody and stick to it," recalled Bobby Womack. "He'd say, That's why my songs hit, 'cos people like to sing along."

Overnight, Sam Cooke was a secular superstar. With his first solo release he was all over American radio and prominent on TV shows such as *American Bandstand*. When the entertainment machine went into predictable overdrive, a white agent at William Morris convinced Sam that he could "move him into the non-black market". Meanwhile, Art Rupe rushed out 'I'll Come Running Back

To You' in an attempt to cash in on his departed star's glory. (The remaining Specialty sides were much of a muchness, although 'That's All I Need To Know' coaxed one of his most enchanting performances.)

Sam Cooke did "move into the non-black market", but with mixed results. Convinced that career longevity was contingent on breaking into the Harry Belafonte/Johnny Mathis/Sammy Davis Jr supper-club league, he not only packed his first Keen album with glutinous ballads and syrupy show tunes, but – long before he was ready for such a thing –allowed William Morris to set up an engagement at New York's legendary Copacabana club in the spring of 1958. Singing to the borscht-belt fans of standup Jewish comic Myron Cohen, the boy stiffed. "He doesn't seem ready for the more savvy Copa clientele," adjudged the reviewer for *Variety*. ...

A first session at RCA's New York studio in late January 1960 saw an initial attempt at the drecky 'Teenage Sonata', Sam's first single for the label. Fortunately, it also saw the recording of the vastly superior 'Chain Gang', based on an experience Sam had while driving through Georgia during a tour. There was a certain disjunction between the grimness of the theme and the jauntiness of the song's arrangement – complete with a white backing chorale – but it was a terrific pop record anyway RCA showed just how lacking they were in judgement by shelving the record for seven months and issuing 'Teenage Sonata' and the even less successful 'You Understand Me' in its place. Meanwhile he cut *Cooke's Tour*, a pathetic album of songs with the common theme of travel: 'Galway Bay', 'Bali H'ai', 'Jamaica Farewell' and other staggeringly soul-free ditties. That didn't do too well either.

Ironically, it was Keen Records who put Sam back on the pop map by digging out an old Adler/Alpert song called 'Wonderful World', cut virtually as a demo a year earlier. With its references to history and trigonometry, the song was an instant teen classic and climbed all the way to Number 12 on the pop chart. When RCA finally got around to issuing 'Chain Gang' it did even better, making Number 2 on both pop and R&B charts.

Thanks to 'Wonderful World' and 'Chain Gang', Sam Cooke finished 1960 as a pop monarch. In his open-neck shirts, cardigans and checkered pants, he was already the epitome of svelte, casual sophistication, beaming from the covers of magazines like *Sepia*.

"If you look at Belafonte and Cooke and Marvin Gaye, they all look alike," says Kim Fowley, who met Sam Cooke several times in the nascent days of the LA pop industry. "They all have a Grecian quality to their bone structure.

Sam had white features and Italian suits and he drove around in a green E-type Jaguar. Sam was the black Elvis, but in pop terms he wasn't really a black artist."

And yet Sam Cooke was becoming increasingly conscious of his status as a black icon. It was significant, for example, that in late 1959 he stopped processing his hair and began letting it grow naturally. In a syndicated piece for black papers in the summer of 1960 he wrote about civil rights and said he "detested people...who've lacked the courage to stand up and be counted". Increasingly, like his friend Cassius Clay, he was prepared to be counted alongside his more courageous colleagues. ...

ALTHOUGH HE HAD now turned 30, Sam continued to keep pace with teen trends. 1962 saw two classic dance-party records in 'Having A Party' and 'Twistin' The Nite Away' (complete with its sly



lines about "A place up New York way where the people are so gay" and "The fellow in the blue jeans dancing with the older queen"). ...

Between five and six thousand people trooped through the People's Funeral Home to view Sam's body on December 12, 1964. Three thousand people jammed into the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Chicago the following week, with seven thousand more packed outside in the freezing Windy City streets. ...

"If he hadn't have left God, left the church, it would never have happened," pronounced one Baptist minister, voicing sentiments shared by many. Of course it wasn't true. Three years later Jimmie Outler, the singer who'd replaced Sam Cooke's replacement in the Soul Stirrers, was knifed to death in a fight. Religion and violence go hand in hand in black America. Born of the same evil root of slavery, they are merely flipsides of the same massive injustice.

It was part of Sam's identity crisis as a black American that he wanted to be all things to all his fans: to record string-driven MOR atrocities, to appear on gospel programmes, to nurture a roster of R&B/soul singers. He wanted the Copa and he wanted the Harlem Square Club. But what would he have done if he'd lived? Recorded in Memphis?

Signed to Tamla Motown? Played at Monterey alongside his disciple Otis Redding? Or missed the boat completely? In the end it doesn't matter, for the voice on the records speaks as loudly as the legacy of his influence. Leave the last words to Jerry Wexler, who might conceivably have steered Sam Cooke towards the deep soul he did so much to father.

"When I listen to his gospel work," said the veteran Atlantic producer, "everything else goes away."

© Barney Hoskyns, 1995

### **13. Larry Starr & Christopher Waterman, "Berry Gordy and Motown," *American Popular Music: From Minstrelsy to MTV*; Oxford 2003.**

Meanwhile, in Detroit, Berry Gordy Jr. (b. 1929) was creating his own songwriting/producing/marketing organization along lines directly analogous to Philles Records. But Motown (named after the "Motor town" or "Motor city" -i.e., Detroit, the automobile production capital of America) came to be a success story that surpassed even that of Philles; more importantly, it came to be the most stunning success story in the entire history of African American businesses in this country. Motown was not the first black-owned record company by a long shot (see the discussion of Black Swan in Chapter 5). The intensity and duration of its commercial success (and it is still an important market presence at the time of this writing) may be attributed to the distinctive dual thrust of Gordy's vision.

First of all, he was determined to keep all of the creative *and* financial aspects of the business under African American control-which effectively meant under *his* control. This worked because Gordy had an uncanny ability to surround himself with first-rate musical talent in all areas of the record-making process, and to maintain the loyalty of his musicians for substantial periods of time. It also worked, of course, because Gordy had a shrewd head for business as well as for music, and this leads us to the second element of his visionary plan. Unlike the music of earlier black-owned record companies, Motown's music was not directed primarily at black audiences. Gordy unapologetically

sought to make an African American pop music addressed to the widest possible listening public. The only segregation Gordy permitted his product was geared to age; like rock 'n' roll itself, Motown's music was designed to cut across divisions of race, region, and class, but it definitely was as the label itself proclaimed-"the sound of young America."

It is almost as if Gordy launched his enterprise as a kind of counteroffensive against the expropriation of African American music and the exploitation of African-American musicians that had been as much a part of the early history of rock 'n' roll as it had been of other periods in the development of American popular music. And the unique genius of Gordy-and of his entire Motown organization-was the ability to create a black music aimed right at the commercial mainstream that somehow never evoked the feeling, or provoked the charge, of having sold out.

With remarkably few exceptions, Motown recordings avoided direct evocations of earlier rhythm & blues forms and styles; twelve-bar blues patterns are strikingly rare, as are the typical devices of doo-wop or anything suggestive of the 1950s sounds of Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, or Little Richard. Yet a generalized blues or gospel manner remained a defining characteristic of Motown's performers; sometimes it could be very subtle, as is often the case with William "Smokey" Robinson, and sometimes much more overt, as is the case with Martha Reeves. And this manner proved sufficient to give a definite African American slant to the pop-structured, pop-flavored songs that were characteristic of Motown.

Like Phil Spector, Berry Gordy Jr. started his career as a songwriter (he cowrote a number of pop and rhythm & blues hits performed by Jackie Wilson in the late 1950s), although unlike Spector he did not perform on records. Motown, which began its operations in 1959 but at first grew very slowly, was reaching its commercial peak just at the point when Spector folded Philles in 1966. The Motown model was strikingly similar to that employed by Philles: tight quality control on all levels of creation and production, and the concentration on a small number of records to yield a high proportion of hits. It is impossible to determine direct influence, one way or the other, between the Philles and Motown organizations; it seems to be a case of two remarkable talents having similar ideas, and similar success, at around the same time. However, Gordy's organization was noticeably larger in its scope and ambition than Spector's.

From the beginning, Gordy planned a group of labels rather than just one: records under the Motown, Tamla, Gordy, and Soul names were all issued from his Detroit headquarters, and each label boasted its own roster of hitmakers. Furthermore, whereas Spector was essentially interested only in the records themselves, Gordy specifically chose and developed his recording artists to be charismatic and sophisticated live performers, complete with characteristic modes of dress and distinctive stage choreography-not to mention strict codes of conduct on and off stage that apparently were enforced quite vigorously. There were complaints about the iron hand with which Gordy ruled his roost, just as there were complaints about Spector's passion for control. But there can be no doubt that Gordy's active encouragement of his artists to be more than just recording acts made it possible for both individuals and groups from the organization to develop long-term careers. It is no accident that groups like the Supremes and the Temptations are significantly better known to a wide public than are the Crystals or the Ronettes--or that individuals like Smokey Robinson and Diana Ross were able to win the kind of name recognition that enabled them eventually to branch off from the groups with which they initially were associated (the Miracles and the Supremes, respectively) and to forge hugely successful solo careers.

The Motown records of the early 1960s exemplify the rock 'n' roll trends of their time. Among the biggest of Motown's early hits were "Please Mr. Postman" by the Marvelettes (Number One, 1961), a quintessential girl group record, and "Do You Love Me" by the Contours (Number Three, 1962), a hard-driving dance record that linked success in romance to the ability to perform currently popular dance steps, such as the twist and the mashed potatoes. (The Contours' "Do You Love Me" found renewed chart success in 1988, on the strength of its prominent employment on the soundtrack of the movie Dirty Dancing, which is set in the early 1960s.) By the mid-1960s a more complex, occasionally lush sound came to characterize Motown's productions. Surely the Temptations' "My Girl" (see the "Listening To" section) is as much a "teenage symphony" as any of Phil Spector's most elaborate offerings. Just like Spector, however, Motown never lost touch with a danceable beat, and although the Supremes' "You Can't Hurry Love" (see the "Listening To" section) has a much more sophisticated sound and arrangement than "Please Mr. Postman" from five years earlier, both records share an irresistible groove. Gordy's touch seemed never to falter, and his organization steadily increased its share of the hit record market throughout the 1960s; in the year 1970 alone, Motown and its affiliated labels placed sixteen records in the Top 10 and scored seven Number One records (out of the year's total of twenty-one Number One songs)!

Motown's headquarters in Detroit (which Gordy named "Hitsville, USA") served as a magnet for a spectacular array of talented individuals, some of whom did session work or even office work until they finally managed to get the attention of Gordy. Among performers, Gordy-like so many other producers-tended to favor vocal groups, although he did have important solo acts from early on, such as Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells, and Stevie Wonder, and did eventually wean some solo performers from the groups that they fronted. Important Motown groups not yet mentioned include Martha (Reeves) and the Vandellas, Junior Walker and the All Stars, the Four Tops, Gladys Knight and the Pips, and the Jackson Five; the last-named group made their first record for Motown in 1969, when lead singer Michael was all of eleven years old, and their string of hits for the label helped assure Motown's fortunes well into the 1970s. Gordy's organization was also blessed with remarkable songwriting and production talent, and Gordy would often have his teams of songwriting producers compete for the privilege of working with particular hot recording acts. Among the most famous of these Motown writing/production teams were (Eddie) Holland- (Lamont) Dozier-(Brian) Holland, Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong, and Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson. Smokey Robinson was unusual among the earlier Motown artists in being both a performer and a songwriter/producer; he furnished material not just to his own group, the Miracles, but also to Mary Wells, the Marvelettes, and the Temptations. Later on, in the 1970s, Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder also took on writing and production responsibilities for their own records.

Finally, but certainly not least in importance, Motown had a sterling house band, the so-called Funk Brothers, in every sense a match for Phil Spector's Wrecking Crew in assuring that the highest level of instrumental musicianship was always present to back up and inspire the vocal performers. Bass player James Jamerson, drummer Benny Benjamin, and keyboardist Earl Van Dyke were among the most important contributors to the Motown sound.

In 1971 Berry Gordy moved the Motown headquarters to Los Angeles, at last joining the "westward migration" that had been playing an important role in American pop music, and in American culture generally, since the early 1960s. We now turn our attention specifically to California, to surf music, and to Brian Wilson who did more than any other single person to make California the new focus of America's rock 'n' roll mythology.

\* \* \* \* \*

"My Girl," composed and produced by Smokey Robinson and Ronald White, performed by the Temptations (Number One, 1965); "You Can't Hurry Love," composed by Holland-Dozier-Holland, produced by Brian Holland and Lamont Dozier, performed by the Supremes (Number One, 1966)

"My Girl" is a moderate-tempo love ballad. As a composition, it is a song of sweetly conventional romantic sentiment in a straightforward verse-chorus form. But as a recording, it is lifted emphatically beyond the ordinary by virtue of the Temptations' thoroughly engaging performance and by virtue of Motown's spectacular production values.

From the outset, the arrangement hooks the listener: a repeating solo bass motive establishes the beat, over which a lead guitar enters with a memorable melodic figure. (Both of these instrumental hooks are also used later on in the recording, so that they are firmly fixed in the listener's mind after one hearing of the song.) Then the drums and lead voice enter, followed subtly by background vocals; by the time the first chorus is reached, brass instruments are present in the accompaniment, to which are then added orchestral strings. The cumulative layering of sounds gives a sense of steadily increasing passion and intensity to the song, as the singer's words metaphorically detail his feelings for his "girl." The second verse brings new brass fanfares in response to the lead vocalist's calls. There is a sumptuous instrumental interlude before the third (last) verse, dominated by the strings, which play a new melodic figure over the song's characteristic chord progressions. Then, as a final intensifying gesture, a dramatic upward key change takes place just before the concluding verse and chorus.

If "My Girl" showcases the brilliance of Motown's arranging and producing staff, "You Can't Hurry Love" demonstrates that Motown's writers could also come up with clever, innovatively structured pop songs. The listening outline below conveys the intricacies of this Holland-Dozier-Holland composition, although the most casual hearing of the record will affirm that—as with so much of the finest pop music—catchiness was absolutely not sacrificed to the cause of sophistication.

The opening A section of "You Can't Hurry Love" is extremely short, just half the length of each of the ensuing Band C sections. The function of this A is at first unclear, both because of its brevity (is it a kind of introduction? or is it a very short verse?) and because of its similarity to the music of B; the basic chord progressions underlying both A and B are virtually identical, even though their vocal melodies differ. C brings a striking chord change and another change of melody, which might initially suggest a kind of bridge section. But when A fails to return after C, and instead Band C alternate with one another, we seem to be in an unorthodox verse-chorus type of situation, in which we hear the first verse (C) after the chorus (B), and in which the words of the chorus aren't always exactly the same. Just when a pattern seems to have been established, A unexpectedly returns with a vengeance. Instead of proceeding right to B, it is played twice through, creating a composite section that is now as long as B or C. Then, in the most clever formal maneuver of all in this already complex song, an ambiguous section is inserted, as the composers take advantage of the chord progression shared by A and B; with minimal melodic activity from the voice, which keeps "waitin'," we can't tell for sure which of the two sections we're actually hearing! The instruments tease us briefly here by playing the melodic motive associated with B, "you can't hurry love." But the voice holds back until we're at the top of the chord progression again, at which point it finally begins a proper, full repetition of B, toward the end of which the record fades out.

All this play with form would be just so much intellectual busywork if it didn't reflect on the meaning of the song. "You Can't Hurry Love" is a song about the importance of waiting. Formally, the song keeps us guessing—waiting for clarification of the functional relationships among the

different sections. When the A section at last returns, it keeps us waiting extensively for B and its restatement of the song's essential message. On the level of detail, notice also in the second and third B sections how the lead vocalist avoids or postpones singing the words "you can't hurry love," again forcing the listener to wait. This makes the final B that much more of a release of tension, as it behaves in an expected manner at last.

Like all the great Motown hits, "You Can't Hurry Love" submerges its many subtleties beneath an irresistible pop-friendly surface. Maybe this is why you don't tend to find it, or other Motown records, the subject of discussion when matters turn toward innovative aspects of 1960s music. Still, any list of the significant music of this period that omits a record like "You Can't Hurry Love" is surely missing something important.

#### **14. Richard Williams,, "PHIL SPECTOR," *Let It Rock*, October 1972**

ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED MOMENTS IN late-Sixties rock comes at the beginning of 'To Be Alone With You' on Bob Dylan's *Nashville Skyline* album. As the guitars begin to strum, Dylan drawls, "Is it rolling, Bob?"

"Bob" is Bob Johnston, Dylan's producer. With that single question Dylan brings to our attention Johnston's role in the singer's recording career. The producer is here acknowledged as a crucial part of the whole undertaking — as necessary as the tape machines, microphones, and instruments...almost as important as the singer himself.

By the end of the Sixties, most rock fans could give you the names of any number of important producers: Jimmy Miller (with the Rolling Stones), George Martin (with the Beatles), Kit Lambert (with the Who), the Holland Brothers and Lamont Dozier (with Motown's Four Tops and the Supremes), and so on. It was important to know that Stephen Stills produced the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young albums, and that Bob Krasnow's production techniques were a crucial factor in the sound of Captain Beefheart's *Strictly Personal* album. Production methods had an immense influence on the aesthetics of the music in question.

It is pure speculation, and almost certainly untrue, to say that none of this would have happened without Phil Spector. But it's equally certain that it was he, single handed, who turned the producer from an obscure back-room boy whose name was of little or no importance to the average record buyer, into a figure parallel with the great movie directors. The comparison is in fact valid. Just as we not only ask "Have you seen the new Brando movie?" but also "Have you seen the new Losey?" so in the mid-Sixties did we ask, "Have you heard the new Spector single?" neglecting, probably, to add whether the singers on the record were the Crystals, the Ronettes, or the Righteous Brothers.

Of course there were producers before Phil Spector, important men who helped mold the way music reached our ears. Some, like John Hammond, played a vital role in the history of popular music, by helping performers of real talent to overcome neglect and racial barriers. Beginning in 1931, Hammond started bringing to public attention jazz artists like Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Mildred Bailey, and Lionel Hampton. In fact it was he who persuaded Benny Goodman to hire the pianist Teddy Wilson — the first time a black musician was able to join a "name" band. It was a great step. Hammond maintained his track record after the war: while with Columbia Records he brought both Aretha Franklin and Bob Dylan to the label.

As a record producer, Hammond assumed the standard function of middleman between the artist and the engineer. He made sure that the material selected was suitable, that a good sound was obtained on the tape, and that all concerned were happy with the environment and results. He might have suggestions such as bringing certain musicians together for a date, but his aesthetic control did not extend beyond that. Which was how he wanted it, since his only desire was to allow musicians to place their particular talents on tape in the optimum circumstances. It is significant that after Aretha was taken from under Hammond's wing, where she had been increasingly successful with Blues and Gospel material, she was forced to record supposedly commercial pop songs and became a dismal failure. Some years later she joined Atlantic, where producer Jerry Wexler reverted to Hammond's pattern, with brilliant success, both artistic and commercial.

Another way of approaching a producer's work was presented by George Goldner, one of the great rock and roll producers of the Fifties. In '53 Goldner formed the Gee label — to which were added later Rama, Gone, End, and Goldisc. He specialized in street-corner groups, mostly black or Puerto Rican, who hung around the poor areas of New York, harmonizing endlessly either on current favourites or their own compositions. These groups were in the process of inventing a whole new sound. Goldner capitalized on it by going out, grabbing them up, pulling them into his recording studio, and cutting a couple of sides for which he'd pay them a few dollars. Rarely were these records anything more than regional hits around New York (how many people elsewhere remember the Hartbeats, the Wrens, or the Harptones?), but occasionally sales were so big that a record would reach the national charts, from where radio stations around the country would start picking it up. This happened to 13-year-old Frankie Lymon and his group, the Teenagers. Goldner cut a record with them called 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love', a song written by Lymon. In the early part of 1956 the recording sold a million copies, reaching number seven on the national chart.

Goldner also launched Little Anthony and the Imperials on the End label, but his first really big recording (some have called it the first real rock and roll record) was 'Gee' by the Crows — the sound which former Creedence Clearwater guitarist Tom Fogarty has cited as the key which first turned him on to the potential power of pop music.

As a producer in the later sense of the term, Goldner was nothing. It is likely, as Bill Miller in his book *The Drifters* has suggested, that Goldner persuaded his black groups to sweeten their delivery for the huge white market, but, like Hammond, he was more of an organizer than a creator. Unlike Hammond though, he was a hustler, and that, to some extent, is how he came to influence Spector. Goldner knew how to get his records played on the radio — and there's no denying that he extracted the maximum possible percentage for himself. For instance, he gave himself a co-authorship credit on 'Why Do Fools Fall In Love', thus taking for himself half the composer royalties. In addition he organized a tie-up with the large Roulette complex and thus ensured that his records were exposed to the best advantage and widest distribution.

It was that commercial ability that Spector admired almost as much as he loved the sounds that Goldner's groups made. It was a different kind of "producing", which made its influence felt when Phil finally came to form his own independent record company, Philles, in 1961. Goldner had made the industry work for him, and that's what Spector set out to emulate.

Spector's real spiritual ancestor, however, was Sam Phillips, owner of Sun Records in Memphis. It was Phillips who cut Elvis Presley's first and greatest records: 'That's All Right', 'Mystery Train', 'Baby

Let's Play House', 'You're A Heart-breaker', and so on — all characterized by an innovative use of tape-echo. Instead of producing the cavernous, bathroomy effect obtained by the over-lavish use of echo chamber so beloved of contemporary producers, Phillips' method gave the records a larger-than-life quality. The snare drum and string bass snapped in unison. This "presence" gave the records an indefinable lift and vitality. It didn't just happen on Presley's records, either; Phillips did the same with Jerry Lee Lewis on 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On' and 'Great Balls of Fire', and on lesser known classics like Warren Smith's 'Rock and Roll Ruby'. The sound affected a whole generation, and it turned Spector around.

These, then, were the three basic types of producer before Spector came along: the more or less altruistic organizer, the shrewd businessman, and the studio innovator. Spector took all three, rolled them into one, added his own genius, and created a totally new concept: the producer as overall director. In the process he put out a group of the most memorable records in all of pop music.

He took control of everything. He picked the bands, wrote or chose the material, supervised the arrangements, told the singers how to phrase, masterminded all phases of the recording process, and released the result on his own label, a label with no affiliation with any of the supposedly all-powerful major record companies. He introduced many innovations: by concentrating all his efforts on one record at a time, he avoided the wasteful scattershot policy of the majors; by bringing the technique of overdubbing to a new peak, he created a sound never heard before, a sound which came to be known as The Spector Sound throughout the world's recording industry.

He also revolutionized the industry's attitude to youth. Previously, older men like Alan Freed, Dick Clark, Goldner, and the presidents of the major labels had exerted total control over the pop youth culture. Kids made the music, but they had no say in what happened after it got onto the tape, and they rarely saw much of the money. Because of this, they often fell back into obscurity after their brief glimpse of limelight, and often their lives (like that of Frankie Lymon) ended in squalid tragedy. The kids made it and the kids bought it, but it was the "cigar-chomping fatties" who first took the cream, and then the milk, and then threw the empty bottle into the trash can.

Spector set out to change all that. He fought the system through his own company. To make the changes he had to succeed, succeed, and succeed again. At 21 years of age even one failure would have been too costly. It would have enabled the fatties to smirk and tell themselves that the kids couldn't handle it after all; that they actually *needed* the older guys to take care of business for them. But Spector did succeed, for more than four straight years. Eventually the industry got him, its rage no longer containable, but while he was hot he was always sowing the seeds for a new self-determination, the birthright now demanded by every rock musician. These days you won't find a George Goldner telling Neil Young or John Fogerty what to do to get a hit record (of course this is not *necessarily* a good thing for all the Neil Youngs and John Fogertys).

Spector's musical influence has been immense, both in general and in specific areas. Remember 'I Got You Babe', by Sonny and Cher? That record and that group happened because Sonny Bono wanted to *be* Phil Spector. So did Andrew Oldham, the Rolling Stones' first producer: the sound and style of the early Stones owes a great debt to Spector, as does the studio sound of the Beach Boys as developed by Brian Wilson. The scale of Spector's efforts prompted Wilson to investigate the technical resources at his command; it is likely that, had there not been a Phil Spector, there would not have been a 'Good Vibrations' either.

Neither would there have been a Shadow Morton. Not one of the best known producers, Morton

nevertheless came up with some of the most interesting records of the middle and late Sixties, the epic 'Leader of The Pack' by the Shangri-Las, and the first album by Vanilla Fudge, one of rock's great testaments.

All these men and their records have altered the face of pop. It can be said that they changed it from a performing art into an art which could exist only inside a recording studio, making possible such artifacts as the Beatles' 'A Day In The Life', or the Four Tops' 'Reach Out, I'll Be There'.

Surely no greater tribute could be paid to Spector's giant importance than his appointment early in 1970 as virtual working head of the record division of Apple. Spector owns the ultimate power of veto over whatever goes out on the label. Since 1970 he has produced everything by John Lennon and George Harrison, thus fitting effortlessly into the fastest company in the entire rock world. And he looks so *right* there; other producers could give the ex-Beatles records an adequate sound, and could pander to their whims in the studio, but only Spector could stand with them on an equal footing, not fearing to lend his own ideas for the one goal of better music.

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## **15. Rick Hall, “Birth of the Muscle Shoals Sound,” in *The Man from Muscle Shoals : My Journey from Shame to Fame (Clovis, CA: Heritage Builders, 2015)***

When we were finally done building the new Fame Recording Studios, the time came for the acid test. How will it sound? Was there any magic there? For my first recording session which was in 1963, I called in the musicians who played on “You Better Move On”. The singer was Jimmy Hughes, and the song was “Steal Away.” Jimmy Hughes, just like his musical idol Sam Cooke, was an extremely handsome young black man with a unique and sensational high tenor singing voice. Every time I saw him, he was immaculately groomed and dressed like a Philadelphia lawyer. Like most great blues and soul singers, Jimmy had been brought up in the music of the church, singing solos and performing in gospel groups. It was commonplace in those days for an R&B artist or record producer to reinterpret gospel songs and spirituals in far more earthly and sensual terms than they were originally written.

In our case, the anthem “Steal Away to Jesus” evolved into Jimmy's sultry and dangerous saga of an illicit late- night rendezvous between two young lovers. Nobody could ever hit those high notes Jimmy Hughes could hit as a singer, and they certainly couldn't milk the emotion and soul from the lyrics that he could. He sang “Steal Away” with raw, hungry, heart-wrenching passion.

I first met Jimmy through a local businessman, Bob Carl Bailey, a mutual friend of ours who would later own and manage WZZA, a small black radio station in Tuscumbia, Alabama one of the four cities that make up the Muscle Shoals area. Bob Carl was a respected leader in the black community who appreciated the best of the blues and R&B and had an ear for exceptional talent. Jimmy Hughes grew up ten miles from Muscle Shoals in Leighton, Alabama in the Tennessee River bottoms where cotton was and will always remain king. Bob Carl sensed great musical potential in Jimmy's voice, so he sent the young singer my way.

At the time we met, Jimmy was working for Robbins Rubber Co., a plant that manufactured floor tile and had earlier made car tires. As soon as I saw him, I was awestruck by his chiseled movie-star



good looks and mesmerized by the power of his high tenor voice. Most of the guys I used on the session had played on “You Better Move On,” and I thought they were the best around. Using David Briggs on piano, Norbert Putnam on bass, Jerry Carrigan on drums and Terry Thompson on electric guitar, I somewhat nervously switched on the 351 Ampex and hit the record button. Then I nervously pushed the talk-back button and announced to the studio musicians with a slight break in my voice, “Rolling.”

While David’s fingers walked the keys of the piano with a riff slightly akin to “Love Letters Straight From Your Heart,” Jerry kicked in with the heavy kick drums combined with Norbert’s soulful bass. The sound from the big A-7 Voice of the Theater speakers shook the shirt on my chest and rattled the rafters of the studio. Then, when Jimmy’s velvety high tenor voice kicked in and cried the pleading lyrics “Pleasee, please, steal away...,” big chill bumps rose up on my arms and the hair on the back of my neck stood straight up. I felt like I had died and gone straight to heaven. Those four great echo chambers I had so worried might fail me rang out their heavenly sounds and performed their job to perfection. I sat in spellbound silence at the console of my new studio, completely overwhelmed with emotion, and wept with quiet joy as the great “Muscle Shoals sound” was born. The worlds of pop, rock and R&B would never be the same.

The little town of Muscle Shoals was entering the big pop music scene and would soon be competing with Los Angeles, New York, Memphis, and New Orleans. As the song progressed, I remember thinking that the key I had chosen for Jimmy was much too high, and I knew he could never make it to the end of the song since the end of the song was an octave higher than the rest of the song. I’d never heard anyone reach the high notes that he could, even when singing in falsetto, but Jimmy had the power to hit upper octaves in his natural voice. So at the song’s big climax when he had to reach those extremely high notes and was begging and pleading, “I know it’s late, but oh, I can’t wait, so come on and steal away...” – I watched Jimmy rare back, dig in, and with passion and determination written all over his face, he nailed it! What a singer, I thought – what a star!

Even with his handsome Hollywood looks and his incredible songwriting and singing abilities, Jimmy was never totally taken by my enthusiasm over his talent, or the thought that he might develop into a major recording artist. Jimmy was a very quiet, humble and private man who was always very pleasant and genial and easy to work with, but he had an air of sophistication and intelligence about him that told you he was a shrewd, no-nonsense guy. He was a devoted family man with a good job and a steady paycheck who was married to a beautiful school teacher named Roberta. Jimmy was always reluctant to trade in security and stability for the harsh night life of the music business and the demands of touring the country and being away from his family for long periods of time. Of all the great artists I’ve worked with over the years, I think Jimmy was the one singer who never hit the illustrious heights that he deserved. His talent was much bigger than the short length of his career might indicate.

“Steal Away” eventually became both a smash pop hit and a Southern soul classic, and Jimmy Hughes and I would go on to score several more hits over the next few years. In time, though, Jimmy gave up on the music business and came back to his hometown of Leighton, where he still lives today. He retired a few years ago from a local manufacturing company and very seldom sings anymore, except in church on Sundays. I still see him around town occasionally, and he always gives me a friendly wave and a big warm smile. He remains a world-class talent and a dear, dear friend of mine. After building the new studio and buying out Hansel, good things were beginning to happen for this country boy from The Freedom Hills. The world would soon beat a path to our door

searching for FAME and fortune.

### 'Steal Away' – a Big Breakthrough

Breaking “Steal Away” took a lot more than simply getting radio airplay in the Southeastern record market. To score a big hit with Jimmy’s record, we needed not only concentrated airplay, but a distributor to supply the record to the retail stores. So while Dan and I were traveling from city to city and radio station to radio station, we decided to set up distributorships for the record as well. Since we were already crisscrossing the Southeast, we reasoned that we could also contact independent record distributors and ask each of them to service our FAME Records product. Bill Lowery, a music publisher in Atlanta, Georgia, who was becoming my tutor in the record business, advised me to sell my records C.O.D. – cash on delivery – or I might never get paid for them unless I had a follow-up hit for “Steal Away.” Bill said, “They’re not likely to pay you for the first one until after they get the new one.”

The first stop we made was to see Henry Hildebrand, the general manager of Delta Record Distributors in New Orleans. The distributorship was actually owned by Leonard Chess, who also owned Chess, Checker and Argo Records out of Chicago. I told Henry that I was promoting an absolute smash hit on Jimmy Hughes and I wanted him to distribute it. I offered Henry “Steal Away” for forty cents a record, which I thought was a sweet deal since the major labels were charging fifty cents for their singles. It was customary then (and still is) for independent record distributors to get 150 records free for every five hundred records they sold; this supposedly gave them promotional copies and was an incentive to work harder. Henry agreed to take 650 records, but I could tell he wasn’t bowled over with excitement. As Dan unloaded the boxes, Henry told him, “Just leave them behind the door there, son, so nobody will trip over them.” In Atlanta I set up a distributorship with Gwen Kessler, the head of Southland Record Distributors. Gwen was already a great friend and supporter. Without her help and advice, I would probably be working at a sawmill or digging ditches today. I used Henry Stone as my distributor in Miami, the Swartz Brothers in Charlotte, N.C., and Washington, D.C., and Southern Record Distributors in Nashville. After more than a week of drinking vodka, laughing and joking, and wheeling and dealing, Dan and I came home to Muscle Shoals half- dead, halfdrunk and dragging ass.

It took two or three more weeks to set up the remaining distribution for “Steal Away,” but in the end I had seven distributors and “onestops” which had each taken 650 of my records to service and sell for me. The Monday morning after we got home, I nervously called Henry Hildebrand in New Orleans and asked if he’d had any calls for “Steal Away.” Much to my surprise, he said, “Yes, Rick, I sold the 650 you left me, and I need you to send me 650 more.” The timing seemed terrible, but I had to tell him, “I’m sorry, Henry, but I’ll need to send them to you C.O.D. because I really don’t have the funds to press up any more records unless I can get paid as I go.” I was greatly relieved when Henry quite calmly replied, “That’s fine, Rick. Send them on.” I then called Gwen in Atlanta and told her Henry had sold his first 650 records of “Steal Away” and had ordered 650 more. She said, “Very good, Rick. If Henry can sell the record, so can I, so send me 650 more.” I called all my distributors, and each ordered another 650 records. Dan Penn became, in addition to a FAME songwriter, the FAME Records’ official packaging and mailing mogul. He licked postage stamps, crammed records into boxes and mailed them to distributors. After a week, I bought a stamp machine since Dan complained of “dry mouth” from licking so much glue.

I was so thrilled at the record sales that were coming in for “Steal Away” that I thought I must be dreaming – and if I was, I hoped I would never wake up. The following week I checked in with my

distributors and they increased their record orders from 650 to 1,300. Wow! I had a smash record, and with it, the classic problem of a small label. How the hell was I going to come up with the money it would take to press up that many records? I'd worked my whole life to get a hit record, and now it seemed like it might bankrupt me and send me to jail! None of the banks in the Muscle Shoals area wanted any part of it.

I scraped together \$400.00 that week, but when I again followed up, my seven distributors ordered a mind-boggling 13,000 records each. I didn't have the money to press up a hundred thousand records or to ship them. I called Bill Lowery in Atlanta who said, "Rick, you need to lease this record to a major label, right now. You can bet that they will be hearing about it and will be coming after you before too long." Sure enough, in a few days the major labels started ringing my phone and begging me to let them lease and distribute "Steal Away" for themselves. I was a little reluctant since I was due forty cents for every copy of "Steal Away" that was being sold. Leasing it to a major label would relieve me of a great deal of cost and responsibility, but the most I'd be making was about 10 cents a record. I decided that the risk was too high and took Bill's advice, leasing "Steal Away" to Vee Jay Records, a label owned by a black family who had just moved from Chicago to Los Angeles. They had a big hit record on Dee Clark called "Hey, Little Girl," and were the American distributors for the first massive hits by the Beatles. Bill Lowery told me that if I would lease Vee Jay Records "Steal Away" through Steve Clark, a friend of his who was their Southeastern promotion man out of Atlanta, Vee Jay would promote Steve to vice president of the label and put him in charge of the royalty department. That way, I would be sure to get my money. So I said, "Send Steve Clark to Muscle Shoals and we'll make a deal."

"Steal Away" became a huge hit nationwide, soaring up the rhythm-and-blues charts and cracking the Top 20 on the pop charts. This was the era of segregation and the civil-rights struggle, and the racial environment was tense and volatile, especially in the South. Black was black and white, was white and the nation was burning with tension between the two. The governor of my own state, George Wallace, was standing in the schoolhouse door to oppose the admission of the first black student into the University of Alabama. Bull Connor was turning police dogs and fire hoses on innocent people in nearby Birmingham and elsewhere in the state. Martin Luther King and his followers were making their famous march from Selma to Montgomery. But back in Muscle Shoals, I was a white producer who would soon be cutting hit after hit after hit with black artists and using an integrated horn section and rhythm section. It was a dangerous time, but the studio was a safe haven where blacks and whites could work together in musical harmony. While Rome was burning with racial strife, we kept playing the proverbial fiddle and recording million-selling records.

I never had any fears about being around black people during that time. If I had any fear of danger for me and my family, it would have come from whites who objected to my close friendship and working association with black people. A short time after "Steal Away" became a sensational smash, Vee Jay Records asked if I would bring my wife to Los Angeles to help them celebrate our hit record. I had never had anything like this happen in my life before. I was on Cloud 9 and feeling like I was about to shit a squealing worm with a crocheted tail. I called Linda and told her, "Pack your bags, honey. Vee Jay is flying us out to Los Angeles to celebrate our hit on 'Steal Away.'"

## **16. Hank Bordowitz, "Ahmet Ertegun and the History of Atlantic Records,"** *Schwann Spectrum*, Winter 1991

"WHEN I FIRST started Atlantic Records," reflects the label founder, Ahmet Ertegun, "I intended to make good blues and jazz music, as well as some pop music. My main interest was in jazz and blues."

In the nearly 45 years since Ertegun and his original partner Herb Abramson first got together with this idea (and \$10,000 from Ertegun's dentist), Atlantic has become one of the most consistently successful companies in music. So much the paradigm of the post WWII growth of the music business, Charlie Gillett used them for his model in his chronicle, *Making Tracks*.

"The late 50s were a time of great opportunity," Elektra Records President Bob Krasnow noted at last year's New Music Seminar. "So many people were not doing things, and it left these big, gaping holes. I worked for King Records, which was a competitor of Atlantic Records. There was no industry then. I remember, my parents used to say, 'What are you talking about, 'the music business'? What is the music business?' It wasn't really a business. You found the music, you found the money to make the records, and then the other people tried to get paid for selling these records."

"We used to have to sell 60,000 singles a month to meet the nut," a bemused Jerry Wexler recalled of his early days as a general partner in Atlantic, circa 1953, for *Record World* Magazine in 1972, "which was pretty extensive. I came in as a partner. We were three active partners and one silent partner and we all drove big cars, had Diner Club Cards and got decent salaries, so we were enjoying the prerequisites of management instantly, and in order to do that we had to sell those 60,000 singles a month. I remember every week Ahmet and I and Muriel Matenson then, we used to sit with a little hand crank adding machine and figure out if we'd survived that week."

"In those days," Ertegun adds, "you hoped that something would sell enough to keep the doors open. For the first two years, it was all touch and go, and thereafter, the company grew a lot, because we got a large roster of good artists."

These days, business is a bit more involved. Atlantic has grown by keeping the things that work but recognizing what was needed for growth. "We have a big nut," Ertegun boils down the situation at Atlantic today, "and we need to have those hits all the time."

Through college, Ertegun, son of the Turkish Ambassador to the United States, supplemented his allowance by making and selling records. He and Abramson set up shop as Atlantic in the latter part of 1947. Their first records, jazz sides by Tiny Grimes and Errol Garner, came out in 1948.

"When Herb Abramson, another music buff, and I decided to start Atlantic Records in 1947," Ertegun recalls. "We did it for one main reason. We wanted to make the kind of records we wanted to buy. First and foremost, we were having great fun, and never imagined we would be able to make a living doing what we loved most. It is out of this kind of atmosphere that traditions are challenged, rules are broken, and new music is generated. The first Atlantic office, was in the now defunct Jefferson hotel. We were only there for about a year and a half or so. Then we moved to an office on Eighth Avenue, and I guess 53rd or 54th St. It was in the same building as Stillman's Gym."

Ertegun and Abramson spent their first year and a half scuffling to get their records out. National distributors felt that Atlantic's jazz and rough R&B was not the stuff that record sales were made of. They changed their tune when Atlantic released Stick McGhee's 'Drinkin' Wine Spo-De-O-Dee' in 1949. That became a major R&B hit, the company's first, and even made inroads onto the pop

charts. Distributors could no longer ignore the upstart independent. Atlantic soon had a string of similar hits with Big Joe Turner, LaVern Baker, The Drifters and Ruth Brown.

"We wanted to record the kind of music we love, mainly jazz and blues," Ertegun explains. "In New York City in the late 1940's, there were very few bluesmen. It was very hard to record blues, because the Delta musicians, who came from Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama and so forth, migrated mostly in the beginning to Chicago, and later on to California. Our market was really the black market, which was in large part in the South, and their favorite music was the blues in those days. We had a little bit of a rough time trying to get our artists to do anything resembling the blues. They were more singers like LaVern Baker and Ruth Brown. We managed to sign a great blues singer, Big Joe Turner. But the bands we had were composed of players from the big jazz bands and swing orchestras who had become studio musicians. They were not at all like the kind of musicians who were playing the blues in Chicago, like Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon and all those people. When we had these musicians try to play in an authentic blues fashion, it didn't work. The result, however, was quite intriguing. What emerged was music with a blues feel, but with a particularly Northern, urban influence. Trying to make groups like the Clovers and the Coasters and so on be more funky, we created a music that was palatable, oddly enough, to a white audience. Much to our amazement, the records were bought by both, black and white kids alike, the first true crossover music. In fact, the music we were making was rock and roll, although it certainly is not what we think of today as rock and roll."

Such crossover was unheard of in the 50s. In a way, Atlantic and companies like Atlantic heralded the early shaking, rattling and rolling of the Civil Rights movement. As New Music Seminar founder Mark Josephson pointed out when he presented the Joel Webber award to Ertegun last summer, "Ertegun's accomplishments in breaking down the racial distinctions that have, for too long plagued our country and other countries around the world, are remarkable in themselves. The fact that they did so while creating records of such lasting aesthetic importance is all the more remarkable."

Not surprisingly, Ertegun sees this in more modest and pragmatic terms. "See, they segregated everything in those days. Certainly the South was fully segregated. But they couldn't segregate the radio dial. So, as we got our records played on radio stations that played black music, the white audience could turn the dial and get that station. A lot of the white kids started to listen to our music, which was really made for a black audience. That was really the beginning of rock and roll, because among those young white kids were people like Elvis Presley, who listened to Ray Charles and Chuck Berry and Little Richard. That was the beginning."

There is a certain amount of magic in those early Atlantic records. It is a quality Ertegun recognizes, even if he can't quantify it. Yet, the string of hits in the early 50s allowed Atlantic to expand from a part time adjunct to graduate school into a full time business. And as they started to get operating capital from these hit records, Ertegun and Abramson started to operate like a business. Yet they never lost track of the magic or the reason they went into business in the first place. Atlantic licensed music by artists like Sidney Bechet, Don Byas and Dizzy Gillespie from Blue Star Records in France. They started to look around for artists who were not necessarily unsigned, but artists on other labels Abramson and Ertegun thought would do well on Atlantic. All in the search and service of this magic.

"Sometimes," Ertegun notes, "when you hear the artist the first time, you hear the magic. You hear there's going to be something. That's what I heard when I first heard a recording by Ray Charles

and we went out and bought his contract."

The \$2500 that Atlantic spent buying Charles' contract from Swingtime records in 1952 might have been the best investment Ertegun made. Hits like 'What'd I Say', helped keep Atlantic afloat. And while it was a relatively small amount of money, Ertegun had begun to think big.

"We tried to sign Elvis Presley very early in the game," he recollects. "He was a little bit too expensive for us. I offered \$25,000. They wanted \$45,000. I didn't have \$45,000 at that time. Otherwise we would have gotten him." In 1953, Abramson found himself in the military. This left a void in the admittedly small Atlantic hierarchy. This was filled by *Billboard* record reviewer Jerry Wexler.

"Ahmet and I co-produced practically all the records from '53 to about '58 or '59," Wexler noted. "And then we had to diverge, and each one handled a separate group of artists because there were too many to handle together. But I went right into the studio with Ahmet and he trained me and showed me what to do. And let's face it: We were all in on a pass, because none of us were musicians, but we... called the sessions and we survived."

"For many years, Atlantic was literally a one room operation," Ertegun adds. "When we moved to an office on 56th St., right next to Patsy's restaurant, that's when we had our first studio. The studio was not a separate studio. It was a room that was shared by me and Jerry Wexler. We had two desks and a grand piano. The two desks were my desk and Jerry's. That was our office. In the evening we piled one desk on top of the other, and move them to a corner. Then we'd have enough room to put an orchestra in there and mic them. We brought out some chairs, and that was our studio. It was a great way to avoid paying for studio time. We put in a little control room and we hired Tommy Dowd, who was a young engineer who worked at various studios here, and later worked for the Voice of America. But he was a part time engineer, recording in that room. Tommy was our first and best engineer. He got a great sound under truly Spartan conditions. We made a lot of hit records in that room."

In addition to the production work that Ertegun and Wexler were doing, Atlantic had hooked up with a team of two talented West Coast writers and producers. Contracted in 1956, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller brought with them their own hit making apparatus.

"I think they were the first independent producers," Ertegun notes. "They had a label on the West Coast with Lester Sill (Spark Records). They had this group who we later called the Coasters. They were called the Robins at the time they were recording for Jerry and Mike's label. We wanted to sign that group, and we also wanted them to continue producing them. So, we signed the group, and we made a production deal with Leiber and Stoller. I guess they were the first so-called independent producers. We had a long series of hits with them."

Indeed, between 1956 and 1960, Atlantic had 84 hits in the Hot 100. Of those, 56 were the product of five Atlantic artists – 15 by the Coasters, 11 by LaVern Baker and ten each by the Drifters, Clyde McPhatter and Bobby Darin.

Yet with all the pop success, Atlantic continued to make those records that they set out to make in the beginning. In 1956, Ahmet's brother Nesuhi joined the company to explore the relatively new LP market, as well as continuing the company's commitment to jazz.

"Nesuhi had been in California," Ahmet says. "He owned Jazz Man Records, and also ran the

Crescent label, which was dedicated to New Orleans music. He gave the first course on the history of jazz at UCLA, and also was head of A&R at Contemporary Records where he recorded people like Barney Kessel and Shelly Mann. When Nesuhi joined me at Atlantic, he oversaw our entry into the LP business. But most importantly, he made a series of historic jazz recordings by the Modern Jazz Quartet, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Charles Mingus and many others. A true music man, Nesuhi never recorded an artist he didn't like, and throughout his life he was a champion of new music, a huge defender of musicians' rights."

Through the late 50s and early part of the 60s, Atlantic continued to expand their R&B dominance. They also started exploring other areas. In 1958, Abramson had signed a young college drop-out named Bobby Darin. In three tries, however, they were unable to generate a hit. Ertegun decided to take a crack at it. Lightening up on the usual Atlantic approach, he cut a novelty ditty, 'Splish Splash', that went to #3 pop and started both Darin's career and Atlantic's involvement with 'white' rock and roll.

"By then we had already started branching out a little bit into pop music," Ertegun recollects, "with Bobby Darin, who made some historical records with us. I think the first recordings I made with Bobby Darin were very important records. That was a great career. I produced most of those albums. I produced just about everything that came out on Atlantic. And then, we got very lucky with a couple of acts. Nino Tempo and April Stevens (1963), and Sonny and Cher (1965). By this time, I had latched onto Eric Clapton. We recorded a group called Cream, then I got the Bee Gees, and then Led Zeppelin. Then we signed up Buffalo Springfield. I signed them up in California.

And suddenly, we're in the new music. In the new white rock and roll syndrome. So we became sort of a well rounded record company, and managed to grow year by year."

While Ertegun skates over this major move, the subtle shift in focus that it represents is notable for many reasons. With the earlier acts, a certain level of integrity leavened the pop songs. Even Sonny and Cher were a notch above a lot of the forgettable pop music that was charting circa 1965. Yet, while Atlantic was working acts like these, other companies had started aggressively working the next big thing in pop music, the British Invasion bands. However, as the list Ertegun offers illustrates, Atlantic hopped that steamship a bit late, catching it on the second wave.

"In the early 60s," Ertegun remonstrates, "it didn't take a genius to see that, first with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who, these were very, very new and important openings toward rock and roll. We didn't have those artists. I had to get into that area. We couldn't just sit by. Besides, I love that music. One of the first people I signed up was Eric Clapton, with Robert Stigwood. We heard Clapton together for the first time, and I said, 'Well, that is an artist I want.' And that was the beginning of Cream. Then I signed up Yes, of course Led Zeppelin and Emerson, Lake and Palmer."

These signings were also remarkable. Led Zeppelin's was, in fact unprecedented. Not only was their advance purported to be the largest ever offered a new band, they were also given total control over everything from record production to merchandising. Similarly, to entice the Rolling Stones Ertegun offered them what amounted to a production and distribution deal for their own label (a deal Zeppelin would echo some years later with their own Swan Song imprint.)

"When I signed the Rolling Stones," Ertegun declares, "the first recordings that we made with them, 'Brown Sugar', and so forth, brought them sales that they never had before."

In the mean time, Atlantic was still a major power in black music, particularly black music that went

pop. They developed a working relationship with Memphis based Stax Records and Muscle Shoals, Alabama's Fame Records. In addition to adding to the label's revenue, it added a musical jolt at a time when they were beginning to really need it, especially where two of the label's big soul signings, Wilson Pickett and Aretha Franklin, were involved.

"We used arrangements from the beginning," Wexler held forth. "The sound was getting played out. The stink of the studio was upon our records, you know? It became highlighted by a problem that I had with Wilson Pickett. We had signed him, but I just couldn't get off the ground with him. I got the idea of taking him to Memphis. We were getting these great records from Stax. I knew the Stax thing, the rhythm section, Booker T. and the MG's and I was close to the guys. So we did head arrangements, and he got along fantastically with the guys, especially with Cropper. So we came down there and I stayed a few days and we cut 'Midnight Hour' and 'Don't Fight It'. And then I left and they stayed and kept cutting. He came down later and did two more sessions down there. Nothing but winners, all hits: '99 1/2', '6345789', after 'Midnight Hour'. 'Midnight Hour' really changed things around. It was really a seminal record in rock."

Similarly, Aretha Franklin recorded but got nowhere. Everyone knew she had talent and possibly the most expressive voice anyone had ever been gifted. Yet, John Hammond had her for several years at Columbia. Perhaps it was the lingering effects of Columbia's long time anti-rock stance from the Miller years – they couldn't see setting a voice like that in such "crude" music – but for nearly eight years they could just barely buy Franklin a hit. Then she signed with Atlantic.

"We took her out of the traditional large band orchestrations of standards, which is the sort of thing she did at Columbia," Ertegun says. "We recorded her in the Atlantic style of that time, which was very lively rhythm and blues arrangements. We recorded down in Muscle Shoals or Memphis or whatever, with the kind of musicians that excited her, and she excited them. It worked very well. I think that Jerry Wexler made some of the most important recordings of all time with Aretha."

By the time Aretha Franklin was having her first Atlantic hits, and the Rascals and Buffalo Springfield were establishing their places on the roster, the principals at Atlantic sold the company to Warner/Seven Arts. While the principals stayed on, there were now, for the first time, people to answer to.

"These days," Wexler commented in 1972, "when you merge in the industry, there are certain cliché reasons that are always sent up, that are floating like balloons out of cartoon people's mouths. Okay, so official reasons for merging:

1) 'To have global facilities at your disposal.' Okay, that's a cosmic reason. 2) 'To have the wherewithal to continue expansion.' Well, that's good, because the N.A.M. would dig that. It's very American to expand. 3) 'To utilize the technological synergy that will emerge when we put these things together.' But the real reason is capital gains, the American dream. That's the real reason every time. Every time for everybody. But I guess you're not supposed to say that.

"We never had a recording budget," he added, "an advertising budget or a promotional budget. If Ahmet wanted to make a record, he'd make a record. Same with Nesuhi or I. We would discuss it many times if there was enough money involved, and if somebody really wanted to do something, the others never said no. So we worked without a budget. Of course, this gave a big case of faint hearts to the Warner Brothers' accountants after we merged. That's like saying you're existing without oxygen or something."



While pro forma moves were made to assuage this aspect of the new owners, very little else changed at Atlantic. They kept signing artists, releasing records and getting bigger. It's interesting to note how long many careers lasted on the label. Aretha Franklin recorded for Atlantic for nearly a decade, as did Darin. All the Coaster's hits were for the label, all Led Zeppelin's records. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young have been with the label from the git-go, as have Foreigner and Roberta Flack.

"She's been with us ever since my brother signed her up," Ertegun points out. "That was over 20 years ago. Her current album is probably one of the best she ever did. It looks like a very big hit. She's one of the finest singers in American pop history."

Atlantic was powered through a great deal of the seventies on the strength of many acts from the late 60s. Yet with the change of focus in the pop music audience and Atlantic, Wexler estimated that R&B only accounted for only about 15% of the company's business by 1972. Through the 70s, Atlantic developed such current superstars as Genesis (and their drummer, Phil Collins), and such period stars as ABBA (who were responsible for as much of Swedish GNP as Volvo at one time). They were on the dance music tip as it rose out of the underground, with Chic. In turn they were rewarded with their all-time best selling single, 'Dance, Dance, Dance'. They also were able to sign acts with a certain amount of cachet from other bands.

"The same thing that happened with Aretha Franklin," Ertegun postulates, "in a sense, happened when Doug Morris took Stevie Nicks into the studio and gave her the sort of encouragement and guidance that made her a very important, big star. But all these people, of course had huge talent. It becomes easy when you have that sort of outstanding talent."

In addition to having kept Atlantic afloat, the fact that this wealth of talent has been going on for over 40 years gives Atlantic archives that are wide and deep. They have never been loath to exploit them (though sometimes they have been a bit capricious about it). In 1972, Wexler worried out loud about the future, about the off chance that the company would become a source of "great archival records that keep getting reviewed in *Creem* magazine as classics. That's cool, but there's a responsibility to keep this thing moving." He need not have worried. In addition to keeping on the cutting edge of contemporary music, Atlantic remains second only to Columbia in the depth of its catalog and the ways they have exploited that depth. As you read this, Atlantic has begun a vast reissue/repackaging campaign. Along with the re-release of the Led Zeppelin boxed set that Jimmy Page remastered last year, release is imminent on a three CD/cassette Ray Charles box, *The Birth of Soul – The 20 Complete Atlantic Rhythm & Blues Recordings, 1952 - 1959*. This will be accompanied on the racks by single disc retrospectives by Charles' contemporaries like LaVern Baker, The Clovers and Clyde McPhatter. Additional releases will make Chic, shamefully out of print for around six years, available for the first time on CD, as well as two single discs on Bobby Darin, a double disc on the Spinners, a single disc offering of Sonny and Cher and the classic holiday record *Soul Christmas*. A dozen classic Stax recordings will be re-released, as well. "We have planned this," Ertegun intimates, "Since last year. We had such great success with the Led Zeppelin box."

Yet, rather than being the company's *raison d'etre*, projects like the reissue series exist largely on the coattails of contemporary, successful Atlantic artists. As the company has grown, they have hired good ears for what sells. Atlantic garners its share of hits, which they owe to not doing much about changing the signing approach Wexler mentioned earlier. As he and the Ertegun brothers were able to make the records they wanted to make, the same goes today, according to Ertegun.

"We have A&R meetings," Ertegun says of the signing process, "and everybody listens to the stuff that is brought in. The signings are usually a combination of Doug Morris' choices along with mine. Doug Morris, by the way," he adds about his current co-chairman and co-CEO, "I must tell you is the finest record man I ever worked with. He has a great ear. Our tastes are very similar. But, if anybody on our A&R staff is very very strong on any artist, whether we like it or now, we sign it."

This has allowed Atlantic to keep up with developing trends. The last one they missed might well have been the first wave of the British invasion. Recently, with the pop youth movement in full swing, Atlantic led the way with Debbie Gibson. On the cusp of the modern hip-hop girl group revival, they sold two million copies of a record by En Vogue. Unable to crack rap on their own terms, they made deals with First Priority and Luke records. As pop-metal came on, Atlantic made their own kind of heavy metal (i.e. gold and platinum) with groups like Kix, Winger and Skid Row.

"One of most recent important signings is Skid Row," Ertegun notes. "I worked with Jason Flom and Doug in getting that group signed up. It was tough. There were a lot of other companies bidding for the group. Jason originally found the group and asked me to go hear them. We flew out to Allentown, Pennsylvania one night when they played in front of about 25 people, with no applause. I was very very impressed by the band and the lead singer, who has a very formidable presence on stage. It was one of our best signings."

Additionally, Atlantic today seems to have a pretty good sense of artist development. Perhaps this harks back to their heritage. A label that got its start in jazz, after all, has to know that developing artists takes time and patience. It took years for John Coltrane to sell 100,000 albums. Ornette Coleman and Charles Mingus might have as much or more to say artistically than Led Zeppelin, but they were never nearly the sellers. ...

"You know," he brightens, "from being a small company run by a handful of people, we've now become a fairly large company. We have hundreds of people working here, and we have this big machine that has to be fed. So we make all kinds of music now. But we keep on making the original kind of music that we started with, which is rhythm and blues. I think that's the soul of Atlantic Records. Rhythm and blues, and rock and roll and jazz. And we are very active in all those fields. But again, it reflects not my personal taste, which it did when I first started Atlantic records, but rather the tastes of many people. So that gives us a blend of different styles of music."

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## **17. Philip Norman, "James Brown: Mister Messiah," *Sunday Times*, 1971**

JAMES BROWN will die on the stage one night, on the moving staircase of his own feet in front of a thirty-piece band; and then who knows what may be unloosed between black Americans and white?

In Baltimore or Washington or Detroit, cities where the very peace between them has a quality of angry breathing, merely the presence of Brown has been reckoned to equal 100 policemen. Harlem, on the sweltering night after an atrocity, he can cool by one word. At the end of each performance he sings the chorus "Soul Power" over and over again with bass guitar equalling a tribal tom-tom in

rhythm that locks up the mind; but he doesn't cause a riot, he empties the theatre. The audience dances out into the street.

Oppressed people are the ones who need heroes in the deepest sense of idols that come from among them and can show them a way upwards to release and happiness. James Brown is the greatest American black hero; more than any of their dissenters, more even than Dr King. He is so much to them because of his distance above them as the most famous of all Soul and Rock singers; because he started life far below them, shining shoes on the doorstep of a Georgia radio station; and because this ascent has given him a bulging conceit which, like an itchy ectoplasm, reaches black audiences, somehow transformed to pride that they deserve to feel in themselves but have been denied. He is great, above all, for his music, for never having withdrawn, as the Beatles did, to be cut and issued from record studios by scientific means. After 15 years, every night he is miraculously re-created on the stage of one desperate city or another.

When Dr Martin Luther King was murdered in 1968, the Brown revue was appearing at the Boston Garden arena. It was the televising of his show three times during the following 24 hours that kept streets throughout the Republic relatively clear of the destruction that police and National Guard had anticipated. Brown himself made a public entreaty to black people to contain their grief – "you ain't going to tear up the streets and throw your shoes in the trash can" – that was afterwards entered on the Congressional Record. Therefore, black politicians sustained by hate say he is an Uncle Tom, just a catspaw of the white law agencies. They monstrously resent Brown for what he does for morale. He has given black people not theories or systems of aggression but a phrase from the soul that they can speak and be uplifted by and yet smile at – "Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud." What can white culture offer to give a glow like that to the spirit?

I first saw Brown sing at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem three years ago; in a winter when the sauerkraut relish from the hot dogs steamed on the breath of queues stretching two blocks either way down 125th Street. And the Apollo audience is exquisitely critical and it has tranquilly watched the decline of many who fancied themselves Brown's equal in soul-size. There was Little Richard, whose stage company finally exceeded any fee he could possibly be paid, who sang flanked by mock Grenadiers and demanded that a carpet be unrolled before him as he walked. There was Screaming Jay Hawkins, carried onstage in a coffin (which shut him in one night), and Solomon Burke, who always had the catering franchise. His followers used to sell pork sandwiches and popcorn in wrappers that bore Burke's image wearing a crown.

And then a new generation of perfectly good people, like Sam and Dave, Joe Tex, Arthur Conley, has from time to time produced a challenger to Brown, emboldened by the thought that he was making records in 1965, when 'Please Please Please' sold a million. There have even been tournaments, with Brown and his younger opponent as mailed knights and some gigantic Southern stadium the tilt-yard. Always the challenger has been danced off the platform, roared out of sight, unable to comprehend that Brown has lungs and legs like a normal man.

He could tear down a theatre on his own; yet the turning of a short man of 38 with a perceptible heart condition into this colossus is the product of an organisation as quaint as it is profitable. Brown is a business tycoon and multi-millionaire; a condition that his soul-brothers readily pardon because of the thousands of dollars he gives back to Negro charities and schools. He owns buildings and three radio stations including the one where he was shoeshine boy, and a chain of restaurants called The James Brown Gold Platter, which do quick-service Soul food. His few leisure hours have a baroque quality – in the ornate mansion in Queens, New York, that is soon to become a museum of black history, at his

estate in the lushest portion of white Georgia next to the links where they play the U.S. Masters golf tournament, and in a black private aircraft named The Sex Machine after its owner's most characteristic song.

When I reached Washington last month for his appearance at Loew's Palace, the Brown organisation had struck the District of Columbia already. Detailed sheets had been drawn up of exactly how much the four-night engagement should earn, allowing for the usual percentage of children let in at a special rate of 99 cents. The theatre management had received exact, if slightly misspelt, instructions as to the advertisements required, the size of Brown's name in relation to his supporting acts, and how many promotional spots should be engaged on Soul radio stations around the city.

It was only in the wings of the theatre, watching the show for the sixth or seventh time, that I began to appreciate Brown's full size as a star: that is, how many arms and legs existed round him to do their utmost to stop us meeting. There was a U.S. Marshal with white hair, a camel coat and eyes and eyebrows cast into the same dangerous dark nuggets; there were dozens of other acolytes wearing suits and sometimes hats, addressing each other as Mr Bobbit, Mr Hall, Mr Holmes as their employer insists they do – he once corrected Hubert Humphrey for omitting that courtesy. I was also counselled not to drink to excess, since Mr Brown disliked the smell of alcohol, and told to have faith. In the succeeding 48 hours I must have shaken as many black hands as the Chief Scout at an international jamboree.

The show is Brown – virtually nothing else. Even the three go-go dancers who pump their knees in ghostly red light on a dais behind him seem to have been chosen for perfect inconspicuousness. There is a comic and a supporting group, in this case the Chi Lights, who astonished me by saying they had worked 10 years together. But the band is splendid. Splendour is forced on them. There is an Afro-Rock section, a formal octet of brass and strings, two drum kits, talking drums. Good billing is also deservedly given to an old friend of Brown's, Bobby Byrd, who was in his classic group of the early Sixties, the Famous Flames. Byrd plunged offstage in a glaze of exertion and was at once introduced to me. "*The London Times!*" he exclaimed. His hand shot out. "Talk it up!"

Because of his heart condition, each of Brown's appearances has an element of brilliant suicide: each is like his first big chance or his last, and yet he has probably done two shows tonight already. It is as if he is gripped by demons and poltergeists, themselves in the grip of drums. Hot whips seem to turn him: the eye can only follow him when he stops but he can't bear to stop. 'Get Up, Get Out, Get Involved' with its chorus "Soul Power" stretches into parts of an hour because there truly is no end to such a rhythm. Brown is wrapped in a cloak which he casts from him again and again, precisely on the drum-roll. Is the only thing he really loves the velvet space he sees beyond the mirage of the stage lights?

Finally at four in the morning I was beckoned through the crowd of supplicants into Brown's dressing-room. It remained, however, difficult to enter, because of the number of black men in suits respectfully crowding the walls. Reverence hung like the smell of an altar. The next thing I saw was some two dozen pairs of boots and shoes, from the 80 pairs Brown wears out onstage each year, in patent leather and piebald and snakeskin, giving the impression of a harbour crowded with picturesque craft. Next to the shoes sat Brown himself, drinking beer from a can. After the way he looks in performance, coiffed and tailored in beige or soft blue, he is a man of surprising shortness and plainness.

He was engaged with a disc-jockey in tape-recording programme flashes for his most recently acquired radio station, in Baltimore. That and WJBE in Knoxville and WDRW in Augusta, Georgia, are among the very few Soul stations in America which are actually black-owned. "Hi," Brown said into the microphone, "this is James Brown. Hello Brother! Now," he ordered the disc-jockey, "you reply "Hello Sister"."

"Hello Sister," repeated the disc-jockey.

"Hey no – they'll think I'm some kinda" faggot here. Say after me. Hello

Brother!" "Hello Brother!"

*"Hello Sister!"*

"Hello Sister!" said the disc-jockey.

"I think the people are beginning to understand," Brown recited. "Get outa' that bed and into that bread!

"Now li'l brother and li'l sister, if you on your way to school and you feeling bad – a education can bring you the things that you never had – so don't feel bad, but say it out loud..." Brown produced a variation on the axiom that has passed into the literature: "I'm going to school and I'm black and I'm proud."

He started to talk, but this was as much to his attendants as to me and his voice, to begin with, was silted up with distrust. "I'm preaching revolution. Some preach revolution for land and some for politics – I'm preaching it for *awareness*. If I'd of had an education I wouldn't be where I am today, wouldn't know nothing about land, business, but not everyone can have my advantages. Most important teacher I ever had? He was my manager, Mr Bart of Universal Attractions. He was manager to a lot of famous people, Jackie Wilson, Little Anthony and the Imperials, but he told me I had something no-one else had – intelligence. I was a whole man. A doctor or an attorney, he's a doctor or an attorney 150 per cent of the time. How can he satisfy a woman?"

Brown turned to one of his men and said, "Now Mr Patton, you shoulda' told this young man 'fore he came in here that I was super-hip, you shoulda' primed this man up. I can tell what he's going to ask me 'fore he asks it."

I replied that this was untrue. For the first time I felt Brown's complete attention settle on me, with a body-weight. There was a little shudder from the door. The interview ended and for the next 24 hours it was intimated at second and third hand that I had blown the whole of it by contradicting the star: he was as a result "leery" of me and, anyway, I had already enjoyed as much of his time as had ever been granted to *Look* magazine or *Cosmopolitan*.

Therefore it was surprising to me – not to mention those of his followers trying to see me off – when Brown told me to go up to his suite at the Hotel Sonesta when he rose in the early afternoon.

Brown was eating a tangerine in a white-carpeted parlour, somewhat complicated by cream-coloured wrought-iron tables and chairs. All the ashtrays had peel in them and the room smelled sharp with it.

At first Brown appeared to be by himself: then the soft movements were added of a woman in slacks whom I took to be a chambermaid. It was only when she gave Brown his heart-pill that I realised this was his wife Deirdre. She came back into the room with two of the long waste-paper baskets peculiar to American hotels, and Brown put one leg into each. They were filled with warm water and salts. Then she rubbed his feet with ointment. Sitting beside him on the couch she took one of his hands under her arm and began to trim all the cuticles of his nails. In this apparently servile posture, all at once she looked strong and influential, and Brown not lordly but quite small and vulnerable.

"When I'm on my own on the road I behave just like a teen-ager, 19, 20 years old – bang, bang, bang," Brown said. "I'll eat a hamburger before the show that I won't even finish, but this afternoon I ate almost a full meal with salad and Black Forest dessert. We could get a maid to do all this but she won't have it. People sure like me if Didi's visiting. She salts my feet and rubs 'em and takes the ingrowing hairs out of my nose that I'd cut myself if I tried.

"She gives me a lot of room in the bed. I don't do karate tricks but I have to spread out. If my wife and I are together in bed I'll dream – 95 per cent pleasant dreams. If I eat late I may dream about an accident and that's not pleasant. And I wake up and see the outline of her there, and I feel like I did sleeping at the back of the aunt I boarded with when I was 12 years old. She gets up to bring me a soda. I drink a little of it. I can relax and feel like my spirit goes and lies on the studio-couch in the next room 'till morning."

Brown grew up in Augusta; in red clay country where the white word "Boy" can have the most evil sound in the world. "It was a country home – water outside. I was nine years old before I had my first store-bought underwear, my clothes having been made out of sacks and things like that. My first memory is unpleasant. If it were pleasant I wouldn't remember it." His mother left home when he was scarcely walking; his father greased and washed cars and was a sporadic parent. James helped him and picked cotton and gathered coal from railway lines, danced for the soldiers at Fort Gordon or cleaned shoes. "I'd come home at one or two a.m. and there was nobody there."

His cousin Fred Holmes, now with the Brown road show, says, "We'd steal anything – groceries, hub-caps. All I could think of then was that James was going to be a hoodlum." At 16, Brown was sent to reform school; at 19 he was paroled and became a lightweight boxer. The cleft over his right eye that the stage make-up conceals is a souvenir of that. "I trained with Beau Jack and all the fighters I was with went on to spar with Ray Robinson. I only ever lost one fight and that was because I was a chicken." Today, in extreme displeasure, he will still aim a punch at somebody.

When he sang spirituals in a church in Toccoa it was not from any promptings of the soul but because "I was trying to get a foothold in *anything*." His early professional years were spent touring Southern dives, he and eight musicians and their equipment all junked into one station wagon. It was that life which gave Brown his extraordinary notions of how orderly and punctual a touring Rock show must be. His employees, as well as addressing one another formally, have to wear suits. Even the road-managers with their filthy nails have to operate in jackets, sometimes with *three* rear vents. The available females that pursue Brown after each show are used with the same relentless courtesy. Brown himself makes little secret of benefiting from their company. "That racehorse – he don't run if he ain't got no lust." According to someone else, "there can be three different women in three motel rooms but he's polite to 'em; he calls 'em 'Miss' and puts 'em on a pedestal if they put him on one."

The band is ruled by iron. Rock musicians must forsake their dilatory ways if Brown employs them. He devises each phrase they play and remembers everything. He designs their suits. He is capable of rehearsing them 12 hours at once. With him, recording is not simply a lazy, artful process on individual tracks: he wants everything played straight off as if it were live onstage. He governs by a system of fines: 25 dollars for dirty shoes, 100 dollars for lateness; it can be as much as 1000 dollars for what Brown considers some gross breach of order or courtesy. The astonishing thing is, the bandsmen pay. They believe Brown leads them to play beyond their capabilities.

Possibly his equation of business acumen with pride of manhood is whimsical: even so, it beats political harangues or the vagaries of someone like Chester Himes, the novelist, whose vision is that blacks will engage whites in total war. "We ain't won," Brown says, "until any black man can walk down the street and nobody turns their head to look at him." But how about looking at his clothes, his shoes or his car? At this question Brown's features parted into a brilliant grin. "Yeah," he said, "*right*. I put all o' my people into Cadillacs. Miss Sanders my wardrobe mistress I gave a Cadillac Bro'ham. I got a Buick Riviera '71 that there's only seven of made at a time 'cause of the recession, and when I'm sitting in that sometimes I wish I was the car so people would look at me that way."

By the third night of his engagement at Loew's Palace, a vast number of people had assembled outside his dressing-room. There were several U.S. Marshals now, police and local disc-jockeys, most of whom professed intimate friendship with Brown, and one insufferably earnest white youth from the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, and the pilot of The Sex Machine. At one point, Deirdre Brown was also there, holding their two-year-old daughter; the child's hair rose up from her face in a cataract and she stared at all the people while her shoulders moved in intimations of rhythm as thrilling to watch as a first step forward.

And there was a preacher named "King" Coleman with a bald head like a Payne's Poppet and a character named Rufus – "folks call me Catfish" – Mayfield who was intent on out-preaching him in the small hours, while Brown was still lecturing the band musicians on their night's performance.

"I," Catfish shouted, "am the sergeant-at-arms, I am the chairman of the board and the master of my own soul and there ain' no white man on his Ajax horse gonna come along and say to me 'down Boy'."

"Rufus," King Coleman said. "You been brained." "No I ain't, no I ain't," Catfish shouted. "You a militant..."

"No I ain't," Catfish shouted. "I'm only doin' what J.B. says to do. Get out, get involved and take care o' business."

At last Brown released his guitarist and bass guitarist and came out of the theatre himself. He was intercepted by two boys, their hair shaved into black stooks, who clamoured that they'd been made to leave their shoeshine boxes outside during the show, and somebody stole them.

Brown gave them a 20-dollar bill.

"Oh – hey, thanks," said the larger boy. "I was meanin' to come talk to you James Brown while you was appearing."

"Mister Brown," Brown said. "When I come back tomorrow I want to see you here and your shoeshine boxes full of shine. Then I'm going to call you 'Mister'."



CHAPTER FIVE

1960s: Surf and the  
British Invasion





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## 1. Jules Siegel, “Goodbye Surfing, Hello God!,” *Cheetah*, October 1967.

IT WAS just another day of greatness at Gold Star Recording Studios on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood. In the morning four long-haired kids had knocked out two hours of sound for a record plugger who was trying to curry favor with a disk jockey friend of theirs in San Jose. Nobody knew it at the moment, but out of that two hours there were about three minutes that would hit the top of the charts in a few weeks, and the record plugger, the disk jockey and the kids would all be hailed as geniuses, but geniuses with a very small g.

Now, however, in the very same studio a Genius with a very large capital G was going to produce a hit. There was no doubt it would be a hit because this Genius was Brian Wilson. In four years of recording for Capitol Records, he and his group, the Beach Boys, had made surfing music a national craze, sold 16 million singles and earned gold records for 10 of their 12 albums.

Not only was Brian going to produce a hit, but also, one gathered, he was going to show everybody in the music business exactly where it was at; and where it was at, it seemed, was that Brian Wilson was not merely a Genius—which is to say a steady commercial success—but rather, like Bob Dylan and John Lennon, a GENIUS—which is to say a steady commercial success and hip besides.

Until now, though, there were not too many hip people who would have considered Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys hip, even though he had produced one very hip record, “Good Vibrations,” which had sold more than a million copies, and a super-hip album, *Pet Sounds*, which didn’t do very well at all—by previous Beach Boys sales standards. Among the hip people he was still on trial, and the question discussed earnestly among the recognized authorities on what is and what is not hip was whether or not Brian Wilson was hip, semi-hip or square.

But walking into the control room with the answers to all questions such as this was Brian Wilson himself, wearing a competition-stripe surfer’s T-shirt, tight white duck pants, pale green bowling shoes and a red plastic toy fireman’s helmet.

Everybody was wearing identical red plastic toy fireman’s helmets. Brian’s cousin and production assistant, Steve Korthoff, was wearing one; his wife, Marilyn, and her sister, Diane Rovellet—Brian’s secretary—were also wearing them, and so was a once-dignified writer from *The Saturday Evening Post* who had been following Brian around for two months.

Out in the studio, the musicians for the session were unpacking their instruments. In sport shirts and slacks, they looked like insurance salesmen and used-car dealers, except for one blonde female percussionist who might have been stamped out by a special machine that supplied plastic mannequin housewives for detergent commercials.

Controlled, a little bored after 20 years or so of nicely paid anonymity, these were the professionals of the popular music business, hired guns who did their job expertly and efficiently and then went home to the suburbs. If you wanted swing, they gave you swing. A little movie-track lushness? Fine, here comes movie-track lushness. Now it’s rock and roll? Perfect rock and roll, down the chute.

“Steve,” Brian called out, “where are the rest of those fire hats? I want everybody to wear fire hats. We’ve really got to get into this thing.” Out to the Rolls-Royce went Steve and within a few minutes all of the musicians were wearing fire hats, silly grins beginning to crack their professional dignity.

“All right, let’s go,” said Brian. Then, using a variety of techniques ranging from vocal demonstration to actually playing the instruments, he taught each musician his part. A gigantic fire howled out of the massive studio speakers in a pounding crash of pictorial music that summoned up visions of roaring, windstorm flames, falling timbers, mournful sirens and sweating firemen, building into a peak and crackling off into fading embers as a single drum turned into a collapsing wall and the fire-engine cellos dissolved and disappeared.

“When did he write this?” asked an astonished pop music producer who had wandered into the studio. “This is really fantastic! Man, this is unbelievable! How long has he been working on it?” “About an hour,” answered one of Brian’s friends. “I don’t believe it. I just can’t believe what I’m hearing,” said the producer and fell into a stone glazed silence as the fire music began again.

For the next three hours, Brian Wilson recorded and rerecorded, take after take, changing the sound balance, adding echo, experimenting with a sound effects track of a real fire.

“Let me hear that again.” “Drums, I think you’re a little slow in that last part. Let’s get right on it.” “That was really good. Now, one more time, the whole thing.” “All right, let me hear the cellos alone.” “Great. Really great. Now let’s *do it!*”

With 23 takes on tape and the entire operation responding to his touch like the black knobs on the control board, sweat glistening down his long, reddish hair onto his freckled face, the control room a litter of dead cigarette butts, Chicken Delight boxes, crumpled napkins, Coke bottles and all the accumulated trash of the physical end of the creative process, Brian stood at the board as the four speakers blasted the music into the room.

For the 24th time, the drum crashed and the sound effects crackle faded and stopped.

“Thank you,” said Brian, into the control room mike. “Let me hear that back.” Feet shifting, his body still, eyes closed, head moving seal-like to his music, he stood under the speakers and listened. “Let me hear that one more time.” Again the fire roared. “Everybody come out and listen to this,” Brian said to the musicians. They came into the control room and listened to what they had made.

“What do you think?”

Brian asked. “

It’s incredible, incredible,” whispered one of the musicians, a man in his 50s, wearing a Hawaiian shirt and iridescent trousers and pointed black Italian shoes. “Absolutely incredible.”

“Yeah,” said Brian on the way home, an acetate trial copy or “dub” of the tape in his hands, the red plastic fire helmet still on his head. “Yeah, I’m going to call this ‘Mrs. O’Leary’s Fire’ and I think it might just scare a whole lot of people.”

As it turns out, however, Brian Wilson’s magic fire music is not going to scare anybody—because nobody other than the few people who heard it in the studio will ever get to listen to it. A few days after the record was finished, a building across the street from the studio burned down and, according to Brian, there was also an unusually large number of fires in Los Angeles. Afraid that his music might in fact turn out to be magic fire music, Wilson destroyed the master.

“I don’t have to do a big scary fire like that,” he later said. “I can do a candle and it’s still fire. That would have been a really bad vibration to let out on the world, that Chicago fire. The next one is going to be a candle.”

A person who thinks of himself as understanding would probably interpret this episode as an example of perhaps too-excessive artistic perfectionism. One with psychiatric inclinations would hear all this stuff about someone who actually believed music could cause fires and start using words such as neurosis and maybe even psychosis. A true student of spoken hip, however, would say *hang-up*, which covers all of the above.

As far as Brian’s pretensions toward hipness are concerned, no label could do him worse harm. In the hip world, there is a widespread idea that really hip people don’t have hang-ups, which gives rise to the unspoken rule (unspoken because there is also the widespread idea that really hip people don’t make *any* rules) that no one who wants to be thought of as hip ever reveals his hang-ups, except maybe to his guru, and in the strictest of privacy.

In any case, whatever his talent, Brian Wilson’s attempt to win a hip following and reputation foundered for many months in an obsessive cycle of creation and destruction that threatened not only his career and his future but also his marriage, his friendships, his relationship with the Beach Boys and, some of his closest friends worried, his mind.

For a boy who used to be known in adolescence as a lover of sweets, the whole thing must have begun to taste very sour; yet, this particular phase of Brian’s drive toward whatever his goal of supreme success might be began on a rising tide that at first looked as if it would carry him and the Beach Boys beyond the Beatles, who had started just about the same time they did, into the number-one position in the international pop music fame-and-power competition.

“About a year ago I had what I consider a very religious experience,” Wilson told Los Angeles writer Tom Nolan in 1966. “I took LSD, a full dose of LSD, and later, another time, I took a smaller dose. And I learned a lot of things, like patience, understanding. I can’t teach you or tell you what I learned from taking it, but I consider it a very religious experience.”

A short time after his LSD experience, Wilson began work on the record that was to establish him right along with the Beatles as one of the most important innovators in modern popular music. It was called “Good Vibrations,” and it took more than six months, 90 hours of tape and 11 complete versions before a three-minute-35-second final master tape satisfied him. Among the instruments on “Good Vibrations” was an electronic device called a theramin, which had its debut in the soundtrack of the movie *Spellbound*, back in the Forties. To some people, “Good Vibrations” was considerably crazier than Gregory Peck had been in the movie, but to others, Brian Wilson’s new record, along with his somewhat earlier LP release, “Pet Sounds,” marked the beginning of a new era in pop music.

“They’ve Found the New Sound at Last!” shrieked the headline over a London Sunday *Express* review as “Good Vibrations” hit the English charts at number six and leaped to number one the following week. Within a few weeks, the Beach Boys had pushed the Beatles out of first place in England’s *New Musical Express*’ annual poll. In America, “Good Vibrations” sold nearly 400,000 copies in four days before reaching number one several weeks later and earning a gold record within another month when it hit the one-million sale mark.

In America, where there is none of the Beach Boys’ California-mystique that adds a special touch of

romance to their records and appearances in Europe and England, the news had not really reached all of the people whose opinion can turn popularity into fashionability. With the exception of a professor of show business (right, professor of show business; in California such a thing is not considered unusual) who turned up one night to interview Brian, and a few young writers (such as *The Village Voice's* Richard Goldstein, Paul Williams of *Crawdaddy*, and Lawrence Dietz of *New York Magazine*) not too many opinion makers were prepared to accept the Beach Boys into the mainstream of the culture industry.

“Listen man,” said San Francisco music critic Ralph Gleason who had only recently graduated from jazz into Bob Dylan and was apparently not yet ready for any more violent twists, “I recognize the L.A. hype when I hear it. I know all about the Beach Boys and I think I liked them better before, if only for sociological reasons, if you understand what I mean.”

“As for the Beach Boys,” an editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* chided his writer, who had filed the world’s longest Western Union telegram of a story, “I want you to understand that as an individual you can feel that Brian Wilson is the greatest musician of our time, and maybe the greatest human being, but as a reporter you have got to maintain your objectivity.”

“They want me to put him down,” the writer complained. “That’s their idea of objectivity—the put-down.

“It has to do with this idea that it’s not hip to be sincere,” he continued, “and they really want to be hip. What they don’t understand is that last year hip was sardonic—camp, they called it. This year hip is sincere.

“When somebody as corny as Brian Wilson starts singing right out front about God and I start writing it—very *sincerely*, you understand—it puts them very uptight.

“I think it’s because it reminds them of all those terribly sincere hymns and sermons they used to have to listen to in church when they were kids in Iowa or Ohio.

“Who knows? Maybe they’re right. I mean, who needs all this goddamn intense sincerity all the time?”

What all this meant, of course, was that everybody agreed that Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys were still too square. It would take more than “Good Vibrations” and *Pet Sounds* to erase three-and-a-half years of “Little Deuce Coupe”—a *lot* more if you counted in those J. C. Penney-style custom-tailored, kandy-striped sport shirts they insisted on wearing on stage.

Brian, however, had not yet heard the news, it appeared, and was steadily going about the business of trying to become hip. The Beach Boys, who have toured without him ever since he broke down during one particularly wearing trip, were now in England and Europe, phoning back daily reports of enthusiastic fan hysteria—screaming little girls tearing at their flesh, wild press conferences, private chats with the Rolling Stones. Washed in the heat of a kind of attention they had never received in the United States even at the height of their commercial success, three Beach Boys—Brian’s brothers, Dennis and Carl, and his cousin, Mike Love—walked into a London Rolls-Royce showroom and bought four Phantom VII limousines, one for each of them and a fourth for Brian. Al Jardine and

Bruce Johnston, the Beach Boys who are not corporate members of the Beach Boys' enterprises, sent their best regards and bought themselves some new clothing.

"I think this London thing has really helped," said Brian with satisfaction after he had made the color selection on his \$32,000 toy—a ducal-burgundy lacquered status symbol ordinarily reserved for heads of state. "That's just what the boys needed, a little attention to jack up their confidence." Then, learning that he wouldn't be able to have his new car for three months, he went out and bought an interim Rolls-Royce for \$20,000 from Mamas and Papas producer Lou Adler, taking possession of the automobile just in time to meet his group at the airport as they returned home. "It's a great environment for conducting business," he explained as his friend and former road manager, Terry Sachen, hastily pressed into service as interim chauffeur for the interim Rolls-Royce, informally uniformed in his usual fringed deerskins and moccasins, drove the car through Hollywood and to one of Brian's favorite eating places, the Pioneer Chicken drive-in on Sunset Boulevard.

"This car is really out of sight," said Brian, filling up on fried shrimp in the basket. "Next time we go up to Capitol, I'm going to drive up in my Rolls-Royce limo. You've got to do those things with a little style. It's not just an ordinary visit that way—it's an arrival, right? Wow! That's really great—an *arrival*, in my limo. It'll blow their minds!"

Whether or not the interim Rolls-Royce actually ever blew the minds of the hard-nosed executives who run Capitol Records is something to speculate on, but no one in the record industry with a sense of history could have failed to note that this very same limousine had once belonged to John Lennon; and in the closing months of 1966, with the Beach Boys home in Los Angeles, Brian rode the "Good Vibrations" high, driving forward in bursts of enormous energy that seemed destined before long to earn him the throne of the international empire of pop music still ruled by John Lennon and the Beatles.

At the time, it looked as if the Beatles were ready to step down. Their summer concerts in America had been only moderately successful at best, compared to earlier years. There were ten thousand empty seats at Shea Stadium in New York and 11 lonely fans at the airport in Seattle. Mass media, underground press, music-industry trade papers and the fan magazines were filled with fears that the Beatles were finished, that the group was breaking up. Lennon was off acting in a movie; McCartney was walking around London alone, said to be carrying a giant torch for his sometime girl friend, Jane Asher; George Harrison was getting deeper and deeper into a mystical Indian thing under the instruction of sitar-master Ravi Shankar; and Ringo was collecting material for a Beatles museum. In Los Angeles, Brian Wilson was riding around in the Rolls-Royce that had once belonged to John Lennon, pouring a deluge of new sounds onto miles of stereo tape in three different recording studios booked day and night for him in month-solid blocks, holding court nightly at his \$240,000 Beverly Hills Babylonian-modern home, and, after guests left, sitting at his grand piano until dawn, writing new material.

The work in progress was an album called *Smile*. "I'm writing a teen-age symphony to God," Brian told dinner guests on an October evening. He then played for them the collection of black acetate trial records which lay piled on the floor of his red imitation-velvet wallpapered bedroom with its leopard-print bedspread. In the bathroom, above the wash basin, there was a plastic color picture of Jesus Christ with trick effect eyes that appeared to open and close when you moved your head. Sophisticate newcomers pointed it out to each other and laughed slyly, almost hoping to find a Keane painting among decorations ranging from Lava Lamps to a department-store rack of dozens

of dolls, each still in its plastic bubble container, the whole display trembling like a space-age Christmas tree to the music flowing out into the living room.

Brian shuffled through the acetates, most of which were unlabeled, identifying each by subtle differences in the patterns of the grooves. He had played them so often he knew the special look of each record the way you know the key to your front door by the shape of its teeth. Most were instrumental tracks, cut while the Beach Boys were in Europe, and for these Brian supplied the vocal in a high sound that seemed to come out of his head rather than his throat as he somehow managed to create complicated four and five part harmonies with only his own voice.

“Rock, rock, Plymouth rock roll over,” Brian sang. “Bicycle rider, see what you done done to the church of the native American Indian...Over and over the crow cries uncover the cornfields...Who ran the Iron Horse...Out in the farmyard the cook is chopping lumber; out in the barnyard the chickens do their number...Bicycle rider see what you done done...”

A panorama of American history filled the room as the music shifted from theme to theme; the tinkling harpsichord-sounds of the bicycle rider pushed sad Indian sounds across the continent; the Iron Horse pounded across the plains in a wide-open rolling rhythm that summoned up visions of the old West; civilized chickens bobbed up and down in a tiny ballet of comic barnyard melody; the inexorable bicycle music, cold and charming as an infinitely talented music box, reappeared and faded away.

Like medieval choirboys, the voices of the Beach Boys pealed out in wordless prayer from the last acetate, thirty seconds of chorale that reached upward to the vaulted stone ceilings of an empty cathedral lit by thousands of tiny votive candles melting at last into one small, pure pool that whispered a universal *amen* in a sigh without words.

Brian’s private radio show was finished. In the dining room a candle-lit table with a dark blue cloth was set for ten persons. In the kitchen, Marilyn Wilson was trying to get the meal organized and served, aided and hindered by the chattering suggestions of the guests’ wives and girl friends. When everyone was seated and waiting for the food, Brian tapped his knife idly on a white china plate. “Listen to that,” he said. “That’s really great!” Everybody listened as Brian played the plate. “Come on, let’s get something going here,” he ordered. “Michael—do this. David—you do this.” A plate-and-spoon musicale began to develop as each guest played a distinctly different technique, rhythm and melody under Brian’s enthusiastic direction.

“That’s absolutely unbelievable!” said Brian. “Isn’t that unbelievable? That’s so unbelievable I’m going to put it on the album. Michael, I want you to get a sound system up here tomorrow and I want everyone to be here tomorrow night. We’re going to get this on tape.”

Brian Wilson’s plate-and-spoon musicale never did reach the public, but only because he forgot about it. Other sounds equally strange have found their way onto his records. On *Pet Sounds*, for example, on some tracks there is an odd, soft, hollow percussion effect that most musicians assume is some kind of electronically transmuted drum sound—a conga drum played with a stick perhaps, or an Indian tom-tom. Actually, it’s drummer Hal Blaine playing the bottom of a plastic jug that once contained Sparkettes spring water. And, of course, at the end of the record there is the strangely affecting track of a train roaring through a lonely railroad crossing as a bell clangs and Brian’s dogs, Banana, a beagle, and Louie, a dark brown weimaraner, bark after it.

More significant, perhaps, to those who that night heard the original instrumental tracks for both

*Smile* and the Beach Boys' new single, "Heroes and Villains," is that entire sequences of extraordinary power and beauty are missing in the finished version of the single, and will undoubtedly be missing as well from *Smile*—victims of Brian's obsessive tinkering and, more importantly, sacrifices to the same strange combination of superstitious fear and God-like conviction of his own power he displayed when he destroyed the fire music.

The night of the dining-table concerto, it was the God-like confidence Brian must have been feeling as he put his guests on his trip, but the fear was soon to take over. At his house that night, he had assembled a new set of players to introduce into his life game, each of whom was to perform a specific role in the grander game he was playing with the world.

Earlier in the summer, Brian had hired Van Dyke Parks, a super-sophisticated young songwriter and composer, to collaborate with him on the lyrics for *Smile*. With Van Dyke working for him, he had a fighting chance against John Lennon, whose literary skill and Liverpudlian wit had been one of the most important factors in making the Beatles the darlings of the hip intelligentsia.

With that flank covered, Brian was ready to deal with some of the other problems of trying to become hip, the most important of which was how was he going to get in touch with some really hip people. In effect, the dinner party at the house was his first hip social event, and the star of the evening, so far as Brian was concerned, was Van Dyke Parks' manager, David Anderle, who showed up with a whole group of very hip people.

Elegant, cool and impossibly cunning, Anderle was an artist who has somehow found himself in the record business as an executive for MGM Records, where he had earned himself a reputation as a genius by purportedly thinking up the million-dollar movie-TV-record offer that briefly lured Bob Dylan to MGM from Columbia until everybody had a change of heart and Dylan decided to go back home to Columbia.

Anderle had skipped back and forth between painting and the record business, with mixed results in both. Right now he was doing a little personal management and thinking about painting a lot. His appeal to Brian was simple: everybody recognized David Anderle as one of the hippest people in Los Angeles. In fact, he was something like the mayor of hipness as far as some people were concerned. And not only that, he was a genius.

Within six weeks, he was working for the Beach Boys; everything that Brian wanted seemed at last to be in reach. Like a magic genie, David Anderle produced miracles for him. A new Beach Boys record company was set up, Brother Records, with David Anderle at its head and, simultaneously, the Beach Boys sued Capitol Records in a move to force a renegotiation of their contract with the company.

The house was full of underground press writers. Anderle's friend Michael Vosse was on the Brother Records payroll out scouting TV contracts and performing other odd jobs. Another of Anderle's friends was writing the story on Brian for *The Saturday Evening Post* and a film crew from CBS-TV was up at the house for a documentary to be narrated by Leonard Bernstein. The Beach Boys were having meetings once or twice a week with teams of experts briefing them on corporate policy, drawing complicated chalk patterns as they described the millions of dollars everyone was going to earn out of all this.



As 1967 opened it seemed as though Brian and the Beach Boys were assured of a new world of success; yet something was going wrong. As the corporate activity reached a peak of intensity, Brian was becoming less and less productive and more and more erratic. *Smile*, which was to have been released for the Christmas season, remained unfinished. "Heroes and Villains," which was virtually complete, remained in the can, as Brian kept working out new little pieces and then scrapping them. Van Dyke Parks had left and come back and would leave again, tired of being constantly dominated by Brian. Marilyn Wilson was having headaches and Dennis Wilson was leaving his wife. Session after session was canceled. One night a studio full of violinists waited while Brian tried to decide whether or not the vibrations were friendly or hostile. The answer was hostile and the session was canceled, at a cost of some \$3,000. Everything seemed to be going wrong. Even the *Post* story fell through.

Brian seemed to be filled with secret fear. One night at the house, it began to surface. Marilyn sat nervously painting her fingernails as Brian stalked up and down, his face tight and his eyes small and red.

"What's the matter, Brian? You're really strung out," a friend asked.

"Yeah, I'm really strung out. Look, I mean I really feel strange. A really strange thing happened to me tonight. Did you see this picture, *Seconds*?"

"No, but I know what it's about; I read the book."

"Look, come into the kitchen; I really have to talk about this." In the kitchen they sat down in the black and white houndstooth-check wallpapered dinette area. A striped window shade clashed with the checks and the whole room vibrated like some kind of op art painting. Ordinarily, Brian wouldn't sit for more than a minute in it, but now he seemed to be unaware of anything except what he wanted to say.

"I walked into that movie," he said in a tense, high-pitched voice, "and the first thing that happened was a voice from the screen said 'Hello, Mr. Wilson.' It completely blew my mind. You've got to admit that's pretty spooky, right?"

"Maybe."

"That's not all. Then the whole thing was there. I mean my whole life. Birth and death and rebirth. The whole thing. Even the beach was in it, a whole thing about the beach. It was my whole life right there on the screen."

"It's just a coincidence, man. What are you getting all excited about?"

"Well, what if it isn't a coincidence? What if it's real? You know there's mind gangsters these days. There could be mind gangsters, couldn't there? I mean look at Spector, he could be involved in it, couldn't he? He's going into films. How hard would it be for him to set up something like that?"

"Brian, Phil Spector is not about to make a million-dollar movie just to scare you. Come on, stop trying to be so dramatic."

"All right, all right. I was just a little bit nervous about it," Brian said, after some more back and forth about the possibility that Phil Spector, the record producer, had somehow influenced the making of *Seconds* to disturb Brian Wilson's tranquillity. "I just had to get it out of my system. You can see where something like that could scare someone, can't you?"

They went into Brian's den, a small room papered in psychedelic orange, blue, yellow and red wall fabric with rounded corners. At the end of the room there was a juke box filled with Beach Boy

singles and Phil Spector hits. Brian punched a button and Spector's "Be My Baby" began to pour out at top volume.

"Spector has always been a big thing with me, you know. I mean I heard that song three and a half years ago and I knew that it was between him and me. I knew exactly where he was at and now I've gone beyond him. You can understand how that movie might get someone upset under those circumstances, can't you?"

Brian sat down at his desk and began to draw a little diagram on a piece of printed stationery with his name at the top in the kind of large fat script printers of charitable dinner journals use when the customer asks for a hand- lettered look. With a felt-tipped pen, Brian drew a close approximation of a growth curve. "Spector started the whole thing," he said, dividing the curve into periods. "He was the first one to use the studio. But I've gone beyond him now. I'm doing the spiritual sound, a white spiritual sound. Religious music. Did you hear the Beatles album? Religious, right? That's the whole movement. That's where I'm going. It's going to scare a lot of people.

"Yeah," Brian said, hitting his fist on the desk with a slap that sent the parakeets in the large cage facing him squalling and whistling. "Yeah," he said and smiled for the first time all evening. "That's where I'm going and it's going to scare a lot of people when I get there."

As the year drew deeper into winter, Brian's rate of activity grew more and more frantic, but nothing seemed to be accomplished. He tore the house apart and half redecorated it. One section of the living room was filled with a full- sized Arabian tent and the dining room, where the grand piano stood, was filled with sand to a depth of a foot or so and draped with nursery curtains. He had had his windows stained gray and put a sauna bath in the bedroom. He battled with his father and complained that his brothers weren't trying hard enough. He accused Mike Love of making too much money.

One by one, he canceled out the friends he had collected, sometimes for the strangest reasons. An acquaintance of several months who thought he had become extremely close with Brian showed up at a record session and found a guard barring the door. Michael Vosse came out to explain. "Hey man, this is really terrible," said Vosse, smiling under a broad-brimmed straw hat. "It's not you, it's your chick. Brian says she's a witch and she's messing with his brain so bad by ESP that he can't work. It's like the Spector thing. You know how he is. Say, I'm really sorry." A couple of months later, Vosse was gone. Then, in the late spring, Anderle left. The game was over.

Several months later, the last move in Brian's attempt to win the hip community was played out. On July 15th, the Beach Boys were scheduled to appear at the Monterey International Pop Music Festival, a kind of summit of rock music with the emphasis on love, flowers and youth. Although Brian was a member of the board of this nonprofit event, the Beach Boys canceled their commitment to perform. The official reason was that their negotiations with Capitol Records were at a crucial stage and they had to get "Heroes and Villains" out right away. The second official reason was that Carl, who had been arrested for refusing to report for induction into the Army (he was later cleared in court), was so upset that he wouldn't be able to sing.

Whatever the merit in these reasons, the real one may have been closer to something John Phillips of the Mamas and Papas and a Monterey board member suggested: "Brian was afraid that the hippies from San Francisco would think the Beach Boys were square and boo them."

But maybe Brian was right. “Those candy-striped shirts just wouldn’t have made it at Monterey, man,” said David Anderle.

Whatever the case, at the end of the summer, “Heroes and Villains” was released in sharply edited form and *Smile* was reported to be on its way. In the meantime, however, the Beatles had released *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and John Lennon was riding about London in a bright yellow Phantom VII Rolls-Royce painted with flowers on the sides and his zodiac symbol on the top. In *Life* magazine, Paul McCartney came out openly for LSD and in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco George Harrison walked through the streets blessing the hippies. Ringo was still collecting material for a Beatles museum. However good *Smile* might turn out to be, it seemed somehow that once more the Beatles had outdistanced the Beach Boys.

Back during that wonderful period in the fall of 1966 when everybody seemed to be his friend and plans were being laid for Brother Records and all kinds of fine things, Brian had gone on a brief visit to Michigan to hear a Beach Boys concert. The evening of his return, each of his friends and important acquaintances received a call asking everyone to please come to the airport to meet Brian, it was very important. When they gathered at the airport, Brian had a photographer on hand to take a series of group pictures. For a long time, a huge mounted blow-up of the best of the photographs hung on the living room wall, with some thirty people staring out—everyone from Van Dyke Parks and David Anderle to Michael Vosse and Terry Sachen. In the foreground was *The Saturday Evening Post* writer looking sourly out at the world.

The picture is no longer on Brian’s wall and most of the people in it are no longer his friends. One by one each of them has either stepped out of the picture or been forced out of it. The whole cycle has returned to its beginning. Brian, who started out in Hawthorne, Calif., with his two brothers and a cousin, once more has surrounded himself with relatives. The house in Beverly Hills is empty. Brian and Marilyn are living in their new Spanish Mission estate in Bel-Air, cheek by jowl with the Mamas and Papas’ Cass Elliott.

What remains, of course, is “Heroes and Villains.” And there is also a spectacular peak, a song called “Surf’s Up” that Brian recorded for the first time in December in Columbia Records Studio A for a CBS-TV pop music documentary. Earlier in the evening the film crew had covered a Beach Boys vocal session which had gone very badly. Now, at midnight, the Beach Boys had gone home and Brian was sitting in the back of his car, smoking a joint.

In the dark car, he breathed heavily, his hands in his lap, eyes staring nowhere. “All right,” he said at last. “Let’s just sit here and see if we can get into something positive, but without any words. Let’s just get into something quiet and positive on a nonverbal level.” There was a long silence.

“OK, let’s go,” he said, and then, quickly, he was in the studio rehearsing, spotlighted in the center of the huge dark room, the cameramen moving about him invisibly outside the light.

“Let’s do it,” he announced, and the tape began to roll. In the control room no one moved. David Oppenheim, the TV producer, fortyish, handsome, usually studiously detached and professional, lay on the floor, hands behind his head, eyes closed. For three minutes and 27 seconds, Wilson played with delicate intensity, speaking moodily through the piano. Then he was finished. Oppenheim, whose last documentary had been a study of Stravinsky, lay motionless.

“That’s it,” Wilson said as the tape continued to whirl. The mood broke. As if awakening from heavy sleep the people stirred and shook their heads.

“I’d like to hear that,” Wilson said. As his music replayed, he sang the lyrics in a high, almost falsetto voice, the cameras on him every second.

“The diamond necklace played the pawn,” Wilson sang. “...A blind class aristocracy, back through the opera glass you see the pit and the pendulum drawn.

“Columnated ruins domino,” his voice reached upward; the piano faltered a set of falling chords. In a slow series of impressionistic images the song moved to its ending:

I heard the word: Wonderful thing! A children’s song!

On the last word Brian’s voice rose and fell, like the ending of that prayer chorale he had played so many months before.

“That’s really special,” someone said.

“Special, that’s right,” said Wilson quietly. “Van Dyke and I really kind of thought we had done something special when we finished that one.” He went back into the studio, put on the earphones and sang the song again for his audience in the control room, for the revolving tape recorder and for the cameras which relentlessly followed as he struggled to make manifest what still only existed as a perfect, incommunicable sound in his head.

At home, as the black acetate dub turned on his bedroom hi-fi set, Wilson tried to explain the words.

“It’s a man at a concert,” he said. “All around him there’s the audience, playing their roles, dressed up in fancy clothes, looking through opera glasses, but so far away from the drama, from life—‘Back through the opera glass you see the pit and the pendulum drawn.’

“The music begins to take over. ‘Columnated ruins domino.’ Empires, ideas, lives, institutions—everything has to fall, tumbling like dominoes.

“He begins to awaken to the music; sees the pretentiousness of everything. ‘The music hall a costly bow.’ Then even the music is gone, turned into a trumpeter swan, into what the music really is. “‘Canvas the town and brush the backdrop.’ He’s off in his vision, on a trip. Reality is gone; he’s creating it like a dream. ‘Dove-nested towers.’ Europe, a long time ago. ‘The laughs come hard in Auld Lang Syne.’ The poor people in the cellar taverns, trying to make themselves happy by singing. “Then there’s the parties, the drinking, trying to forget the wars, the battles at sea. ‘While at port a do or die.’ Ships in the harbor, battling it out. A kind of Roman Empire thing.

“‘A choke of grief.’ At his own sorrow and the emptiness of his life, because he can’t even cry for the suffering in the world, for his own suffering.

“And then, hope. ‘Surf’s up!...Come about hard and join the once and often spring you gave.’ Go back to the kids, to the beach, to childhood.

“‘I heard the word’—of God; ‘Wonderful thing’—the joy of enlightenment, of seeing God. And what is it? ‘A children’s song!’ And then there’s the song itself; the song of children; the song of the universe rising and falling in wave after wave, the song of God, hiding the love from us, but always

letting us find it again, like a mother singing to her children.”

The record was over. Wilson went into the kitchen and squirted Reddi-Whip direct from the can into his mouth; made himself a chocolate Great Shake, and ate a couple of candy bars.

“Of course that’s a very intellectual explanation,” he said. “But maybe sometimes you have to do an intellectual thing. If they don’t get the words, they’ll get the music. You can get hung up in words, you know. Maybe they work; I don’t know.” He fidgeted with a telescope.

“This thing is so bad,” he complained. “So Mickey Mouse. It just won’t work smoothly. I was really freaked out on astronomy when I was a kid. Baseball, too. I guess I went through a lot of phases. A lot of changes, too. But you can really get into things through the stars. And swimming. A lot of swimming. It’s physical; really Zen, right? The whole spiritual thing is very physical. Swimming really does it sometimes.” He sprawled on the couch and continued in a very small voice.

“So that’s what I’m doing. Spiritual music.”

“Brian,” Marilyn called as she came into the room wearing a quilted bathrobe, “do you want me to get you anything, honey? I’m going to sleep.”

“No, Mar,” he answered, rising to kiss his wife goodnight. “You go on to bed. I want to work for a while.”

“C’mon kids,” Marilyn yelled to the dogs as she padded off to bed. “Time for bed. Louie! Banana! Come to bed. Goodnight, Brian. Goodnight, everybody.”

Wilson paced. He went to the piano and began to play. His guests moved toward the door. From the piano, his feet shuffling in the sand, he called a perfunctory goodbye and continued to play, a melody beginning to take shape.

Outside, the piano spoke from the house. Brian Wilson’s guests stood for a moment, listening. As they got into their car, the melancholy piano moaned.

“Here’s one that’s really outasight from the fantabulous Beach Boys!” screamed a local early morning Top-40 DJ from the car radio on the way home, a little hysterical as usual, his voice drowning out the sobbing introduction to the song.

“We’re sending this one out for Bob and Carol in Pomona. They’ve been going steady now for six months. Happy six months, kids, and dig! ‘Good Vibrations!’ *The Beach Boys! Outasight!*”

1967

## **2. Mick Farren, “JAN AND DEAN: YOU DON'T COME BACK FROM DEAD MAN'S CURVE,” *New Musical Express*, 11 January 1975**

OKAY, ALL you, out there. How many of you remember Jan and Dean? If they weren't the great innovators of surf music, they were at least the second in line... the only people who ever shut them down were the Beach Boys.

Of course, there were other surfing bands, the Ripcords, Ronnie and the Daytonas, the Surfaris, the Rivingtons and even the Trashmen. But these were no competition. If they weren't an amalgam of Jan, Dean or members of the Beach Boys, they were invariably recording either a Beach Boys or a Jan and Dean tune.

Jan and Dean had a fast brief career that ran from around 1959 to 1966. They didn't have the solid artistry of either the Beatles, Chuck Berry or the Beach Boys, but they carved a solid niche in the consciousness of their time with songs like 'Little Old Lady From Pasadena', 'Dead Man's Curve' and 'Ride the Wild Surf'. They were firmly locked into the surf and drag crazes of the period and provided pleasant (and occasionally memorable) songs that celebrated these phenomena.

In April 1966 the career of Jan and Dean came to a sudden full stop. Their wave broke. Jan piled up his Corvette in Whittier Boulevard, Los Angeles. The head injuries he received in the crash caused serious brain damage that left his speech and physical co-ordination seriously impaired. It was the end for Jan and Dean. Dean Torrence tried to preserve a little of the momentum with an album called *Save For A Rainy Day*, but after a more than negative response from Jan, and legal wranglings with his family, Dean backed away from the whole project and retreated to the quiet, more orderly life of a graphic designer.

Today, eight years after, Dean Torrence looks like a kindly, gentle senior surfer. The flat top has gone, his blond hair is now shoulder length. He still wears sneakers and a sweatshirt, however, and he still goes surfing. Dean has mellowed, but he hasn't totally put the past behind him. In fact, when we met, he was checking the final release details of a retrospective Jan and Dean album called *Gotta Take That One Last Ride*. He seemed pleased to talk about the old days of his rock and roll career.

"In the beginning we just started singing. There was no idea of actually making a living at it. Almost everything that was happening seemed to be coming out of Philadelphia. Stuff like Fabian, Frankie Avalon, that kind of thing. It never occurred to us that we could make money singing.

"Jan and I were both in the high school football team. That's really how we met. We had lockers next to each other. It sounds like a bad movie script, but it's true. We first sang together in the showers, really. Things like the Silhouettes 'Get A Job' and Danny and the Juniors' 'At The Hop'.

If one single fact contributed to the conception of Jan and Dean above all others it was that Jan was a tape freak. He had two home machines set up in his garage, and an embryonic group began to gather there.

"Mostly neighbours. There was Bruce Johnson, Sandy Nelson played drums and there was a third guy with acne whose name I don't remember who brought over his saxophone. We'd all get together in Jan's garage and fool around.

"One day Jan came in and told us how it was possible to make a dub from our tapes. We'd never heard of anything like that before, and it seemed a great idea to actually have a disc of one of our songs."

The song chosen was one called 'Jennie Lee'. It was written after seeing a stripper of the same name at an L.A burlesque theatre.

"We went up this studio to find out about making a dub. The guy in charge told us it would be 20 dollars an hour and we thought 'Jesus'. We didn't have that kind of money. Then he explained that he could make two dubs, one for me, and one for Jan, for 10 dollars. We decided that was okay, and went ahead.

"While the engineer was running the tape through to get a cutting level, a little Jewish guy stuck his

head round the door and yelled 'Hey'. It was just like a bad rock and roll movie again. He told us that he loved the record and that he wanted to put it out. He told us we'd be bigger than the Everly Brothers. He paid for the dubs that we wanted, and took some for his company. He worked for Arwin Records. We only found out later that Arwin was a tax shelter for Doris Day and her husband Marty Melcher."

As things turned out, the Little Jewish Guy was as good as his word. Four months after its creation, 'Jennie Lee' was number three in the national chart, behind 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' by the Everly brothers. Jan and Dean were up there with Don and Phil. ...

Their next relationship was with the youthful combination of Lou Adler and Herb Alpert. The product of this conspiracy was 'Baby Love', which, arranged by Alpert, went to number seven after which Adler had sold it to Dore, a comparatively new label that had recently had a hit with the fifteen-year-old Phil Spector's production of 'To Know Him Is To Love Him' by the Teddy Bears.

These followed a series of Dick Clark shows and a bunch of little chart records from Dore. Jan and Dean did their major tours during the summer months when the high schools and colleges were out — partly because they pulled better audiences, and partly because Jan and Dean were still at college themselves, ensuring their future careers in case the rock and roll money gave out.

Right up until his accident, Jan was studying to be a doctor.

In Dean's case this late studying paid dividends. After the disaster he could slide easily into a ready-made career. From his conversation you get the idea that he is proud of the Grammy award for the cover of the album by a group called Pollution, as of any of his hit records.

"Anyway, there we were back in L.A. It was round about that time that Herb and Lou decided they ought to part company. It started when Herb came in with his trumpet record that he'd recorded and expected Lou to get a release for. Lou told him that he was crazy, and that trumpet records had no chance at all. Then Lou found out that Herb had spent all the company's money on producing it. At that point they decided it might be better if they divided up what was left, and went their separate ways. Lou got Jan and Dean, and Herb got the tape recorder."

Two things happened next that were to have a major effect on the continuation of Jan and Dean. They listened to the Four Seasons, and they signed with Liberty Records. The Four Seasons gave them idea of using a falsetto parts, and the company gave them a solid foundation to perfect the sound and produce their major hit 'Linda'.

"After 'Linda', Liberty wanted us to do an album. We were going surfing, surfing music had just happened and we wanted to do a surfing album. We had to keep 'Linda' in the title so we arrived at *Linda Goes Surfing*."

Dean politely cracks up at the humour of it all.

"We were looking round for songs to put on the album. We'd played at hops with the Beach Boys and sung with them, and it seemed natural to do our version of 'Surfin' and 'Surfin' Safari'. We got the Beach Boys along to help us out. After the session Brian Wilson played us their new single. It was based on a Chuck Berry tune and called 'Surfin' USA'. We immediately wanted it, but Brian said no, he was going to keep it for himself. Then he played us another tune, 'Surf City' and said we could have that one.

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THIS WAS the vintage period for Jan and Dean. Together with the Beach Boys, they were the sole American stronghold against the British invasion until the event of Bob Dylan and the folk/protest movement. One hit followed the other, and both bands maintained their boy-next-door image, Jan and Dean in their sweatshirts and the Beach Boys in their Pendleton stripes. Brian Wilson began to demonstrate his leaning towards the great innovator while Jan and Dean dropped increasingly into the role of arch clowns of the rock world. They hosted the *TAMI Show*, a movie shown over here as *Gather No Moss* that started the Rolling Stones, James Brown, the Supremes and practically everyone who'd had a chart hit in 1965.

It wasn't however, a time without problems. The first was created by both Jan's and Dean's positive refusal to drop out of school. They still had little faith in the long-term career prospects of rock and roll stars. Being essentially part-timers, it created massive problems for any potential manager. ... "We'd worked for a long time with the Beach Boys, Brian in particular. He was always around. Jan would take a song to a certain point, and then Brian would come into the studio and make it anything from five to 15 per cent better. He could take a good track and make it fantastic. We were quite free about singing on each other's records, but then the record companies started clamping down. Capitol got really uptight about the Beach Boys singing on some of our hits and Liberty in their turn, began objecting to us singing on Beach Boys tracks. It started to get stupid.... "

THAT'S ABOUT the story, the epitaph for Jan and Dean. We cross the street to take pictures on the Hollywood High School football field. Dean asks *NME* photographer Joe Stevens if he'd like to go surfing, Dean still takes his board out most Sundays. You get the impression that, to him, it's more important than a previous career as a rock star.

### **3. Howard Kramer, "Rock and Roll Music, from *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge University Press, 2011)**

George Martin, in many ways, birthed the Beatles as we know them. We know them through their records, not their performances. They arrived on his step as a nightclub-hardened beat group with virtually no studio experience and, under his tutelage, they became the musical group that personified the studio as an instrument. The Beatles' first three long-playing records, *Please Please Me*, *With the Beatles*, and *A Hard Day's Night*, were a short ramp leading up to a colossal cultural shift. Astonishingly, they were all recorded and released in a twenty-two-month period. To examine those cornerstone recordings, we must first see how they arrived there.

The first experience any of the Beatles had with recording was in 1958, when the Quarrymen, with John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Colin Hanton, and Duff Lowe, cut a shellac disc of two songs at a home studio in Liverpool. One was Buddy Holly and the Crickets' "That'll Be the Day," a highly appropriate choice considering Holly's pervasive influence on the band. The other was "In Spite of All the Danger," a McCartney-Harrison composition characterized by McCartney as "very influenced by Elvis."<sup>1</sup> To the participants, the event had a magical feel, as they now could return to their homes and play an actual performance of their own. Still, a professional studio seemed an unattainable dream, and they were barely beyond being just a scruffy little skiffle group.

The evolution of the Quarrymen into the Beatles was a path forged on the streets and in the rank nightclubs of Hamburg, Germany. As Lennon said, "I grew up in Hamburg, not Liverpool." During the Beatles' second stay in Hamburg, they were recruited by independent producer Bert Kaempfert,



who would have a substantial career of his own, to back fellow English performer Tony Sheridan. The Beatles and Sheridan were appearing together at the Top Ten Club. The results were musically unspectacular. Sheridan's vocal performance is a pale amalgam of Elvis Presley, Jack Scott, and Gene Vincent. The Beatles' instrumental backing shows competence, but little more. During the sessions, the Beatles cut a few songs not featuring Sheridan, the well-worn chestnut "Ain't She Sweet," sung by Lennon, and another original instrumental, "Cry for a Shadow." When the record of "My Bonnie" was released, Sheridan got top billing, and the Beatles were renamed the Beat Brothers. It was very anticlimactic for the Beatles.

The Kaempfert sessions, however, resulted in a profound event in the Beatles' career. Legend has it that on October 28, 1961, a young man named Raymond Jones came into NEMS Music Store in Liverpool and asked its proprietor, Brian Epstein, if they had "My Bonnie" by the Beatles in stock. Within two weeks, Epstein witnessed the Beatles for the first time, and was managing them by December. His goal was to procure a recording contract. As the proprietor of a successful record shop, and possessed of a well-groomed manner, Epstein could open doors for his new clients. In 1961, there were, essentially, four major record companies in England: EMI, Pye, Philips, and Decca. Epstein arranged for the Beatles to audition for Decca Records in London on January 1, 1962.

The Beatles' session at Decca began at 11:00 a.m. There is little evidence to suggest the session lasted much longer than the combined duration of the fifteen songs. John Lennon recalled: "We virtually recorded our Cavern show, with a few omissions." As in their live performances, and typical of many of the groups on their circuit, the Beatles covered a wide spectrum of material: R&B ("Money [That's What I Want]," "Three Cool Cats"), standards ("Besame Mucho," "The Sheik of Araby") showtunes ("Till There Was You") and rock and roll ("Memphis," "Crying, Waiting, Hoping"). Three Lennon-McCartney compositions ("Hello Little Girl," "Love of the Loved," "Like Dreamers Do") were also performed. The resulting recording is not much more than a mere transcription of the event. Decca certainly had no incentive to make it more than that. Essentially, the Beatles set up their gear and the engineer rolled tape. There were no overdubs and the only effect used is a uniform echo. You can hear a nervous tightening in all of their voices. The playing is steady and tight, but clipped. Epstein had high hopes that the originals would be recognized as a sign of the Beatles' exceptional talent. The previous two years of near constant performing made the foursome, with Pete Best still on drums, a respectable unit, but Decca was unimpressed. They passed on the group.

Despite this disappointment, Epstein was allowed by Decca to use the tape to shop the band. Pye soon declined to sign the Beatles, too. Epstein's confidence, as well as the band's, was wavering. Epstein continued to beat a path between Liverpool and London. A series of fortunate events placed Epstein in a meeting with Parlophone Records' label head, George Martin. The Beatles passed the audition with George Martin and Parlophone. That session, June 1962, yielded only confirmation that Martin was willing to take a shot at the group. Later, he recalled saying: "I've got nothing to lose."<sup>3</sup> I could go on and on with the minutiae of historical details, but the key thing here is the Beatles got the break they desperately needed. George Martin certainly found the band that changed the fortunes of his label (and all of Great Britain, for that matter). But what he didn't yet know was that he was about to begin the most seamless and symbiotic artist-producer relationship in the history of recorded music.

At the time, an artist's success was based entirely on the sale of singles. Martin's first choice for a single was "How Do You Do It," a song by Mitch Murray and Barry Mason that had been on Martin's desk for several months. In the June audition, the Beatles recorded "Love Me Do." After

they signed, Martin pitched the group “How Do You Do It” and they dutifully learned and recorded the song in their first fully fledged Abbey Road session on September 4, 1962. They also cut “Love Me Do,” this time with Ringo Starr on drums, replacing Pete Best, who had been fired three weeks earlier. Martin and his lieutenant, Ron Richards, heard potential in “Love Me Do,” but were not convinced. The following week, the Beatles, with session drummer Andy White behind the kit and Starr on tambourine, cut a usable master. Martin conceded to the Beatles, and their own composition became their debut single. “Love Me Do”/“P.S. I Love You” was released on October 5.

It’s a misconception that the Beatles’ first release wasn’t much of a hit. The peak of “Love Me Do” at number seventeen was a solid foothold for the band. It had an eighteen-week chart run that was mirrored by their followup single, “Please Please Me.” Cut while “Love Me Do” was climbing the charts, “Please Please Me,” with its upbeat R&B tempo and sweet harmonica hook, started life as a mid-tempo song in the Roy Orbison mold. George Martin’s advice to bring up the tempo yielded the group’s first chart-topper.

In between the sessions with Martin, the Beatles were working virtually every day, with two gigs in one day a common event. The day before the September 4 session, they played a lunchtime set at their hometown club, the Cavern, and an evening show in Widnes, Lancashire. The day after the session, they were back at the Cavern. This pace continued unabated for the next four years. As the Beatles’ successes mounted, the level of pressure related to their performances, writing, and recording grew exponentially.

“Please Please Me” shone a light on a new type of pop group in Britain. The record business was still running on a decades-old business model predicated on a hierarchy of song, publisher, record company, and performer.

Songwriters wrote the material on contract to publishers. The publishers then pushed the song to record companies and producers who could match the song with a performer. The publisher was the main money-generator and beneficiary through the licensing and royalty income. A song could, and often did, have several competing versions vying for the public’s attention. The one that hit would also be a boon to the particular label that released it. As for the artists, they were lucky to be paid at all. Prior to the Beatles, pop/rock music in the UK adhered to a tight formula; bands had a named lead singer with a backing band (Cliff Richard and the Shadows, Shane Fenton and the Fentones) that often performed steps in unison, or a lead singer with a dynamic stage name (Billy Fury, Marty Wilde, Adam Faith). Impresario Larry Parnes, who had passed on the Beatles early in their career, managed many of the latter. Both of these types of performers were just another extension of the old model, beholden to publishers and producers for material. The Beatles were self-contained in the truest sense. They wrote and performed their own music and, by design, did not stick one sole member into the limelight.

With two hit singles to their credit, the Beatles now had to create an album. George Martin said: “I asked them what they had that we could record quickly, and the answer was their stage act.” It was finely honed and well rehearsed. A session was scheduled for Monday, February 11, 1963. As Mark Lewisohn, in his essential book *The Complete Beatles Recording Sessions*, wrote of this day: “There can scarcely have been 585 more productive minutes in the history of recorded music.” It is a bold yet undeniable statement. Between 10:00 a.m. and 10:45 p.m., the Beatles cut thirteen songs, twelve of which, along with “Please Please Me” and its B side “Ask Me Why,” became their entire first long-playing record.

Released in the first week of April 1963, *Please Please Me* promptly installed itself at number one and remained in the album charts for seventy weeks. Oddly enough, the album bore a resemblance to the Beatles' Decca audition. It contained R&B ("Twist and Shout," "Chains") pop ("A Taste of Honey") and original rock and roll.

The addition of those McCartney/Lennon originals (as they were billed on the record) changed the landscape dramatically. The eight originals on *Please Please Me*, compared to the three found on the Decca audition, reveal significant artistic growth. Kicking off the record was "I Saw Her Standing There," a fiery original rocker. This track served as a declaration that there should be no question about the legitimacy of the Beatles. "I Saw Her Standing There" was a bona fide rock and roll song, joining the rare company of "Move It" by Cliff Richard and the Shadows and "Shakin' All Over" by Johnny Kidd and the Pirates as genuine UK rock songs. It sounded like it could have been stolen from a Little Richard Specialty Records session. The Beatles' influences were on clear display throughout the LP. "Misery" and "There's a Place" blend Everly Brothers-type harmonies with a nod to Brill Building composition. The Brill Building is further evident in the two Shirelles covers, "Boys" and "Baby It's You," and the Cookies' "Chains." John Lennon's vocals on the sublime country soul of Arthur Alexander's "Anna (Go To Him)" are a touchstone for virtually everything he ever recorded afterward. Add to that his throat-shredding performance on the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout" and Lennon arrives on the scene as one of the most promising white rock vocalists. Considering that Lennon was suffering from a terrible cold and sore throat, that February day only amplifies its greatness.

Released less than three weeks after *Please Please Me* came the Beatles' third single. Curiously, it was not included on their debut LP. Then again, they were still operating in a world where the single was king. Written on the back of a tour bus while on the road supporting Helen Shapiro and recorded on March 5, 1963, "From Me to You" became the tipping point for the band. The complete session, which surfaced on a bootleg CD in 1994, shows the group running through several takes of the song, complete with Lennon's directions to McCartney to "keep right in with your harmonies." "From Me to You" wasn't a revelatory piece of music. Like its predecessors, it had ringing guitars, vocal harmonies, and a great harmonica hook. This time, however, the Beatles had a feverishly growing audience, and "From Me to You" hit number one on May 4 and remained there for seven weeks. *Please Please Me* followed it to number one on the album chart the following week and remained there for an astounding thirty weeks.

In addition to their tireless live performance schedule, the Beatles had to cut dedicated live sessions of their songs for the BBC to play achieve airplay. It's hard for today's radio audiences to conceive, but in the UK in 1963 most music performances had to be sourced from live sessions. This was a negotiated contract point with the musicians' union to ensure that the broadcasting of records would not take jobs from musicians. Furthermore, pop music, under the name of light programs, was only one small part of the programming spectrum found at the BBC. The biggest pop music program, Saturday Club, could have more than 3 million listeners, nearly 7 percent of England's population. A single appearance could make a career; repeated appearances practically ensured it. The power was very similar to the hold the Grand Ole Opry had on country music in the USA. Between April 4 and May 21, 1963, the Beatles recorded no fewer than six different versions of "From Me to You" for broadcast on various BBC programs. With the explosion of Beatlemania, the Beatles actually began hosting their own BBC program, Pop Go the Beatles, in June 1963. The sessions for those broadcasts remained officially unreleased until 1994's *Live at the BBC*. For those who wish to hear what the Beatles sounded like as a performing unit, this is the record to play.

The Beatles' star had risen and became fixed at the pinnacle of the UK entertainment world. Conventional wisdom would dictate that they had no place to go but down. Nothing could be more wrong. In August, the Beatles dropped the musical equivalent of the atom bomb. (It wouldn't be the last time that would happen.) "She Loves You" is practically viral in its catchiness. With its explosive tom-tom drum roll and exuberant opening chorus, complete with the indelible "Yeah, yeah, yeah" vocal hook, "She Loves You" was an unstoppable juggernaut. It spent a total of six weeks at number one and became a hit in several European countries and Australia. "She Loves You" became the biggest-selling single in UK history until 1977, when it was displaced by Paul McCartney's "Mull of Kintyre."

The Beatles had no real competition at this point. Elvis Presley, the first rock and roll deity, was ensconced in Hollywood making mediocre films, and Presley's contemporaries had mostly fallen away in various ignominious ways. The Beatles' immediate predecessors, such as Cliff Richard, seemed irrelevant by comparison (although Richard did maintain a very successful career for decades). The machine of Liverpool-based groups also managed by Brian Epstein, such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, and Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, were also topping the UK charts, but the Beatles were different. They had more than charisma. They possessed the type of magnetism that made Presley a revolution seven years prior, only multiplied by a factor of four. And where Presley had shrouded his ambition in his polite Southern son persona, the Beatles were openly ambitious. John Lennon often rallied his bandmates by asking, "Where are we going, boys?" "To the toppermost of the poppermost, Johnny!!" they replied. It wasn't a joke. In February 1963, *New Musical Express* ran a page on the Beatles in which they each filled out answers to a questionnaire. It asked for their personal statistics, likes, and hobbies. In the category of "Professional ambition," John Lennon answered, "To be rich and famous."

The task of a second album was at hand. Success brought with it the luxury of more time to record. For *With the Beatles*, the group spread out the recording sessions to seven days over the course of four months. Luxury is a relative term, as the group continued to work virtually every day either in performance, in session for the BBC, or making television appearances. (They also bade farewell to their hometown haunt of the Cavern on August 3 after nearly 300 appearances there.)

With the Beatles contained eight new originals, including George Harrison's first solo composition, "Don't Bother Me." The six non-originals heavily favored contemporary American rhythm and blues, notably three from the blossoming Motown stable. The Beatles hadn't quite shaken show tunes, and included "Till There Was You" from *The Music Man*, a song they had performed at their Decca audition. Again, it was the Lennon-McCartney originals that set them apart. Pick any tune: "Hold Me Tight," "It Won't Be Long," or "All My Loving" are all joyous and steady rocking songs with fantastically emotive lead vocals and harmonies, sharp guitars, and swinging drums. Even Ringo's spotlight, "I Wanna Be Your Man," a song initially given to the Rolling Stones and thought by Lennon and McCartney to be substandard, was a kicking rave-up awash with tremolo-laden guitars. If "She Loves You" was a statement about the pop craftsmanship abilities of the Beatles and the Lennon-McCartney team, *With the Beatles* said there was a lot more where that came from. *With the Beatles* did not need the inclusion of "She Loves You" to make it a hit. It entered the album chart on December 7, posted itself at number one for twenty-one weeks, and was the best-selling album of 1963.

EMI, the parent corporation of Parlophone, was suddenly awash with money. They acted as any self-respecting, profit-driven record company would in that situation; they immediately saw repackaging

opportunities with the Beatles' limited output. Between July and November, EMI released three EPs, four-song, 7-inch extended play records, of existing hits and album tracks. Why release a record only once when you can release and sell it twice?

No discussion of *With the Beatles* can be contemplated without considering the album cover. On *Please Please Me*, the band assembled above the entrance to EMI's Manchester Square headquarters, where photographer Angus McBean framed the four Beatles in color as vibrant and youthful extensions of the contemporary architecture, a new band for a new era in Britain. They were smiling, besuited and clean cut, if you excuse Ringo's Teddy boy hair. The cover of *With the Beatles* created an iconography comparable only to Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 photos of Elvis Presley. Like Wertheimer's photos, it was stark yet filled with energy. It was shot by photographer Robert Freeman in black and white at the Palace Court Hotel in Bournemouth, the Beatles posing tightly in black turtlenecks with the light from a window half illuminating their still and fixed facial expressions. It's dark and nearly brooding, but the image transmits a message that change is here. Rock and roll is not dead. The eyes of the four are deep and knowing. The millions who bought this record, and its North American equivalent, understood. This image permitted all who connected with it to declare: "This is new. This is mine. This is not like what came before." If the visual wasn't enough of a cultural demarcation, *With the Beatles* was released on November 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Beatlemania was in full-blown effect in England. The Beatles sometimes had to dress as policemen to sneak into theatres where they performed. Hordes of screaming fans drowned out the meager PA systems of the day, leaving the Beatles to lipread one another just to follow a song in performance. Outside of the UK, they were the hottest thing throughout Scandinavia and Australia. In the United States, the birthplace of the Beatles' musical heroes, they were virtually unknown. Capitol Records, EMI's partner in the USA, passed on the Beatles, and their first few records were released on a smattering of independent labels. Frustrated with the lack of cooperation, Brian Epstein called Capitol Records president, Alan Livingston, and convinced him to release the records. As this chapter must restrict itself to the first three UK albums, I highly recommend any and all of Bruce Spizer's books to those who wish to learn more about the Beatles' records in America.

Hard on the heels of *With the Beatles* came yet another irresistible freestanding single. One might say that the Beatles could have put out a record of them making animal noises and it would have hit number one, just based on the mass hysteria enveloping them. Whether that is true or not, the Beatles dropped yet another indelible piece of pop perfection. Britain's *New Musical Express* described "I Want to Hold Your Hand" as "repetitious almost to the point of hypnosis . . . [a] power-packer disc." Perhaps the venerable music magazine was looking for an excuse to account for the Beatles' hold on the public. Cut in October during the recording of *With the Beatles*, "I Want to Hold Your Hand" rocketed to number one for a five-week run as 1963 closed.

The session for "I Want to Hold Your Hand" also marked the first time the Beatles cut a session with a four-track recorder. Despite the fact that this technology had been in use in the US for several years, EMI was slow to adopt it. Once it was done, though, the Beatles took to it immediately. With the additional tracks available, overdubbing became easier and allowed for a more expansive sonic canvas. In the next four years, the Beatles' mastery of this medium would be revealed.

The new year saw Beatlemania reach an unstoppable pitch around the world. As they became an international commodity, the Beatles expanded their touring. In January 1964, they were in residency at the Paris Olympia, supporting French singer Sylvie Vartan and American singer-

guitarist Trini Lopez. Odeon Records, EMI's licensee in Germany, felt that the only way to sell large quantities of records there was for the Beatles to sing in German.

The session at EMI's Pathé Marconi studios was meant to cut German language versions of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "She Loves You." After they cut "Komm, Gib Mir Deine Hand" and "Sie Lieb Dich," ample time remained to record another Lennon-McCartney original, "Can't Buy Me Love." It was the only session recorded by the Beatles outside of the UK.

To fill the time between singles, EMI continued to release EPs. "All My Loving," a track from *With the Beatles* so strong that Paul McCartney opened his shows on his 2002 US tour with it, was coupled with "Money (That's What I Want)" and the now thrice-released "Ask Me Why" and "P.S. I Love You."

It opens with a cold-start vocal, and immediately the Beatles are off to the races. "Can't Buy Me Love" is yet another gem steeped in first-generation rock and roll. The subject of money and riches has a strong tradition in all pop music, and "Can't Buy Me Love" fitted the bill like an answer record to the Drifters' classic "Money Honey." In light of the Beatles' immense popularity and imminent wealth, it also possesses the makings of a classic British "piss-take," at least one with self-deprecating overtones. "Can't Buy Me Love" spent three weeks at number one and was the UK's best-selling single of 1964.

If a three-week run at number one for "Can't Buy Me Love" seems puny by comparison to previous hits, there is a solid economic reason. Although the Beatles were firmly seated at the mountaintop of pop music in 1964, in their wake came a flood of performers who now jockeyed with the Fab Four for chart-toppers. By the end of 1964, the list of fellow British bands to bag a number one hit reads like a Who's Who of British rock: the Dave Clark Five, the Animals, the Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann, the Kinks, and Herman's Hermits. So complete was British domination that only two American acts, Roy Orbison and the Supremes, hit the top in 1964. On the album side of the business, the Beatles' dominance was nearly complete. Their albums clocked a total of forty weeks at number one that year.

Another EP hit the streets in June 1964. The Long Tall Sally EP was full of covers of American songs and one original. "I Call Your Name" was a castoff that Lennon gave to Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas a year earlier, but had now deemed worthy of recording. The covers of Carl Perkins, Larry Williams, and Little Richard were straight from the Beatles' stage repertoire. The path from the top of the charts to the silver screen was well worn when the Beatles cut their four-picture deal with United Artists. The first film was *A Hard Day's Night*, a black and white "documentary" of a couple of days in the life of the Beatles. Written by Alun Owen and directed by Richard Lester, it proved to be a splendid platform for the group and a remarkably enduring film. The film was shot over March and April with recording sessions spread out between February and June.

The soundtrack marked the first time a Beatles album comprised entirely Lennon-McCartney compositions, thirteen in total, and *A Hard Day's Night* shows them truly blossoming as songwriters. There was collaboration, but the die was cast with the primary songwriter taking lead vocals. In his *New Musical Express* review of July 3, 1963, Allan Evans wrote: "I don't think this album has the uninhibited joyous drive of the former Beatles' LPs, but it is still way out ahead of rivals." While there is no question that the Beatles had no creative rivals, Evans's perception of a lack of joy missed a key point. In the face of inconceivable tumult, they found a way to grow, both as individuals and as artists. Two songs in particular, McCartney's "Things We Said Today" and Lennon's "I'll Be Back,"

ring slightly of melancholy but point to a style that would develop into the songs that filled *Rubber Soul* eighteen months later.

Released on July 10, 1964, *A Hard Day's Night* sat at number one for twenty-one consecutive weeks. It was displaced by *Beatles For Sale*.

We look back now and see a lifetime of work. In truth, the Beatles would be over and done as a working group in little more than five years from this point. Their first two years as a recording entity were frenzied and prolific, and truly changed much of the world. This was merely the first step.

#### **4. Richard Poirier, "Learning from the Beatles," *Partisan Review* 4, 1967.**

HAS ANYONE been able completely to ignore *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*? Probably not. But the very fact of its immense popularity with people of every age and persuasion is almost a guarantee of its not receiving the demanding critical attention that it calls for. It isn't enough to say that it is the latest and most remarkable of the thirteen albums composed and performed by the Beatles since 1964; some such claim could have been made for each album when it appeared. *Sgt. Pepper* isn't in the line of continuous development; rather, it is an eruption. It is an astounding accomplishment for which no one could have been wholly prepared, and it therefore substantially enlarges and modifies all the work that preceded it. It sends us back to the earlier Beatles not for confirmation of the fact that they have always been the best group of their kind. Rather, we listen for those gestations of genius that have now come to fruition. And the evidence is there: in each album which, while being unmistakably theirs, is nonetheless full of exploratory peculiarities not heard on the others; in the way the release even of a single can set off a new surge of energy in their many imitators; in a self-delighting inventiveness that has gradually exceeded the sheer physical capacities even of four such brilliant musicians. The consequent necessity for expanded orchestral and electronic support reached the point where the *Sgt. Pepper* album had to be wholly conceived in studio with as many as forty-eight instruments. Meanwhile, still in their mid-twenties they have made two movies, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, which are in spots as good as the Marx brothers, and their most talented member, John Lennon, has written two books of Joycean verbal play that suggest why no one is ever in danger of reading too much into the lyrics of their songs. The Beatles are now beyond patronization, and this is especially satisfying to those like myself who have wondered how much longer the literary academic adjudicators could claim to be taking the arts seriously by promoting a couple of distinguished novels every year, a few films, some poems, maybe a museum show and, if they're really lucky, a play.

Of course to delay a revolution there are ways and ways of finally paying considered attention to the lower orders. One way is to sociologize in the manner, McLuhan or pre-McLuhan, that forces the good and the bad in the popular arts to lie down in the same categories. There'll surely be a piece announcing, say, that the Beatles "represent"—a favorite word in the shelving process—not just the young but an aristocracy of the young. And of course they are aristocratic: in their carelessness, their assumption that they can enact anyone else's life just for the fun of it, their tolerance for the things they do make fun of, their delight in wildness along with a disdain for middle-class rectitudes, their easy expertness, their indifference to the wealth they are happy to have, their pleasures in costume and in a casual eccentricity of ordinary dress, their in-group language not meant, any more than is Bob Dylan's—another such aristocrat—to make ordinary sense. That kind of accommodation is familiar by now, and so is another, which is to admit them into the company of their "betters." You know, the way jazz is like Bach? Well, sometimes they are like Monteverdi and sometimes their songs

are even better than Schumann's. But that won't work either. Liverpool boys of their sort have been let into Eton before, and not on the assumption that it would be the style of Eton that would change.

It won't be easy to accommodate the Beatles, and that's nowadays almost the precondition for exciting the pastoral concern of Responsible Critics. Literary and academic grown-ups will discover that their favorite captive audience, the young in school, really have listened to the Beatles' kind of music and won't buy the yarn of significance that ensnares most adult talk about the other arts. Any effort to account for what the Beatles are doing will be difficult, as I've learned from this not very extensive and inexpert try, but only to the extent that talking about the experience of any work of art is more difficult than talking about the theory of it, or the issues in it or the history around it. The results of any such effort by a number of people would be of importance not just for popular music but for all the arts. People who listen to the Beatles love them—what about that? Why isn't there more talk about pleasure, about the excitement of witnessing a performance, about the excitement that goes into a performance of any kind? Such talk could set in motion a radical and acutely necessary amendment to the literary and academic club rules. Since the exalted arts (to which the novel, about a century ago, was the last genre to be admitted) have all but surrendered the provision of fun and entertainment to the popular arts, criticism must turn to film and song if it is to remind itself that the arts really do not need to be boring, no matter how much copy can be made from the elaboration of current theories of boredom. [...]

The Beatles' music is said to belong to the young, but if it does that's only because the young have the right motive for caring about it—they enjoy themselves. They also know what produces the fun they have, by phrase and instrument, and they're very quick, as I've discovered, to shoot down inflated interpretations. They should indeed exercise proprietary rights. This is the first time that people of school age have been tuned in to sounds invented not by composers approved by adults but in to sounds invented by their own near contemporaries, sounds associated with lyrics, manners and dress that they also identify as their own. David Amram, the New York Philharmonic's first resident composer, is understandably optimistic that this kind of identification will develop an avidity of attention to music that could be the salvation of American musical composition and performance. Perhaps in some such way the popular arts can help restore all the arts to their status as entertainment.

To help this process along it isn't necessary that literary and academic grown-ups go to school to their children. Rather, they must begin to ask some childlike and therefore some extremely difficult questions about particular works: Is this any fun? How and where is it any fun? And if it isn't why bother? While listening together to recordings of popular music, people of any age tend naturally to ask these questions, and I've heard them asked by young people with an eager precision which they almost never exhibit, for want of academic encouragement, when they talk about a poem or a story. Their writing about this music isn't as good as their talk, at least in the magazines I've been able to get hold of, like *Vibrations*, *The Broadside* and, perhaps the best, *Crawdaddy*. In written criticism they display some of the adult vices, including at times a nearly Germanic fondness for categorization: the Mersey beat, the raving style, trip songs, the San Francisco school, the love sound, folk-rock and the rock-folk-pop tradition are typical of the terms that get bandied about with desperate and charming hope. Reviews of popular music in the major newspapers and magazines are much worse, however, and before the Sgt. Pepper album practically no space even for an intelligent note was given the Beatles in any of them. Now that they've begun to appear, any adult easily victimized by a reputed generational gap need only read reviews of *Sgt. Pepper* in the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice* by Richard Goldstein to discover that youth is no guarantee of understanding. In his early twenties, he is



already an ancient. Some of his questions—does the album have any real unity?—were not necessary even when originally asked some two thousand years ago, while others are a bad dream of Brooks and Warren: the “lyrical technique” of “She’s Leaving Home” is “uninspired narrative, with a dearth of poetic irony.” The song is in fact one of *Sgt. Pepper’s* satirically funniest cuts, though someone Goldstein’s age mightn’t as easily see this as someone older. Recognition of its special blend of period sentimentality and elegance of wit is conferred upon the listener not by his being chronologically young but by his having once lived with that especially English blend of tones from Beatrice Lillie or Noel Coward, and their wistful play about the genteel.

Nearly all the songs on the Sgt. Pepper album and the two singles released here since then—“All You Need Is Love” and “Baby You’re a Rich Man”—are in fact quite broadly allusive: to the blues, to jazz hits of the thirties and forties, to classical music, early rock and roll, previous cuts by the Beatles themselves. Much of the comedy in these songs and much of their historical resonance, as in the stately Wagnerian episode in “A Day In the Life,” is managed in this way. Mixing of styles and tones reminds the listener that one kind of feeling about a subject isn’t enough and that any single induced feeling must often exist within the context of seemingly contradictory alternatives. Most good groups offer something of this kind, like the Who, with the brilliant drummer Keith Moon. In songs like “Don’t Look Away” and “So Sad About Us,” Moon, working with the composer-guitarist Pete Townsend, calls forth a complicated response in a manner nicely described in *Crawdaddy* by Jon Landau, one of the best of the reviewers I’ve read: “Townsend scratches his chorus, muffles his strings, or lets the chord stand out full depending on what Moon is doing—the result being a perfectly unified guitar-drum sound that can’t help but make you feel happy even while the lyrics tell you to feel sad.” The Beatles have often in the past worked for similar mixtures, but they now offer an additional nuance: especially in later songs, one of the interwoven strands is likely to be an echo of some familiar, probably clichéd musical, verbal or dramatic formula. These echoes, like the soap-opera background music of “She’s Leaving Home” or the jaunty music-hall tones of “When I’m Sixty-four,” have the enriching effect that allusiveness can have in poetry: of expanding a situation toward the simultaneous condition of pathos, because the situation is seen as recurrent and therefore possibly insoluble, and comic, because the recurrence has finally passed into cliché.

Any close listening to musical groups soon establishes the fact that as composers and performers the Beatles repay attention altogether more than does any other group, American or English. They offer something for nearly everyone and respond to almost any kind of interest. The Rolling Stones, the Left Banke and the Bee Gees are especially good, but in none of these is there an inventive productivity equal to that of Lennon, McCartney or their producer George Martin, whose contributions of electronic and orchestral notation really make him one of the group, particularly now that their performances are to be exclusively in studio. Only Dylan shows something equivalent to the Beatles in his combination of talents as composer, lyricist and performer. In performance the Beatles exhibit a nearly total theatrical power. It is a power so unencumbered and so freely diverse both for the group and for each of its members that it creates an element of suspense in whatever they do, an expectation that this time there really will be a failure of good taste—that attribute shared by only the greatest theatrical performers. They never wholly lose themselves in anyone else’s styling, however, or in their own exuberance; they never succumb to the excitements they generate, much less those of their audience. It’s unthinkable that they would lend themselves for the rock and wreck sequence of the Yardbirds in Antonioni’s *Blow-up*. That particular performance, quite aside from what it contributed to a brilliant film, is a symptom of the infiltration even into popular music of the decadence by which entertainment is being displaced by a self-abasing enactment of what is implicit in the *form* of entertainment—in this instance, of group

playing that gives way to animosities and a destructive retaliation against recalcitrant instrumental support. When the Beatles sound as if they are heading orchestrally into self-obliterating noise, it is very often only that they may assert their presence vocally in quite the opposite direction: by contrasting choirboy cooing, by filigrees of voice-play coming from each of them, as in the reprise of "Sgt. Pepper," for instance, or, as in "Lovely Rita," the little choral oo's and gaspings—all of these suggesting, in their relation to solo, crosscurrents of feeling within an agreed area of play. Manners so instinctively free and yet so harmonious could not be guided from outside, either by an audience or even by directorial guidance, however much the latter did help in rescuing them from the tawdry enslavement to Elvis Presley, an otherwise profitable influence, in their first, fortunately hard-to-find recording of 1961 made in Hamburg with Ringo's predecessor at the drums, Peter Best.

As is the taste of all great performers—in athletics, in politics, in any of the arts—the taste of the Beatles or of Dylan is an emanation of personality, of a self that is the generous master but never the creature of its audience. Taste in such instances is inseparable from a stubbornness of selfhood, and it doesn't matter that the self has been invented for the theater. Any self is invented as soon as any purpose is conceived. But the Beatles are a special case in not being *a* self at all. They are a group, and the unmistakable group identity exists almost in spite of sharp individuation, each of them, except the invisible Martin, known to be unique in some shaggy way. There are few other groups in which even one or two of the members are as publicly recognizable as any of the Beatles, and this can't be explained as a difference simply in public relations. It is precisely this unusual individuation which explains, I think, why the Beatles are so much stronger than any other group and why they don't need, like the Who, to play at animosities on stage. The pretense doesn't communicate the presence of individual Who but rather an anxiety at their not instinctively feeling like individuals when they are together. The Beatles, on the other hand, enhance the individuality of one another by the sheer elaborateness by which they arrive at a cohesive sound and by a musical awareness of one another that isn't distinguishable from the multiple directions allowed in the attainment of harmony. Like members of a great athletic team, like such partners in dance as Nureyev and Fonteyn or like some jazz combos, the Beatles in performance seem to draw their aspirations and their energy not from the audience but from one another. Their close, loyal and affectionate personal ties are of course not irrelevant.

The incentive for what they accomplish seems to be sequestered among them, a tensed responsiveness that encourages from Harrison, as in "And Your Bird Can Sing," what sounds like the best guitar playing in the world and which provokes the immense productivity of Lennon and McCartney. The amount they have composed might be explained by commercial venture but not the daring and originality of each new single or album. Of course the promise of "new sounds" is itself a commercial necessity in their business, as the anxieties of the second album of the Jefferson Airplane indicate, but the Beatles will soon release their fourteenth, and it's not merely "new sounds" that they produce, an easy enough matter with orchestral support, electronics and Asiatic importations. They produce different styles, different musical conceptions and revisions of sentiment that give an unprecedented variety to an artistic career that had its proper beginning a mere four or five years ago. The freshness of each effort is often so radically different from the one before, as any comparison among *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper* will indicate, as to constitute risk rather than financial ambition—especially three such albums, along with a collection of earlier songs, *Yesterday and Today*, in a period just over eighteen months. They are the ones who get tired of the sounds they have made, and the testings and teasings that produce each new album are self-inflicted. If they are careerist it is in the manner not of Judy Garland, reminding us in each concert of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and the pains of show biz, but of John Coltrane who, when he died in July at forty,

was also about to give up performance in public altogether, even though his reputation as one of the most influential musicians in jazz and its greatest saxophonist guaranteed him an increasingly profitable concert career. His interest in music was a continually exploratory one, an effort to broaden the possibilities, as the Beatles do now in studio, of his music and his instruments. Like Harrison with his guitar, he managed with the soprano sax to produce a nearly oriental sound, and this discovery led him to an interest in Indian music much as Harrison was led to the study of the sitar. And again like the Beatles, Coltrane's experimentation was the more intense because he and his sidemen, Elvin Jones and McCoy Tyner, achieved a remarkable degree of liberating, energizing empathy. Almost all such champions are extraordinary and private men who work with an audience, as the phrase goes, only when that audience is composed of the few who can perform with them. Otherwise, the audience is what it ought to be: not participants but witnesses or only listeners to a performance. The audience that in the theme song of *Sgt. Pepper* is so "lovely" that "we'd like to take you home with us" is a wholly imaginary one, especially on a record contrived as an escape from public performance.

Aloof from politics, their topicality is of music, the sentiments and the social predicaments traditional to folk songs, and ballads. Maybe the most important service of the Beatles and similar groups is the restoration to good standing of the simplicities that have frightened us into irony and the search for irony; they locate the beauty and pathos of commonplace feelings even while they work havoc with fashionable or tiresome expressions of those feelings. A particularly brilliant example is the record, released some weeks after the *Sgt. Pepper* album, with "Baby You're a Rich Man" on one side and "All You Need Is Love" on the other. "Baby You're a Rich Man" opens with an inquiry addressed by McCartney and Harrison to Lennon, who can be said to represent here a starry-eyed fan's version of the Beatles themselves: "How does it feel to be / One of the beautiful people?" This and subsequent questions are asked of the "rich man" in a reverentially high but devastatingly lilting voice, to the accompaniment of bursts of sitar music and the clip-clopping of Indian song. The sitar, an instrument Harrison studied in India for six weeks with the renowned Ravi Shankar ("George," he reported, "was truly humble") here suggests not the India of "Within You, Without You" evoked on the *Sgt. Pepper* album, the India of the Bhagavad Gita. It is rather another India, of fabulous riches, the India of the British and their Maharajahs, a place for exotic travel, but also for josh sticks and the otherworldliness of a "trip." All these possibilities are at work in the interplay of music and lyrics.

Contributing to the merely social and satiric implications of the song, the Indian sounds operate in the manner of classical allusion in Pope: they expand to the ridiculous the cant of jet-set, international gossip columns—"one of the beautiful people" or "baby, you're a rich man now," or "how often have you been there?" But, as in Pope, the instrument of ridicule here, the sitar, is allowed in the very process to remain unsullied and eloquent. The social implications of the song carry more than a hint of self-parody since the comic mixtures of verbal and musical phrasing refer us to similar mixtures that are a result of the Beatles' fantastic fortune: Liverpool boys, still in their twenties, once relatively poor and now enormously rich, once socially nowhere and now internationally "there," once close to home both in fact and in their music but now implicated not only in the Mersey beat but in the Ganges sound, in travel to India and "trips" of a kind for which India set the precedent for centuries.

Most remarkably, the song doesn't sort out its social satire from its implicitly positive treatment of drugs. Bob Dylan often puns with roughly the same intention, as in "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35," a simple but effective example:

*Well, they'll stone you when you're trying to be so good,  
They'll stone you just like they said they*

would. They'll stone you when you try  
to go home,  
Then they'll stone you when you're  
there all alone. But I would not feel so  
all alone:  
Everybody must get stoned.

In the Beatles' song, the very same phrases that belong to the platitudes of the "beautiful people" belong also, with favorable connotations, to the drug scene. The question, "And have you travelled very far?" is answered by Lennon, the "beautiful" person, with what socially would be a comfortable cliché: "Far as the eye can see." But the phrase is really too outmoded for the jet age and thus sends us back to the original question and to the possibility that the "travel" can refer to a "trip" on LSD, the destination of which would indeed be "as far as the eye can see." Most of the lyrics operate in this double way, both as social satire and drug talk: "How often have you been there? / Often enough to know," or "What did you see when you were there? / Nothing that doesn't show" or "Some do it naturally" (presumably an acidhead by nature) to which the answer is "Happy to be that way." The song could pass simply as social satire, though to see that and that only is also to be the object of satire, of not knowing what implications are carried even by the language you make fun of for its imprecisions. The point, and it's one that I'll come back to, is that the argot of LSD isn't much different from the banalities of question and answer between a "beautiful" person and his bedazzled interviewer. The punning genius of Lennon is evident here perhaps more effectively than in his two books, *In My Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works*, with their affinities to Edward Lear as well as to the Joy of *Finnegans Wake*.

The Beatles won't be stuck even within their most intricate contrivances, however, and they escape often by reminding us and themselves that they are singers and not pushers, performers and not propagandists. The moment occurs in "Baby You're a Rich Man," as it does in other songs, near the end, in the question "Now that you've found another key / What are you going to play?" Necessarily the question refers us to their music while at the same time alluding to the promised results of drugs—a new "key" to personality, to a role as well as to the notes that one might "play." Similar uses of words that can allude both to the subject of the moment and to their constant subject, musical creation, occur in "All You Need Is Love" ("Nothing you can sing that can't be sung"), with implications we'll get to in a moment, and in the second song on the Sgt. Pepper album, "A Little Help From My Friends." Sung by Ringo the "help" refers most simply to affection when there is no one around to love and it also means pot supplied by a friend. However, at the beginning of the song it explicitly means the assistance the others will give Ringo with his singing, while the phrases "out of tune" and "out of key" suggest, in the broadest sense, that the number, like the whole occasion, is in the mode not of the Beatles but of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band: "What would you think if I sang out of tune, / Would you stand up and walk out on me. / Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song, / And I'll try not to sing out of key. / Oh, I get by with a little help from my friends, / Mmmm, I get high with a little help from my friends, / Mmmm, going to try with a little help from my friends,..."

One of the Beatles' most appealing qualities is their tendency more to self-parody than to parody of others. The two are of course very close for performers who empathize with all the characters in their songs and whose most conspicuous moments of self-parody occur when they're emulating someone whose style they'd like to master. At such moments their boyishness really does shine forth as a musical virtue: giving themselves almost wholly to an imitation of some performer they admire, their necessary exaggeration of his style makes fun of no one so much as themselves. It's a matter of trying

on a style and then—as if embarrassed by their own riches, by a self-confident knowledge that no style, not even one of their own invention, is more than a temporary exercise of strength—of laughing themselves out of imitation. Listen to the extravagant rendering on *Beatles '65* of Chuck Berry in “Rock and Roll Music” or their many early emulations of Presley, whose importance to their development is everywhere apparent, or the mimicry of Western music in “Act Naturally” on one of their very best albums, *Yesterday and Today*, or the McCartney imitation of Little Richard singing “Long Tall Sally” on the *Beatles Second Album*. It’s all cowboys and Indians by people who have a lot of other games they want to play and who know very well where home is and when to go there. Parody and self-parody is frequent among the other groups in the form of persistent stylization, but its object is almost always some clichéd sentiment or situation. Parody from the Beatles tends usually, and increasingly, to be directed toward musical tradition and their own musical efforts. This is at least one reason why “All You Need Is Love,” recorded on the reverse side of “Baby You’re a Rich Man,” is one of the most important they have ever done, an indication, along with the Sgt. Pepper album, of so sophisticated an awareness of their historical achievements in music as to make it seem unlikely that they can continue much longer without still further changes of direction even more radical than their decision not to perform henceforth for live audiences. “All You Need Is Love” is decisive evidence that when the Beatles think about anything they think musically and that musical thinking dictates their response to other things: to “love,” in this instance, to drugs and social manners in “Baby You’re a Rich Man Now” and throughout the Sgt. Pepper album.

I doubt that any of these subjects would in itself prove a sufficient sustenance for their musical invention until first called forth and then kindled by some musical idea. At this point in their career it is impossible, given their and George Martin’s musical knowledge and sophistication, that the title “All You Need Is Love” should mean what it would mean coming from any other group, namely hippie or flower love. Expectations of complications are satisfied from the outset: the repetition, three times and in a languorous tone, of the phrase “love, love, love” might remind us of the song of the aging Chaplin in *Limelight*, a song in which he keeps repeating the word throughout with a pitiable and insistent rapidity. Musical subterfuge of lyric simplicity occurs again when the title line, “all you need is love,” picks up a musical trailer out of the thirties ballroom. The historical frequency of the “need” for love is thus proposed by the music, and it is as if this proposition emboldens the lyrics: “Nothing you can do that can’t be done,” “nothing you can sing that can’t be sung,” “nothing you can know that can’t be known,” “nothing you can see that can’t be shown—it’s easy”—this is a sample of equally ambiguous assertions that constitute the verbal substance of the song, even while the word “love” is being stretched out in choral background. And like the ambiguous language of “Baby You’re a Rich Man,” the phrasing here sounds comfortably familiar—if you had love you could do anything. Except that isn’t really what the lyrics imply. Rather, the suggestion is that doing, singing, knowing, seeing have in some sense already been done or at least that we needn’t be in any particular sweat about them; they’re accepted as already within the accustomed range of human possibility. What has not been demonstrated to anyone’s satisfaction, what hasn’t been tried, is “love.” “Love” remains the great unfulfilled need, and the historical evidence for this is in endless musical compositions about it. Far from suggesting that “love” will solve everything, which would be the hippie reading of “all you need is love,” the song allows most things to be solved without it. Such a nice bit of discrimination issues from the music and thence into the lyrics. Interestingly enough, the lyrics were meant to be simple in deference to the largely non-English-speaking audience for whom the song was especially written and performed on the BBC worldwide TV production of “Our World.” “Normally,” the Beatles’ song publisher Richard James later observed, “the Beatles like to write sophisticated material, but they were glad to have the opportunity to write something with a very basic appeal.” But so was Shakespeare at the Globe, and we know how unsophisticated *he* could be. The simplicity is entirely in

the initial repetitions of title line and the word “love,” a verbal simplicity first modified by the music and then turned into complications that have escaped even most English-speaking listeners.

Lennon and McCartney’s recognition through music that the “need” for love is historical and recurrent is communicated to the listener by instrumental and vocal allusions to earlier material. The historical allusiveness is at the outset smart-alecky—the song opens with the French National Anthem—passes through the Chaplin echo, if that’s what it is, to various echoes of the blues, and boogie-woogie, all of them in the mere shadings of background, until at the end the song itself seems to be swept up and dispersed within the musical history of which it is a part and of the electronics by which that history has been made available. The process begins by a recurrence of the “love, love, love” phrase, here repeated and doubled as on a stalled record. It then proceeds into a medley of sounds, fractured, mingled musical phrases drifting into a blur which my friend Paul Bertram pointed out to me is like the sounds of a radio at night fading and drifting among the signals of different stations. We can make out fragments of old love songs condemned to wander through the airways for all time: “Green Sleeves,” a burst of trumpet sound I can’t identify, a hit of the thirties called “In the Mood,” a ghostly “love you, yeah, yeah, yeah” of “She Loves You” from the *Beatles Second Album* of 1964 and, in the context of “All You Need Is Love,” a pathetic “all together now...everybody!” of the old community sing. Far from being in any way satiric, the song gathers into itself the musical expression of the “need” for love as it has accumulated through decades of popular music.

This historical feeling for music, including their own musical creations, explains, I think, the Beatles’ fascination with the invented aspects of everything around them, the participatory tenderness and joy with which they respond to styles and artifact, the maturity with which they have come to see the coloring of the human and social landscape of contemporary England. It’s as if they naturally see the world in the form of *son et lumière*: as they say in a beautiful neighborhood song about Liverpool, “Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes.” Not everyone their age is capable of seeing the odd wonder of a meter maid—after all, a meter maid’s a meter maid; fewer still would be moved to a song of praise like “Lovely Rita” (“When it gets dark I tow your heart away”); and only a Beatle could be expected, when seeing her with a bag across her shoulder, to have the historically enlivened vision that “made her look a little like a military man.” Now of course English boys out of Liverpool can be expected, it says here, to be more intimate than American boys from San Francisco with the residual social and cultural evidences from World War II and even from the First World War. In response to these and other traces of the past, however, the Beatles display an absolutely unique kind of involvement. It isn’t simply that they have an instinctive nostalgia for period styles, as in “She’s Leaving Home” or “When I’m Sixty-four,” or that they absorb the past through the media of the popular arts, through music, cinema, theatrical conventions, bands like Sgt. Pepper’s or music-hall performers. Everyone to some extent apprehends the world in the shapes given it by the popular arts and its media; we all see even the things that are new to us through that gridiron of style that Harold Rosenberg imagines as a debilitating shield in front of the British Redcoats even as they first entered the American terrain. No, the Beatles have the distinction in their work both of *knowing* that this is how they see and feel things and of enjoying the knowledge. It could be said that they know what Beckett and Borges know but without any loss of simple enthusiasm or innocent expectation, and without any patronization of those who do not know. In the loving phrases of “Penny Lane,” “A pretty nurse is selling poppies from a tray / And tho’ she feels as if she’s in a play, / She is anyway.”

It isn’t surprising that drugs have become important to their music, that they are leading an effort in England for the legalization of marijuana, partly as a result of the conviction and sentencing on drug charges of two of the Rolling Stones, and that in response to questions, Lennon, McCartney and

Harrison have let it be known that they've taken LSD. At least four of the songs on the Sgt. Pepper album are concerned with taking a "trip" or "turning on": "A Little Help From My Friends," "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," "Fixing a Hole" and "A Day in the Life," with a good chance of a fifth in "Getting Better." Throughout the album, the consciousness of the *dramatis personae* in the songs is directed more or less by inventions of media or of the popular arts, and drugs are proposed as one kind of personal escape into the freedom of some further invention all on one's own. Inventing the world out of the mind with drugs is more physically risky than doing it by writing songs, films or wearing costumes, but danger isn't what the songs offer for consideration, and it's in any case up to the Beatles alone to decide what they want for their minds and bodies. Instead, the songs propose, quite delightfully and reasonably, that the vision of the world while on a "trip" or under the influence of a drug isn't necessarily wilder than a vision of the world through which we travel under the influence of the arts or the news media. Thus, the third song on the album, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," proposes that the listener can "picture" a "trip" scene without taking such a "trip" himself. Here, as in "Baby You're a Rich Man," the experience of a "trip" is wittily superimposed on the experience of ordinary travel: "Picture yourself on a train in a station, / With plasticine porters with looking glass ties, / Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile, / The girl with kaleidoscope eyes." Of course the images could come as easily from Edward Lear as from the experience of drugs, and Lennon has claimed that the title of the song is not an anagram for LSD but was taken from a drawing his son did at school. Lennon, the author of two books of Joycean punning, knows to the point of hilarity that one meaning denies the presence of another, which it has hidden inside, only to all strangers and the police. Still his reticence is obviously a form of the truth. The Beatles won't be reduced to drugs when they mean, intend and enact so much more. "Acid," Harrison told the Los Angeles *Free Press* in August, "is not the answer, definitely not the answer. It's enabled people to see a little bit more, but when you really get hip, you don't need it." Later, to Hunter Davies of the London *Sunday Times*, McCartney announced that they'd given up drugs. "It was an experience we went through and now it's over we don't need it any more. We think we're finding other ways of getting there." In this effort they're apparently being helped by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the Indian founder of the International Meditation Society, though even on the way to their initiation in Bangor, North Wales, Lennon wondered if the experience wasn't simply going to be another version of what they already knew: "You know, like some are EMI and some Decca, but it's really still records."

The notion that we "picture" ourselves much of the time anyway without even willing it, that we see ourselves and the world in exotic images usually invented by someone else, is suggested throughout the Sgt. Pepper album, even on the cover, with its clustered photographs of world-shaping "stars" of all kinds. In "A Day in the Life," the last song and a work of great power and historical grasp, the hapless man whose role is sung by McCartney wants to "turn on" himself and his lover—maybe us too—as a relief from the multiple controls exerted over life and the imagination by various and competing media. The sad little "oh boy" interjected by McCartney's sweet, vulnerable voice into orchestral movements of intimidating, sometimes portentous momentum, expresses wonderfully how the victim is further confounded by the fact that these controls often impose themselves under the guise of entertainment:

*I read the news today oh boy About a lucky man who made the grade  
And though the news was rather sad Well I just had to laugh  
I saw the photograph.  
He blew his mind out in a car He didn't notice that the lights had changed  
A crowd of people stood and stared  
They'd seen his face before Nobody was really sure If he was from the House of Lords.  
I saw a film today oh boy*

*The English Army had just won the war  
A crowd of people turned away  
But I just had to look Having read the book.  
I'd love to turn you on...*

The news in the paper is “rather sad” but the photograph is funny, so how does one respond to the suicide; suicide is a violent repudiation of the self but it mightn’t have happened if the man had followed the orders of the traffic lights; the victim isn’t so much a man anyway as a face people have seen someplace in the news, in photographs or possibly even on film; and while a film of the English army winning the war is too dated for most people to look at, and maybe they don’t believe in the victory anyway, the man in the song has to look at it (oh boy—a film) because he has read a book about it and therefore it does have some reality for him. “Turning on” is at least a way of escaping submission to the media designed to turn on the mind from the outside—quite appropriately the song was banned on the BBC— and loving to turn “you” on, either a lover or you, the listener, is an effort to escape the horror of loneliness projected by the final images of the song:

*I read the news today oh boy Four thousand holes in Blackburn Lancashire  
And though the holes were rather small They had to count them all  
Now they know how many holes it takes To fill the Albert Hall.  
I'd love to turn you on.*

The audience in Albert Hall—the same as the “lovely audience” in the first song that the Beatles would like to “take home” with them?—are only so many holes: unfilled and therefore unfertile holes, of the earth and therefore holes of decomposition, gathered together but separate and therefore countable, utterly and inarticulately alone. Is this merely a bit of visionary ghoulishness, something seen on a “trip”? No, good citizens can find it, like everything else in the song, in the daily news—of how Scotland Yard searched for buried bodies on a moor by making holes in the earth with poles and then waiting for the stench of decomposing flesh.

Lennon and McCartney in their songs seem as vulnerable as the man in “A Day in the Life” to the sights and sounds by which different media shape and then reshape reality, but their response isn’t in any way as intimidated, and “turning on” isn’t their only recourse. They can also tune in and play the game, sometimes to show, as in “A Day in the Life,” how one shaped view of reality can be mocked out of existence by crossing it with another. They mix their media the way they mix musical sounds or cross lyrics of one tone with music of quite another—with a vengeance. It’s unwise ever to assume that they’re doing only one thing or expressing themselves in only one style. “She’s Leaving Home” does have a persistent cello background to evoke genteel melodrama of an earlier decade, and “When I’m Sixty-four” is intentionally clichéd throughout both in its ragtime rhythm and in its lyrics. The result is a satiric heightening of the love-nest sentimentality of old popular songs in the mode of “He’ll build a little home / Just meant for two / From which I’ll never roam / Who would, would you?” The home in “When I’m Sixty-four” is slightly larger to accommodate children, but that’s the only important difference: “Every summer we can rent a cottage / In the Isle of Wight, if it’s not too dear / We shall scrimp and save / Grandchildren on your knee / Vera Chuck & Dave.” But the Beatles aren’t satisfied merely with having written a brilliant spoof, with scoring, on their own authority, off death-dealing clichés. Instead, they quite suddenly at the end transform one cliché (of sentimental domesticity) into another (of a lonely-hearts newspaper advertisement) thereby proposing a vulgar contemporary medium suitable to the cheap and public sentiments that once passed for nice, private and decent: “Send me a postcard, drop me a line, / Stating point of view /



Indicate precisely what you mean to say / Yours sincerely, wasting away / Give me your answer, fill in a form / Mine for evermore / Will you still need me, will you still feed me / When I'm sixty-four."

The Sgt. Pepper album and the singles released here just before and after it—"Penny Lane," "Strawberry Fields Forever," "All You Need Is Love" and "Baby You're a Rich Man"—constitute the Beatles' most audacious musical effort so far, works of such achieved ambitiousness as to give an entirely new retrospective shape to their whole career. Nothing less is being claimed by these songs than that the Beatles now exist not merely as a phenomenon of entertainment but as a force of historical consequence. They have placed themselves within a musical, social and historical environment more monumental in its surroundings and more significantly populated than was the environment of any of their early songs. Listening to the Sgt. Pepper album one thinks not simply of the history of popular music but of the history of this century. It doesn't matter that some of the songs were composed before it occurred to the Beatles to use the motif of Sgt. Pepper, with its historical overtones; the songs emanated from some inwardly felt coherence that awaited a merely explicit design, and they would ask to be heard together even without the design.

Under the aegis of an old-time concert given by the type of music-hall band with which Lennon's father, Alfred, claims to have been associated, the songs, directly or by chance images, offer something like a review of contemporary English life, saved from folksong generality by having each song resemble a dramatic monologue. The review begins with the Sgt. Pepper theme song, followed immediately by "A Little Help From My Friends": Ringo, helped by the other Beatles, will, as I've already mentioned, try not to sing out of "key," try, that is, to fit into a style still heard in England but very much out of date. Between this and the reprise of Sgt. Pepper, which would be the natural end of the album, are ten songs, and while some are period pieces, about hangovers from the past, as is the band itself, no effort is made at any sort of historical chronology. Their arrangement is apparently haphazard, suggesting how the hippie and the historically pretentious, the genteel and the mod, the impoverished and the exotic, the Indian influence and the influence of technology are inextricably entangled into what is England. As I probably shouldn't say again, the Beatles never for long wholly submerge themselves in any form or style, so that at the end of the Indian, meditative sonorities of "Within You, Without You" the burst of laughter can be taken to mean—look, we have come through, an assurance from the Beatles (if it *is* their laughter and not the response of technicians left in as an example of how "straights" might react) that they are still Beatles, Liverpool boys still there on the far side of a demanding foreign experience. This characteristic release of themselves from history and back to their own proper time and place occurs with respect to the design of the whole album in a most poignant way. Right after the reprise of the Sgt. Pepper song, with no interval and picking up the beat of the Sgt. Pepper theme, an "extra" song, perhaps the most brilliant ever written by Lennon and McCartney, breaks out of the theatrical frame and enters "a day in the life," into the way we live now. It projects a degree of loneliness not to be managed within the conventions of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Released from the controls of Sgt. Pepper, the song exposes the horrors of more contemporary and less benign controls, and it is from these that the song proposes the necessity of still further release. It does so in musical sounds meant to convey a "trip" out, sounds of ascending- airplane velocity and crescendo that occur right after the first "I'd love to turn you on," at midpoint in the song, and after the final, plaintive repetition of the line at the end, when the airplane sounds give way to a sustained orchestral chord that drifts softly and slowly toward infinity and silence. It is, as I've suggested, a song of wasteland, and the concluding "I'd love to turn you on" has as much propriety to the fragmented life that precedes it in the song and in the whole work as does the "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih" to the fragments of Eliot's poem. Eliot can be remembered here for still

other reasons: not only because he pays conspicuous respect to the music hall but because his poems, like the Beatles' songs, work for a kaleidoscopic effect, for fragmented patterns of sound that can bring historic masses into juxtaposition only to let them be fractured by other emerging and equally evocative fragments.

Eliot is not among the sixty-two faces and figures, all unnamed and in some cases probably quite obscure, gathered round the Beatles on the cover, a pictorial extension of the collage effect which is so significant to the music. In making the selection, the Beatles were understandably drawn to figures who promote the idea of other possible worlds or who offer literary and cinematic trips to exotic places: Poe, Oscar Wilde, H. G. Wells, along with Marx, Jung, Lawrence of Arabia and Johnny Weismuller. They are also partial to the kind of theatrical person whose full being is the theatrical self, like W. C. Fields, Tom Mix, Brando and Mae West, who has delightfully adapted such Beatle songs as "Day Tripper" to her own style. Above all, the cover is a celebration of the Beatles themselves who can now be placed (and Bob Dylan, too) within a group who have, aside from everything else, infused the imagination of the living with the possibilities of other ways of living, of extraordinary existences, of something beyond "a day in the life." So it is indeed like a funeral for the Beatles, except that they'd be no more "dead" than anyone else in attendance. There they are in the center, mustachioed and in the brassed and tassled silk of the old-time bands, and, with brilliant, quite funny implications, they are also represented in the collage as wax figures by Madame Tussaud, clothed in business suits. Live Beatles in costumes from the past and effigies of the Beatles in the garb of the present, with the name of the Beatles in flowers planted before the whole group—this bit of slyness is of a piece with not sorting out past and present and promised future in the order of the songs, or the mixed allusiveness to period styles, including earlier Beatles' styles or the mixing and confoundings of media in songs like "When I'm Sixty-four" or "A Day in the Life." The cover suggests that the Beatles to some extent live the past in the present, live in the shadows of their own as well as of other people's past accomplishments, and that among the imaginative creations that fascinate them most, the figures closest at hand on the cover, are their own past selves. "And the time will come," it is promised in one of their songs, "when you will see we're all one, and life flows on within you and without you." As an apprehension of artistic, and perhaps of any other kind of placement within living endeavor, this idea is allowable only to the very great.

1967

## **5. Maureen Cleave, "THE ROLLING STONES: THIS HORRIBLE LOT – NOT QUITE WHAT THEY SEEM," *Evening Standard*, 21 March 1964**

"BUT WOULD YOU LIKE your daughter to marry one?" is what you ask yourself about the Rolling Stones. They've done terrible things to the musical scene – set it back, I would say, by about eight years.

Just when we'd got our pop singers looking neat and tidy and, above all, cheerful, along come the Rolling Stones, looking almost like what we used to call beatniks. (I use this *démodé* word liberally. I hope you can remember what beatniks looked like.)

The Stones, which is what they are called by intimates, have wrecked the image of the pop singer in the '60s.

"We're a horrible-looking bunch," they say of themselves, and there is not a murmur of dissent. Girls stop to stare and giggle in the street, men shout things that are unrestrainedly rude, the Hilton Hotel

shows them the door and so do many provincial pubs.

They do take a bit of getting used to. And certainly no prospective mother-in-law is going to accept them in their present condition.

Their ages range from 19 to 22. There is Keith Richard who has a pert face, pert manners and was eating an apple; there is Charlie Watts who is keen on clothes and considered by his manager to have the bone structure of Steve McQueen and therefore a great future in films; there is Brian Jones who has floppy yellow hair and is the one best- liked by me; there is Bill Wyman who bears a marked resemblance to both Charles I and Charles II, an essentially Stuart face; and then there is Mick Jagger, who is indescribable.

### **Curious appeal**

On television they look curiously appealing with their great heads shaking vaguely, Mick Jagger jerking like a jack- in-the-box but his feet rooted to the spot.

They possess no uniform: "We couldn't adapt ourselves to a uniform," they say. They will walk on to the stage in the outfits depicted above, tie or no tie as the case may be. They sell a lot of records. Their 'Not Fade Away' is in at No. 3. Their manager, a young man with red hair called Andrew Loog Oldham, is passionately devoted to their scruffy image.

"Aggressive," he said with satisfaction. "They don't wash too much and they aren't all that keen on clothes. And they don't play nice-mannered music; it's raw and masculine. I get letters from the kids begging me not to let them appear at the Palladium or go to America and get all tidied up." Often he is asked if they are as stupid as they look. "People," said Mr. Oldham nonchalantly, "keep asking me if they're morons."

### **Belgravia**

Indeed the Stones are not what they seem. You discover that one was a graphic designer, another did engineering, another went to the London School of Economics.

Brian Jones now lives in a village in Berkshire but shortly moves to Belgravia where, he says, he will live next door to Lady Dartmouth. He hires a different make of car each week so as to get to know them all.

Charlie Watts has invested a lot of his money in the Rock of Gibraltar which the others think is pretty stupid.

They originally created a stir in a club in the Station Hotel, Richmond. The place held 140 people and on a good night there would be 500 dancing in the street. Sometimes you would find the Salvation Army at one end of the street and the Stones at the other.

"The kids used to hang off the ceiling," said Brian, "taking their shirts off and that. They liked the way we raved. In places like Cardiff they kiss us, getting the sweat off our faces on to their faces." As the Stones would say, the kids "recon" them like mad. They claim to have a disruptive influence on other pop singers, many of whom long to throw away their blue mohair suits and rebel.

And of course their effect on the poor young man in conventional employment is to make him

extremely discontented. He is forever confiding in the Stones how he longs to wear his hair down his back only his bosses and teachers won't let him. "From that quarter," Mick Jagger said, "there seems to be some sort of opposition."

Two weeks ago, they scored a victory over the grown-ups in the north. They appeared on Scene at 6:30.

"Get those horrible people off the screen," cried the adults, switching over to *Top of the Pops*. There, gaping at them smugly from Top of the Pops, were the Stones.

"We're quite clean really," Brian Jones says. Just for your information. "What we want to do is bring a lot of pleasure to people. Thereby earning a bomb!"

## **6. Peter Guralnick, "On the Rolling Stones," in *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'N' Roll* (NY: Hachette, 2012; originally 1976)**

*Dig these rhythm 'n' blues!*

Chuck Berry

I think our development just about paralleled that of The Rolling Stones. When they first appeared they were a blues group almost exclusively, and one of the things that most appealed to us about them was that their taste corresponded so exactly with our own: Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, and Little Walter. On their first American tour they made the obligatory stop in Chicago, and when they appeared on *Shindig* they brought along Howlin' Wolf and sat mutely at his feet while he shook and writhed, jumping up and down till it seemed as if the small stage would collapse, taking Wolf, Stones, and *Shindig* dancers along with it. With the debut of Wolf on network television and the popularity of his "Little Red Rooster," if only in The Stones' version, we were in our heaven.

But if The Stones merely served to confirm our belief in the blues, in soul music they played a truly educational function. I don't think I'd ever heard of Solomon Burke before The Stones recorded "Cry to Me." And though we listened to WILD, the local soul station, for whatever blues they might play, we were largely indifferent to the rest of the music. Otis Redding, Don Covay, Wilson Pickett, Marvin Gaye—these were just indiscriminate names to me before The Stones singled them out and deposited them in our homes (just as they deposited blues in the guise of rock 'n' roll for their larger audience) in songs like "Hitchhike," "Pain in My Heart," "Have Mercy." Because whatever else they have been, The Stones have always proved the best advertisement for American black music outside of the music itself. Where a group like The Beatles retreated quickly into studio seclusion and, more important, never really did anything to see that their influences were recognized, The Stones from the first have paid their respects.

They have recorded songs by artists as prominent as Muddy Waters and as obscure as Slim Harpo and the Reverend Robert Wilkins. They have showcased blues and rhythm and blues artists like Buddy Guy and Junior Wells, B.B. King, and Chuck Berry and even allowed themselves to be upstaged by James Brown (on film) and Ike and Tina Turner in person. It would be difficult to imagine many other performers paying such explicit dues, but then The Stones have always had a sense of high drama.

Of all their contributions to my own education, though, I would say that the one for which I was most grateful was the presence of James Brown in The Stones-headlined *T.A.M.I. Show* film. James Brown, of course, we had heard of, we knew his music a little, and his reputation as an entertainer preceded him. Nothing that we heard could have prepared us for what we saw even in the grainy, far-away quality of the film. The dynamism, the tireless energy and unflagging zeal, the apocalyptic drama of his performance were all unprecedented in our experience, and when we emerged from the theatre we had the idea that we could skate one-legged down Washington Street, defying gravity and astonishing passers-by. The Stones after that performance had been nothing more than an anti-climax, and we watched in silent approval as the blacks trooped out one by one, leaving the field to the latecomers. ...

## 7. Paul Williams, "THE KINKS: FACE TO FACE," *Crawdaddy!*, March 1967

IF YOU ARE not a Kinks fan, you are either a) uninformed, or b) not a Kinks fan. If it's the latter, there's nothing you can do about it. The Kinks, rather like Johnny Hart's B.C. or the novels of Kurt Vonnegut, are absolutely indefensible (and unassailable). I can't tell you why they're great: there are no standards by which the Kinks can be judged. Ray Davies' music has nothing to do with almost anything else. It's in a category unto itself, and if you don't like it, well, there you are.

I would like to say that *Face to Face* is a tremendously funny lp. I'm uncomfortably aware, however, that there are those, even those I respect muchly and love warmly, who do not find B.C. at all funny. I hesitate, therefore, to urge upon them an album that starts with four rings of a telephone and a pristine male voice saying "Hello, who is that speaking please", followed inexorably by a lead guitar and bass who sound like they've been perched for hours just waiting to play their little run and get into the song (a righteous complaint against whatever it is that interrupts phone conversations). The humor of the thing is indescribable: it's all in the timing, and I break down every time I hear it. But there are those who sit unmoved. It must have something to do with taste.

The Kinks are mostly – but not entirely – Ray Davies. Ray is songwriter, vocalist, motive force for the group, and it is his curious personality that comes through in every note the Kinks play. Some people think Ray is a genius (albeit a misguided one). I think it's more accurate to call him an amazingly articulate musician; his mood at any given time is reproduced impeccably in his songs, with no apparent effort on his part. Playing around with a familiar melody and an unusual break – 'Rosie Won't You Please Come Home?' – he lets the words fall where they may. "And I'll bake a cake if you'll tell me you are on the first plane home." Sheer nonsense... but it all falls in place so perfectly, it's hard to imagine any other words could belong there. Ray's gift is his control of his music: whatever he does, it's right.

He couldn't do it without the other Kinks, however. They complement his vocals and carry the moods of his songs so precisely that one would think them pursued by the same demons. Brother Dave on lead guitar, Pete Quaife on bass, Mick Avory on drums, all run wild within the confines of a private world limited by the walls of the Pye Recording Studios on the one hand and the curious imagination of Mr. Ray Davies & Co. on the other. The limits of Mr. Davies' imagination, however, are unknown.

Ah, what is so rare as a Kink in tune? You might well ask. Don't take your eye off the madness, however, to worry such things: Kinks aren't really concerned with tunes. When Ray sings 'Dandy',

for instance, it is reportedly the same silly little piece he wrote for Peter Noone. But in point of fact, Ray's 'Dandy' has little to do with Herman's Herman who merely sang the song.

Ray doesn't hit a note, but he hits Dandy square between the eyes, every stretch of his voice portrays more of the bachelor in question than 17 glances at a full-length mirror.

There's a lot of depth to this album. 'Rainy Day in June', for example: how can anything that starts with a thunderclap not be a pretty damn serious song? But it is, and it's a major work. The piano/bass thing rainy days all over you, while Ray's voice just stares out the window. The important part is "Everybody's got the rain," an unfinished line which is about as universal as they come. Wow. A work of beauty.

'Rosie Won't You Please Come Home?' is too unbearably funny. The nice thing is, he's not putting down anybody: he's just getting totally into the mother's part, with full sympathy but never a serious moment. 'Most Exclusive Residence For Sale' is almost as good; Ray acts very straight and pseudo-tragic about the whole thing, but the ba-ba- ba-ba chorus that backs him up gives him away and completely gasses the listener.

'Fancy' is so lovely and so far-out musically that everyone should notice it and nobody will. Two years from now, when everyone's into this kind of thing, no one will remember that Ray Davies was into it first. They never do. 'Little Miss Queen of Darkness' is wonderfully well built. For once, a good walking vocal to go, along with a well- handled walking bass, and a drummer who knows how to take over when the whole thing walks his way. Oh yeah, There's a fine four-way fight going on after the drum solo here – it sounds as though Ray won by fading all tracks except his own. Harmony out of discord. If you can ignore the frenetic upstaging long enough to catch the words to the song, do; they're delightful. Davies is master of smiling pathos.

'Sunny Afternoon' is a song to end if not all other songs then at least several. It is a Davies tour de force; if 'Too Much On My Mind' is his statement of policy, then 'Sunny Afternoon' – following, as it does, a nervous breakdown – is Ray's State of the Union Address to the world. And it's beautiful. It starts off descending and just floats on down for another 3.5 minutes: It's a portrait of the artist as a happy, helpless himself, trapped on a sunshine carpet of psychosomatic flypaper (purchased from the album of the same name by the Blue Magoos) – and like every Davies portrait, it is razor-sharp but it draws absolutely no conclusions. Goods and bads do not enter into the picture. Ray is sympathetic to all things and all people, up to and including Ray Davies.

*Face to Face* is a fine lp; the Kinks have really never done a poor one. This is perhaps the best Kinks lp to meet them on – it hits hardest and fastest, it is the most sophisticated and in many ways the funniest and most musically inventive. It is also the best programmed, because Reprise chose to release the original Pye recording, with all fourteen (!) cuts in their original order. Poor programming – the curse of the throw-away album designed for U.S. consumption by ignorant U.S. labels – has hurt the Kinks badly in the past. *Face* is not, however, the best Kinks album. That title would probably go to *Kink Kontroversy*, an early 1966 album that had no single track as good or even as ambitious as 'Rainy Day in June' or 'Sunny Afternoon'. *Kontro* stands, however, as the best statement of the Ray Davies approach to music and/or life. Its overall quality is much higher than *Face* partly because it doesn't fool around as much – as a result, it avoids the occasional self-consciousness of the new lp... and it doesn't display its low points as obviously ('Holiday in Waikiki' is a good example of

a track that just doesn't fit on *Face to Face*), in many ways, is an overly arty lp; *Kontro* offers us Kinks in their natural habitat.

But Kinks, no matter where they are or what they're doing, are well worth your attention. Whether or not you enjoy them is surely a matter of taste. But if, like many, you've overlooked them, you're missing one of the finest groups we have.

## **8. David Hajdu, *The LP, Love for Sale: Pop Music in America* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), pp. 163–65.**

By 1968, LPs were outselling single records for the first time, and the album format would be central to the way musicians, listeners, marketers, and most others would think about popular music until the invention of the MP3 and the rise of digital downloading in the twenty-first century. The LP, originally designed so that a full movement of a Berlioz symphony would fit on one side of a record, allowed for twenty to twenty-five minutes of music to play without the listener having to futz with the playing equipment. Because it was a nuisance to lift the tonearm and drop it again at precisely the right spot between bands on a spinning record, listening for twenty or so minutes straight became a near imperative. For the first time since songs became popular as mass-marketable products, through sheet music in the late nineteenth century, the form that popular music took changed substantively. Musicians and their audiences were now conceiving of and experiencing a work of popular music not as a three-minute thing but as a forty-minute thing—or a pair of twenty-minute things.

The way LPs were packaged made the album a physically appealing object. The cover was called a dust jacket, suggesting that it was both protective and an article of finery. At slightly more than twelve inches by twelve inches, the jacket was larger than the cover of a hardcover book and even larger than an eight-by-ten framed photograph. Looking over an album in the store to decide whether or not to buy it, you would hold it in two hands, and it would hold your attention. The size of the jacket allowed the creation of some ambitious, often beautiful, or, at the very least, complicated cover art: the graveyard dream collage of the Beatles, surrounded by cryptic symbols and standees of old celebrities on Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band; the 3-D penis, dressed to the right, behind the pull-able zipper Andy Warhol designed for the Rolling Stones' Sticky Fingers; the song rundown in comix panels by Robert Crumb on Big Brother and the Holding Company's Cheap Thrills ... Song lyrics could be printed on the inner sleeve that held the album itself, and if the package was a gatefold, more art and information or writing could be included. The printing of the words implied that the lyrics were worth printing, prodding songwriters to write for the eye as well as the ear. There was space for liner notes of half-decent length, and record companies took to commissioning writing on the subject of the record's artist by the likes of Bob Dylan (who wrote long prose poems for several albums by his friends in the early 1960s); Langston Hughes (for Joan Baez 5); Igor Stravinsky (for his own *Firebird*); and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) for John Coltrane's *Live at Birdland*. The multidimensional, tangibly gratifying entirety of the package reinforced the value of the music in the record grooves and, sometimes, provided enough of its own value to make up for not-so-great music.

Rock and pop artists grew to treat the album as a creative form rather than a way to re-merchandise a batch of singles. Singers and songwriters who came up through the folk craze, such as Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, and Simon and Garfunkel, were early among artists of the rock generation to do this, having occupied a sphere where some of the best-known albums—Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Woody Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads*, and Johnny Cash's *Songs of Our*

Soil—were unified by theme. Each of Bob Dylan's albums had integrity as a whole and presented his latest mode of thinking as a package—social and political consciousness on *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, personal reflection on *Another Side of Bob Dylan* ...

## 9. Gene Sculatti, "VILLAINS AND HEROES: IN DEFENSE OF THE BEACH BOYS," *Jazz & Pop*, September 1968

BRIAN WILSON AND COMPANY are currently at the center of an intense contemporary rock controversy, involving the academic "rock as art" critic-intellectuals, the AM-tuned teenies, and all the rest of us in between. As the California sextet is simultaneously hailed as genius incarnate and derided as the archetypical pop music copouts, one clear-cut and legitimate query is seen at the base of all the turmoil: how seriously can the 1968 rock audience consider the work of a group of artists who, just four years earlier, represented the epitome of the whole commercial-plastic "teenage music industry?" ...

The answer is a simple one. The Beach Boys' approach to their music is as valid now as it was in 1962 and vice versa. Brian Wilson owes no one any apologies for his music, present or past.

The most popular charge leveled at the Beach Boys is their apparently excessive immersion in and identification with mass culture and "commercialism".... [An] association with mass culture was indeed a characteristic of the Beach Boys' music up until 1966. Moreover, it was an "honest" association.... Wilson's world circa 1962 was seriously involved with all the then dead serious/now ludicrous manifestations of adolescence: hot rods, surfing and making-out in the school parking lot really do exist. A fascination with popular culture has proven to be a significant part of the twentieth century artist's personality. It has served [Andy] Warhol and Chuck Berry (the Beach Boys' earliest influence) equally well.

Southern California teenage culture provided Brian Wilson with material for his art in 'Surfin' Safari' and 'Little Deuce Coupe', as did the drug experience in 'Good Vibrations', as does whatever in *Wild Honey*. The aforementioned charges would, however, have been valid (as certainly they are when applied to performers like Jan & Dean) if the Beach Boys' music had proven to be of no artistic merit, but such is not the case. Despite the oversaturation of the public with surf and drag argot, despite the fact that their recordings became somewhat anachronistic for a while, the Beach Boys have maintained a consistent impressive musical output....

In retrospect, the first Beach Boys music was a relatively crude product. In their initial LP effort, *Surfin' Safari*, the only talent evidenced is Brian Wilson's empathy, his ability to assimilate his environment and structure it into lyrical form. In their third LP, *Surfer Girl*, the Beach Boys emerged as the first authentic "rock 'n' roll group," in the modern sense; they were at once composers, singers and musicians, arrangers and producers, the first major self-sufficient rock band. In *Surfer Girl* Brian Wilson supervises the whole recording operation; still working with the formula, he is able to create a work of variety and subtlety.

By *Little Deuce Coupe* the formula has been polished to high gloss, directly working from Chuck Berry and Four Freshmen stylings. Brian's proficiency at composing intriguing melodies is displayed in 'Car Crazy Cutie' and 'Spirit of America'. The formula works perfectly, for the last time.



What ensued after *Little Deuce Coupe* was a period of artistic transition which lasted roughly from 1964 to 1966. From *Shut Down Volume 2* through *Beach Boys Party Album* formula is necessarily discarded and the LPs become uneven collections, replete with boring bull session fillers, displaying commendable experimentation and sophistication, moments of beauty amid dullness.

[The] most ambitious of the group's transition efforts [was] *The Beach Boys Today!* While it avoids contextual unity *Today!* is remarkable in its embodiment of Brian's oft quoted "voices-as-instruments" philosophy. The perfect vocal intricacies of 'She Knows Me Too Well' and 'Please Let Me Wonder' originally elicited Jack Good's famous quote that "Beach Boys' records sound as if they were sung by eunuchs in the Sistine Choir." A precursor of *Pet Sounds* orchestration is found in the elaborate treatment given Spector's Ronettes' 'I'm So Young'. Perhaps more than any previous work, *Today!* substantiated Brian's stature as one of the all-time great composers of melody in rock (along with Lennon-McCartney, John Phillips and Smokey Robinson).

Two important singles mark the Beach Boys' final transition phase. 'Sloop John B' early in 1966 was a partially effective attempt at erasing youth cult leaders image by adapting folk-rock to traditional Beach Boys' style. 'God Only Knows', a truly distinctive 45, was the lead-off cut on the most fascinating and creative Beach Boys album to date, *Pet Sounds*. *Pet Sounds* was by no means a revolutionary work in that it inspired or influenced the rock scene in a big way. It was revolutionary only within the confines of the Beach Boys' music. The concept behind the album was part of a tradition established by *Rubber Soul*; *Rubber Soul* was the definitive "rock as art" album, revolutionary in that it was a completely successful creative endeavor integrating with precision all aspects of the creative (rock) process—composition of individual tracks done with extreme care, each track arranged appropriately to fit beside each other track, the symmetrical rock 'n' roll album.

*Rubber Soul* established itself as the necessary prototype that no major rock group has been able to ignore; *Rubber Soul*, [the Rolling Stones'] *Aftermath* and *Pet Sounds* are of the same classic mold. Brian's omniscience is surely felt in *Pet Sounds*, the master hand collecting and selecting, shaping his musical expression to exhibit all of the parts of the whole; the Freshmen harmonizing, Spector's cavernous hollows of sound, lush 1940's movie music, adolescent romanticism. Like the prototype, *Pet Sounds* was a final statement of an era and a prophecy that sweeping changes lay ahead.

'Good Vibrations' may yet prove to be the most significantly revolutionary piece of the current rock renaissance; executed as it is in conventional Beach Boys manner, it is one of the few organically complete rock works; every audible note and every silence contributes to the whole three minutes, 35 seconds, of the song. It is the ultimate in-studio production trip, very much rock 'n' roll in the emotional sense and yet un-rocklike in its spacial, dimensional conceptions. In no minor way, 'Good Vibrations' is a primary influential piece for all producing rock artists; everyone has felt its import to some degree, in such disparate things as the Yellow Balloon's 'Yellow Balloon' and the Beatles' 'A Day in the Life', in groups as far apart as (recent) Grateful Dead and the Association, as Van Dyke Parks and the Who....

*Smiley Smile* was an abrupt collection of comic vocal exercises. The most promising cuts, 'Vegetables', 'Gettin' Hungry' and 'She's Goin' Bald', act as illustrations of the voice-as-instrument thing (they're mainly freaky-hip vocal diversions, not even songs), but *Smiley Smile* was predominantly a downer.

As if enough fuel hadn't been added to the fire, shortly after the radical (it is nothing if not experimental) *Smiley Smile*, an astonishingly conventional album, *Wild Honey*, made its appearance; the Beach Boys come on really schizoid now. In *Wild Honey* they have the audacity to fool around with r&b, a territory indeed alien to them. Surprisingly, *Wild Honey* works well. It isn't the least bit pretentious; it's honest, and convincing. A whole lot of soul is used up on 'Wild Honey' and 'Darlin', as well as the re-make of Stevie Wonder's 'I Was Made To Love Her.' 'Aren't You Glad' achieves a Miracles style smoothness via a Bobby Goldsboro-type song, and Brian's weird ear for melody is again evidenced in 'Let the Wind Blow' and 'Country Air.' *Wild Honey* is ambitious but not obnoxious. It's where the Beach Boys presently are at, in many ways it is where they have been all along (a kind of lyrical romance rock); and it is precisely where they belong, doing their thing uniquely like no one else can.

The Beach Boys' most recent work, *Friends*, may actually be their best. This album represents the culmination of the efforts and the results of their last three LPs. Demonstrating their highly distinctive approach and their own sense of organicism, *Friends* derives primarily from *Pet Sounds*, *Smiley Smile*, *Wild Honey*, and little else. The characteristic innocence and somewhat childlike visions imparted to their music are applied directly to the theme of the album: friendships. As usual, the lyrics tend to be basic, yet as expressive as they need to be; words, like individual voices or instruments, are all part of the larger whole of music; the sole qualifications for Beach Boys' lyrics is that they partake of, and don't visibly harm, melody.

*Friends* is certainly less "complex," as regards harmonic intricacies, than much recent Beach Boys work. Compared to *Pet Sounds* and *Smiley Smile*, *Friends* seems to be vocally thin. The emphasis is on very strong melodies and it is

here that Brian Wilson scores again.... In 'When A Man Needs A Woman' Wilson again treats sex as he did in 'Gettin' Hungry' (*Smiley Smile*), with a stunning directness and surprisingly effective simplicity. *Friends* differs little in effect from most other Beach Boys albums. It is another showcase for what is the most original and perhaps the most consistently satisfying rock music being created today.

## **10. Michael Lydon, "LENNON AND MCCARTNEY: SONGWRITERS — A PORTRAIT FROM 1966," unpublished, March 1966**

IT IS NOW ABOUT A DOZEN YEARS since the pop music revolution – since Alan Freed began to play, instead of soupy white imitations, straight rhythm and blues in New York and called it rock'n'roll; since Wild Bill Haley and his Comets roared to the top of the Top Ten with 'Shake, Rattle and Roll'; since the advent of the 45 rpm record and the post-war prosperity stretched that Top Ten into the Top 40, and even the Top 100.

Despite adult accusations of the sameness of all the bleating sounds, pop has changed many times in those years. Those "indistinguishable" songs from the teenager's transistors have in fact been the country rock sounds of Carl Perkins, Gene Vincent or the Everly Brothers; the sweet harmonizing of the Platters, the Shirelles, the Drifters or the Five Satins; the plaintive blues orchestrations of Curtis Mayfield's Impressions; the funny, guttural blues of Chuck Berry or the Coasters; and the jazzed-up beat of the Tamla Motown groups, the Miracles, Marvelettes, and Martha and the Vandellas.

The list merely hints at the diversity. Most of the songs, however, are poor, quickly recorded imitations of a seemingly successful formula written by songwriters with a facile ear for discerning what sound has "teen feel". But for those few writers and performers – like Mayfield, Keith Richard and Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, and the Beach Boys – who attempt something new, these 13 years of evolution and synthesis provide a rich tradition of themes of rhythms, harmonies, and effects to create upon. No one has done this more successfully or with more verve than John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

The duo's claim on immortality can be established purely by their commercial success. In the three and a half years since 'Love Me Do' became the first Beatles hit, they have published eighty-eight songs (not including another hundred or so, some dating back to the earliest days in Hamburg and Liverpool's Cavern Club, which have never been published or recorded).

By February 1, 1966, the eighty-eight Lennon-McCartney songs had been recorded in 2,921 versions, and by now the figure must be well over three thousand. They have been recorded by other beat groups like Billy J. Kramer, the Rolling Stones, Peter and Gordon; jazz singers like Ella Fitzgerald; rhythm and blues groups like the Supremes; ballad singers like Marianne Faithfull; dance orchestras of every variety and singers in every country of the world to which electricity has penetrated.

Versions by the Beatles have by now sold close to 200 million record tracks; total sales of all Lennon/McCartney- recorded compositions must be pushing half a billion. Only songwriters established for 30 years or more, giants like Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Irving Berlin, and Jerome Kern, could hope to match the records set by the two boys in three years. And when their life as performing Beatles begins to die a natural death, their lives as writers become increasingly important to them.

The extraordinary response to their songs, aside from their appeal as Beatles, indicates their instinctive feel for the pop idiom developed from a lifetime immersion, to the exclusion of all else, in popular music. Growing up in Liverpool, they absorbed both the fruity tradition of music hall ballads and the constant imports of popular records from America. John was a poet first, scribbling verses as soon as he could write, then writing his first song when he had learned one chord on a guitar at the age of 14. Paul met him in the mid-'50s when skiffle, an English adaptation of American folk music, was popular, and the team began work instantaneously.

"When I first met John, he'd written the words to a skiffle song," Paul told a British journalist recently. "It still had a skiffley sound, but he'd changed the words to 'Come and go with me, Down at the Penitentiaree' or something like that. Then I did one, 'When I Lost My Little Girl,' with the three chords I knew at the time. We got out of that stage and worked out chords together. We used to play truant and go to his house or mine and mess about all afternoon. It was a great feeling of escape. One song of that era was 'Love Me Do.' It wasn't good, but it was only a little bit worse than the kind of things on the hit parade then."

In those days when they were still the Quarrymen and then the Silver Beatles, they were fans of Little Richard, Buddy Holly, Elvis, Carl Perkins, and Chuck Berry, and in the four or five-hour sessions at the Cavern Club they pounded out their versions of the American hits over and over again. The Liverpool scene, then swarming with groups, many now long disbanded, was also a formative influence.

"If we hadn't played so long or so much, we never would have made it," John told me last week. "It was a funny place, Liverpool then. You were half friends with the other groups, half rivals. In a way it was like a school of painting developing among a group, but people who see the school side forget there were jealousies and feuds. Sure, we learned from the others; you couldn't help it. But we were smart heads, we thought from the start we were better. We were the only group then writing songs, so we used to say we had written about a hundred, even though it was only thirty, Some of those are lost by now. We had one, 'That's My Woman Standing Over There,' I've forgotten how it went."  
...

During the fall of 1965, in two weeks of constant writing and recording, they produced *Rubber Soul*, which, they feel, marks an almost total break with what they had done before. "You don't know us now if you don't know *Rubber Soul*," says John. "All our ideas are different now."

"If someone saw a picture of you taken two years ago and said that was you, you'd say it was a load of rubbish and show them a new picture," adds Paul. "That's how we feel about the early stuff and *Rubber Soul*. That's who we are now. People have always wanted us to stay the same, but we can't stay in a rut. No one else expects to hit a peak at 23 and never develop, so why should we? *Rubber Soul* for me is the beginning of my adult life." As Paul told Francis Wyndham in an article in *London Life*, "You can't be singing 15-year-old songs at 20 because you don't think 15-year-old thoughts at 20 – a fact that escapes a lot of people."

Part of this excitement is purely an excitement about the present, and both boys admit it. But the songs of *Rubber Soul* do mark a new maturity, both in music and lyrics. Steve Race, a well-known British jazz critic who has long been a Lennon and McCartney fan, admits he was astonished when he first heard the LP. "When heard 'Michelle' I couldn't believe my ears," he said in heated excitement recently. "The second chord is an A-chord, while the note in the melody above is A-flat. This is an unforgivable clash, something no one brought up knowing older music could ever have done. It is entirely unique, a stroke of genius. In fact, when Billy Vaughn recorded it, his arranger was so attuned to the conventional way of thinking he didn't even hear what the boys had done, and wrote an A-flat into the chord below – taking all the sting out. I suppose it was sheer musical ignorance that allowed John and Paul to do it, but it took incredible daring. And 'Girl', why, it's like a folk song from some undiscovered land, it's so new – the alternation from major to minor is fantastic. The use of the sitar on 'Norwegian Wood,' plus the involutions of the opening three phrases, is sheer brilliance."

Paul himself talked for two hours on *Rubber Soul* to Francis Wyndham. On 'The Word': "This could be a Salvation Army Song. The word is love, but it could be Jesus (it isn't mind you, but it could be). 'It's so fine, it's sunshine, it's the word'. It's about nothing, really, but it's about love. It's so much more original than our old stuff, less obvious. 'Give the word a chance to say! That the word is just the way' – then the organ comes in, just like the Sally Army."

On 'We Can Work It Out' (released as a separate single in Britain): "The middle eight is the best – it changes the beat to a waltz in the middle. The original arrangement was terrible, very skiffley. Then at the session George Martin had the idea of splitting the beat completely. The words go on at a double speed against the slow waltz music."

On 'Girl': "John's been reading a book about pain and pleasure, about the idea behind Christianity – that to have pleasure you have to have pain. The book says that's all rubbish; it often happens that

pain leads to pleasure, but you don't have to have it, that's all a drag. So we've written a song about it. *'Was she told when she was young that pain would lead to pleasure/ Did she understand it when they said, that a man must break his back to earn his day of leisure/ will she still believe it when he's dead?'* Listen to John's breath on the word 'girl': we asked the engineer to put it on treble, so you get this huge intake of breath and it sounds just like a percussion instrument."

All the lyrics are imaginative, either probing problems usually too serious for pop songs or having touches of the wildly inventive humour that marks Lennon's poetry. Part of 'Norwegian Wood', written by John after a late night and a hangover, goes: *"I had a girl, or should I say she once had me/ She showed me her room, isn't it good, Norwegian wood, She asked me to stay and she told me to sit anywhere, I looked around and I noticed there wasn't a chair."*

Every song on the LP has something new. This time, instead of picking up a country and western song for Ringo to sing they wrote their own: 'What Goes On'. They fulfil an ambition of long standing in writing 'Drive My Car', a near perfect one-note song in which, strictly speaking, there is no melody but the rhythmic singing of one note. "Melodic songs are in fact quite easy to write," Paul told me. "To write a good song with just one note in it – like 'Long Tall Sally' – is really very hard."

Into 'I'm Looking Through You', a piece with a loping beat, they stick riffs of what is known in England as "rave- up" guitar, until it comes out as part country and western and part blues-shout. And yet, despite all the innovation and the radical expansion of the pop idiom on *Rubber Soul*, the LP has become their biggest seller to date. That is one of the advantages in being both a Beatle and a songwriter, Paul says. "We are so well established that we can bring the fans along with us and stretch the limits of pop. We don't have to follow what everyone else is doing."

Like many artists, however, Lennon and McCartney find it both difficult and hardly relevant to explain in words what they are doing and how they do it. When a now-famous January 1963 article in *The Times* referred flatteringly to their use of "Aeolian cadences" and "chains of pandiatonic clusters," "melismas," and "submediant switches," they were as baffled as the ordinary fan. They do not find extraordinary what they have done. In interviews there is hardly a trace of introspection or critical analysis of their work. If pressed they try to answer as truthfully as possible, but avoid getting involved in detailed discussion of how and why they have changed. "It all comes back to this," Paul said after an hour's talk. "We just happen to be songwriters. We write songs that people like. We wrote worse songs, we hope to write better songs."

They are almost as vague about the process of writing the songs. Paul has just begun to learn written notation and for practice recently wrote a simple piece for his girlfriend, Jane Asher, who plays classical guitar. Otherwise they write in their heads or work out a tune on a guitar. "I've never sat down to write a simple song," John explained to me. "I might think the song won't be complex, but I'm not of those writers who chomp out songs to a formula. The beginning idea could be anything on earth. A bit of melody might come to me, and if it sticks, I'll find my guitar and play it into a tape recorder, try to fool with it and extend it. Maybe I'd call Paul up and tell him to come over and we'll work on it together. 'Norwegian Wood' started as a guitar bit. I was just fiddling when it came to me. It almost never got written, but then I found some time."

\*

IN LIVERPOOL, IDEAS USED TO come from playing together, and a new song might have grown from improvisation on stage. Now, except for occasional late night sessions when they play for their own enjoyment, they tend to develop ideas on their own. Many songs, however, get written just by

sitting down to write. "When we have an LP to do, we know we have to write twelve songs, so we will sit down to write a raver or a ballad on order," said John. "We want to write more this way, I've never liked the idea of going to an office just to write, but we might do this soon. Otherwise a lot of ideas, good ones, get lost."

Many songs John and Paul write together, both doing words and music; others are done solo. But just as they are distinct personalities, their musical abilities differ. Paul, more open, gentle, and articulate, tends to write the "soppier" songs – "John doesn't like to show he's sentimental; I don't mind." John, a deeper, more explosive, and enigmatic person, is more willing to try less conventional sounds. John also tends toward a greater interest in lyrics; Paul towards music. But their tastes and personalities complement each other, and they are close and trusting friends, a rare thing in creative partnerships.

"A perfect example of how we work is 'Drive My Car,' Paul said. "I wrote it with the repetitive line being 'You can give me golden rings'. When I played it to John at the recording session, he said, 'Crap!' It was too soft. I thought about it and knew he was right, so we went on to other songs, then that night we spent hours trying to get a better idea. Finally we ended up with 'You can drive my car.' The idea of the bitchy girl was the same, but it gave the song a better story line, and made the key line much more effective."

Lyric ideas come on everywhere. They once wrote a song called 'Thinking of Linking', picking up the phrase from the television commercial for the Link Furniture Company. Noting the ambiguous meaning, however, they never recorded it. Some of John's ideas stay semi-conscious for years before they come out as songs. As a child he was amused by a religious motto that hung in his home:

"However black the clouds may be, in time they'll pass away. Have faith and trust and you will see, God's light make bright your day." This appeared in *Spaniard in the Works*, John's second book, as: "However Blackpool tower may be, in time they'll pass away. Have faith and trust and B.B.C., Griff's light make bright your day." And in the song 'Tell Me What You See' as:

*Big and black the clouds will be, Time will pass away  
If you put your trust in me, I'll make bright your day.*

Both stress that since they do not write their songs down, the finished record is really the song they write. In the studio they do most of the arranging, but are aided by George Martin, who has recorded everything they have done, and by the inventive playing of George Harrison and Ringo Starr. Though they would blanch at the comparison, they are rather like Duke Ellington, who writes and arranges with particular musicians in mind. "George Martin is important because he knows what we want," John told me. "He acts as a translator between us and Norman Smith, the engineer who actually runs the recording machines."

Now they are interested in getting more complicated electronic effects, using more over-dubbing, feedback, and "hyping" their sounds. One of their biggest recent influences has been a newly popular British group, the Who, who use tremendous amounts of feedback. "They started us thinking again," Paul said. "We had that feedback idea in 'I Feel Fine' but the Who went farther and made all kinds of weird new sounds. I suppose Donald Zec [a disparaging music critic on the *Daily Mirror*] would say 'What would they do without amplifiers?' But that's as silly as saying, 'If God wanted us to smoke, he'd have given us chimneys.' We haven't got chimneys, but we smoke – so what?" What

would the theatre be without a stage and make-up, or movies without a camera?"

Both men say that other influences are hard to pin down. "If we say we are influenced by someone or we like them, that will make them too important. Our best influences now are ourselves," says Paul. "We listen to records every day, a big mixture of stuff," says John. "You can't pick out anyone person." But John did mention Steve Cropper, guitarist/writer with Booker T. and The MG's, suggesting that they would like to have Cropper produce Beatle recording sessions. Paul mentioned a wide range of people he likes now: from groups like the Marvelettes and rhythm and blues singer Otis Redding, through Stockhausen and John Cage, and onto Albert Ayler, a pioneer of random jazz. Cage, he felt, is too random. "I like to get ideas randomly but then develop them within a frame." As an afterthought he put forward the Fugs, a New York group who sing wildly obscene songs, purposely using verbal shock as a musical technique. "It's like a new development in discordancy. Anyway, its new and very funny," he explained.

Summed up, their musical achievements have been breathtaking. Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, and Richard Rodgers all had written songs, and good ones, by their early twenties, but none could have matched the sheer output, range, or originality of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, aged 25 and 23 respectively. Yet they feel they have done nothing extraordinary, rather that they have just begun, and fairly modestly at that.

In interviews they stress over and over again the obvious facts: they have been at the game seriously just over six years; that much of their early work was adolescent and imitative; that they can hope to live and create for another forty years; and that they have total financial freedom to develop in any way they please.

"None of us has barely started," Paul says. "At first we wanted to make money, now we've got it, a fantastic platform of money to dive off into anything. People say we've had a fantastic success and that is all. We don't look at it that way. We look at our lives as a whole, think in terms of forty more years of writing. I wouldn't mind being a white-haired old man writing songs, but I'd hate to be a white-haired old Beatle at the Empress Stadium, playing for people. We might write longer pieces, film scores – I know we want to write the whole score of our next film. We might write specifically for other people, write for different instrument – you name it, and it's possible we could do it." Their development has already, in fact, brought them fully around one circle: Marshall Chess, head of Chess Records which records Chuck Berry, has asked John and Paul to write songs for Berry, who until now has written all his songs himself. The boys now influence their influences.

John and Paul like to write songs and so far they have hardly had to work at it. "I'd never struggle writing a song till it hurt," John says, "I'd just forget it and try something else." The direct sense of their own enjoyment comes through in the songs. Each one, from the first to the last, is a direct statement of a simple emotional idea. Perhaps in some cases the emotion is a juvenile one. They would be the first to admit that. Yet each song is honest. None has the syrupy sentimentality of the songs written by adults for teenagers. This transparent honesty is the key to both the appeal and quality of songs. In that way their work is a perfect mirror of themselves, the boys whose candid simplicity has baffled and annoyed their elders.

"One thing that modern philosophy, existentialism and things like that, has taught people, is that you have to live now," says Paul. "You have to feel now. We live in the present, we don't have time to figure out whether we are right or wrong, whether we are immoral or not. We have to be honest, be straight, and then live, enjoying and taking what we can."

Each song can stand as a statement of that idea. Thus any comparison of their work with that of earlier generations of songwriters is beside the point, not just because the boys have been totally grounded in the idioms of rock 'n' roll, but because their rough and straightforward presentation has no more to do with Cole Porter's ironic sophistication than Levi's and the direct fashions of today have to do with the gauzy silks of the the Thirties.

To stretch a point, Lennon and McCartney's music is pop art, not just pop music; but unlike pop art, which with time is increasingly evidencing its sterility, their music shows every sign of deepening in meaning and mood. Their work to date has shown an unbounded, joyful inventiveness unparalleled in popular music; it has also shown a deep, if not "serious," insight into the emotions of growing up. Nothing so far has curbed then. As John and Paul grow, they are losing none of their fey freedom or their youth. With that, as they have proved, they can do anything.

### **11. Geoffrey O'Brien, "Seven Years in the Life," *The New York Review of Books*, January 11, 2000.**

The Beatles Anthology by the Beatles. Chronicle Books, 368 pp., \$60.00 1by the Beatles. EMI, compact disc, \$18.99

On a summer afternoon in 1964 I went to a neighborhood movie theater to see the Beatles in *A Hard Day's Night*. It was less than a year since John F. Kennedy had been assassinated. Kennedy's death, and its aftermath of ceremonial grief and unscheduled violence, had if nothing else given younger observers an inkling of what it meant to be part of an immense audience. We had been brought together in horrified spectatorship, and the sense of shared spectatorship outlasted the horror. The period of private shock and public mourning seemed to go on forever, yet it was only a matter of weeks before the phenomenally swift rise of a pop group from Liverpool became so pervasive a concern that Kennedy seemed already relegated to an archaic period in which the Beatles had not existed. The New York DJs who promised their listeners "all Beatles all the time" were not so much shaping as reflecting an emergence that seemed almost an eruption of collective will. The Beatles had come, as if on occult summons, to drive away darkness and embody public desire on a scale not previously imagined.

Before the Christmas recess—just as "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was finally breaking through to a US market that had resisted earlier releases by the Beatles—girls in my tenth-grade class began coming to school with Beatles albums and pictures of individual Beatles, discussing in tones appropriate to a secret religion the relative attractions of John or Paul or Ringo or even the underappreciated George. A month or so later the Beatles arrived in New York to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and were duly ratified as the show business wonder of the age. Everybody liked them, from the Queen of England and *The New York Times* on down.

Even bystanders with no emotional or generational stake in the Beatles could appreciate the adrenaline rush of computing just how much this particular success story surpassed all previous ones in terms of money and media and market penetration. It was all moving too fast even for the so-called professionals. The Beatles were such a fresh product that those looking for ways to exploit it—from Ed Sullivan to the aging news photographers and press agents who seemed holdovers from the Walter Winchell era—stood revealed as anachronisms as they flanked a group who moved and



thought too fast for them.<sup>1</sup>

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And what was the product? Four young men who seemed more alive than their handlers and more knowing than their fans; aware of their own capacity to please more or less everybody, yet apparently savoring among themselves a joke too rich for the general public; professional in so unobtrusive a fashion that it looked like inspired amateurism. The songs had no preambles or buildups: the opening phrase—"Well, she was just seventeen" or "Close your eyes and I'll kiss you"—was a plunge into movement, a celebration of its own anthemic impetus. Sheer enthusiasm, yet tempered by a suggestion of knowledge held in reserve, a distancing that was cool without malice. When you looked at them they looked back; when they were interviewed, it was the interviewers who ended up on the spot.

That the Beatles excited young girls—mobs of them—made them an unavoidable subject of interest for young boys, even if the boys might have preferred more familiar local products like Dion and the Belmonts or Freddy Cannon to a group that was foreign and long-haired and too cute not to be a little androgynous. The near-riots that accompanied the Beatles' arrival in New York, bringing about something like martial law in the vicinity of the Warwick Hotel, were an epic demonstration of nascent female desire. The spectacle was not tender but warlike. The oscillation between glassy-eyed entrancement and emotional explosion, the screams that sounded like chants and bouts of weeping that were like acts of aggression, the aura of impending upheaval that promised the breaking down of doors and the shattering of glass: this was love that could tear apart its object.

Idols who needed to be protected under armed guard from their own worshippers acquired even greater fascination, especially when they carried themselves with such cool comic grace. To become involved with the Beatles, even as a fan among millions of others, carried with it the possibility of meddling with ferocious energies. Spectatorship here became participation. There were no longer to be any bystanders, only sharers. We were all going to give way to the temptation not just to gawk at the girl in Ed Sullivan's audience—the one who repeatedly bounced straight up out of her seat during "All My Loving" as if pulled by a radar-controlled anti-gravity device—but to become her.

I emerged from *A Hard Day's Night* as from a conversion experience. Having walked into the theater as a solitary observer with more or less random musical tastes, I came out as a member of a generation, sharing a common repertoire with a sea of contemporaries. The four albums already released by the Beatles would soon be known down to every hesitation, every intake of breath; even the moments of flawed pitch and vocal exhaustion could be savored as part of what amounted to an emotional continuum, an almost embarrassingly comforting sonic environment summed up, naturally, in a Beatles lyric:

*There's a place Where I can go When I feel low... And it's my mind, And there's no time.*

Listening to Beatles records turned out to be an excellent cure for too much thinking. It was even better that the sense of refreshment was shared by so many others; the world became, with very little effort, a more companionable place. Effortlessness—the effortlessness of, say, the Beatles leaping with goofy freedom around a meadow in *A Hard Day's Night*—began to seem a fundamental value. That's what they were there for: to have fun, and allow us to watch them having it. That this was a myth—that even *A Hard Day's Night*, with its evocation of the impossible pressure and isolation of the Beatles

as hostages of their fame, acknowledged it as a myth—mattered, curiously, not at all. The converted choose the leap into faith over rational argument. It was enough to believe that they were taking over the world on our behalf.

A few weeks later, at dusk in a suburban park, I sat with old friends as one of our number, a girl who had learned guitar in emulation of Joan Baez, led us in song. She had never found much of an audience for her folksinging, but she won our enthusiastic admiration for having mastered the chord changes of all the songs in *A Hard Day's Night*. We sang for hours. If we had sung together before, the songs had probably been those of Woody Guthrie or the New Lost City Ramblers, mementos of a legendary folk past. This time there was the altogether different sensation of participating in a new venture, a world-changing enterprise that indiscriminately mingled aesthetic, social, and sexual possibilities.

An illusion of intimacy, of companionship, made the Beatles characters in everyone's private drama. We thought we knew them, or more precisely, and eerily, thought that they knew us. We imagined a give-and-take of communication between the singers in their sealed-off dome and the rest of us listening in on their every thought and musical reverie.

It is hard to remember now how familiarly people came to speak of the Beatles toward the end of the Sixties, as if they were close associates whose reactions and shifts of thought could be gauged intuitively. They were the invisible guests at the party, or the relatives whose momentary absence provided an occasion to dissect their temperament and proclivities.

That intimacy owed everything to an intimate knowledge of every record they had made, every facial variation gleaned from movies and countless photographs. The knowledge was not necessarily sought; it was merely unavoidable. The knowledge became complex when the Beatles' rapid public evolution (they were after all releasing an album every six months or so, laying down tracks in a couple of weeks in between the tours and the interviews and the press conferences) turned their cozily monolithic identity into a maze of alternate personas. Which John were we talking about, which Paul? Each song had its own personality, further elaborated or distorted by each of its listeners. Many came to feel that the Beatles enjoyed some kind of privileged wisdom—the evidence was their capacity to extend their impossible string of successes while continuing to find new styles, new techniques, new personalities—but what exactly might it consist of? The songs were bulletins, necessarily cryptic, always surprising, from within their hermetic dome at the center of the world, the seat of cultural power.

Outside the dome, millions of internalized Johns and Pauls and Georges and Ringos stalked the globe. What had at first seemed a harmonious surface dissolved gradually into its components, to reveal a chaos of conflicting impulses. Then, all too often, came the recriminations, the absurd discussions of what the Beatles ought to do with their money or how they had failed to make proper use of their potential political influence, as if they owed a debt for having been placed in a position of odd and untenable centrality. All that energy, all that authority: toward what end might it not have been harnessed?

At the end of the seven-year run, after the group finally broke up, the fragments of those songs and images would continue to intersect with the scenes of one's own life, so that the miseries of high school love were permanently imbued with the strains of "No Reply" and "I'm a Loser," and a hundred varieties of psychic fracturing acquired a common soundtrack stitched together from "She

Said She Said” (“I know what it’s like to be dead”) or the tornado- like crescendo in the middle of “A Day in the Life.” Only that unnaturally close identification could account for the way in which the breakup of the Beatles functioned as a token for every frustrated wish or curdled aspiration of the era. Their seven fat years went from a point where everything was possible—haircuts, love affairs, initiatives toward world peace—to a point where only silence remained open for exploration.

All of this long since settled into material for biographies and made-for-TV biopics. Even as the newly released CD of their number one hits breaks all previous sales records, the number of books on the Beatles begins to approach the plateau where Jesus, Shakespeare, Lincoln, and Napoleon enjoy their bibliographic afterlife. If *The Beatles Anthology* has any claim, it is as “The Beatles’ Own Story,” an oral history patched together from past and present interviews, with the ghost of John Lennon sitting in for an impossible reunion at which all the old anecdotes are told one more time, and occasion is provided for a last word in edgewise about everything from LSD and the Maharishi to Allen Klein and the corporate misfortunes of Apple.

The book, which reads something like a *Rolling Stone* interview that unaccountably goes on for hundreds of pages, is heavy enough to challenge the carrying capacity of some coffee tables and is spread over multicolored page layouts that seem like dutifully hard-to-read tributes to the golden age of psychedelia. It is the final installment of a protracted multimedia project whose most interesting component was a six-CD compilation of outtakes, alternates, and rarities released under the same title in 1995.

Those rarities—from a crude tape of McCartney, Lennon, and Harrison performing Buddy Holly’s “That’ll Be the Day” in Liverpool in 1958 to John Lennon’s original 1968 recording of “Across the Universe” without Phil Spector’s subsequently added orchestral excrescences—were revealing and often moving, and left no question at all that the Beatles were no mirage. Indeed, even the most minor differences in some of the alternate versions served the valuable function of making audible again songs whose impact had worn away through overexposure. In the print-version *Anthology*, the Beatles are limited to words, words whose frequent banality and inadequacy only increase one’s admiration for the expressiveness of their art. People who can make things like *With the Beatles* or *Rubber Soul* or *The White Album* should not really be required also to comment on what they have done.

The most interesting words come early. Before *Love Me Do* and Beatlemania and the first American tour, the Beatles actually lived in the same world as the rest of us, and it is their memories of that world—from Liverpool to Hamburg to the dance clubs of northern England—that are the most suggestive. The earliest memories are most often of a generalized boredom and sense of deprivation. A postwar Liverpool barely out of the rationing card era, with bombsites for parks (Paul recalls “going down the bombie” to play) and not much in the way of excitement, figures mostly as the blank backdrop against which movies and music (almost exclusively American) could make themselves felt all the more powerfully. “We were just desperate to get anything,” George remarks. “Whatever film came out, we’d try to see it. Whatever record was being played, we’d try to listen to, because there was very little of anything....You couldn’t even get a cup of sugar, let alone a rock’n’roll record.”

Fitfully a secret history of childhood music takes form: Paul listening to his pianist father play “Lullaby of the Leaves” and “Stairway to Paradise,” George discovering Hoagy Carmichael songs and Josh White’s “One Meatball,” and Ringo (the most unassuming and therefore often the most eloquent speaker here) recalling his moment of illumination:

My first musical memory was when I was about eight: Gene Autry singing “South of the Border.” That was the first time I really got shivers down my backbone, as they say. He had his three compadres singing, “Ai, ai, ai, ai,” and it was just a thrill to me. Gene Autry has been my hero ever since.

Only John—indifferent to folk (“college students with big scarfs and a pint of beer in their hands singing in la-di-da voices”) and jazz (“it’s always the same, and all they do is drink pints of beer”)—seems to have reserved his enthusiasm until the advent of Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard: “It was Elvis who really got me out of Liverpool. Once I heard it and got into it, that was life, there was no other thing.” If one can imagine Paul playing piano for local weddings and dances, George driving a bus like his old man, and Ringo perhaps falling into the life of crime his teenage gang exploits seemed to promise, it is inconceivable that John could have settled into any of the choices he was being offered in his youth.

None of them ever did much except prepare themselves to be the Beatles. Their youths were devoid of incident (at least of incident that anyone cared to write into the record) and largely of education. John, the eldest, had a bit of art school training, but for all of them real education consisted more of repeated exposure to Carl Perkins, Chuck Berry, and Frank Tashlin’s Cinemascope rock’n’roll extravaganza *The Girl Can’t Help It*. On the British side, they steeped themselves in the surreal BBC radio comedy *The Goon Show*—echoes of Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers’s non sequiturs are an abiding presence in their work—and in the skiffle band craze of the late Fifties (a renewal of old-fashioned jug band styles) they found a point of entry into the world of actual bands and actual gigs.

“I would often sag off school for the afternoon,” writes Paul, “and John would get off art college, and we would sit down with our two guitars and plonk away.” Along with the younger George, they formed a band that played skiffle, country, and rock, and played local dances, and after some changes in personnel officially became, around 1960, the Beatles, in allusion to the “beat music” that was England’s term for what was left of a rock’n’roll at that point almost moribund. Hard up for jobs, they found themselves in Hamburg, in a series of Reeperbahn beer joints, and by their own account were pretty much forced to become adequate musicians by the discipline of eight-hour sets and demanding, unruly audiences. Amid the amiable chaos of whores, gangsters, and endless amphetamine-fueled jamming—“it was pretty vicious,” remarks Ringo, who joined the group during this period, “but on the other hand the hookers loved us”—they transformed themselves into an anarchic rock band, “wild men in leather suits.” Back in the UK they blew away the local competition: “There were all these acts going ‘dum de dum’ and suddenly we’d come on, jumping and stomping,” in George’s account. “In those days, when we were rocking on, becoming popular in the little clubs where there was no big deal about The Beatles, it was fun.”

Once the group gets back to England, the days of “sagging off” and “plonking away” are numbered. As their ascent swiftly takes shape—within a year of a Decca executive dismissing them with the comment that “guitar groups are on the way out” they have dropped the “wild man” act and are already awash in Beatlemania—the reminiscences have less and less to do with anything other than the day-to-day business of recording and performing. Once within the universe of EMI, life becomes something of a controlled experiment, with the Beatles subjected to unfamiliar sorts of corporate oversight:

PAUL:...We weren’t even allowed into the control room, then. It was Us and Them. They had white shirts and ties in the control room, they were grown-ups. In the corridors and back rooms there were guys in full-length lab coats, maintenance men and engineers, and then there was us, the tradesmen....We gradually became the workmen who took over the factory.

If they took over, though, it was at the cost of working at a killing pace, churning out songs, touring and making public appearances as instructed, keeping the merchandise coming. It can of course be wondered whether this forced production didn't have a positive effect on their work, simply because the work they were then turning out— everything from "Love Me Do" and "Please Please Me" to *Rubber Soul* was produced virtually without a break from performing or recording—could hardly be improved.

It is the paradox of such a life that it precludes the sort of experience on which art usually nurtures itself. The latter-day reminiscences evoke the crew members on a prolonged interstellar flight, thrown back on each other and on their increasingly abstract memories of Earth, and livening the journey with whatever drugs or therapies promise something like the terrestrial environment they have left behind. In this context marijuana and LSD are not passing episodes but central events, the true subject matter of the later Beatles records. In the inner storms of the bubble world, dreams and private portents take the place of the comings and goings of a street life that has become remote.

The isolation becomes glaring in, say, Paul's recollections of 1967: "I've got memories of bombing around London to all the clubs and the shops....It always seemed to be sunny and we wore the far-out clothes and the far-out little sunglasses. The rest of it was just music." One can be sure that the "bombing around" took place within a well-protected perimeter. It is around this time that we find the Beatles pondering the possibility of buying a Greek island in order to build four separate residences linked by tunnels to a central dome, like something out of *Dr. No* or *Modesty Blaise*, with John commenting blithely that "I'm not worried about the political situation in Greece, as long as it doesn't affect us. I don't care if the government is all fascist, or communist....They're all as bad as here."

The conviction grows that the Beatles are in no better position than anyone else to get a clear view of their own career. "The moral of the story," says George, "is that if you accept the high points you're going to have to go through the lows....So, basically, it's all good." They know what it was to have been a Beatle, but not really—or only by inference—what it all looked like to everybody else. This leads to odd distortions in tone, as if after all they had not really grasped the singularity of their fate. From inside the rocket was not necessarily the best vantage point for charting its trajectory.

Paul's comments on how certain famous songs actually got to be written are amiably vague: "'Oh, you can drive my car.' What is it? What's he doing? Is he offering a job as a chauffeur, or what? And then it became much more ambiguous, which we liked." As much in the dark as the rest of us as to the ultimate significance of what they were doing, the Beatles were all the more free to follow their usually impeccable instincts. So if John Lennon chose to describe "Rain" as "a song I wrote about people moaning about the weather all the time," and Paul sees the lyrics of "A Day in the Life" as "a little poetic jumble that sounded nice," it confirms the inadvisability of seeking enlightenment other than by just listening to the records. (John, again: "What does it really mean, 'I am the eggman'? It could have been the pudding basin, for all I care.") The band doesn't know, they just write them.

In the end it was not the music that wore out but the drama, the personalities, the weight of expectation and identity. By the time the Beatles felt obliged to make exhortations like "all you need is love" and "you know it's gonna be all right," it was already time to bail out. How nice it would be to clear away the mass of history and personal association and just hear the records for the notes and words. Sometimes it's necessary to wait twenty years to be able to hear it again, the formal

beauty that begins as far back as “Ask Me Why” and “There’s a Place” and is sustained for years without ever settling into formula. Nothing really explains how or why musicians who spent years jamming on “Be Bop a Lula” and “Long Tall Sally” turned to writing songs like “Not a Second Time” and “If I Fell” and “Things We Said Today,” so altogether different in structure and harmony. Before the addition of all the sitars and tape loops and symphony orchestras, before the lyrical turn toward eggmen and floating downstream, Lennon and McCartney (and, on occasion, Harrison) were already making musical objects of such elegant simplicity, such unhectored emotional force, that if they had quit after *Help!* (their last “conventional” album) the work would still persist.

Paul McCartney recalls that when the Beatles heard the first playbacks at EMI it was the first time they’d really heard what they sounded like: “Oh, that sounds just like a record! Let’s do this again and again and again!” The workmen taking over the factory were also the children taking over the playroom, determined to find effects that no one had thought of pulling out of the drawer before. They went from being performers to being songwriters, but didn’t make the final leap until they became makers of records. Beyond all echoes of yesterday’s mythologized excitement, the records—whether “The Night Before” or “Drive My Car” or “I’m Only Sleeping” or any of the dozens of others—lose nothing of a beauty so singular it might almost be called underrated.

2001

1. Or so it seemed at the time. The anachronisms worried about it, of course, all the way to the bank, while the Beatles ultimately did their own computing to figure out just how badly they had been shortchanged by the industry pros.





## CHAPTER SIX

# The 1960s: Folk, Folk-Rock, The LA Scene



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## 1. Nat Hentoff, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan: Liner notes, Columbia LP, 1963.*

Of all the precipitously emergent singers of folk songs in the continuing renaissance of that self-assertive tradition, none has equaled Bob Dylan's singularity of impact. As Harry Jackson, a cowboy singer and a painter, has exclaimed: "He's so goddamned real it's unbelievable!" The irrepressible reality of Bob Dylan is a compound of spontaneity, candor, slicing wit and an uncommonly perceptive eye and ear for the way many of us constrict our capacity for living while a few of us don't.

Not yet twenty-two at the time of this album's release, Dylan is growing at a swift, experience-hungry rate. In these performances, there is already a marked change from his first album (*Bob Dylan* Columbia CL 1779/CS 8579), and there will surely be many further dimensions of Dylan to come. What makes this collection particularly arresting is that it consists in large part of Dylan's own compositions. The resurgence of topical folk songs has become a pervasive part of the folk movement among city singers, but few of the young bards so far have demonstrated a knowledge of the difference between well-intentioned pamphleteering and the creation of a valid musical experience. Dylan has. As the highly critical editors of *Little Sandy Review* have noted, "...right now, he is certainly our finest contemporary folk song writer. Nobody else really even comes close."

The details of Dylan's biography were summarized in the notes to his first Columbia album; but to recapitulate briefly, he was born on May 24, 1941, in Duluth, Minnesota. His experience with adjusting himself to new sights and sounds started early. During his first nineteen years, he lived in Gallup, New Mexico; Cheyenne, South Dakota; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Phillipsburg, Kansas; Hibbing, Minnesota (where he was graduated from high school), and Minneapolis (where he spent a restless six months at the University of Minnesota).

"Everywhere he went," Gil Turner wrote in his article on Dylan in *Sing Out*, "his ears were wide open for the music around him. He listened to the blues singers, cowboy singers, pop singers and others—soaking up music and styles with an uncanny memory and facility for assimilation. Gradually, his own preferences developed and became more, the strongest areas being Negro blues and country music. Among the musicians and singers who influenced him were Hank Williams, Muddy Waters, Jelly Roll Morton, Leadbelly, Mance Lipscomb and Big Joe Williams." And, above all others, Woody Guthrie. At ten he was playing guitar, and by the age of fifteen, Dylan had taught himself piano, harmonica and autoharp.

In February 1961, Dylan came east, primarily to visit Woody Guthrie at Greystone Hospital in New Jersey. The visits have continued, and Guthrie has expressed approval of Dylan's first album, being particularly fond of the "Song to Woody" in it. By September of 1961, Dylan's singing in Greenwich Village, especially at Gerde's Folk City, had ignited a nucleus of singers and a few critics (notably Bob Shelton of the *New York Times*) into exuberant appreciation of his work. Since then, Dylan has inexorably increased the scope of his American audiences while also performing briefly in London and Rome.

The first of Dylan's songs in this set is "Blowin' In The Wind." In 1962, Dylan said of the song's background: "I still say that some of the biggest criminals are those that turn their heads away when they see wrong and they know it's wrong. I'm only 21 years old and I know that there's been too many wars.... You people over 21 should know better." All that he prefers to add by way of commentary now is: "The first way to answer these questions in the song is by asking them. But lots

of people have to first find the wind.” On this track, and except when otherwise noted, Dylan is heard alone—accompanying himself on guitar and harmonica.

“Girl From The North Country” was first conceived by Bob Dylan about three years before he finally wrote it down in December 1962. “That often happens,” he explains. “I carry a song in my head for a long time and then it comes bursting out.” The song—and Dylan’s performance—reflect his particular kind of lyricism. The mood is a fusion of yearning, poignancy and simple appreciation of a beautiful girl. Dylan illuminates all these corners of his vision, but simultaneously retains his bristling sense of self. He’s not about to go begging anything from this girl up north.

“Masters Of War” startles Dylan himself. “I’ve never really written anything like that before,” he recalls. “I don’t sing songs which hope people will die, but I couldn’t help it in this one. The song is a sort of striking out, a reaction to the last straw, a feeling of what can you do?” The rage (which is as much anguish as it is anger) is a way of catharsis, a way of getting temporary relief from the heavy feeling of impotence that affects many who cannot understand a civilization which juggles its own means for oblivion and calls that performance an act toward peace.

“Down The Highway” is a distillation of Dylan’s feeling about the blues. “The way I think about the blues,” he says, “comes from what I learned from Big Joe Williams. The blues is more than something to sit home and arrange. What made the real blues singers so great is that they were able to state all the problems they had; but at the same time, they were standing outside them and could look at them. And in that way, they had them beat. What’s depressing today is that many young singers are trying to get inside the blues, forgetting that those older singers used them to get outside their troubles.”

“Bob Dylan’s Blues” was composed spontaneously. It’s one of what he calls his “really off-the-cuff songs. I start with an idea, and then I feel what follows. Best way I can describe this one is that it’s sort of like walking by a side street. You gaze in and walk on.”

“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” represents to Dylan a maturation of his feelings on this subject since the earlier and almost as powerful “Let Me Die In My Footsteps,” which is not included here but which was released as a single record by Columbia. Unlike most of his song-writing contemporaries among city singers, Dylan doesn’t simply make a polemical point in his compositions. As in this song about the psychopathology of peace-through-balance-of-terror, Dylan’s images are multiply (and sometimes horrifyingly) evocative. As a result, by transmuting his fierce convictions into what can only be called art, Dylan reaches basic emotions which few political statements or extrapolations of statistics have so far been able to touch. Whether a song or a singer can then convert others is something else again.

“Hard Rain,” adds Dylan, “is a desperate kind of song.” It was written during the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 when those who allowed themselves to think of the impossible results of the Kennedy-Khrushchev confrontation were chilled by the imminence of oblivion. “Every line in it,” says Dylan, “is actually the start of a whole song. But when I wrote it, I thought I wouldn’t have enough time alive to write all those songs so I put all I could into this one.” Dylan treats “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right” differently from most city singers. “A lot of people,” he says, “make it sort of a love song—slow and easy-going. But it isn’t a love song. It’s a statement that maybe you can say to make yourself feel better. It’s as if you were talking to yourself. It’s a hard song to sing. I can sing it sometimes, but I ain’t that good yet. I don’t carry myself yet the way that Big Joe

Williams, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lightnin' Hopkins have carried themselves. I hope to be able to someday, but they're older people. I sometimes am able to do it, but it happens, when it happens, unconsciously. You see, in time, with those old singers, music was a tool—a way to live more, a way to make themselves feel better at certain points. As for me, I can make myself feel better sometimes, but at other times, it's still hard to go to sleep at night." Dylan's accompaniment on this track includes Bruce Langhorne (guitar), George Barnes (bass guitar), Dick Wellstood (piano), Gene Ramey (bass) and Herb Lovelle (drums).

"Bob Dylan's Dream" is another of his songs which was transported for a time in his mind before being written down. It was initially set off after all-night conversation between Dylan and Oscar Brown, Jr., in Greenwich Village. "Oscar," says Dylan, "is a groovy guy and the idea of this came from what we were talking about." The song slumbered, however, until Dylan went to England in the winter of 1962. There he heard a singer (whose name he recalls as Martin Carthy) perform "Lord Franklin," and that old melody found a new adapted home in "Bob Dylan's Dream." The song is a fond looking back at the easy camaraderie and idealism of the young when they are young. There is also in "Dream" a wry but sad requiem for the friendships that have evaporated as different routes, geographical and otherwise, are taken.

Of "Oxford Town," Dylan notes with laughter that "it's a banjo tune I play on the guitar." Otherwise, this account of the ordeal of James Meredith speaks grimly for itself.

"Talkin' World War III Blues" was about half-formulated beforehand and half-improvised at the recording session itself. The "talking blues" form is tempting to many young singers because it seems so pliable and yet so simple.

However, the simpler a form, the more revealing it is of the essence of the performer. There's no place to hide in the talking blues. Because Bob Dylan is so hugely and quixotically himself, he is able to fill all the space the talking blues affords with unmistakable originality. In this piece, for example, he has singularly distilled the way we all wish away our end, thermo-nuclear or "natural." Or at least, the way we try to.

"Corrina, Corrina" has been considerably changed by Dylan. "I'm not one of those guys who goes around changing songs just for the sake of changing them. But I'd never heard 'Corrina, Corrina' exactly the way it first was, so that this version is the way it came out of me." As he indicates here, Dylan can be tender without being sentimental and his lyricism is laced with unabashed passion. The accompaniment is Dick Wellstood (piano), Howie Collins (guitar), Bruce Langhorne (guitar), Leonard Gaskin (bass) and Herb Lovelle (drums).

"Honey, Just Allow Me One More Chance" was first heard by Dylan from a recording by a now-dead Texas blues singer. Dylan can only remember that his first name was Henry. "What especially stayed with me," says Dylan, "was the plea in the title." Here Dylan distills the buoyant expectancy of the love search.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, Dylan isn't limited to one or two ways of feeling his music. He can be poignant and mocking, angry and exultant, reflective and whoopingly joyful. The final "I Shall Be Free" is another of Dylan's off-the-cuff songs in which he demonstrates the vividness, unpredictability and cutting edge of his wit.

This album, in sum, is the protean Bob Dylan at the time of the recording. By the next recording, there will be more new songs and insights and experiences. Dylan can't stop searching and looking

and reflecting upon what he sees and hears. “Anything I can sing,” he observes, “I call a song. Anything I can’t sing, I call a poem. Anything I can’t sing or anything that’s too long to be a poem, I call a novel. But my novels don’t have the usual story lines. They’re about my feelings at a certain place at a certain time.” In addition to his singing and song writing, Dylan is working on three “novels.” One is about the week before he came to New York and his initial week in that city. Another is about South Dakota people he knew. And the third is about New York and a trip from New York to New Orleans.

Throughout everything he writes and sings, there is the surge of a young man looking into as many diverse scenes and people as he can find (“Every once in a while I got to ramble around”) and of a man looking into himself. “The most important thing I know I learned from Woody Guthrie,” says Dylan. “I’m my own person. I’ve got basic common rights—whether I’m here in this country or any other place. I’ll never finish saying everything I feel, but I’ll be doing my part to make some sense out of the way we’re living, and not living, now. All I’m doing is saying what’s on my mind the best way I know how. And whatever else you say about me, everything I do and sing and write comes out of me.”

It is this continuing explosion of a total individual, a young man growing free rather than absurd, that makes Bob Dylan so powerful and so personal and so important a singer. As you can hear in these performances.

1963

## **2. Dave Headlam, “Blues to 1960s rock,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music*, ed. by Allan Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)**

At the end of the 1950s and leading into the 1960s, a split occurred in the musical world viewed through the lens of blues and gospel appropriations. Soul music stemming from gospel supplanted blues-based r&b, as described below. Meanwhile, following the abrupt end of the first generation of rock’n’rollers in the U.S. by death, gaol, injury, scandal, and the army, the rise of Calypso from Harry Belafonte, and a few years of industry pap of the American Bandstand variety, white musicians in the U.S. and Britain became interested in r&R, r&b and Chicago electric blues. This formed the basis for four developments: the Liverpool bands in Britain, most notably the Beatles; London groups like the Rolling Stones, Cream, and Led Zeppelin influenced by Chicago and even Mississippi blues; their counterparts in the U.S., such as the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and Canned Heat; and a folk/ blues movement in the U.S. featuring Bob Dylan, which had a psychedelic folk/blues rock aspect on the West Coast along with some Latin/blues mixes, in bands such as Santana. It took the entire decade for rock musicians and their critics to catch up to musical developments in the black music world, as most white rock groups went through their blues reworking years to eventually develop their own style. What made rock music different from preceding appropriations was the enormous wealth and influence that modern media exposure and the baby-boomer audience fostered.

The 1960s interest in blues-based music featured a group of white player-scholars – John Mayall, Eric Clapton, Paul Butterfield, John Hammond, and Al Wilson, among others – who sparked a blues revival, which revitalized the careers of many older black blues players. B. B. King, Muddy Waters and other blues players performed for adoring white throngs in the late 1960s, and as music critics and scholars became aware of the blues tradition and its influence on rock music, they

began to document the blues and create a “museum exhibit” context valuing authenticity and originality. Older players, Son House, Skip James, Mance Lipscomb, Robert Pete Williams, Rev. Gary Davis, and Mississippi’s Fred MacDowell and John Hurt, were rediscovered and brought back into the recording studio and onto the stage to play for white audiences. In general, the rediscoverers paid their debt to the original musicians and helped them to at least some proportion of recompense. Blues came to be highly valued in white venues, but not by black audiences. The scholarly and performance-based appropriation was largely based in Britain, and this trend has continued, as evidenced by this book.

In Britain, r&r and Chicago electric blues had a huge influence, primarily in the two centers of Liverpool and London. Visits by Big Bill Broonzy (1951), Muddy Waters (1958), Sonny Boy Williamson (1963), John Lee Hooker, and others, which included playing with the inexperienced white British players, inspired the nascent blues crowd. The groups that emerged – the Beatles, Rolling Stones, the Who, Cream, Led Zeppelin, and others – evolved rock music by combining elements of r&r, r&b, and Chicago electric blues with their own native influences. Commentators on the enormously successful British rock music scene were alerted to the origins of the music, and the Mississippi Delta original performers became legendary. With its appropriation of American blues, and a fusion of blues elements with other styles, British rock music raised the awareness of the United States to its own cultural heritage.

The musical rise of the blues and its transformation into rock music can be seen in the careers of two guitarists, Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix.<sup>11</sup> ...

Musically, the transformation of blues into rock is largely a reduction, in instrumental forces, rhythmic complexity, harmonic motion and form, with a simplification to a basic riff amidst a syncopated rock beat. The rock combo, with its basic guitar–bass–drums–(keyboard) setup simplified the textures of the urban blues models. The biggest change, aside from the volume, is in the rhythm: from a fluid, jazzy or bluesy shuffle rhythm, to the emphasis on backbeats 2 and 4, to an unwavering straight eighth-note rock rhythm with emphasized beats and syncopations. The rhythms of Cream’s “Crossroads” (from Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues”) and Zeppelin’s “Whole Lotta Love” (from Willie Dixon’s “You Need Love”) are representative.<sup>15</sup>

The rise and transformation of rock music from its blues-based beginnings is contrasted between the Beatles, who continued to evolve, and Rolling Stones, who largely stayed within their style of blues-rock. The Beatles, part of the r&b and r&r-influenced music scenes in Liverpool, England and Hamburg, Germany, in the late 1950s, started playing songs by Presley, Berry, Little Richard, Perkins, Holly, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, as well as by vocal groups the Shirelles and Isley Brothers, taking songs by Leiber and Stoller and others and thereby appropriating the appropriated styles. They also sang show tunes and pop songs, foreshadowing their own eclectic output. While big sellers in Britain in the early 1960s, the American label Capitol owned by British EMI passed on their early records, and so the Beatles’ initial songs came out on the black Vee-Jay label from Chicago; within a year, Capitol realized their mistake and squeezed Vee-Jay out. This industry action was emblematic of the effect of the Beatles: their appropriated style squeezed out the original black artists and they provided a model for the “rock group” in which black performers have had almost no part. ...

## Notes

11 The list could include Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin), Peter Green (Fleetwood Mac), Jeff Beck (Jeff

Beck Group), Alvin Lee (Ten Years After), and many others.

13 See See Hatch and Millward (1987) on families of blues songs. Storm Roberts (1972: 197) traces such songs like "Spoonful Blues" back to African music: not harmonically structured, just shifting chords in an overall repetitive form with one-chord accompaniment.

### **3. Paul Williams, "Folk, Rock & Other Four-Letter Words," *Crawdaddy!*, 28 March 1966**

THERE HAS BEEN a great increase recently in the number of popular artists whose songs are influenced by or taken from American folk music—both traditional and modern. The paranoiac need of modern man for a label for anything that comes near him resulted, in this case, in the term "folk-rock" to signify pop music with strong folk influences. Originally "folk-rock" meant pop music that used actual folk material; later, anything folk-influenced that retained a heavy beat, and still later, anything having anything to do with folk that happened to sell in the pop market.

The term "folk-rock" is a silly one, and has grown sillier over the months. It would be just another in an endless parade of silly terms, however, were it not that the press and the music trade have, because of the word "folk-rock," chosen to believe that folk mixed with rock 'n' roll is the big new trend. There are a lot of "Folk-rock is a way of life" articles appearing hither and yon, signed by the same old bunch of interpreters who really believe that if you speak the language of the teenager you understand him. The mass media are currently explaining to the mass audience how Bob Dylan, the new pied piper, with his electric flute, is leading the youth of America out of the coffeehouses and into the echo chambers of plugged-in music. Hogwash!

In point of fact, nobody is leading anyone, the overall nature of the pop music field has not changed too significantly, folk influences have always been significant, and "folk-rock" is nothing but an undefined term carelessly applied to a certain ancient style of rock 'n' roll which happens to be getting better, and thus more popular, at the moment.

The difference between pop music (rock 'n' roll if you will) and folk music, if there is a difference, it is that folk music is what the folk feel like writing at a given time, and pop music is what the folk (in general) feel

like listening to. If they happen to overlap a little, and 'Sounds of Silence' sells a million records and 'Turn, Turn, Turn' 800,000, be happy that the free hand and the free ear have agreed for once. But don't try to say that the one is absorbing the other. If tomorrow the non-professionals of the nation feel like singing about surfboards, while Tin Pan Alley works overtime feeding a national taste for songs of the open road, the former will still be creating folk music, the latter pop music. And if the two should influence each other, rejoice at the occasion. But don't speak of folk and rock as though folk were something filed in the Library of Congress of sleeping in Bob Dylan's breast, and rock a beast that cannot borrow from something without devouring it. Folk is folk and rock is rock, and if the twain should meet, and exchange note, fine. But that's no reason to try to unite them forever, folk-rock, a marriage of brothers. "Folk-rock" is a deception, and the sooner the American press defines its terms and realizes it has deceived itself, the better.

#### **Three Short Reviews**

**'What Does It Get You?', Carolyn Hester, Dot 16800 'I'll Keep It With Mine', Judy Collins, Elektra 45601**

Carolyn Hester and Judy Collins are both popular female folksingers, thought of by some as second-rate Baezes, by others as first-rate Baezes. Fortunately, they are neither. Unlike Baez, both these women have style and empathy. Both of them also have recently released 45s to their credit; one of them even has a potential hit.

Carolyn Hester is easily my favorite of the two as a performer and a folksinger. However, the only thing that will interest anyone in the Top 40 field about 'What Does It Get You?' is the fact that it was produced by Normal Petty (all right, so you don't remember the Buddy Holly days. I remember the Buddy Holly days!). The song is pleasant, nicely sung, and unexciting. It is not successfully pop-oriented, it is not catchy, it is not very good.

Judy Collins, on the other hand, has made a recording which is damn good and should, with exposure, be a Top 10 hit. The arrangement is excellent, the singing is intense and surprisingly well recorded, and the accompaniment is a good pop sound. The song is by Bob Dylan; the words are nice but ambiguous and the song ends very inconclusively, as though Dylan really didn't have anything to say, just a nice tune to play around with. But it's a fine song; it may not be much to dance to, but just try to get it out of your head once you've heard it.

Of course, the music business geniuses will probably look at the charts, note how poorly Dylan's own single is doing, and announce: "Don't play it, the Dylan trend is over, instrumentals based on TV commercials are the new trend." I've never seen a group of prophets so utterly unable to see the trees for the forest.

**'Set You Free This Time' & 'It Won't Be Wrong', the Byrds, Columbia 43501**

The Byrds' latest single is a double-sided hit (they get a lot out of a piece of plastic), each side by a different member of the group. Though it catches on slower, 'Set You Free This Time' (by Gene Clark) is definitely the bigger and better side. It's a lovely, moving song with Dylan-like twenty-syllable lines chockfull of well-chosen words. The arrangement is in the usual Byrds style, rhythm & bass backup, melody carried mainly by the vocalist while the lead instrument or instruments work harmonic variations on the tune. The singer is deliberate and effective; he occasionally under-emotes, but since the group does not rely completely on the vocal to convey feeling, no harm is done. The harmonica at the end is beautiful.

The flip, 'It Won't Be Wrong' (by Jim McGuinn), is louder and more catchy, though not as memorable. It's a good r'n'r sound, and moving in its plaintiveness ("Please let me love you and it won't be wrong"). Both sides show clearly that the Byrds are nothing if not original. This won't match 'Turn! Turn! Turn!'s three weeks at #1 (one for each "Turn!"), but it should be a good solid Top 20 hit.

'Mellow Down Easy', the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Elektra 45016 'Back Door Man', the Blues Project, Verve-Folkways 5004

The happening at clubs in New York and LA for the past year has been the coming of the electric blues bands. With groups like Paul Butterfield and the Lovin' Spoonful leading the way, a field that was empty a year ago actually became crowded. Sooner or later this sound is sure to spill over into the charts. Let's take a look at two of the 45s that might start the action.

'Mellow Down Easy' and its flip, 'Got My Mojo Working', are both cuts from Butterfield's first LP,

which has been selling excellently. Unfortunately, those stations that have picked up the single so far have been playing 'Mojo', sung by drummer Sam Lay, which is a fine number but too familiar to make any kind of pop splash. 'Mellow Down Easy', however, has some potential. It's a great song; Butterfield's singing and harmonica are fantastic here, as is Mike Bloomfield's electric guitar. But I like the song too much to be able to say for sure whether someone brought up entirely on rock 'n' roll would be turned on by it if he heard it on the radio. It is a danceable, driving number; Butterfield definitely has the best sound of all the white blues groups, including the Stones. Sooner or later, this band is sure to record a #1 hit song. I don't think this is it, however.

'Back Door Man' is much more likely to be a big seller, if it gets airplay. The words are bluesy, but not so far out of sight that the average listener doesn't know what's going on. The beat is straightforward and effective. The band is terrific; it is almost a prerequisite for blues bands to have more talented and imaginative players than straight r'n'r bands. And to top it off, this song has a hook, a really fine one. The band breaks at the start of the last line of the chorus, emphasizing a particularly exciting vocal. You've got to hear it to know what I'm talking about; the point is, I think this song could be huge if it gets airplay.

#### **4. John Harris, "You had to hold on to the furniture when Sandy sang," *The Guardian* 5 May, 2005.**

Kurt Cobain's mother called it "that stupid club": the enclosure, presumably located somewhere in the here-after, in which Jim Morrison clinks glasses with Brian Jones, Gram Parsons tries to avoid Sid Vicious, and all those stars who suffered an early death toast the revenue from posthumous record sales.

But where are the women? Given the inescapable fact that most successful musicians are men, the gender imbalance

- give or take the likes of Billie Holiday, Janis Joplin and Mama Cass - seems pretty much inevitable. There may be another factor at work, however: the fact that the romantic stereotype of the burned-out young star is necessarily male. Critics use words like "Dionysian"; further down the musical food chain, it's often a simple matter of callow young men surveying the wreckage and deriving the usual vicarious thrills. Either way, women need not apply.

The life, death and reputation of Sandy Denny are a perfect case in point. Equipped with an incredible voice and an immense songwriting talent, she was none the less plagued by the chronic insecurities that led her into excess. Her drinking partners included the late Keith Moon and John Bonham; the folk-tinged milieu from which she came also included Nick Drake. She died aged 31, in 1978 - but whereas lesser talents have been posthumously feted, she remains a decidedly cult interest.

For some, that's a sign of her singular talent. "The thing that always amazed me about Sandy," says her friend and contemporary Linda Thompson, "was that she thought she actually could appeal to the masses. Of course she couldn't - and who would want to? If you're writing songs that people can shoot themselves to, you know you're not going to be in the charts. Sandy's music was uncomfortable. It demanded too much."

Alexandra Denny was born in 1947, and raised in Wimbledon. Her early adulthood found her working as a nurse and then putting in time at art school, while immersing herself in a nocturnal



world centred around the kind of London clubs - the Troubadour in Earl's Court, Cousins in Soho - where candles burned into the small hours, and aspiring musicians split their attentions between self-written songs and traditional folk music. Her vocal abilities took in both a seductive gentleness and strident power; away from the stage, according to one of her acquaintances, "she was incredibly funny, with a very quick mind ... a chaotic intelligence just poured out".

In the spring of 1968, Denny auditioned for the job of vocalist with Fairport Convention, then fond of cover versions by Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, and attempting to somehow align themselves with the music drifting into the UK from the American west coast. "It was in a room attached to a pub in west London," recalls Ashley Hutchings, the band's then bass player. "We thought we were auditioning her, and she took over. She told us what she would like us to play for her. But she had the strong presence that we needed on stage. She had a wonderful voice. And we immediately liked her."

Denny stayed with the group for three albums. She was instrumental in nudging them towards the melding of old and new elements that would mark their effective invention of British folk rock. Equally importantly, her time with the band saw her take her first decisive steps as a songwriter. What We Did On Our Holidays from 1969 contained Fotheringay, a evocation of Mary, Queen of Scots that now sounds rather gauche, but served notice of both her talent and ambition; the same year's Unhalfbricking featured Who Knows Where the Time Goes, so brimming with poise and insight that it hardly sounded like something authored by a 22-year-old.

Linda Thompson (née Peters), was a close friend of Denny, another fantastically talented singer, and an associate of the group who would soon marry their guitarist, Richard Thompson. "I can remember Sandy saying to me, 'I'm going to try to write some songs,'" she says. "And I thought to myself, 'That's ridiculous. She won't be able to do that.' We were young, and there weren't many women writing songs. And she played Who Knows Where the Time Goes, and I nearly fell off my chair.'

Accounts of her life suggest that Denny was well aware of how good she was, though her confidence and ambition could never offset her seemingly innate insecurity. "I don't think she was ever truly comfortable," says Ashley Hutchings. "She was a restless soul. And very nervous: nervous about performing, nervous about travelling - particularly flying. I think she probably needed the props of drink and drugs. And she needed people around her, who she trusted and loved, to keep her going; to tell her how good she was. The question, of course, is how could you be that insecure when you have so much talent? But she was."

Denny's fragile self-esteem was rattled by a particularly cruel part of the 1960s pop whirl. One early Melody Maker profile of the band blithely described Denny as "plump"; according to those who knew her, the fact that she didn't quite match up with a skinny, mini-skirted archetype caused her no end of unease.

"She had this amazing talent, this incredible voice - but she always wanted to be pretty and fanciable," says Linda Thompson. "And she was! But she never thought she was, because she wasn't conventionally pretty. And these were the 60s, when no one ate anything and they were all stick thin. She'd go on these daft diets - we were all on slimming pills, and God knows what - and she'd get thinner, but she'd put it on again. And she never quite got over that. It was so ridiculous: we were all slaves to it, but it was a real burden for her.

"But some of the things people said were unbelievable. They'd say things like, 'her sweet, chubby face'. I think that was very hard indeed. But also, she could always leave the room with the most interesting guy around - if he had a brain. Because not only was she attractive, she was so smart and so talented. I think she had decided long before that she was more witty and talented than any of these dolly birds. And that's how she wowed men. She had a thing with Frank Zappa, whenever he was in London. She went out with some pretty remarkable people."

Denny left Fairport Convention in late 1969. Her exit, in later accounts, seems to have been prompted by two factors: her unease with the band's increasing tilt towards folkly orthodoxy, and the fact that touring led to long spells away from her future husband. Trevor Lucas was an Australian-born folk musician (variously described as "another alpha male in her life" and "a real ladies' man") who quickly joined her in the short-lived band they named Fotheringay. In contravention of the rigid sexual politics of the time, he was happy enough to allow Denny the starring role.

By 1971, with Lucas's encouragement, she had reluctantly gone solo, commencing a run of four albums: that year's *The North Star Grassman and the Ravens*, *Sandy* (1972), *Like an Old Fashioned Waltz* (1974) and *Rendezvous* (1977). The first and second, home to songs as accomplished as *Late November*, *John the Gun* and the wondrous *It'll Take a Long, Long Time*, frequently crystallised her talent to marvellous effect; thanks partly to her background in traditional music, she could make her songs sound as if they were rooted in a wisdom that was palpably timeless. From thereon in, though she could still scrape incredible heights, she was rather hampered by soupy arrangements (she was particularly partial to the string sections she described as her "fur coat"), and, on her last album, the fact that her voice was showing the strain that came from her fondness for drink and drugs.

Commercial success consistently eluded her, though a fleeting place in the mass market was assured by her appearance on *Led Zeppelin IV*, on which she was invited by *Led Zeppelin* to duet with Robert Plant on *The Battle of Evermore*. "She used to hang out with *Led Zeppelin*," recalls Linda Thompson. "Robert and Jimmy [Page], and John Bonham and Keith Moon - they all knew how fantastic she was. Robert Plant was the loudest singer on the planet at the time, and Sandy could blow him off the stage. You'd have to hold on to the furniture when Sandy was singing. So these guys knew what a star she was. And like a lot of girls who are unhappy about the way they look, she became one of the boys. You had to go some to drink with John Bonham. You couldn't keep up with those guys. But Sandy could."

Inevitably, this was not all the stuff of rock'n'roll high jinks. Her propensity for excess eventually turned pathological; worse still, her appetites extended way beyond what was available in the off licence. In 1977, she became pregnant; it was then that her closest friends began to feel truly anxious. "I was worried when she was pregnant, because I knew she was doing drugs and drinking," says Linda Thompson. "And later on, she was crashing the car and leaving the baby in the pub and all sorts of stuff. And that was worrying. I've said it before about Nick Drake: these days, we might have done an intervention or something. But back then, you thought people would grow out of it."

"When I went to see her in the hospital after she'd had the baby, I was terribly worried. The baby was premature. She'd abused herself during pregnancy - and she said, 'They're giving me such a hard time, telling me off. What about me?' And I thought, 'God, that's so peculiar.' When you've just had a baby, you don't think about yourself at all. By that time, I thought it was a little bit psychotic."

In March 1978, Denny and her newborn daughter Georgia took a holiday with her parents in Cornish cottage. She fell down a flight of stairs, and subsequently complained of severe headaches, for which she was prescribed a painkiller called Distalgesic. If mixed with alcohol they can be fatal. A month later, she was dead, thanks to what the coroner later called a "traumatic mid-brain haemorrhage". It is one of the more tragic aspects of her death that when she fell into a terminal coma, her husband and baby were elsewhere; fearing for his daughter's safety, Trevor Lucas had travelled with Georgia to his native Australia. As with so many musicians' stories, the tale is more a matter of grinding dysfunction than of any hedonistic romance.

This month sees the re-release of Denny's four solo albums, augmented with an array of bonus tracks, and contextualised via sleeve notes that make the case for her promotion to the part of musical history reserved for accredited pioneers. "She's been namechecked by some high-profile people," considers Ashley Hutchings. "But she needs to be re-evaluated. She wrote a kind of song that's very rarely written now - emotional, musically interesting, sung really well - serious songwriting. She was head and shoulders above the rest. And she remains so." 2005

## **5. Robert Christgau, "The Monkees," *Esquire*, June 1967**

The Monkees are four young men who star in an adolescent TV comedy of the same name and make records that rise to the top of the charts like jellyfish. They were chosen (from a hirsute field of 437) not for musical ability but for exuberance and irreverence, qualities salient in the chaps who were in those very successful Richard Lester movies. You remember.

You'd better, because the Monkees, conceived as a haircut on *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, find themselves sole inheritors of the great Beatle tradition. The originals have abdicated, withdrawing from teeny idolatry into their music, which is popular but personal and exotic. Young fans, confused, miss those nice floppy Englishmen they fell for three years ago, and the Monkees provide a wholesome American substitute (with an Englishman added for remembrance). They're not too handsome, not too pretentious, and every week they do silly things for thirty minutes, not counting commercials. At the moment the kids seem to love them.

For similar reasons, serious rock fans hate them. They know the Monkees are together by happenstance, that they are not too irreverent, too precocious, too sexual--too anything. They know they are lousy singers and can hardly play their instruments. They note that Mickey Dolenz was once "Circus Boy" and forget that Mike Nesmith has had a respectably bumpy folk-rock career. And they conclude that the music stinks.

It doesn't. It's not great, but it is good, better than much of what makes top ten—an important test if rock is truly a popular art. The group's second album, *More of the Monkees*, is hard to criticize objectively. Do I hear that dishonest edge in a funny, raucous song like "Your Auntie Grizelda" because it's there or because I expect it to be? Who can tell? With a couple of horrible exceptions, the songs sound OK, testimony to the truth that good rock is largely a matter of production and publicity. "Mary, Mary," which Nesmith wrote and produced, is very successful. He is their clearest talent and a bit of a real rebel. One would hope that he and not Dolenz will dominate the group. Something may come of this yet.

But whatever it is, it won't be the Beatles.

## 6. Lillian Roxon, “The Doors,” and “The Monkees,” in *Lillian Roxon’s Rock Encyclopedia* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969).

**THE DOORS** / *Jim Morrison (vocals), Ray Manzarek (organ), Robbie Krieger (guitar), John Densmore (drums).*

More gloppy, pretentious, pseudosurrealistic, hyperliterary, quasi-mystical prose has been written about the Doors than about any rock group ever. Whenever the Doors are mentioned in print, the similes fly like shrapnel in an air raid. They are unendurable pleasure indefinitely prolonged, they are the messengers of the devil, they are the patricide kids, the Los Angeles branch of the Oedipus Association, the boys next door (if you live next door to a penitentiary, a lunatic asylum or a leather shop). So say the metaphor makers anyway. The Doors seeped in through the underground early in 1967, a time when no one could possibly have predicted that a group that sang about the evil and the reptilian and the bloody was about to become not just the number one group in America, but the number one *teenybopper* group in America, which just shows what secret dreams of mayhem and vengeance and violent sexuality all those dear little suburban nymphets were harboring in the infant hearts beating under all those preteen bras.

Initially there was an album, *THE DOORS*, a growing reputation on the West Coast, and a ferocious single, “Break On Through,” that defined their sound and image perfectly but got nowhere. The album, on the other hand, scored up the biggest underground following any local group had ever had—there was an organ *before* Procol Harum, images more grimly surreal than Dylan’s; there was poetry, violence, mystery, suspense and terror. Wow, they were saying in those days when the Doors first came in from the West, this is *adult* rock, and the adults of the underground settled down smugly to keep this group to itself. At Ondine and then Steve Paul’s The Scene, it became clear that theatre was a very important part of what the Doors were doing: Ray Manzarek played the organ as if he were on leave from a black mass engagement. In person, singer Jim Morrison was cold, insolent, evil, slightly mad and seemed to be in some sort of drugged or hypnotic trance. His shrieks as he killed that imaginary father in *The End* (which is an eleven-and-one-half minute piece) were straight out of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. At that stage it was probably one of the most exciting rock performances ever.

Then several things happened. The second single, “Light My Fire,” got on the charts and, as fire after fire was lit all over America, rocketed to number one. From that day on Morrison was lost to the underground forever. It’s one thing to lick your lips and strain and sneer at Steve Paul’s The Scene to a roomful of cognoscenti. It’s another thing to do your thing, every nuance of it, not even bothering to change the order of each gesture, in front of five thousand screaming little girls. Jim Morrison’s grimaces, Robbie Krieger’s peasant-boy bewilderment, Ray Manzarek’s satanic sweetness, John Densmore’s wild drumming—they were all public property. As triumph piled on triumph for the Doors—packed auditoriums, television appearances, riots, hit after hit, albums in the top hundred, fees soaring and soaring—the underground drew back first in dismay, then in disgust. Incredible, incredible, the Doors, of all people, had sold out. First they sold out to *Sixteen* magazine, where Morrison allowed himself to be molded into a teeny idol. Then they sold out in performance by stereotyping all those seemingly spontaneous movements that had originally whacked half the underground out of its collective skull. It got so you couldn’t go to a Doors concert because you’d seen it all before. An earthshaking second album might have saved the scene and allowed the Doors

to win friends in both camps. But the second album was a repeat, a lesser repeat, of the first. And the third album, *WAITING FOR THE SUN*, strengthened dreadful suspicion that the Doors were in it just for the money (as did a single, "Hello I Love You," that seemed to be a straight cop from an early Kinks hit). Then a magical thing happened to the Doors, the big beautiful bust in New Haven, which to this day has not been matched for theatre and excitement. Morrison in tight leather pants or less embracing a beautiful young girl in the dressing room. Enter police. Morrison makes one violent movement and is Maced on the spot. He is allowed to go on stage and perform, but the "performance" is a monologue telling what has just happened. Police rush on, and there, in front of the paying customers, looking for all the world like a crucified angel or Saint Sebastian, Morrison is dragged off. It is no accident that the picture blown up to monster size now graces the walls of his recording company. Millions wouldn't have bought publicity like that. Later, Morrison made national headlines again when Miami, Florida police issued six warrants for his arrest on charges involving, "lewd and lascivious behavior in public by exposing his private parts and by simulating masturbation and oral copulation" and for alleged public profanity and drunkenness during a March 2, 1969 concert in Miami.

Things are looking up for The Doors. One more bust and they'll be back in favor with the underground.

**THE MONKEES / Mickey Dolenz (guitar, lead vocals, drums), Davy Jones (vocals, tambourine), Michael Nesmith (bass). Previous Member: Peter Tork (guitar).**

The cynicism with which it was done was incredible and created a lot of resentment. Four boys would be cast in Beatle-like roles, and each installment in the fall 1966 tv series would be done as much like *A Hard Day's Night* as humanly possible. Nobody really minded that the Monkees, as this new group was called, were manufactured entirely in cold blood and for bluntly commercial reasons. But when, never having played together before, their records hit the top of the charts on the strength of what seemed like nothing more than tv exposure and a good sound financial push, the bitterness from other struggling groups was overwhelming. The story went that they were being told what to play note by note, that it had all been worked out for them, and that half the time on the records *they* weren't playing but the Candy Store Prophets, experienced musicians (with Bobby Hart of the Hart and Boyce team which produced and wrote many of the Monkees' early hits), were. Today, merely to mention this possibility brings on the wrath of several million Monkee fans who regard even the suggestion as treason. But it really no longer matters whether the Monkees did play every note themselves on those early singles or not.

The four boys were brought together one way or another (the story that they all answered an ad in *Variety* is sometimes contradicted) and told they would star in a weekly tv series about a rock group. It was one of the Beatles who pointed out that just getting out that weekly episode was a full-time job and that it wasn't fair to expect the group to be monster musicians as well. And they said it too, that they were hired as *actors*, actors who would portray musicians, and that musical background would help but that that wasn't what it was about. So then why put out singles if they weren't musicians? The answer to that is why not? The public bought, didn't they? And in the beginning it was like that. The Monkees were treated as one big hype. It was very hard on the boys. Not so much on Davy, who was basically an actor (he'd been very big on Broadway as the Artful Dodger in *Oliver*). Not so much on Mickey, who also was a former child actor and had starred in the *Circus Boy* tv series. But on Mike Nesmith and Peter Tork, who had paid a few dues in the music scene, it was rough. The point was in the beginning, with the series and the publicity, there hadn't been *time* to get together musically. But

there was pressure to get a single out, so everyone did the best he could, and if that involved a little help from professional musicians, it wasn't the first time or the last time it had happened and with much more established groups than the poor old Monkees. Still, there was no doubt, and they were the first to admit it at the start, that they weren't four musical geniuses.

Mickey Dolenz had been a lead singer with a group called the Missing Links and he could play guitar and had started to play drums before he became a Monkee but, well, he was no Ginger Baker. Davy Jones played a little guitar and he'd sung in *Oliver* and Screen Gems had tried unsuccessfully to make him a solo singer before the Monkees. Peter Tork did that whole Greenwich Village coffeehouse circuit and had a lot of musical know-how. And Mike Nesmith was also performing professionally before the Monkees. After a while it got to be a matter of pride for the Monkees to master their own instruments, so when things were a little settled in the summer of 1967 they got together a live "act" with which they toured the country proving they could provide a pleasant evening's entertainment as well as anyone. The tour won them a lot of respect from people who had previously dismissed them as a non-group. It was not that they were so fantastic, though they certainly were entertaining and competent, but that they were willing to face an audience and be judged like any other group was to their credit. Somewhere in all this they got away from their plastic image into something a bit earthier. Individual personalities started to emerge. Nesmith's stint as a folk singer and comedian at Los Angeles' Troubadour stood him in good stead. (Later, when the Monkees were established, he wrote, produced and conducted an instrumental album of serious music, *THE WICHITA TRAIN WHISTLE*.) Dolenz did his James Brown imitation. Jones has Broadway ambitions. Tork is all gentleness and peace. It was the music people who first discovered that the Monkees were good guys. Everyone else followed. By 1968 it was distinctly *not done* to put down the Monkees. And to top things, they did a rather nice album that suggested there was more than tv exposure selling their singles for them. The end of 1968 saw their film *Head*, which finally established them as, if not exactly underground heroes, then underground pets. Early in 1969 Peter Tork left the group, but the Monkees decided to continue as a trio. Their latest album, *INSTANT REPLAY*, was recorded without Tork, and the group is supposedly much tighter now. Only time will tell if a barrel of three Monkees is as much fun as a barrel of four. 1969

## **7. Lester Bangs, "Astral Weeks," in *Psychotic reaction and Carburetor Dung*, ed. by Greil Marcus (Anchor, 2003)**

Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* was released ten years, almost to the day, before this was written. It was particularly important to me because the fall of 1968 was such a terrible time: I was a physical and mental wreck, nerves shredded and ghosts and spiders looming and squatting across the mind. My social contacts had dwindled almost to none; the presence of other people made me nervous and paranoid. I spent endless days and nights sunk in an armchair in my bedroom, reading magazines, watching TV, listening to records, staring into space. I had no idea how to improve the situation, and probably wouldn't have done anything about it if I had.

*Astral Weeks* would be the subject of this piece—i.e., the rock record with the most significance in my life so far—no matter how I'd been feeling when it came out. But in the condition I was in, it assumed at the time the quality of a beacon, a light on the far shores of the murk; what's more, it was proof that there was something left to express artistically besides nihilism and destruction. (My other big record of the day was *White Light/White Heat*.) It sounded like the man who made *Astral Weeks* was in terrible pain, pain most of Van Morrison's previous works had only suggested; but

like the later albums by the Velvet Underground, there was a redemptive element in the blackness, ultimate compassion for the suffering of others, and a swath of pure beauty and mystical awe that cut right through the heart of the work.

I don't really know how significant it might be that many others have reported variants on my initial encounter with Astral Weeks. I don't think there's anything guiding it to people enduring dark periods. It did come out at a time when a lot of things that a lot of people cared about passionately were beginning to disintegrate, and when the self-destructive undertow that always accompanied the great sixties party had an awful lot of ankles firmly in its maw and was pulling straight down. So, as timeless as it finally is, perhaps Astral Weeks was also the product of an era. Better think that than ask just what sort of Irish churchwebbed haints Van Morrison might be product of.

Three television shows: A 1970 NET broadcast of a big all-star multiple bill at the Fillmore East. The Byrds, Sha Na Na, and Elvin Bishop have all done their respective things. Now we get to see three or four songs from a set by Van Morrison. He climaxes, as he always did in those days, with "Cyprus Avenue" from Astral Weeks. After going through all the verses, he drives the song, the band, and himself to a finish which has since become one of his trademarks and one of the all-time classic rock 'n' roll set-closers. With consummate dynamics that allow him to snap from indescribably eccentric throwaway phrasing to sheer passion in the very next breath he brings the music surging up through crescendo after crescendo, stopping and starting and stopping and starting the song again and again, imposing long maniacal silences like giant question marks between the stops and starts and ruling the room through sheer tension, building to a shout of "It's too late to stop now!," and just when you think it's all going to surge over the top, he cuts it off stone cold dead, the hollow of a murdered explosion, throws the microphone down and stalks off the stage. It is truly one of the most perverse things I have ever seen a performer do in my life. And, of course, it's sensational: our guts are knotted up, we're crazed and clawing for more, but we damn well know we've seen and felt something.

1974, a late night network TV rock concert: Van and his band come out, strike a few shimmering chords, and for about ten minutes he lingers over the words "Way over yonder in the clear blue sky / Where flamingos fly." No other lyrics. I don't think any instrumental solos. Just those words, repeated slowly again and again, distended, permutated, turned into scat, suspended in space and then scattered to the winds, muttered like a mantra till they turn into nonsense syllables, then back into the same soaring image as time seems to stop entirely. He stands there with eyes closed, singing, transported, while the band poises quivering over great open-tuned deep blue gulfs of their own.

1977, spring-summer, same kind of show: he sings "Cold Wind in August," a song off his recently released album *A Period of Transition*, which also contains a considerably altered version of the flamingos song. "Cold Wind in August" is a ballad, and Van gives it a fine, standard reading. The only trouble is that the whole time he's singing it he paces back and forth in a line on the stage, his eyes tightly shut, his little fireplug body kicking its way upstream against what must be a purgatorial nervousness that perhaps is being transferred to the cameraman.

What this is about is a whole set of verbal tics—although many are bodily as well—which are there for reason enough to go a long way toward defining his style. They're all over Astral Weeks: four rushed repeats of the phrases "you breathe in, you breathe out" and "you turn around" in "Beside You"; in "Cyprus Avenue," twelve "way up on"s, "baby" sung out thirteen times in a row sounding like someone running ecstatically downhill toward one's love, and the heartbreaking way he stretches "one by one" in the third verse; most of all in "Madame George," where he sings the word "dry"

and then “your eye” twenty times in a twirling melodic arc so beautiful it steals your own breath, and then this occurs: “And the love that loves the love that loves the love that loves the love that loves to love the love that loves to love the love that loves.”

Van Morrison is interested, obsessed with how much musical or verbal information he can compress into a small space, and, almost conversely, how far he can spread one note, word, sound, or picture. To capture one moment, be it a caress or a twitch. He repeats certain phrases to extremes that from anybody else would seem ridiculous, because he’s waiting for a vision to unfold, trying as unobtrusively as possible to nudge it along. Sometimes he gives it to you through silence, by choking off the song in midflight: “It’s too late to stop now!”

It’s the great search, fueled by the belief that through these musical and mental processes illumination is attainable. Or may at least be glimpsed.

When he tries for this he usually gets it more in the feeling than in the Revealed Word—perhaps much of the feeling comes from the reaching—but there is also, always, the sense of WHAT if he DID apprehend that Word; there are times when the Word seems to hover very near. And then there are times when we realize the Word was right next to us, when the most mundane overused phrases are transformed: I give you “love,” from “Madame George.” Out of relative silence, the Word: “Snow in San Anselmo.” “That’s where it’s at,” Van will say, and he means it (aren’t his interviews fascinating?). What he doesn’t say is that he is inside the snowflake, isolated by the song: “And it’s almost Independence Day.”

You’re probably wondering when I’m going to get around to telling you about Astral Weeks. As a matter of fact, there’s a whole lot of Astral Weeks I don’t even want to tell you about. Both because whether you’ve heard it or not it wouldn’t be fair for me to impose my interpretation of such lapidarily subjective imagery on you, and because in many cases I don’t really know what he’s talking about. He doesn’t either: “I’m not surprised that people get different meanings out of my songs,” he told a Rolling Stone interviewer. “But I don’t wanna give the impression that I know what everything means ’cause I don’t.... There are times when I’m mystified. I look at some of the stuff that comes out, y’know. And like, there it is and it feels right, but I can’t say for sure what it means.”

There you go Starin’ with a look of avarice  
Talkin’ to Huddie Ledbetter Showin’ pictures on the walls  
And whisperin’ in the halls And pointin’ a finger at me

I haven’t got the slightest idea what that “means,” though on one level I’d like to approach it in a manner as indirect and evocative as the lyrics themselves. Because you’re in trouble anyway when you sit yourself down to explicate just exactly what a mystical document, which is exactly what Astral Weeks is, means. For one thing, what it means is Richard Davis’s bass playing, which complements the songs and singing all the way with a lyricism that’s something more than just great musicianship: there is something about it that’s more than inspired, something that has been touched, that’s in the realm of the miraculous. The whole ensemble—Larry Fallon’s string section, Jay Berliner’s guitar (he played on Mingus’s Black Saint and the Sinner Lady), Connie Kay’s drumming—is like that:

they and Van sound like they’re not just reading but dwelling inside of each other’s minds. The facts may be far different. John Cale was making an album of his own in an adjacent studio at the time,



and he has said that “Morrison couldn’t work with anybody, so finally they just shut him in the studio by himself. He did all the songs with just an acoustic guitar, and later they overdubbed the rest of it around his tapes.”

Cale’s story might or might not be true—but facts are not going to be of much use here in any case. Fact: Van Morrison was twenty-two—or twenty-three—years old when he made this record; there are lifetimes behind it. What *Astral Weeks* deals in are not facts but truths. *Astral Weeks*, insofar as it can be pinned down, is a record about people stunned by life, completely overwhelmed, stalled in their skins, their ages and selves, paralyzed by the enormity of what in one moment of vision they can comprehend. It is a precious and terrible gift, born of a terrible truth, because what they see is both infinitely beautiful and terminally horrifying: the unlimited human ability to create or destroy, according to whim. It’s no Eastern mystic or psychedelic vision of the emerald beyond, nor is it some Baudelairean perception of the beauty of sleaze and grotesquerie. Maybe what it boils down to is one moment’s knowledge of the miracle of life, with its inevitable concomitant, a vertiginous glimpse of the capacity to be hurt, and the capacity to inflict that hurt. ...

## 8. Robert Christgau on the Los Angeles scene, *Esquire*, June 1968

In early 1967, when we were hearing rumblings from San Francisco but couldn't tell whether it was an earthquake or just the new subway, I made a prediction: The real music would come from Los Angeles. Big deal. I might as well have predicted that the real cars would come from Detroit. San Francisco's to-thine-own-self-be-true music and the long-haired businessmen from the Southland have combined to take over the music industry from New York. The New Hollywood, they call it, and talk about dynasties that will rival those of the cinemoguls.

I was dubious about San Francisco music before I heard it because I believe commercial strictures are good for pop, forcing artists to concentrate on their audiences instead of themselves—but the San Francisco groups did care about their audiences. They were the hippest in the country, and the quality of that first wave of records—by Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, Country Joe, even the Sopwith Camel—was astonishing. The only exception was Big Brother & the Holding Co., stuck with a schlocky (New York) label. The follow-up, however, has not been so impressive. Country Joe's second album was a vacuous disappointment, and the Airplane succumbed to artiness, going back for more overdubs after hearing "I Am the Walrus" and in general acting petulant. *After Bathing at Baxter's* was a good record but not as good as they or their acolytes thought. The only follow-up record that makes it completely is Moby Grape's *Wow*. The group's first record, overpromoted and underproduced, was dismissed as a hype by people who should have been listening. Hopefully this one, which includes a free disc of improvisations called "Grape Jam," will make up for it. The Grape can jam but on records tries to maintain a tight sound, much like L.A.'s Buffalo Springfield, whose *Buffalo Springfield Again* I consider the best American LP of last year.

The still-burgeoning San Francisco scene is simple compared to the welter of Los Angeles, where everybody seems to get recorded. It becomes hard to distinguish between the honest commercial group (the Sunshine Company) and the trashy one (the Love Generation), the legitimately refurbished image (Del Shannon's *The Further Adventures of Charles Westover*) and the insulting phony (Tommy Roe's *Phantasy*). But it is clear that what goes on aboveground in the industry itself is more interesting than what there is of an "underground." .... The work of the 5th Dimension is also a

testimony to the good things that can come out of a studio. Collaborating closely with boy-genius composer Jim Webb, the group is into a nightclubby kind of showbiz music that is not my thing at all. But even though their second LP, *The Magic Garden*, is slick and melodramatic, it does things with that weary form; "Paper Cup" says far more about alienation than Paul Simon's "I Am a Rock" ever did.

I recommend both *The Magic Garden* and *Song Cycle* to anyone who doesn't like rock but is even less impressed by the rest of what's happening in "popular music." But for those whose tastes are like mine, three Los Angeles albums are musts. All are by groups that have recorded before, and all prove that if a group's music is good, it can get better without any self-conscious, Airplane-style attempts at Artistic Advancement. The third album by Love, *Forever Changes*, is a vast improvement. Arthur Lee has stopped trying to imitate Mick Jagger with his soft voice, and the lyrics, while still obscure, now have an interesting surface as well. *The Notorious Byrd Brothers* is simply the best album the Byrds have ever recorded. Gone are the weak—usually folky—tracks that have always flawed their work. Then there is the Beach Boys' *Wild Honey*. Love and the Byrds have to a certain extent elaborated their original styles, but the Beach Boys have retrogressed. That's fine. I have always felt that affection for early surfing music is a sure test of whether you really like rock and roll or are merely an arriviste. Every bit as much as the very peculiar *Smiley Smile*, *Wild Honey* epitomizes Brian Wilson. One little nonrock song, "I'd Love Just Once to See You," expresses perfectly his quiet, thoughtful, sentimental artistic personality. Sexual assertiveness is not the only thing that makes good music.

It's hard to believe that so much good can come out of one place. Let's hope it keeps up.

## **9. Nat Hentoff, "The Crackin', Shakin', Breakin' Sounds," *The New Yorker* (October 24, 1964)**

The word "folk" in the term "folk music" used to connote a rural homogeneous community that carried on a tradition of anonymously created music. No one person composed a piece; it evolved through generations of communal care. In recent years, however, folk music has increasingly become the quite personal—and copyrighted—product of specific creators. More and more of them, in fact, are neither rural nor representative of centuries-old family and regional traditions. They are often city-bred converts to the folk style; and, after an apprenticeship during which they try to imitate rural models from the older approach to folk music, they write and perform their own songs out of their own concerns and preoccupations. The restless young, who have been the primary support of the rise of this kind of folk music over the past five years, regard two performers as their preëminent spokesmen. One is the twenty-three-year-old Joan Baez. She does not write her own material and she includes a considerable proportion of traditional, communally created songs in her programs. But Miss Baez does speak out explicitly against racial prejudice and militarism, and she does sing some of the best of the new topical songs. Moreover, her pure, penetrating voice and her open, honest manner symbolize for her admirers a cool island of integrity in a society that the folk-song writer Malvina Reynolds has characterized in one of her songs as consisting of "little boxes." ("And the boys go into business / And marry and raise a family / In boxes made of ticky tacky / And they all look the same.") The second—and more influential—demiurge of the folk-music microcosm is Bob Dylan, who is also twenty-three. Dylan's impact has been the greater because he *is* a writer of songs as well as a performer. Such compositions of his as "Blowin' in the Wind," "Masters of War," "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right," and "Only a Pawn in Their Game" have become part of the repertoire of many

other performers, including Miss Baez, who has explained, “Bobby is expressing what I—and many other young people— feel, what we want to say. Most of the ‘protest’ songs about the bomb and race prejudice and conformity are stupid. They have no beauty. But Bobby’s songs are powerful as poetry and powerful as music. And, oh, my God, how that boy can sing!” Another reason for Dylan’s impact is the singular force of his personality. Wiry, tense, and boyish, Dylan looks and acts like a fusion of Huck Finn and a young Woody Guthrie. Both onstage and off, he appears to be just barely able to contain his prodigious energy. Pete Seeger, who, at forty-five, is one of the elders of American folk music, recently observed, “Dylan may well become the country’s most creative troubadour—if he doesn’t explode.”

Dylan is always dressed informally—the possibility that he will ever be seen in a tie is as remote as the possibility that Miss Baez will perform in an evening gown—and his possessions are few, the weightiest of them being a motorcycle. A wanderer, Dylan is often on the road in search of more experience. “You can find out a lot about a small town by hanging around its poolroom,” he says. Like Miss Baez, he prefers to keep most of his time for himself. He works only occasionally, and during the rest of the year he travels or briefly stays in a house owned by his manager, Albert Grossman, in Bearsville, New York—a small town adjacent to Woodstock and about a hundred miles north of New York City. There Dylan writes songs, works on poetry, plays, and novels, rides his motorcycle, and talks with his friends. From time to time, he comes to New York to record for Columbia Records.

A few weeks ago, Dylan invited me to a recording session that was to begin at seven in the evening in a Columbia studio on Seventh Avenue near Fifty-second Street. Before he arrived, a tall, lean, relaxed man in his early thirties came in and introduced himself to me as Tom Wilson, Dylan’s recording producer. He was joined by two engineers, and we all went into the control room. Wilson took up a post at a long, broad table, between the engineers, from which he looked out into a spacious studio with a tall thicket of microphones to the left and, directly in front, an enclave containing a music stand, two microphones, and an upright piano, and set off by a large screen, which would partly shield Dylan as he sang, for the purpose of improving the quality of the sound. “I have no idea what he’s going to record tonight,” Wilson told me. “It’s all to be stuff he’s written in the last couple of months “

...

Dylan was born in Duluth, on May 24, 1941, and grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota, a mining town near the Canadian border. He does not discuss his parents, preferring to let his songs tell whatever he wants to say about his personal history. “You can stand at one end of Hibbing on the main drag an’ see clear past the city limits on the other end,” Dylan once noted in a poem, “My Life in a Stolen Moment,” printed in the program of a 1963 Town Hall concert he gave. Like Dylan’s parents, it appears, the town was neither rich nor poor, but it was, Dylan has said, “a dyin’ town.” He ran away from home seven times—at ten, at twelve, at thirteen, at fifteen, at fifteen and a half, at seventeen, and at eighteen. His travels included South Dakota, New Mexico, Kansas, and California. In between flights, he taught himself the guitar, which he had begun playing at the age of ten. At fifteen, he was also playing the harmonica and the autoharp, and, in addition, had written his first song, a ballad dedicated to Brigitte Bardot. In the spring of 1960, Dylan entered the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, which he attended for something under six months. In “My Life in a Stolen Moment,” Dylan has summarized his college career dourly: “I sat in science class an’ flunked out for refusin’ to watch a rabbit die. I got expelled from English class for using four- letter words in a paper describing the English teacher. I also failed out of communication class for callin’ up every day and sayin’ I couldn’t come. . . . I was kept around for kicks at a fraternity

house. They let me live there, an' I did until they wanted me to join." Paul Nelson and Jon Pankake, who edit the *Little Sandy Review*, a quarterly magazine, published in Minneapolis, that is devoted to critical articles on folk music and performers, remember meeting Dylan at the University of Minnesota in the summer of 1960, while he was part of a group of singers who performed at The Scholar, a coffeehouse near the university. The editors, who were students at the university then, have since noted in their publication: "We recall Bob as a soft-spoken, rather unprepossessing youngster . . . well-groomed and neat in the standard campus costume of slacks, sweater, white oxford sneakers, poplin raincoat, and dark glasses."

Before Dylan arrived at the university, his singing had been strongly influenced by such Negro folk interpreters as Leadbelly and Big Joe Williams. He had met Williams in Evanston, Illinois, during his break from home at the age of twelve. Dylan had also been attracted to several urban-style rhythm-and-blues performers, notably Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry. Other shaping forces were white country-music figures—particularly Hank Williams, Hank Snow, and Jimmie Rodgers. During his brief stay at the university, Dylan became especially absorbed in the recordings of Woody Guthrie, the Oklahoma-born traveller who had created the most distinctive body of American topical folk material to come to light in this century. Since 1954, Guthrie, ill with Huntington's chorea, a progressive disease of the nervous system, had not been able to perform, but he was allowed to receive visitors. In the autumn of 1960, Dylan quit the University of Minnesota and decided to visit Guthrie at Greystone Hospital, in New Jersey. Dylan returned briefly to Minnesota the following May, to sing at a university hootenanny, and Nelson and Pankake saw him again on that occasion. "In a mere half year," they have recalled in the *Little Sandy Review*, "he had learned to churn up exciting, bluesy, hard-driving harmonica-and-guitar music, and had absorbed during his visits with Guthrie not only the great Okie musician's unpredictable syntax but his very vocal color, diction, and inflection. Dylan's performance that spring evening of a selection of Guthrie . . . songs was hectic and shaky, but it contained all the elements of the now-perfected performing style that has made him the most original newcomer to folk music."

The winter Dylan visited Guthrie was otherwise bleak. He spent most of it in New York, where he found it difficult to get steady work singing. In "Talkin' New York," a caustic song describing his first months in the city, Dylan tells of having been turned away by a coffeehouse owner, who told him scornfully, "You sound like a hillbilly. We want folk singers here." There were nights when he slept in the subway, but eventually he found friends and a place to stay on the lower East Side, and after he had returned from the spring hootenanny, he began getting more frequent engagements in New York. John Hammond, Director of Talent Acquisition at Columbia Records, who has discovered a sizable number of important jazz and folk performers during the past thirty years, heard Dylan that summer while attending a rehearsal of another folk singer, whom Hammond was about to record for Columbia Records. Impressed by the young man's raw force and by the vivid lyrics of his songs, Hammond auditioned him and immediately signed him to a recording contract. Then, in September, 1961, while Dylan was appearing at Gerde's Folk City, a casual refuge for "citybillies" (as the young city singers and musicians are now called in the trade), on West Fourth Street, in Greenwich Village, he was heard by Robert Shelton, the folk-music critic for the *Times*, who wrote of him enthusiastically.

Dylan began to prosper. He enlarged his following by appearing at the Newport and Monterey Folk Festivals and giving concerts throughout the country. There have been a few snags, as when he walked off the Ed Sullivan television show in the spring of 1963 because the Columbia Broadcasting System would not permit him to sing a tart appraisal of the John Birch Society, but on the whole he

has experienced accelerating success. His first three Columbia albums—"Bob Dylan," "The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan," and "The Times They Are A-Changin' "—have by now reached a cumulative sales figure of nearly four hundred thousand. In addition, he has received large royalties as a composer of songs that have become hits through recordings by Peter, Paul, and Mary, the Kingston Trio, and other performers. At present, Dylan's fees for a concert appearance range from two thousand to three thousand dollars a night. He has sometimes agreed to sing at a nominal fee for new, nonprofit folk societies, however, and he has often performed without charge at civil-rights rallies.

Musically, Dylan has transcended most of his early influences and developed an incisively personal style. His vocal sound is most often characterized by flaying harshness. Mitch Jayne, a member of the Dillards, a folk group from Missouri, has described Dylan's sound as "very much like a dog with his leg caught in barbed wire." Yet Dylan's admirers come to accept and even delight in the harshness, because of the vitality and wit at its core. And they point out that in intimate ballads he is capable of a fragile lyricism that does not slip into bathos. It is Dylan's work as a composer, however, that has won him a wider audience than his singing alone might have. Whether concerned with cosmic spectres or personal conundrums, Dylan's lyrics are pungently idiomatic. He has a superb ear for speech rhythms, a generally astute sense of selective detail, and a natural storyteller's command of narrative pacing. His songs sound as if they were being created out of oral street history rather than carefully written in tranquillity. On a stage, Dylan performs his songs as if he had an urgent story to tell. In his work there is little of the polished grace of such carefully trained contemporary minstrels as Richard Dyer-Bennet. Nor, on the other hand, do Dylan's performances reflect the calculated showmanship of a Harry Belafonte or of Peter, Paul, and Mary. Dylan off the stage is very much the same as Dylan the performer—restless, insatiably hungry for experience, idealistic, but skeptical of neatly defined causes.

In the past year, as his renown has increased, Dylan has become more elusive. He felt so strongly threatened by his initial fame that he welcomed the chance to use the Bearsville home of his manager as a refuge between concerts, and he still spends most of his time there when he's not travelling. A week after the recording session, he telephoned me from Bearsville, and we agreed to meet the next evening at the Keneret, a restaurant on lower Seventh Avenue, in the Village. It specializes in Middle Eastern food, which is one of Dylan's preferences, but it does not have a liquor license. Upon keeping our rendezvous, therefore, we went next door for a few bottles of Beaujolais and then returned to the Keneret. Dylan was as restless as usual, and as he talked, his hands moved constantly and his voice sounded as if he were never quite able to catch his breath. ...

#### **10. Luc Sante, "I Is Someone Else," *The New York Review of Books*, March 10, 2005.**

BE CAREFUL what you wish for, the cliché goes. Having aspired from early youth to become stars, people who achieve that status suddenly find themselves imprisoned, unable to walk down the street without being importuned by strangers. The higher their name floats, the greater the levy imposed, the less of ordinary life they can enjoy. In his memoir, Bob Dylan never precisely articulates the ambition that brought him to New York City from northern Minnesota in 1961, maybe because it felt improbable even to him at the time. Nominally, he was angling for Leading Young Folksinger, which was a plausible goal then, when every college town had three or four coffeeshouses and each one had its Hootenanny Night, and when performers who wowed the crowds

on that circuit went on to make records that sometimes sold in the thousands. But from the beginning Dylan had his sights set much higher: the world, glory, eternity—ambitions laughably incommensurate with the modest confines of American folk music. He got his wish, in spades. He achieved leading young folksinger status almost immediately, then was quickly promoted to poet, oracle, conscience of his generation, and, in a lateral move, pop star.

Each promotion was heavily taxed. On “Positively Fourth Street” you can hear his half of a recrimination match with one or more former Greenwich Village competitors, once resentful and now obsequious. (“Fame opens up, first, every irony back onto one’s past; one is abruptly *valued* by one’s *friends*. Then actual envy and malice are hard to ignore. It is difficult just to be watched. There is injury to one’s sense of rebellion...”—John Berryman on Stephen Crane.) The year of booing he endured after he started going onstage with an amplified band in 1965 is a familiar tale. In *Chronicles*, which is apparently the first installment of a memoir told in chronologically shuffled vignettes, he revisits the period after his motorcycle crash in 1966, after he had withdrawn from live performance and had only issued one, rather enigmatic record, *John Wesley Harding*, a year and a half later. His silence contributed to his mystique, and that in turn became the focus of a craving for direction and guidance on the part of beleaguered youth in that time of failed revolution. As a result:

Moochers showed up from as far away as California on pilgrimages. Goons were breaking into our place all hours of the night. At first, it was merely the nomadic homeless making illegal entry—seemed harmless enough, but then rogue radicals looking for the Prince of Protest began to arrive....

And a person named A. J. Weberman began going through the Dylan family’s garbage and subjecting it to talmudic analysis. (“One night I went over D’s garbage just for old time’s sake and in an envelope separate from the rest of the trash there were five toothbrushes of various sizes and an unused tube of toothpaste wrapped in a plastic bag. ‘Tooth’ means ‘electric guitar’ in D’s symbology....”) Dylan was doubly consumable by his audience, at once the star on whose image any fantasy could be projected and the sage whose gnomic utterances could be interpreted to justify any feverish scheme. He had become a floating signifier of the greatest order of magnitude.

Overwhelmed by the situation he had semi-wittingly created, Dylan tried various means to escape it. In *Chronicles* he accounts for what seemed at the time to be eccentricities or missteps; they were, he says, intended to bore, mystify, or disgust his admirers so that they would leave him alone. He recorded a country & western album “and made sure it sounded pretty bridled and housebroken,” employing a crooner’s voice cleansed of all his lye and vinegar; had himself photographed wearing a yarmulke at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (“quickly all the great rags changed me overnight into a Zionist”); started a rumor that he was enrolling in the Rhode Island School of Design; failed to show up at any of the major counterculture festivals. All the while he dreamed of “a nine-to-five existence, a house on a tree-lined block with a white picket fence, pink roses in the backyard.” This sounds suspiciously like a line of dialogue from the second act of an MGM musical, begging a question—is this candor, hindsight, irony, spin, rhetorical flight, or some combination thereof?—not unlike those that attend virtually everything else Dylan has written. He can’t seem to help putting forth vivid images equipped with yawning ambiguities. That means that even when he has been at pains to make himself transparent, he has given grist to the interpretation mills, which have rarely been idle in forty years.

It is perfectly possible that the succession of odd choices he made in the late 1960s and early ’70s were meant as deliberate roadblocks to set in the way of overeager fans. It is equally credible,

though, that crooning, Zionism, returning to college, cornball self-parody (aspects of the 1970 album *Self-Portrait*) and, later, born-again Christianity and a range of variously slick show-biz moves were matters he considered quite seriously, if only for a week or a year, as ways of escaping from the burden of himself. What seems to have happened is that he lost or at least misplaced parts of his power and inspiration without actually achieving serenity. Speaking to David Gates in the *Newsweek* interview that heralded the release of *Chronicles*, he went so far as to claim that his artistic drought lasted from sometime in the early '70s until 1998, when he issued his record *Time Out of Mind*. Gates bit his tongue: "He's talking about the twenty-five years that produced *Blood on the Tracks*, *Slow Train Coming*, *Shot of Love*, *Infidels* and its sublime outtakes, and—no. Let's not argue with the man who's in possession of what really matters." Everyone who paid attention to Dylan in that period will have a greater or lesser number of reservations about the quality of the work he did then, but his sweeping assessment is not altogether wrong. A majority of the songs from then are in some way at odds with themselves—compelling words hitched to perfunctory music, or strong ideas clumsily executed, or misfires caused by dunning self-consciousness, or well-conceived pieces sabotaged by their arrangement or production. Everywhere there is evidence of crippling internal struggle, of conflicting intentions that have arrived at a deadlock. It is telling that many of his best songs from that era were officially cast off and not released until much later, if at all.

It's not easy to identify with Dylan's predicament, since so few people have had the experience of finding themselves appointed prophet, and not having the assignment quickly washed away by the tides of fashion. And fame, although significant, is only part of the story. (Berryman on Crane, again: "One's sense of self-reliance is disturbed. Under the special new conditions one behaves—at best—at first as before; but this is not adequate. Also the burden of confidence in oneself is to some extent assumed by others; and the sudden lightness inclines to upset one.") An even greater burden comes from being ceaselessly analyzed, as if one were the reviewing lineup at a May Day parade and the rest of the world was composed of Kremlinologists. And Dylan's audience does not merely appreciate him; it wants things from him, particular things: insights, instructions, answers to questions, a flattering reflection of itself, a mind it can pretend to inhabit. The responses to *Chronicles* include the common complaint that Dylan evades telling us what we want to know. He doesn't explain how he wrote "Visions of Johanna," for example, or what his emotions were during the process—he fails to conduct a tour of his peak moments, and he does not specify how he unbottles his genie. He doesn't discuss such major works as *Highway 61 Revisited* or *Blonde on Blonde* or the huge, only partly issued body of work known in aggregate as *The Basement Tapes*. He doesn't mention *Blood on the Tracks*, either, although when he writes, "Eventually I would even record an entire album based on Chekhov short stories—critics thought it was autobiographical," it would seem, by process of elimination, to be the record he is referring to. But is he serious?

The way *Chronicles* is structured suggests that it is primarily about the interstices in Dylan's life so far, periods when he was attempting to find or retrieve his own voice. The third chapter describes that period around 1969 and 1970 when pressure on him was greatest and his wish to escape from it at its most acute. It reaches a non-climax with the recording of *New Morning*, which was a perfectly decent job of work, neither brilliant nor disastrous. The fourth chapter is concerned with the recording in New Orleans in 1989 of *Oh Mercy*, also a middling performance.

Frustration and confusion are palpable there, too: he can't control the recording process; the songs come out sounding very different from what he had intended; he can have anything he wishes, and yet he is uncertain and adrift. The other three chapters, which bracket the work and comprise nearly two-thirds of it, are a very different proposition, because they focus on the period between his arrival in New York City in 1961 and the issuing of his first record just over a year later. Even if Dylan had

not been thrust so quickly into a position of unwanted responsibility, and even if his most fecund period—the years 1965 and 1966—had not been an epic blur of such intensity and speed (in both senses of the term) that it was sure to end in some sort of crack-up, the eve of success, a sweet and achingly distant time, might well appear to him a career peak. Everything seemed possible then; no options had been used up and nothing had yet been sacrificed.

What Dylan describes in chapters one, two, and five is his education. For all the structural oddity of *Chronicles*, it is in many ways a very traditional sort of memoir, and nowhere more than in those chapters. We see the young man arrive in the city from the provinces, stumble around chasms and into opportunities, sit at the feet of the mighty, acquire necessary tools and skills, begin to be noticed, find a home, fall in love, and then we leave him on the eve of success, full of expectancy but serenely unaware of what is about to befall him. The young Dylan makes an appealing nineteenth-century junior hero: crafty but ingenuous, wide-eyed but nobody's fool, an eager sponge for every sort of experience and information. As in the equivalent *Bildungsroman*, we are given a set piece, a soiree at which are gathered all the leading lights of the world he is poised to enter.

The occasion is a going-away party for Cisco Houston, a handsome (“looked like a riverboat gambler, like Errol Flynn”) singer of cowboy and lumberjack and railroad songs and friend of Woody Guthrie, so mature and gracious and imposing that he does not let on that he is going off to die of cancer. The party is held in a “Romanesque mansion” on Fifth Avenue, in a top-floor apartment with Victorian furnishings and a roaring fireplace. Pete Seeger is there, and the manager of the Weavers, and Moe Asch (founder of Folkways Records), and Theodore Bikel, and Irwin Silber (editor of *Sing Out!*), and sundry cowboy artists, labor organizers, underground filmmakers, ex-Martha Graham dancers, Off-Broadway actors, and a passel of folk singers of greater and lesser importance. Dylan takes us around the room supplying thumbnail sketches of the cast, like a moving camera focusing briefly and then tracking on. He is able to look hard at them all because he is largely invisible to them, and he can provide details of their biographies because he is somewhat in awe of everyone. If this were a nineteenth-century novel, or its 1930s film adaptation, we might later be treated to a succession of scenes in which the hero conquers, supplants, wins over, or silences all the worthies in the room that night. That isn't necessary here.

Dylan isn't out to gloat or settle scores, for which it is far too late anyway. On the contrary, he is keen to record his debts and appreciations, an accounting that takes in a wide range of personalities from the entertainment world of the early 1960s, including such unlikely names as Bobby Vee (for whom he briefly played piano when Vee was on his way up and Dylan was unknown), Tiny Tim (with whom he shared stages and meals in the coffeehouse days), Frank Sinatra, Jr. (for whose unenviable career as a shadow he feels tactful sympathy), and Gorgeous George (who fleetingly but memorably offered encouragement when the very young Dylan performed on a makeshift stage in the lobby of the armory in his Minnesota hometown). He knows that it will confuse his more literal-minded fans that he loves the songs of Harold Arlen (“In Harold's songs, I could hear rural blues and folk music”), polkas, Franz Liszt, “Moon River,” Neil Sedaka, as much as he admires Thucydides, Clausewitz, Leopardi, Tolstoy, Thaddeus Stevens. He is proud that he has one foot in a vanished world:

If you were born around this time [1941] or were living and alive, you could feel the old world go and the new one beginning. It was like putting the clock back to when B.C. became A.D. Everybody born around my time was a part of both.

Dylan's preoccupation with the past isn't only an incipient codger's gambol down memory lane.



While he caused a big splash in the mid-'60s for his dramatic break with folk tradition as it was then understood, the ways in which he has always kept faith with tradition look arguably more radical today. In an interview, considering younger musicians, he once noted, "They weren't there to see the end of the traditional people. But I was." Like his contemporaries, he witnessed the reappearance of various blues and country performers—Skip James, Dock Boggs, Son House, Clarence Ashley, among others—who had recorded in the late 1920s and had returned to obscurity when the Depression all but killed the recording of rural music, and who were tracked down by diligent young fans in the early 1960s and enjoyed a few years in the limelight of Northern stages at the sunset of their lives. Those people were embodiments of a past so far removed by technological and societal changes that they might as well have emerged from Civil War graves. While folk music had taken on a new, confrontational stance toward the world by then—a development for which Dylan was partly responsible—involvement in folk music still entailed an active engagement with the past. This meant that young performers, from the scholarly and meticulous New Lost City Ramblers to the slick and broadly popular Kingston Trio, saw themselves as carrying on a set of skills and themes and concerns and melodies and lyrics that had come down at least from the nineteenth century—even from the Middle Ages, with the earlier Child ballads.

The young Dylan believed fervently in the passing of the torch, the laying on of hands—he learned blues chord changes from Lonnie Johnson and Victoria Spivey, visited the paralytic Woody Guthrie in the hospital and played him his own songs (he doesn't mention here a more purely magical transference, when Buddy Holly looked directly at him from the stage of the Duluth Armory, a few days before his death in a plane crash in Clear Lake, Iowa). And while he was never as extreme as the folk purists—who were so involved with the past that they lived there, like Civil War reenactors who become experts on nineteenth-century underwear—Dylan treated history in a way that was not uncommon then but is sufficiently rare now that some critics of this book have professed their suspicions. In 1961 the past was alive not just in the songs but in the city itself—everybody who played at the Café Bizarre on MacDougal Street knew the place had once been Aaron Burr's livery stable. Dylan tells us he made regular trips to the microfilm room of the New York Public Library, to read newspapers from the 1850s and '60s. "I wasn't so much interested in the issues as intrigued by the language and rhetoric of the times," he writes. But also: "The godawful truth of [the Civil War] would become the all-encompassing template behind everything that I would write."

The songs of the folk-lyric tradition were half truism, half enigma. The key to the latter could perhaps be found in the past.

All of these songs were originally sung by singers who seemed to be groping for words, almost in an alien tongue. I was beginning to feel that maybe the language had something to do with causes and ideals that were tied to the circumstances and blood of what happened over a hundred years ago....All of a sudden, it didn't seem that far back.

Folk songs, no matter how distant or exotic, spoke with bare-bones candor and deployed blunt imagery much more immediate than the froth that came over the radio, telling of "debauched bootleggers, mothers that drowned their own children, Cadillacs that only got five miles to the gallon, floods, union hall fires, darkness and cadavers at the bottom of rivers...." For a long time it didn't occur to him to write his own songs (his first album only contains two, or maybe one-and-a-half: "Song to Woody" and "Talking New York"—the latter is more recitation than song). Few did so then, because the gravity of tradition had been created by the implacable, burning-eyed Anon. and not by tenderfeet from the suburbs. And anyway,

It's not like you see songs approaching and you invite them in. It's not that easy. You want to write

songs that are bigger than life....You have to know and understand something and then go past the vernacular. The chilling precision that these old-timers used in coming up with their songs was no small thing.

When he did start writing, “I rattled off lines and verses based on the stuff I knew—‘Cumberland Gap,’ ‘Fire on the Mountain,’ ‘Shady Grove,’ ‘Hard, Ain’t It Hard.’ I changed words around and added something of my own here and there....You could write twenty or more songs off...one melody by slightly altering it. I could slip in verses or lines from old spirituals or blues. That was okay; others did it all the time.” That is, in fact, a fairly exact description of the folk-lyric process as it was enacted until about seventy years ago by the fearsome and remote Anon.

Once Dylan got started writing songs, other influences were not slow in coming. There was Red Grooms, his girlfriend’s favorite artist:

He incorporated every living thing into something and made it scream—everything side by side created equal— old tennis shoes, vending machines, alligators that crawled through sewers....Brahman bulls, cowgirls, rodeo queens and Mickey Mouse heads, castle turrets and Mrs. O’Leary’s cow, creeps and greasers and weirdos and grinning, bejeweled nude models....Subconsciously, I was wondering if it was possible to write songs like that.

The same girlfriend, Suze Rotolo, worked backstage at a “presentation of songs” by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht. “I...was aroused straight away by the raw intensity of the songs....They were erratic, unrhythmical and herky-jerky— weird visions....Every song seemed to come from some obscure tradition, seemed to have a pistol in its hip pocket, a club or a brickbat and they came at you in crutches, braces and wheelchairs.” And John Hammond, who signed Dylan to his first recording contract, was then about to reissue the neglected songs of the great Delta blues artist Robert Johnson, whose words made my nerves quiver like piano wires. They were so elemental in meaning and feeling and gave you so much of the inside picture. It’s not that you could sort out every moment carefully, because you can’t. There are too many missing terms and too much dual existence....There’s no guarantee that any of his lines...happened, were said, or even imagined....You have to wonder if Johnson was playing for an audience that only he could see, one off in the future.

Around the same time, Suze Rotolo introduced him to the works of Rimbaud. “I came across one of his letters called ‘Je est un autre,’ which translates as ‘I is somebody else.’ When I read those words the bells went off. It made perfect sense. I wished someone would have mentioned that to me earlier.” Dylan was now armed.

Of Dylan’s many achievements, the most fundamental was his hitching together of the folk-lyric tradition and Western modernism, connecting them at the point where their expressive ambiguities met. The merger was not entirely unprecedented, maybe—there are glimmers in *The Waste Land* of Eliot’s St. Louis-bred acquaintance with the world of “Frankie and Johnnie,” and Robert Johnson can certainly sound like a modernist, especially, as Dylan suggests, by virtue of how much he omits. But no one had previously planted a firm foot in each and assumed an equivalence between them. Dylan did not do this to prove a point; he was naturally omnivorous, and he intuited the connection without worrying about pedigree. As a songwriter, he knew what played to the ear, and disregarded the fact that such effects don’t always work on the page. His primary gambit was to take the blues or ballad form and some of its vocabulary and then expand it, or slash it, or smudge it, or make the literal figurative, or the figurative literal. He could, as in “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” take the ancient ballad “Lord Randal” and transform it into a Symbolist catalog of apocalyptic images, or he could, as in “From a Buick 6,” take Sleepy John Estes’s “Milk Cow Blues” and employ it as the

frame for a collage of blues-lyric fragments that makes perfect emotional sense even as it resists parsing (“Well, you know I need a steam shovel mama to keep away the dead / I need a dump truck mama to unload my head”).

In a revealing interview for a book called *Songwriters on Songwriting*, Dylan talks about the “unconscious frame of mind,” the state of suspension he uses to bypass literal thinking:

[I]n the unconscious state of mind, you can pull yourself out and throw out two rhymes first and work it back. You get the rhymes first and work it back and then see if you can make it make sense in another kind of way. You can still stay in the unconscious frame of mind to pull it off, which is the state of mind you have to be in anyway.

In other words, his use of rhymes is not unlike a Surrealist game or an Oulipo exercise, a way to outsmart front-brain thinking, and the same is true of his employment of folk-lyric readymades. When Dylan hit mid-career, though, exhaustion and self-consciousness and the weight of his own reputation pushed him into self-impersonation, and he began to write songs that laboriously strove for effects. He knows the difference. In the same interview he is asked about a line from “Slow Train”: “But that line...is an intellectual line. It’s a line, ‘Well, the enemy I see wears a cloak of decency,’ that could be a lie. It could just be. Whereas ‘Standing under your yellow railroad,’ that’s not a lie.” The former makes sense, in a stilted and poetistic way, while the latter apparently makes no sense, but in context it is inarguable (he misquotes it slightly): “And now I stand here lookin’ at your yellow railroad / In the ruins of your balcony / Wond’ring where you are tonight, sweet Marie.” The blanket dismissal of a quarter century’s work that Dylan offered to David Gates is of course an overstatement, but it is a gauge of his realization that he had long mistaken or overlooked his greatest strengths. The ability to hatch an epigram—the way “To live outside the law you must be honest” emerges right in the middle of “Absolutely Sweet Marie,” between two lines twisted from Blind Lemon Jefferson’s “See That My Grave Is Kept Clean” and the refrain—is a function of that unconscious frame of mind, that willed trance state, that educated lurching, not of the wish to construct an epigram.

Among the four-fifths of the Basement Tapes material that remains officially unreleased is a song called “I’m Not There (1956).” It is glaringly unfinished—Dylan mumbles unintelligibly through parts of it, and throws together fragments of lyrics apparently at random—and yet it is one of his greatest songs. The hymn-like melody, rising from mournful to exalted, is certainly one reason for this, and another is the perfect accompaniment by three members of the Band, but the very discontinuity of the lyrics, in combination with Dylan’s unflagging intensity, creates a powerful, tantalizing indeterminacy that is suddenly if provisionally resolved by every return of the refrain.

Now when I [*unintelligible*] I was born to love her  
But she knows that the kingdom weighs so high  
above her And I run but I race but it’s not too  
fast or soon [?]  
But I don’t perceive her, I’m not there, I’m gone.

The third line is clearly filler; what can be made out of the first probably contains an echo of a Stevie Wonder song played on the radio that same summer; the second, for all that it does not lend itself to reasonable interpretation, rings the bell, and it pulls the previous and succeeding lines along with it into relief and down to the last line, which includes the refrain. Every verse is crowned by one or more such glowing fragments, which materialize, linger briefly, and then vanish, like urgent dispatches transmitted by a spirit medium. The song evades the intellect to address the emotions through underground passageways of memory and association—biblical, in the case of that second

line—and it is a document of the artist in the very midst of the act of creation.

The song gives a sense of how Dylan works when he is tapping his richest vein: the form presents him with a container—a blues basket, a ballad box—which he fills with lines the shapes of which he can discern before he knows their specific content. Such a shape is not simply a measurement determined by meter—it is a ghost outline, maybe a half-heard utterance in which he can make out an emphasis here, a compressed cluster of syllables there, now and again an entire word, which he can use as a dowsing rod for the content. If the shape is not forthcoming, he can fill the space with a folk-lyric readymade. That he has been tapping this vein again is shown by every song on his most recent release, *Love and Theft* (2001). “Bye and Bye,” for example, has a melody derived from “Blue Moon” (“You could write twenty or more songs off..one melody by slightly altering it”); its final verse is:

Papa gone mad, mamma, she’s feeling sad  
I’m gonna baptize you in fire so you can  
sin no more I’m gonna establish my rule  
through civil war  
Gonna make you see just how loyal and true a man can be.

The first and last lines are brazenly drawn from the common well, while the middle lines had to have been dispatched straight from the unconscious. The song’s atmosphere is breezy and menacing; the first and last lines of each verse supply the breeziness, the middle two the menace. The printed lyrics do not, of course, account for Dylan’s vocal performance, which, of a piece with the white suits and riverboat-gambler hats he has been affecting lately, renders uncannily credible the grandiose rhetoric of the middle lines; nor do they convey the insouciant creepiness of Augie Meyers’s roller-rink organ. Treating Dylan as merely a writer is like judging a movie on its screenplay alone.

*Blood on the Tracks* (1974) is cited by many as their favorite Dylan record—Rick Moody calls it “the truest, most honest account of a love affair from tip to stern ever put down on magnetic tape.” It is, to be sure, quite an achievement, with a wealth of lived experience in its dense, intricately plotted songs. And yet, in comparison to the songs on *Blonde on Blonde* or *The Basement Tapes*—which are genuine, sphinx-like, irreducible, hard-shell poems whether or not the words can ever be usefully divorced from the music—such numbers as “Tangled Up in Blue” and “Idiot Wind” are prose. They are driven by their narratives, and their imagery is determined by its function.

I ran into the fortune-teller, who said beware of lightning that  
might strike I haven’t known peace and quiet for so long I can’t  
remember what it’s like There’s a lone soldier on the cross, smoke  
pourin’ out of a boxcar door  
You didn’t know it, you didn’t think it could be done, in the final end he won  
the wars After losin’ every battle.

The smoke issuing from the boxcar door, which is there only to fill out the line and supply an end-rhyme, does come out of nowhere, but everything else seems cooked—the palmist is from central casting and her warning is generic; the soldier on the cross is on loan from an anti-war poster (he seems to be wearing a gas mask); the connecting lines are rhetorical and flat; it could, after all, be a lie. This is not to say that the song is bad, merely purpose-driven, with every verse hastening us along to the point, which is “We’re idiots, babe / It’s a wonder we can even feed ourselves.” And that, in turn, is a great line from a note left on a pillow at dawn. Nothing on *Blood on the Tracks* hobbles in on crutches or speaks to the future or appears on the wall in letters of fire. It is a brilliant account of the vicissitudes of a love affair, an exemplary specimen of the confessional culture of the period,

a remarkable work of emotional intelligence. It is so many people's favorite Dylan album in large part because it is the one that people can imagine themselves creating, were the muse to tap them on the forehead with a nine-pound hammer.

But who, on the other hand, could imagine coming up with "John Wesley Harding / Was a friend to the poor / He trav'led with a gun in ev'ry hand"? The outlaw looks like Shiva, a brace of guns in a brace of hands, the apotheosis of Western legend by way of an apparent awkwardness of syntax, and the impression endures even if we know that Dylan lifted those five words from Woody Guthrie's "Ludlow Massacre," in which the striking miners' women sell their potatoes and with the proceeds "put a gun in every hand." It takes an unusual mind to pick that unremarkable scrap from Guthrie's pocket and paste it athwart a completely different sort of genre piece, like Kurt Schwitters inserting a bus ticket into a landscape.<sup>1</sup> Dylan drives critics mad, because while his vast range of sources can be endlessly itemized and dissected, the ways in which he puts things together tease rational explication before finally betraying it. (Stephen Crane quoted by Berryman: "An artist, I think, is nothing but a powerful memory that can move itself through certain experiences sideways and every artist must be in some things powerless as a dead snake.")

You can find almost anything in Dylan's lyrics, employ them as balm for heartbreak or call to riot, engage in bibliomancy by sticking a knife between the pages of *Lyrics* and divining fortune from the line the tip has come to rest upon. You can find Dylan's rhythms and word choices and as it were his fingerprints in literature that predates him. Michael Gray, who is probably Dylan's single most assiduous critic, turns up a quatrain by Robert Browning that the mind's ear has no trouble hearing in Dylan's voice, and not only because the end-rhymes prefigure "Subterranean Homesick Blues":

Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls  
and sandals And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-  
holding the yellow candles One, he carries a flag up straight,  
and another a cross with handles,  
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals.

Dylan himself, in the *Songwriters* interview, cites a Byron couplet that is equally convincing: "What is it you buy so dear / With your pain and with your fear?" But then, as he told Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times*, "It's like a ghost is writing [the] song....It gives you the song and it goes away. You don't know what it means. Except the ghost picked me to write the song."

Dylan is a mystery, as he has been since his first record, made when he was twenty, established his eerie prerogative to inhabit songs written long before his birth by people with lifetimes of bitter experience. The mystery has endured ever since, through fallow as well as fecund periods, through miscellaneous errors and embarrassments and other demonstrations of common humanity as well as unbelievable runs of consecutive masterpieces. It has survived through candid and guarded and put-on interviews, various appearances on film, and the roughly two hundred concert appearances he has put in every year for the last couple of decades. It is if anything enhanced by Dylan's most astute critics (Greil Marcus, Sean Wilentz, Christopher Ricks, Michael Gray) and untouched by the legions of nit-collectors and communicants in the church of whangdoodle who unstoppably issue treatises and skeleton keys. It will survive his disarmingly unaffected memoir, too. The playwright Sam Shepard noted after observing Dylan for months during the 1974 Rolling Thunder tour that

If a mystery is solved, the case is dropped. In this case, in the case of Dylan, the mystery is never solved, so the case keeps on. It keeps coming up again. Over and over the years. Who is this character anyway?

Dylan is a complex, mercurial human being of astounding gifts, whose purposes are usually ambiguous, frequently elusive, and sometimes downright unguessable. At the same time he is a sort of communicating vessel, open to currents that run up and down the ages quite outside the confines of the popular culture of any given period. That he is able to tune his radio to those long waves in a time of increasingly short memories and ever more rapid fashion cycles is not the least of his achievements.

*Chronicles*, which would appear to have been printed without editorial intervention,<sup>2</sup> is so fluid in its prose and alive in its observations that Dylan looks like a natural at the book game, although his previous experience was not so happy. *Tarantula* was the result of a much-trumpeted contract for a novel that Dylan signed with Macmillan in 1966. The book was not published until 1970, having in the meantime been bootlegged in several different versions. Nearly everyone was disappointed in the final product, which arrived behind the prow of a carefully hedged and rather condescending preface by its editor, Bob Markel. Ever since, the phrase “famously unreadable” has been attached to it, and persons who have wished to demonstrate that Dylan’s vaunted verbal mastery was just so much hype have used it as a handy chair-leg with which to beat its author. It is, in fact, a mess, but it’s a fascinating mess—it’s what Dylan’s automatic writing looks like when it doesn’t have formal containers to shape it. The population of Dylan’s world (Homer the Slut, Popeye Squirm, “Phil, who has now turned into an inexpensive Protestant ambassador from Nebraska & who speaks with a marvelous accent,” etc.) hurtles hectically through a landscape of tanktowns and drunk tanks, all of the action telegraphically alluded to, at best, as if the book were a compilation of gossip columns from whatever newspaper Smokey Stover subscribed to. Although it is easily more entertaining than any of the automatic productions of the Parisian Surrealist crowd, it only clicks at odd intervals, when Dylan briefly finds a model for parody, such as the interspersed letters, which have something of Ring Lardner about them:

cant you figure out all this commie business for yourself? you know, like how long can car thieves terrify the nation? gotta go. there’s a fire engine chasing me. see you when i get my degree. i’m going crazy without you. cant see enough movies your crippled lover, benjamin turtle  
Its one moment of transcendence is the only thing in the book that could have been a song, an ode to Aretha Franklin:

aretha—known in gallup as number 69—in wheeling as the cat’s in heat—in pittsburgh as number 5—in brownsville as the left road, the lonesome sound—in atlanta as dont dance, listen—in bowling green as oh no, no, not again—she’s known as horse chick up in cheyenne—in new york city she’s known as just plain aretha...i shall play her as my trump card

Here he’s hit on a pair of riffs—the urban-hotspot shout-out of ’60s soul anthems such as Martha and the Vandellas’ “Dancing in the Street” and the shifting-name trope familiar from both cowboy movies and doo-wop (e.g. the Cadillacs’ “You know they often call me Speedo but my real name is Mister Earl”)—that he can set to play off each other, arriving at a propulsive litany.

*Chronicles* works so well in part because in writing it he apparently found a formal model to adhere to or violate at will, and if he did not have in mind any specific nineteenth-century account of callowness and ambition, maybe he conjured up a cumulative memory of dusty volumes found on friends’ bookshelves in Greenwich Village or in the basement of the bookshop in Dinkytown he worked in as a student. He also found an outlet for his inclination to counter his audience’s expectations. Readers, guessing on the basis of interviews and movies as well as the hydra-headed mythic image that has grown around Dylan over the decades, might have expected his memoir to be variously inscrutable, gnostic, bilious, confused, preening, recriminatory, impersonal, defensive,

perfunctory, smug, or even ghost-written. Instead Dylan had to outflank them by exercising candor, warmth, diligence, humor, and vulnerability. If there is ever a second volume, he may have to contradict himself yet again.

It is possible that the disguised quote, coming right after “was a friend to the poor,” combines with it to form a subliminal image of popular insurgency. The album came out early in 1968, after all, and the most memorable and hotly debated critical line concerning it has always been Jon Landau’s contention that, although it takes place entirely within the folk-lyric universe, it “manifests a profound awareness of the war and how it is affecting all of us.”

This guess is based primarily on the fact that it doesn’t seem to have been proofread, to judge by the presence of misspellings and inconsistencies in proper nouns, which a spell-checking program does not catch. 2004

## **11. Eve Babitz, “Roll Over Elvis: The Second Coming of Jim Morrison,” *Esquire*, March 1991.**

Jim Morrison Is Dead and Living in Hollywood

J.D. SOUTHER once told me he spent his first years in L.A. learning how to stand. Jim knew how to stand from the start. He stood pigeon-toed, filled with poetry against a mike with that honky-tonk Berlin organ in the background, and sang about “another kiss.”

And there is something to be said for singing in tune. Jim not only sang in tune, he sang intimately—as Doors producer Paul Rothchild once pointed out to me, “Jim was the greatest crooner since Bing Crosby.”

He was Bing Crosby from hell.

In those days, in the '60s, people in L.A. with romantic streaks who knew music went for the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, Paul Butterfield—and for clubs like the Troubadour and the Trip and the Ash Grove. The Whiskey, where the Doors flourished, was the kind of place where the headliner would be Johnny Rivers, a white boy who covered Chuck Berry’s “Memphis.” By the '60s, white boys weren’t supposed to cover soul anymore, but at the Whiskey it was still groovy. The Carpenters played the Whiskey.

At the Whiskey, the bouncers were bouncers, the management was from New York City, and the women wore beehive hairdos long after it was cool.

Rock groups who went to college and actually got degrees were not only uncool, they were unheard-of.

Jim went to college and he graduated. My friend Judy Raphael, who went to film school, too, remembers Jim as this pudgy guy with a marine haircut who worked in the library at UCLA and who was supposed to help her with her documentary term paper one night but ended up talking drunkenly and endlessly about Oedipus, which meant she had to take the course over that summer.

The Doors were embarrassing, like their name. I dragged Jim into bed before they’d decided on the name and tried to dissuade him; it was so corny naming yourself after something Aldous Huxley

wrote. I mean, *The Doors of Perception*...what an Ojai-geeky-too-L.A.-pottery-glazer kind of uncool idea.

The Beatles were desperate criminals compared with them. The Beatles only had one leg to stand on—rock 'n' roll. The Doors, though, were film majors. Being a film major in the '60s was hopelessly square. If you wanted to make a movie, even if you went to UCLA like Francis Coppola and then to the Roger Corman School of Never Lost a Dime Pictures, you *still* weren't cool. Even Jack Nicholson wasn't cool in the '60s. Being an actor wasn't cool in the '60s, because all movies did was get everything *all wrong*. At least until *Easy Rider*, being in the movie business was a horrible thing to admit.

Of course, Oliver Stone was *so* uncool he voluntarily went to Vietnam instead of prowling around the Sunset Strip with the rest of his generation. Oliver Stone was such a nerd he became a soldier, a Real Man. He didn't understand that in the '60s real men were not soldiers. A real man was Mick Jagger in *Performance*, in bed with two women, wearing eye makeup and kimonos. Or John Phillip Law, with wings, in *Barbarella*. Of course, Bob Dylan was even cooler than Mick Jagger, so cool he couldn't sing. He didn't bother, and he was so skinny, with those narrow little East Coast shoulders and that face. And he was mean.

Like everyone back then, Jim hated his parents, hated home, hated it all. If he could have gotten away with it, Jim would have been an orphan. He tried lying about having parents, creating his life anew—about what you'd expect from someone who'd lost thirty pounds in one summer (the summer of '65, from taking drugs instead of eating, and hanging out on the Venice boardwalk). I mean, he awoke one morning and was *so* cute, how *could* he have parents?

According to some health statistics I recently heard about, the '50s was the decade when the American diet contained its highest percentage of fat—over 50 percent. And these '50s children, overfed, repressed, and indignant, waited in the wings, lurking and praying to get big enough to get the fuck out. Jim Morrison had it worse than a lot of kids. He was fat. And his father was a naval officer.

Then the ultimate dream of everyone who weighs too much and gets thin happened to Jim. He lost the weight and turned into the Prince. Into John, Paul, George, and Ringo. Into Mick.

I met Jim early in '66, when he'd just lost the weight and wore a suit made of gray suede, lashed together at the seams with lanyards, and no shirt. It was the best outfit he ever had, and he was so cute that no woman was safe. He was twenty-two, a few months younger than I.

He had the freshness and humility of someone who had been fat all his life and was now suddenly a morning glory.

I met Jim and propositioned him in three minutes, even *before* he so much as opened his mouth to sing. This great event took place not at the Whiskey but at a now-forgotten club just down on the Strip called the London Fog, the first bar there the Doors played. And there were only about seven people in the room anyway.

"Take me home," I demurely offered when we were introduced. "You're not really going to stay here playing, are you?"

"Uh," he replied, "we don't play. We work."



I suggested the next night. And that's when it happened (finally!). Naturally, I dressed my part—black eye makeup out to there, a miniskirt up to here—but the truth was that I did, in fact, have parents. On our first date I even confessed to Jim that my ridiculous father was on that very night playing violin in a program of music by Palestrina. To my tremendous dismay, Jim immediately expressed his desire to drive to Pasadena. I packed him into my '52 Cadillac and off we went, but by intermission I had had enough. He whined that he wanted to stay for the second half, but I put my foot down.

“You just can't be here,” I said. “Listening to this. You just can't.”

Being in bed with Jim was like being in bed with Michelangelo's *David*, only with blue eyes. His skin was so white, his muscles were so pure, he was so innocent. The last time I saw him with no shirt on, at a party up in Coldwater, his body was so ravaged by scars, toxins, and puffy pudginess, I wanted to kill him.

He never really stopped being a fat kid. He used to suggest, “Let's go to Ships and get blueberry pancakes with blueberry syrup.”

“It's so fattening,” I would point out. I mean, really.

Jim was embarrassing because he wasn't cool, but I still loved him. It was his mouth, of course, which was so edible. Just so long as he didn't smile and reveal his too-Irish teeth, just so long as he kept his James Dean smolder, it worked. But it takes a lot of downers to achieve that on a full-time basis. And no fat.

Just so long as he stood there in the leather clothes my sister had hand-made for him, the ones lined with turquoise satin, trimmed with snakeskin and lizard. The black leather pants, the leather jackets. My sister never thought Jim was that cute, but then my sister was one of his girlfriend Pamela's friends, and it was in her best interest to ignore Jim, even though, for a month, my sister and her boyfriend lived with Jim and Pamela, and it was almost impossible. “He was always a very dark presence in a room,” she said. “In fact, if you asked me today the feeling I got, I'd say it was of a person who was severely depressed. Clinically depressed.” She's now a psychologist, so she knows.

“He thought he was ugly,” she said. “He'd look at himself in the mirror trying on those clothes, but he hated looking at himself, because he thought he was ugly.”

My sister and Pamela had to fight to persuade him to leave his hair long, because left to his own devices he'd get it cut preppy-short and break everyone's heart.

Even his voice was embarrassing, sounding so sudden and personal and uttering such hogwash in a time when, if you were going to say words, they were to be ironic and a little off-center. Jim just blurted things the fuck out. My artist friends found him excruciating, too, but my movie friends (who were, by definition, out of it and behind the times and got everything all wrong) loved him. He said what they meant. They might not have understood Dylan— they thought he couldn't sing—but in Hollywood they loved Jim.

Jim as a sex object and the Doors as a group were two entirely different stories. The whole audience

would put up with long, tortured silences and humiliation and just awful schmuck stuff Jim did during performances. He could get away with it because his audience was all college kids who thought the Doors were cool because they had lyrics you could understand about stuff they learned in Psychology 101 and Art History. The kids who liked the Doors were so misguided they thought “Crystal Ship” was for intellectuals.

Jim as a sex object lasted for about two years.

In fact, once he and Pamela became entangled in their fantastic killing struggle—once he finally found someone who, when he said, “Let’s drive over this cliff,” actually *would*—he became more of a death object than a sex object. Which was even sexier.

When Pamela Courson met Jim, he began putting his money where his mouth was. Whereas all he had previously brought to the moment was morbid romantic excess, he now had someone looking at him and saying, “Well, are you going to drive off this cliff, or what?”

She was someone with red hair and a heart embroidered on her pants over the place her anus would be. He was a backdoor man, and Pamela was the door. Pamela was the cool one.

Everything a nerd could possibly wish to be, Pamela *was*. She had guns, took heroin, and was fearless in every situation. Socially she didn’t care, emotionally she was shockproof, and as for her eating disorders—her idea of the diet to be on while Jim was in Miami going to court was ten days of heroin. Every time she awoke she did some, so she just sort of slept through her fast. Once, when she did wake up, she went with some friends to the Beverly Hills Hotel to see Ahmet Ertegun and fainted. Voilà, there she was back at UCLA, diagnosed as dying of malnutrition.

Good old Pamela, what a sport.

She would take Jim’s favorite vest and write FAG in giant letters on the back in india ink. She would go through Rodeo Drive’s Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, piling her arms higher and higher with more stuff, muttering under her breath, “He owes it to me, he owes it to me, he owes it to me.”

Pamela was mean and she was cool. She liked to scare people. Pamela had control over Jim in real life. He made his audience suffer for that.

And I mean, he was so cute, you *would*.

Pamela looked sunny and sweet and cute—she had freckles and red hair and the greenest eyes and just the country-girl glow. It was hard to believe her purse was stuffed with Thorazine (that horrible drug they used to give acid freak-outs). She wore mauve, and large, soft, expensive suede boots and large shawls, but even her laugh was mean.

She was so mean, she told Ray Manzarek (the worst nerd worldwide, known to his friends as Ray of the Desert) that Jim’s last words were, “Pam, are you out there?” even though he actually left a note. And she *knew* that the note would establish forever the literature-movie myth of Jim’s Lizard King image. Everyone hated Pam except Jim.

A friend of mine once said, “You can say anything about a woman a man marries, but I’ll tell you one thing—it’s *always* his mother.”

“Mother,” Jim sang, “I want to...*aggghh*.” Pamela was more than happy to supply the lip back: “Oh, you would, would you? Well, fuck *you!*”

I couldn’t be mean to him. If the phone rang at night and there was a long pause after I said hello, I knew it was Jim. He and I had a lot of ESP in some kind of laser-twisted, wish-fulfillment kind of way. I *always* wished he were there, and every so often, he zoomed in.

“The thing that really made people mad at him,” my sister reminds me, “was that he drank. And it wasn’t cool to drink in those days.”

“Yeah,” I say, “he *did* drink.”

Of course, I drank, but I tried to keep my drinking within the psychedelia-prescribed boundaries of okayness. I drank Dos Equis, wine, and tequila. Jim drank Scotch. Scotches.

Adults drank and got drunk and were uncool. I myself drank, got drunk, and was uncool. But I myself didn’t drink, get drunk, and become *so* uncool I flashed an audience in the South. I myself didn’t drink, get drunk, and then jump out of windows, get busted, stick my fist through plate glass, show up three days late for an interview with Joan Didion from *Life* magazine, drunk, unshaven, and throwing lit matches in her lap.

But Jim did.

Jim drank, got drunk, and woke up bloated and miserable and had to apologize and say he loved you, the alcoholic’s ancient saving grace. Jim drank and got drunk and then was so uncool he had to walk home.

I never saw him drive—he was always on foot in L.A. He didn’t dare drive himself anywhere. He *knew* in his worst blackouts not to drive. Just as I knew in my worst blackouts to put my diaphragm in and take my contact lenses out.

Jim drank, got drunk, and wanted to be shown the way to the Next Whiskey Bar. Whereas the Rolling Stones were ripping off Otis and Robert Johnson and Chuck Berry, and the cool and hip Buffalo Springfield were riffing through Woody Guthrie and Hank Williams with folkie touches or else trying to achieve soul, Jim was ripping off Kurt Weill, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Cocteau, and Lawrence Durrell. While the Rolling Stones were making it cool to be black and folk rockers were making it cool to be white trash, Jim was making it cool to be a poet. If Jim had lived in another era, he would have had a schoolteacher wife to support him while he sat home writing “brilliant” poetry.

One night I was in the bungalow of Ahmet Ertegun (this was when I wised up and quit aiming at rock stars and went for record-company presidents instead—but *cool* ones, not Clive Davis). It was the night of the 1971 moon landing, and when I came in wearing my divine little black velvet dress, my tan, my blond art-nouveau hair, and my one pair of high heels I used for whenever Ahmet was in town, who should be sitting in front of the TV watching the moon landing but Jim, a Scotch and Coke (no ice) in his hand.

Ahmet proceeded to tell a rather gross story about midgets in India, and when he was through, Jim rose to his feet and bellowed, “You think you’re going to *win*, don’t you?! Well, you’re not, you’re not going to win. We’re going to win, *us*—the artists. Not you capitalist pigs!”

You could have heard a pin drop in this roomful of Ahmet’s fashionable friends, architects from

France, artists, English lords, *W*-type women. Of course, Ahmet *was* a capitalist pig, but still, he did write some Drifters lyrics and produce records and his acts sang in tune. Anyway, everybody was silent (except for the moon-landing reporter on the TV) until I stood up and heard myself say, “But Ahmet *is* an artist, Jim!”

I became so embarrassed by how uncool *I* was, I ran down the hallway and into the bathroom, where I stood looking at myself in the mirror and wondering why I didn’t get married and move to Orange County and what was I doing there.

There was a knock on the door. I opened it and Jim came in and shut the door behind him.

“You know,” he said, staring straight into my eyes, “I’ve always loved you.”

Later that night he came back and apologized to Ahmet. But it was too late; by then he was too fat to get away with it. The people who were there refused to remember that it had happened. It was one of those tricky nights when Ahmet was trying to make up his mind whether he was going to seduce Jim away from Elektra Records (whose contract was nearly up). Ahmet had lured Mick away from *his* label the year before, Ahmet bespoke elegance, Côte d’Azur loafers with no socks, Bentleys and Rolls-Royces. Ahmet knew everybody. Jac Holzman of Elektra was an awkward bumpkin compared with Ahmet. Jac was a Virgo, Ahmet the world’s most sophisticated Leo. Ahmet had Magrittes in his living room in New York, his wife was on the Ten Best Dressed list, he’d been everywhere, done everything, and spoke all these languages. Jac liked camping.

Of course, today Ahmet might deny this was going on, but at that time Ahmet never saw a rock star who made money whom he didn’t want. Especially if he could sing in tune. Jim might also have denied anything was going on, or maybe he did notice he was being seduced, maybe that’s why he was on about the capitalist pigs not winning. But then, Jim was drunk and uncool, so maybe what he said wasn’t about anything. That’s the thing with alcoholics: Their resentments are a condition of their disease and not really political at all. A condition of their allergy to alcohol—and allergies mean if you’re allergic to strawberries and eat them, you break out in hives. If Jim drank Scotch, he broke out in fuckups.

But as long as Jim was on foot in L.A.—as long as he was signed to Elektra and in a world where if he fell, it would be into the arms of emergency rooms or girls who knew and loved him—he was, if not okay, at least not dead.

There was always somebody around who would break down the door. He could never get away with killing himself in L.A.

Someone in Paris told me that when she met Jim at a party after he had moved there, he looked into her face and said, “Would you mind scratching my back? It itches.” Her arm went around him, their bodies facing as she scratched. Then Jim said, “You know what? I can’t feel a thing.” Which was really humiliating to her, since having your arm around someone who says he can’t feel it is...well, it sounds like one of Pamela’s tricks.

Jim burned his bridges in Paris. He got fatter and fatter, drank more and more, sampled Pamela’s heroin, and piled up suicide notes on a table in their rooms. Since Jim had rheumatic fever in his youth, his heart was not in condition for what he did to it there—combining insult with fuckups until finally one day Pamela came into the bathroom and Jim wasn’t kidding.

She pulled him out of the tub and there she was—stuck in Paris in early July, forced to put him into a too-small coffin wearing a too-large suit. (Since no one in those days had suits, she had to buy one for him. She didn't know his size.)

Pamela told me she fled to Morocco with an eighteen-year-old French count, a junkie who also OD'd on her and died. And then, having worn out her stay abroad, she returned to the West Coast and sued for her share of Jim's estate until she got it and then, since three years had passed and she was now the same age Jim was when he died, she, too, OD'd and died.

She left behind a VW Bug, two fur coats, and Sage, Jim's dog. A quarter of the group's estate was split between her family and his, and her father saved Jim's "poems" and put them in a safe place in Orange County. The wonderful Julia Densmore Negron, who had divorced the drummer, John, was given royalties as a settlement because, as she said, "By 1971 they were worth practically nothing. But they've gone up more than 1,500 percent in the past eleven years." Since she was only married to John during the last two years of the Doors, when their records didn't sell much anyway, sales must have really gone up, but *why?*

Because Francis Ford Coppola used the song "The End" to make Jim a star in *Apocalypse Now*, which came out in 1979. And now Vietnam's about to do it for Jim again.

If, in the '60s, you were white and political and had noblesse oblige drummed into you (Yale's big selling point), you might have gone to Vietnam as a soldier, as Oliver Stone did, so you could come home and write a book the way Kennedy did and then be elected president.

Being Kennedy was not entirely uncool, but I knew a guy who went to Yale and then officer school at Annapolis and then Guam and then a ship in the harbor at Saigon (if it has a harbor, I don't know; it was someplace with a harbor). And all he did there was drink, and when he got home and went into seclusion to write his book like Kennedy, he couldn't write it. It was one thing being a World War II hero and writing a book. In Vietnam there weren't any heroes.

In *Salvador* (one of the last Oliver Stone movies I'm ever going to see), he created two sleazeballs who can't handle women, who are so incapable of having a real life in a real place that they have to slop down to hell, where they are the richest and most powerful people around. And *still* these guys manage to make victims out of themselves. Stone's heroes always wind up as victims, no matter how sleazy they are.

It has been rumored around L.A. that Oliver Stone is asking everyone in connection with the Doors movie if Jim was impotent, and it makes you think Oliver Stone doesn't know much about Jim's main disease. You'd think he'd at least read up on the symptoms that show up in a person who takes depressants as a cure for depression. Taking Seconal and Tuinal and drinking brandy will bring your sex life to a grinding halt.

But what I want to know about Oliver Stone is not whether he can get it up or not, but why anyone in the '60s would *join* the Army, would *go* to Vietnam and become part of the war and murder and atrocity, when the action for Real Men was on Sunset Strip, the Lower East Side, and in San Francisco. Why did he join them, and why is he now in love with our Jim?

The thing is, we in Los Angeles have always been willing to give a lot of slack for looks—for beauty—but Oliver Stone doesn't have any. He doesn't even like it. His movies are always about

horrible men doing awful stuff, horrible men who are too far into their vileness to look beautiful. It's as though everything he's done is against the very premise of looks; he can't even show Daryl Hannah and understand what she's about. His idea of a good thing is a man bellowing about how being stupid is not that bad. (But it is.)

If being stupid is not that bad, then Jim's poetry would be okay, but it's not. Fortunately Jim had looks.

Maybe like Jim's other nerdy fans, Oliver Stone really believes that Jim was "serious" about breaking on through to the other side. But what does that *mean*—death, the way it sounds? It meant death to Jim personally, if what Pamela told her neighbor Diane Gardiner is to be believed, if he really died in Paris, his suicide note against a lamp, "Last Words, Last Words, Out."

By the time Jim left L.A., everyone thought he was a fool; he was fat, getting fatter, and even his fans were unwilling to look at his cock. He didn't have enough ideas in his head to keep people interested any longer. Underneath his mask, he was dead. But then, by 1971, who wasn't?

I certainly had washed ashore, without illusions. Everyone was afraid of Manson (Jim looked like him in his obit picture in the *Los Angeles Times*), acid had suffered a defeat, and cocaine was up for a long, ugly ride. Until Jim died, I had made a living doing album covers—psychedelic valentines for groups I loved, like Buffalo Springfield. I was in France in 1962 when Marilyn Monroe died, and now Jim was in France, dead, and I was nearly twenty-eight, unmarried, no future, no going forth in glory, only waking up at 3:00 A.M. with free-floating anxiety (which someone said was "the only thing floating around free anymore").

Someone said the '60s was drugs and the '70s was sex, but for me the '70s was staying home.

It was a time when I began to write for a living, and though I never wrote movies, they began seeming not that bad to me. Actors suddenly became okay (at least from afar). I began running into women who kept Jim alive—as did I—because something about him began seeming great compared with everything else that was going on. He may have been a film-school poet, but at least he wasn't disco.

People began trying to make a movie about Jim, and everyone I ran into who tried either died or wound up in AA. They wanted...John Travolta! Casting *anyone* to play Jim was just totally ridiculous to me.

My incredibly beautiful neighbor, Enid Karl, had two children by Donovan in the '60s, and their son, also Donovan, worked as an extra in the *Doors* movie (the daughter, Ione Skye, is an actress, too, but she was in a play in New York during the filming). The experience left Donovan thrilled, excited, and completely on Oliver Stone's side. (Everyone I talked to who worked on the movie—wardrobe women, actors—was on Oliver Stone's side. *Le tout* L.A.)

"In the first scene at the Whiskey, I played my father—because I asked. There were four hundred extras, but I got to sit in front and wear a caftan like my father wore. I thought I was going to end up lost in the crowd with an A.D. in front of me and not in the movie, but Oliver saw me and called out from the stage, 'Donovan! Donovan!' and suddenly they put me in the front row."

Then they gave Donovan a blond wig to wear as an extra in the Ray Manzarek wedding scene, and once he added muttonchops and a moustache he looked so much like Ray's brother that they let him sit with the wedding party.

"The extras were all too young to have been around in the '60s," young Donovan reports, "but really, it felt like everyone loved the Doors, and it was a happening. You didn't feel you were on a movie set."

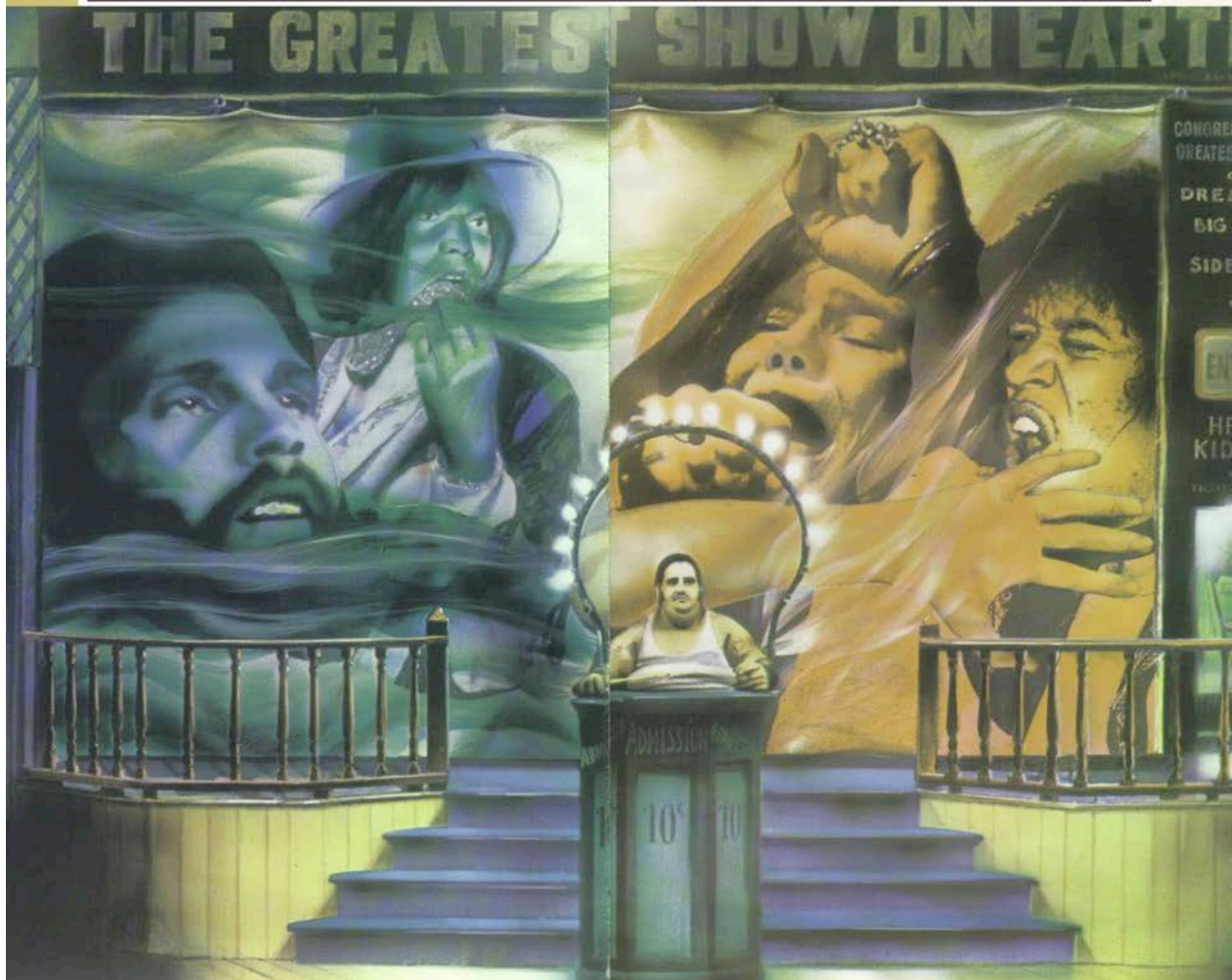
I heard that once shooting began, Val Kilmer sent around a memo demanding that no one speak to him except as Jim. And that no one was allowed to come within ten feet of him. Plus, he wore a sweat shirt with a hood so he could hide his face. Not at all like Jim, who was all things to all people, like Marilyn, but how else can a boy stay in character if he's not actually Jim? (When Dustin Hoffman arrived on the set of *Marathon Man* looking worn and exhausted because he had deliberately avoided sleep for two nights, Laurence Olivier remarked, "Dear boy, you look absolutely awful. Why don't you try *acting*? It's so much easier.")

According to everyone, Val Kilmer is supposed to have gotten Jim's looks exactly right, but what can Val Kilmer know of having been fat all of his life and suddenly one summer taking so much LSD and waking up a prince? Val Kilmer has *always* been a prince, so he can't have the glow; when you've never been a mud lark it's just not the same. And people these days, they don't know what it was to suddenly possess the power to fuck every single person you even idly fancied, they don't know the physical glamour of *that*—back when rock 'n' roll was in flower and movies were hopelessly square. And we were all so young. 1991



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The 1960s: Psychedelia & Anti-Psychedelia, Birth of Metal





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## 1. Peter Jones, "Jimi Hendrix: Mr. Phenomenon!," *Record Mirror*, 10 December 1966

NOW hear this — and kindly hear it good! Are you one of the fans who think there's nothing much new happening on the pop scene?

Right... then we want to bring your attention to a new artist, a new star-in-the-making, who we predict is going to whirl round the business like a tornado.

Name: Jimi Hendrix. Occupation: Guitarist-singer-composer-showman-dervish-original. His group, just three- strong: The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

Bill Harry and I dropped in at the Bag O'Nails' club in Kingley Street to hear the trio working out for the benefit of Press and bookers. An astonished Harry muttered: "Is that full, big, blasting, swinging sound really being created by only three people?" It was, with the aid of a mountain of amplification equipment.

Jimi was in full flight. Whirling like a demon, swirling his guitar every which-way, this 20-year-old (looking rather like James Brown) was quite amazing. Visually, he grabs eyeballs with his techniques of playing the guitar with his teeth, his elbow, rubbing it across the stage... but he also pleurably hammers the eardrums with his expert playing. An astonishing technique... specially considering he started playing only five or six years ago.

Sweatily exhausted, Jimi said afterwards: "I've only been in London three months — but Britain is really groovy. Just been working in Paris and Munich."

In the trio: drummer Mitch Mitchell, a jazz fan, and rock 'n' roll addict Noel Redding on bass. "We don't want to be classed in any category," said Jimi. "If it must have a tag, I'd like it to be called 'Free Feeling'. It's a mixture of rock, freak-out, blues and rave music."

Guiding Jimi's career here (discs have been cut; release information soon) are Chas Chandler, ex-Animal, and Mike Jeffreys. Said Chas: "I first heard Jimi play in Greenwich Village. A friend of mine, an English girl, suggested I called to see him. I was knocked out by his technique and his showmanship. He's only just started singing, though he's had a lot of experience with top American groups.

"Anyway, I suggested we got together — and he agreed. So we brought him over, auditioned to find the right musicians to follow his style — and gave the three of them a chance to find their feet on the Continent. Now we're waiting on a full work permit...

"He really does play incredibly good guitar. You can watch him seven nights on the trot and he changes individual items each time. You just can't get bored with him. It's the first time I've seen such a brilliant musician who can put on such a good visual performance. He has this unique stage appeal. And his mastery of the instrument.

"We want to stick with just two musicians working with him. Noel and Mitch can follow his every mood — if we got even one more in it could spoil the understanding. Make it slower. Now we hope to get Jimi working the R and B clubs, building up a following."

Believe us, Jimi is really something positively new. We think he'll become a sensational success.

About that thing of playing the guitar with his teeth: he says it doesn't worry him. He doesn't feel anything. "But I do have to brush my teeth three times a day!"

## 2. Christgau Consumer Guide: A Guide to 1967 (1967?), *Creem*, Mar. 1977

**THE BEACH BOYS: *Wild Honey* (Capitol)** It feels weird to call this a great record--it's so slight. But it's perfect and full of pleasure; it does what it sets out to do almost without a bad *second* (except for "Let the Wind Blow," each of the 11 tunes--total time: 23:54--ends before you wish it would). And what does it set out to do? To convey the troubled innocence of the Beach Boys through a time of attractive but perilous psychedelic *sturm und drang*. Its method is whimsy, candor, and carefully modulated amateurishness, all of which comes through as humor. Tell me, what other pop seer was inspired enough to cover a Stevie Wonder song in 1967? A+

**THE BEATLES: *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Capitol)** A dozen good songs and true. Perhaps they're too precisely performed, but I'm not going to complain. A

**BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD: *Buffalo Springfield Again* (Atco)** In terms of influence and concentrated talent, this is clearly the most important white group to come out of California in the '60s, but the '70s haunt them. Jim portends Loggins, Richie portends Poco, Stevie portends Manassas, and Neil portends both genius and portentousness--ain't hindsight grand? This is a seminal record, the original studio-hopping sessionman El Lay elpee, and except for Neil's "Broken Arrow"--which portends *Harvest*--represents some of the best singing, playing, and songwriting any of the principals ever did. But only Neil's "Mr. Soul" entirely transcends the professional care of the production. A-

**THE DOORS (Elektra)** I admit that some of the tunes retain considerable nostalgic appeal, but there's no way I can get around it--Jim Morrison sounds like an asshole. B-

**ARETHA FRANKLIN: *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You* (Atlantic)** Aretha's glory and her failing is that she never does anything perfectly, but here she comes as close as is good for her--a healthy mix of rocking soul, dreamy pop, and reflective testifying. Not all of the tracks sound inspired, but on a collection that includes the title cut, "Respect," "Dr. Feelgood," "Do Right Woman," and (whew) "Don't Let Me Lose That Dream," that doesn't really matter much, does it? A

**THE HOLLIES: *Evolution* (Epic)** Sweets for the sweet--they knew what they were doing when they closed with a ditty called "Ye Olde Toffee Shop." This is quintessential pop fluff; its ebulliently gimmicky production style complements its precise, effervescent harmonies perfectly. Graham Nash has never made more sense--the only mystery about this record is why it was good for only one hit single. A-

**JEFFERSON AIRPLANE: *Surrealistic Pillow* (RCA Victor)** I dismissed this as "amplified Peter, Paul & Mary" in the first piece of rock criticism I ever wrote; later, under the influence of "Somebody to Love," a few powerful Jorma Kaukonen riffs, my ex-folkie girlfriend, and the prevalent cultural vibes, I

recanted--in print, yet. Now I think I was closer the first time. There's good stuff here, but Spencer Dryden plays the drums as if trying out for the Riders of the Purple Sage, the sarcasm is as vapid as the optimism, and the folk-pretty melodies simply do not carry lyrics like "When I see a girl like that/It brightens up my day." B+

**THE ROLLING STONES: *Their Satanic Majesties Request* (London)** Back in '67 men were men and rock groups were rock groups: the Beatles "long-awaited" *Sgt. Pepper* appeared only nine months after *Revolver* and was followed by Christmas's *Magical Mystery Tour*, and the Stones released three albums. I don't propose to determine whether *Between the Buttons* and *Flowers* are A's or A pluses, but this one's a challenge--probably the most controversial LP they ever made, it features two communal jams of a most un-Stoneslike looseness, a (mock-?) psychedelic jacket, and a very subdued Mick Jagger. Really, Mick doesn't sing here, not expressively, he simply projects lead vocals through a filter which is one metaphorical equivalent for the sense of distance that is the album's obsession. A lot of people consider *Satanic Majesties* a, how you say it, bummer, but I'm fond of it; without a doubt it contains several great songs ("Citadel," "2000 Man," "2000 Light Years from Home," and Bill Wyman's "In Another Land"). I must admit, however, that the jams are for aficionados only. B+

**THE VELVET UNDERGROUND AND NICO (Verve)** This was hard to suss out at the time, which is probably why people are still learning from it. It sounds intermittently crude, thin, and pretentious at first, but it never stops getting better; even "Venus in Furs," Lou Reed's first recorded sadie-maisie exploitation, is held in place by the narcotic drone that identifies and unifies the LP musically. Nico's contained chantoozy sexuality works against the dispassionate abandon of Reed's chant singing for a vocal variety the band will never duplicate, although their ever-increasing mastery of electric noise and throwaway wordplay will more than make up for it. How about that--they're gonna be famous more than 15 minutes. A

**STEVIE WONDER: *I Was Made to Love Her* (Tamla)** By favoring the ecstatic rocker over Stevie's rather immature teen balladeer, this LP became a sure shot. The usual Motown filler gets in the way, and "Send Me Some Lovin'" is quite lame, but I'll take it in trade for "I Pity the Fool" and "Please, Please, Please." A-

### 3. Michael Lydon, "JIMI HENDRIX 1968," *New York Times*, March 1968

"Will he burn it tonight?" asked a neat blonde of her boyfriend, squashed in beside her on the packed floor of the Fillmore auditorium. "He did at Monterey," the boyfriend said, recalling the Pop Festival at which the guitarist, in a moment of elation, actually put a match to his guitar. The blonde and her boyfriend went on watching the stage, crammed with huge silver-fronted Fender amps, a double drum set, and whispering stage hands. Mitch Mitchell, the drummer, came on first, sat down, smiled, and adjusted his cymbals. Then came bassist Noel Redding, gold glasses glinting on his fair delicate face, and plugged into his amp.

"There he is," said the blonde, and yes, said the applause, there he was, Jimi Hendrix, a cigarette slouched in his mouth, dressed in tight black pants draped with a silver belt, and a pale rainbow shirt half hidden by a black leather vest.

"Dig this, baby," he mumbled into the mike. His left hand swung high over his frizz-bouffant hair making a shadow on the exploding sun lightshow, then down onto his guitar and the Jimi Hendrix Experience roared into 'Red House'. It was the first night of the group's second American tour. During the first tour, last summer, they were almost unknown. But this time two LP's and eight months of legend preceded them.

The crowds in San Francisco – Hendrix's three February nights there were the biggest in the Fillmore's history – were drooling for Hendrix in the flesh. They got him. This time he didn't burn his guitar ("I was feeling mild") but, with the blatantly erotic arrogance that is his trademark, he gave them what they wanted.

He played all the favorites, 'Purple Haze', 'Foxy Lady', 'Let Me Stand Next to Your Fire' and 'The Wind Cries Mary'. He played flicking his gleaming white Stratocaster between his legs and propelling it out of his groin with a nimble grind of his hips. Bending his head over the strings, he plucked them with his teeth as if eating them, occasionally pulling away to take deep breaths. Falling back and lying almost prone, he pumped the guitar neck as it stood high on his belly.

He made sound by swinging the guitar before him and just tapping the body. He played with no hands at all, letting the wah-wah pedal bend and break the noise into madly distorted melodic lines. And all at top volume, the bass and drums building a wall of black noise heard as much by pressure on the eyeballs as with the ears.

The black Elvis? He is that in England. In America James Brown is, but only for Negroes; could Hendrix become that for American whites? The title, rich in potential imagery, is a mantle waiting to be bestowed. Within his wildness, Hendrix plays on the audience's reaction to his sexual violence with an ironic and even gentle humor. The D.A.R. sensed what he is up to: they managed to block one appearance with the Monkees last summer, because he was too "erotic." But if Jimi knows about his erotic appeal, he won't admit it.

"Man, it's the music, that's what comes first," he said, taking a quick swig of Johnny Walker Black in his motel room. "People who put down our performance, they're people who can't use their eyes and ears at the same time. They've got a button on their shoulder blades that keeps only one working at a time. Look, man, we might play sometimes just standing there; sometimes we do the whole diabolical bit when we're in the studio and there's nobody to watch. It's how we feel. How we feel and getting the music out, that's all. As soon as people understand that, the better."

The Jimi Hendrix Experience, now doing a two month tour, was formed in October, 1966, just weeks after Hendrix came to London from Greenwich Village encouraged by former Animal Chas Chandler. Mitchell, 21, came from Georgie Fame's band, a top English rhythm and blues group, and 22-year-old Redding switched to bass from guitar which he had played with several small time bands. Their first job, after only a few weeks of rehearsal, was at the Paris Olympia on a bill with Johnny Hallyday.

Their first record, 'Hey Joe', got to number four on the English charts; a tour of England and steady dates at in London clubs, plus a follow-up hit with 'Purple Haze', made them the hottest name around. Men's hairdressers started featuring the "Experience style". Paul McCartney got them invited to the Monterey Pop Festival and they were a smash hit.

But Jimi Hendrix, born James Marshall Hendrix 22 years ago in Seattle, Washington, goes a lot further

back. Now hip rock's *enfant terrible*, he quit high school for the paratroopers at 16 ("Anybody could be in the army, I had to do it special, but, man, I was bored"). Musically he came up the black route, learning guitar to Muddy Waters records on his back porch, playing in Negro clubs in Nashville, begging his way onto Harlem bandstands, and touring for two years in the bands of rhythm and blues headliners: the Isley Brothers, Little Richard, and King Curtis. He even played the Fillmore once, but that was backing Ike and Tina Turner before the Haight-Ashbury scene.

"I always wanted more than that," he said. "I had these dreams that something was gonna happen, seeing the numbers 1966 in my sleep, so I was just passing time till then. I wanted my own scene, making my music, not playing the same riffs. Like once with Little Richard, me and another guy got fancy shirts 'cause we were tired of wearing the uniform. Richard called a meeting. 'I am Little Richard, I am Little Richard,' he said, 'the King, the King of Rock and Rhythm. I am the only one allowed to be pretty. Take off those shirts.' Man, it was all like that. Bad pay, lousy living, and getting burned."

Early in 1966 he finally got to Greenwich Village where, as Jimmy James, he played the Cafe Wha? with his own hastily formed group, the Blue Flames. It was his break and the bridge to today's Hendrix. He started to write songs – he has written hundreds – and play what he calls his "rock-blues-funky-freak" sound.

"Dylan really turned me on – not the words or his guitar, but as a way to get myself together. A cat like that can do it to you. Race, that was okay. In the Village, people were more friendly than in Harlem where it's all cold and mean. Your own people hurt you more. Anyway, I had always wanted a more integrated sound. Top-Forty stuff is all out of gospel, so they try to get everybody up and clapping, shouting, 'yeah, yeah.' We don't want everybody up. They should just sit there and dig it. And they must dig it, or we wouldn't be here."

A John Wayne movie played silently on the television set in the stale and disordered room, and Hendrix started alternating slugs of scotch and Courvoisier. He stopped and turned toward the window, looking out over San Francisco. "This looks like Brussels, all built on hills. Beautiful. But no city I've ever seen is as pretty as Seattle, all that water and mountains. I couldn't live there, but it was beautiful."

Besides his music, Hendrix doesn't do much. He wants to retire young and buy a lot of motels and real estate with his money. Sometimes he thinks of producing records or going to the Juilliard School of Music to learn theory and composition. In London he lives with his manager, but plans to buy a house in a mews. In his spare time he reads Isaac Asimov's science fiction. His musical favorites as he listed them are Charlie Mingus, Roland Kirk, Bach, Muddy Waters, Bukka White, Albert Collins, Albert King, and Elmore James.

"Where do you stop? There are so many, oh, man, so many more, all good. Sound, and being good, that's important. Like we're trying to find out what we really dig. We got plans for a play-type scene with people moving on stage and everything pertaining to the song and every song a story. We'll keep moving. It get's tiring doing the same thing, coming out and saying, 'Now we'll play this song,' and 'Now we'll play that one.' People take us strange ways, but I don't care how they take us. Man, we'll be moving. 'Cause man, in this life, you gotta do what you want, you gotta let your mind and fancy flow, flow, flow free."

#### **4. Ellen Willis, "Janis Joplin," in Jim Miller, ed., *The Rolling Stone Illustrated***

## ***History of Rock & Roll (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1980).***

Janis Joplin was born in 1943 and grew up in Port Arthur, Texas. She began singing in bars and coffeehouses, first locally, then in Austin, where she spent most of a year at the University of Texas. In 1966, she went to San Francisco and got together with a rock band in search of a singer, Big Brother and the Holding Company. The following summer Big Brother performed at the Monterey Pop Festival; Janis got raves from the fans and the critics and from then on she was a star. *Cheap Thrills*, Big Brother's first major album (there had been an early record on a small-time label), came out in July 1968. By then there were tensions between Janis and the group, and she left soon afterward. With her new backup band she made another album, *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!* But the band never quite jelled, and in the spring of 1970, Janis formed another, Full-Tilt Boogie. They spent most of the summer touring, then went to Los Angeles to record an album, *Pearl*. It was Janis's last. On October 4th, 1970, she died of an overdose of heroin.

The hippie rock stars of the late Sixties merged two versions of that hardy American myth, the free individual. They were stars, which meant achieving liberation by becoming rich and famous *on their own terms*; and they were, or purported to be, apostles of cultural revolution, a considerably more ambitious and romantic vision of freedom that nevertheless had a similar economic foundation. Young Americans were in a sense the stars of the world, drawing on an overblown prosperity that could afford to indulge all manner of rebellious and experimental behavior. The combination was inherently unstable—Whitman's open road is not, finally, the Hollywood Freeway, and in any case neither stardom nor prosperity could deliver what it seemed to promise. For a fragile historical moment rock transcended those contradictions; in its aftermath our pop heroes found themselves grappling, like the rest of us, with what are probably enduring changes in the white American consciousness—changes that have to do with something very like an awareness of tragedy. It is in this context that Janis Joplin developed as an artist, a celebrity, a rebel, a woman, and it is in this context that she died.

Joplin belonged to that select group of pop figures who mattered as much for themselves as for their music; among American rock performers she was second only to Bob Dylan in importance as a creator/recorder/embodiment of her generation's history and mythology. She was also the only woman to achieve that kind of stature in what was basically a male club, the only Sixties culture hero to make visible and public women's experience of the quest for individual liberation, which was very different from men's. If Janis's favorite metaphors—singing as fucking (a first principle of rock and roll) and fucking as liberation (a first principle of the cultural revolution)—were equally approved by her male peers, the congruence was only on the surface. Underneath—just barely—lurked a feminist (or prefeminist) paradox. The male-dominated counterculture defined freedom for women almost exclusively in sexual terms. As a result, women endowed the idea of sexual liberation with immense symbolic importance; it became charged with all the secret energy of an as yet suppressed larger rebellion. Yet to express one's rebellion in that limited way was a painfully literal form of submission. Whether or not Janis understood that, her dual persona—lustful hedonist and suffering victim—suggested that she felt it. Dope, another term in her metaphorical equation (getting high as singing as fucking as liberation) was, in its more sinister aspect, a pain-killer and finally a killer. Which is not to say that the good times weren't real, as far as they went. Whatever the limitations of hippie/rock star life, it was better than being a provincial matron—or a lonely weirdo.

For Janis, as for others of us who suffered the worst fate that can befall an adolescent girl in America— *unpopularity*—a crucial aspect of the cultural revolution was its assault on the rigid sexual styles of the Fifties. Joplin's metamorphosis from the ugly duckling of Port Arthur to the peacock of Haight-Ashbury meant, among other things, that a woman who was not conventionally pretty, who had acne and an intermittent weight problem and hair that stuck out, could not only invent her own beauty (just as she invented her wonderful sleazofreak costumes) out of sheer energy, soul, sweetness, arrogance, and a sense of humor, but have that beauty appreciated. Not that Janis merely took advantage of changes in our notions of attractiveness; she herself changed them. It was seeing Janis Joplin that made me resolve, once and for all, not to get my hair straightened. And there was a direct line from that sort of response to those apocryphal burned bras and all that followed.

Direct, but not simple. Janis once crowed, "They're paying me \$50,000 a year to be like me." But the truth was that they were paying her to be a personality, and the relation of public personality to private self—something every popular artist has to work out—is especially problematic for a woman. Men are used to playing roles and projecting images in order to compete and succeed. Male celebrities tend to identify with their mask-making, to see it as creative and—more or less—to control it. In contrast, women need images simply to survive. A woman is usually aware, on some level, that men do not allow her to be her "real self," and worse, that the acceptable masks represent men's fantasies, not her own. She can choose the most interesting image available, present it dramatically, individualize it with small elaborations, undercut it with irony. But ultimately she must serve some male fantasy to be loved—and then it will be only the fantasy that is loved anyway. The female celebrity is confronted with this dilemma in its starkest form. Joplin's revolt against conventional femininity was brave and imaginative, but it also dovetailed with a stereotype—the ballsy, one-of-the-guys chick who is a needy, vulnerable cream puff underneath—cherished by her legions of hip male fans. It may be that she could have pushed beyond it and taken the audience with her; that was one of the possibilities that made her death an artistic as well as human calamity. There is, for instance, the question of her bisexuality. People who knew Janis differ on whether sexual relationships with women were an important part of her life, and I don't know the facts. In any case, a public acknowledgment of bisexual proclivities would not necessarily have contradicted her image; it could easily have been passed off as more pull-out-the-stops hedonism or another manifestation of her all-encompassing need for love. On the other hand, she could have used it to say something new about women and liberation. What makes me wonder is something I always noticed and liked about Janis: unlike most female performers whose act is intensely erotic, she never made me feel as if I were crashing an orgy that consisted of her and the men in the audience.

When she got it on at a concert, she got it on with everybody.

Still, the songs she sang assumed heterosexual romance; it was men who made her hurt, who took another little piece of her heart. Watching men groove on Janis, I began to appreciate the resentment many black people feel toward whites who are blues freaks. Janis sang out of her pain as a woman, and men dug it. Yet it was men who caused the pain, and if they stopped causing it they would not have her to dig. In a way, their adulation was the cruelest insult of all. And Janis's response—to sing harder, get higher, be worshiped more—was rebellious, acquiescent, bewildered all at once. When she said, "Onstage I make love to 25,000 people, then I go home alone," she was not merely repeating the cliché of the sad clown or the poor little rich girl. She was noting that the more she gave the less she got, and that honey, it ain't fair.

Like most women singers, Joplin did not write many songs; she mostly interpreted other people's.



But she made them her own in a way few singers dare to do. She did not sing them so much as struggle with them, assault them. Some critics complained, not always unfairly, that she strangled them to death, but at her best she whipped them to new life. She had an analogous adversary relationship with the musical form that dominated her imagination—the blues. Blues represented another external structure, one with its own contradictory tradition of sexual affirmation and sexist conservatism. But Janis used blues conventions to reject blues sensibility. To sing the blues is a way of transcending pain by confronting it with dignity, but Janis wanted nothing less than to scream it out of existence. Big Mama Thornton's classic rendition of "Ball and Chain" carefully balances defiance and resignation, toughness and vulnerability. She almost pities her oppressor. Her singing conveys, above all, her determination to survive abuse. Janis makes the song into one long frenzied, despairing protest. Why, why, *why*, she asks over and over, like a child unable to comprehend injustice. The pain is overwhelming her. There are similar differences between her recording of "Piece of My Heart" and Erma Franklin's. When Franklin sings it, it is a challenge: no matter what you do to me, I will not let you destroy my ability to be human, to love. Joplin seems rather to be saying, surely if I keep taking this, if I keep setting an example of love and forgiveness, surely he has to understand, change, give me back what I have given. Her pursuit of pleasure had the same driven quality; what it amounted to was refusal to admit of any limits that would not finally yield to the virtue of persistence—try just a little bit harder—and the magic of extremes. This war against limits was largely responsible for the electrifying power of Joplin's early performances; it was what made Cheap Thrills a classic, in spite of unevenness and the impossibility of duplicating on a record the excitement of her concerts. After the split with Big Brother, Janis retrenched considerably, perhaps because she simply couldn't maintain that level of intensity, perhaps for other reasons that would have become clear if she had lived. My uncertainty on this point makes me hesitate to be too dogmatic about my conviction that leaving Big Brother was a mistake.

I was a Big Brother fan. I thought they were better musicians than their detractors claimed, but more to the point, technical accomplishment, in itself, was not something I cared about. I thought it was an ominous sign that so many people did care—including Janis. It was, in fact, a sign that the tenuous alliance between mass culture and bohemianism—or, in my original formulation, the fantasy of stardom and the fantasy of cultural revolution—was breaking down. But the breakdown was not as neat as it might appear. For the elitist concept of "good musicianship" was as alien to the holistic, egalitarian spirit of rock and roll as the act of leaving one's group the better to pursue one's individual ambition was alien to the holistic, egalitarian pretensions of the cultural revolutionaries. If Joplin's decision to go it alone was influenced by all the obvious professional/commercial pressures, it also reflected a conflict of values within the counterculture itself—a conflict that foreshadowed its imminent disintegration. And again, Janis's femaleness complicated the issues, raised the stakes. She had less room to maneuver than a man in her position, fewer alternatives to fall back on if she blew it. If she had to choose between fantasies, it made sense for her to go with stardom as far as it would take her.

But I wonder if she really had to choose, if her choice was not in some sense a failure of nerve and therefore of greatness. Janis was afraid Big Brother would hold her back, but if she had thought it was important enough, she might have been able to carry them along, make them transcend their limitations. There is more than a semantic difference between a group and a backup band. Janis had to relate to the members of Big Brother as spiritual (not to mention financial) equals even though she had more talent than they, and I can't help suspecting that that was good for her not only emotionally and socially but aesthetically. Committed to the hippie ethic of music-for-the-hell-of-it—if only because there was no possibility of their becoming stars on their own—Big Brother

helped Janis sustain the amateur quality that was an integral part of her effect. Their zaniness was a salutary reminder that good times meant silly fun—remember “Caterpillar”?—as well as Dionysiac abandon; it was a relief from Janis’s extremism and at the same time a foil for it. At their best moments Big Brother made me think of the Beatles, who weren’t (at least in the beginning) such terrific musicians either. Though I’m not quite softheaded enough to imagine that by keeping her group intact Janis Joplin could somehow have prevented or delayed the end of an era, or even saved her own life, it would have been an impressive act of faith. And acts of faith by public figures always have reverberations, one way or another.

Such speculation is of course complicated by the fact that Janis died before she really had a chance to define her post-San Francisco, post-Big Brother self. Her last two albums, like her performances with the ill-fated Kozmic Blues band, had a tentative, transitional feel. She was obviously going through important changes; the best evidence of that was “Me and Bobby McGee,” which could be considered her “Dear Landlord.” Both formally—as a low-keyed, soft, folkie tune—and substantively—as a lyric that spoke of choices made, regretted and survived, with the distinct implication that compromise could be a positive act—what it expressed would have been heresy to the Janis Joplin of *Cheap Thrills*. “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose” is as good an epitaph for the counterculture as any; we’ll never know how—or if—Janis meant to go on from there.

Janis Joplin’s death, like that of a fighter in the ring, was not exactly an accident. Yet it’s too easy to label it either suicide or murder, though it involved elements of both. Call it rather an inherent risk of the game she was playing, a game whose often frivolous rules both hid and revealed a deadly serious struggle. The form that struggle took was incomplete, shortsighted, egotistical, self-destructive. But survivors who give in to the temptation to feel superior to all that are in the end no better than those who romanticize it. Janis was not so much a victim as a casualty. The difference matters. 1980

## **5. Lillian Roxon, “Jefferson Airplane,” in *Lillian Roxon’s Rock Encyclopedia* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1969).**

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE / *Jorma Kaukonen (lead guitar), Jack Casady (bass), Spencer Dryden (replaced Skip Spence) (drums), Paul Kantner (rhythm guitar), Marty Balin (vocals), Grace Slick (replaced Signe Andersen) (bass & rhythm guitar, vocals).*

Jefferson Airplane was the first of the big San Francisco bands to make it, the first to snap up a big contract, the first to get big national promotion, the first with a big national hit (“Somebody to Love” in 1967). The implications of that are enormous. Until then, in spite of the minor eccentricities of the Byrds and the Lovin’ Spoonful, the national rock scene was reasonably sedate. A Beatles cut here, a touch of Carnaby Street there, but little that was really freaky. The arrival of the Jefferson Airplane changed all that forever. Even the New York hippies had to do some serious readjusting when the Airplane first arrived (their first piece of promotion was the first of the psychedelic hippie-nouveau San Francisco style posters most New Yorkers had never seen). This was early 1967, when San Francisco and Haight-Ashbury and Flower Power were in full bloom, and the Airplane breezed into New York to plant those first seeds of love power in the East. Initially, the nation as a whole was a little suspicious, a little afraid of being taken in by a San Francisco hype. But you only had to hear Grace Slick and Marty Balin sing and Casady on bass and those incredible

songs that told you, between the lines, swirling tales of chemical journeys and wondrous discoveries—and you knew it was real. After all those years of Frankie Avalon and Pat Boone, it was startling to hear Gracie singing about acid and drugs and pills on your friendly neighborhood station.

The commercial (as well as the artistic) success of the Airplane was immediate and enormous. Record companies rushed to sign up every other San Francisco band (after having completely ignored them). None ever equaled the Airplane in draw power, though Big Brother and the Holding Company, thanks only to Janis Joplin, was to get a number one album. In any case, we now had on a national level what San Francisco had had all along since the golden days of the fall of 1965—the San Francisco sound. Apart from the goodtimey noises of the Spoonful and the Mamas and Papas, the San Francisco sound was the first original sound the United States had since the English invasion of 1964. (And the English loved it too.) It was a time of be-ins and bells and flowers and incense, and the oriental undertones of the San Francisco sound were the right background music for it all. There were bands that played good music and bands that were a total environment happening. The Jefferson Airplane hit you from all sides. They had Grace Slick, the first girl singer with a big band (she had, however, replaced another girl singer).

Grace was an ex-model, a great beauty with a piercing voice. And though she tended to dominate, the band also had Marty Balin, one of the great singers of love songs in modern rock. They sang around each other and around the music like dancers.

The Airplane has a very wide musical range. In the beginning, when they were playing for dances at the Fillmore in San Francisco—where, if the participants weren't exactly zonked out of their minds, they at least wanted to feel that way—anything went. They could freak out all over the stage; they could get into jazz improvisations, into folk, into blues, into anything. There was no form in the usual rigid sense. There was no “audience” sitting rigidly with rigid expectations. Everything was flowing and free form, with just one important discipline, the usual one: give the customers what they came for. In this case, the customers came to be made one with the music. So there would be long instrumental passages, when everyone wanted to move and dance, and then the voices confirming for them what they knew already. “Triad” is about three people who all love one another, or at least, that's the only way out for them. “White Rabbit” reminds you that *Alice in Wonderland* was probably about drugs. In “Ulysses” you realize that James Joyce was ahead of his time and belongs to the age of McLuhan after all. And so on.

Away from the hot, heavy, sensual atmosphere of the San Francisco Fillmore (and do they ever miss it), the Jefferson Airplane has to come on like any other band. In a recording studio it was hard for them, since so much of their act was dependent upon their contact with their fans. And even in a concert hall without the feedback of that glazed, stoned Fillmore audience, without patterns and images swirling around them, it's very hard. Whenever possible they take Glenn McKay's Headlights with them, a light show that produces visually what the Airplane does with music. (Or is it the other way around?) But when they play, something does happen, even if it's not always their best. And Donovan sings “Fly Jefferson Airplane,” not just because the band has the right name but because it is one of those bands you fly with. That's the whole thing about acid rock. Having experienced, as most San Francisco bands did (as most young San Francisco people did), the sometimes frightening, sometimes ecstatic but always overwhelming effects of lysergic acid diethylamide, the Airplane could not conceive of music in any other way. The group grew with San Francisco, with Timothy Leary's drug revolution, with everything that followed.

In 1965 Grace was with another group, the Great Society, which often appeared on the same bill as

the Airplane. When the Airplane's girl singer left and the Great Society split, Grace moved in with the Airplane, taking a lot of her songs with her. (Grace says it was the Airplane that inspired her and her husband and brother-in-law to start their own group.) Since then a lot has happened. The magic went out of San Francisco. The San Francisco sound was imitated, cheapened and weakened, so that by 1968 it was stale. And the Airplane became America's top group anyway. This should have meant the kiss of death for the group—the usual death from overwork, overpromotion and too much money—and it's true that the hard core is unhappy about the Airplane's playing class gigs like the Whitney Museum and the Waldorf on New Year's Eve. Nevertheless, that mixture of jazz, folk, blues and surrealistic electronic tinkering works, and even when they're not performing well they never sound uptight. Years, or maybe centuries from now, someone will discover that there really was a music of the spheres, and it will sound not unlike the music the Airplane plays in the moments of its highest flight.

1969

## 6. Robert Christgau, "Anatomy of a Love Festival," *Esquire*, Jan. 1968

"This is the love crowd, right?" One A.M. Sunday, the apogee of the Monterey International Pop Festival, and Otis Redding surveyed his audience. They were free and white, but were they twenty-one? In any case, they were cheering again.

"We all love each other, right?"

There was a roar of assent. Redding grinned. He had them right *there*. "Am I right?"

"Yeah!" the crowd yelled.

"Let me hear you say

'Yeah,' then!" "Yeah!"

"All right," Redding said. Then, on some unheard but nevertheless precise beat, Redding began to . . . well, emote, part-singing, part-talking, part-moaning: "I've been [Steve Cropper lightly on guitar] loving you [pause] too long [lone shout from press section] to stop now," and the Mar-Keys started to blow, and the arena was in an uproar again. Superspade was flying high.

Redding had come to Monterey with misgivings. The summer before, he had played San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium to appreciative but restrained applause. Redding, a veteran entertainer who is a demigod on the soul circuit, is used to better than that, and anyway, the festival was only paying expenses. But finally, between the honor, charity, and an untapped market, he came, the only mainstream black performer to do so, and his success was exemplary. Of demigods, at least, this audience demanded nothing—no build, no work, no *show*. All Otis had to do was trot his big self onto the stage and rock into his rather medium-sized hit, "Shake," and he had it made, wham bam thank-you-ma'am. The rest of his act—the dancing, the chuckling, the running around, the whole image of masculine ease on which his career is founded—was icing. They were just cheering *him*. The L.A. record exec in the velour turtleneck was up on his feet again, shouting "Heavy! Heavy!" Brian Jones felt the beginnings of tears in his eyes. The cheap seats were standing. The love crowd was screaming its head off.

When Redding said "love crowd," he of course meant "hippies," but there are no hippies—they have disappeared in an avalanche of copy. Most of the originals who were living in the Haight in 1966, when the journalists started nosing around, have fled from the bus tour and the LSD-Burgers and the panhandling

flower children who will be back in school next semester. Those who remain do not conform to the stereotype any more than those who have left. They seem to have their share of ego, though on a more sophisticated level than, say, the average Reagan supporter, and they think a lot about "the movement." There really is a movement, administered by the media and inspired in a fairly direct way by those hard-core bohemian remnants who are still talking. "The love crowd" is as good a name for it as any.

The love crowd is America's affair with bohemia. Like the hippies, those shadow folk who will necessarily partake in what follows, the love crowd flourishes wherever the living is easy, and almost by definition, it is white. In California—affluent, suburban, temperate, and home of the fabled Haight—it dominates the adolescent imagination, but it is by no means confined to the lost kids who have migrated to the center for a season and their more conservative counterparts back home. The love crowd is everyone who is turned on by the hippies, in person or through the media, not only real dropouts but also a lot of youngish liberals. It is college instructors who wear their hair kind of long and lawyers whose wives like to show off their four years of dance in the flicker of a strobe and all the people who read the Los Angeles *Free Press* or the Berkeley *Barb*. It's everyone who smokes pot, and in California that's a lot of everyone.

Pot is one of the two adhesives that bind the truly disaffiliated to the teenyboppers with ironed hair and the aging-at-twenty-seven rebels. The other is music. The new pop is an avocational fascination of them all, from the graduate Beatlemania to the mourners of John Hurt and John Coltrane. And so the Monterey International Pop Festival became the first powwow of the love crowd, the perfect pastorate, chocked with music and warm-hearted people. Its success was so unprecedented that it took everyone a little by surprise. You see, at the beginning nobody was really sure the love crowd was out there.

And by next summer it may have disappeared forever.

Appropriately enough, Monterey began with a man on the far fringes of the love crowd: Ben Shapiro, an enterprising young man about Hollywood who wishes there were a nicer word for packager. Last March, Shapiro and a well-heeled young scene-maker named Alan Pariser decided it would be nice to run a "music mart" for the serious creators and uncommitted experimenters in "mainstream" music. Because record manufacturers would back the event only in return for artistic control, Shapiro raised fifty thousand dollars seed money on his own. He started a profit corporation, obtained the state-owned Monterey Fairgrounds for June 16-18, and signed Ravi Shankar, who happened to be an old client. Shapiro and Pariser enlisted Derek Taylor, Los Angeles's hippest publicist, to help put the show together. Then Simon & Garfunkel hit town, it was time to firm things up, and representatives went to talk to John and Michelle Phillips, of the Mamas & the Papas. ...

Phillips is a quasi-bohemian in a position any bohemian would envy: He can screw the "establishment" and get away with it. There is so much money in rock that its big names have almost unlimited power, like the top movie stars, but people in rock are not much like movie stars. They are more like, you guessed it, hippies: fond of money, perhaps, but not enslaved by it; more loyal to their generation than to their business; careless of publicity; and libertarian about everything. The Shapiro-Pariser scheme was just hip show business. When Phillips and Paul Simon suggested a nonprofit festival run and financed by artists, and Taylor backed them, the others had to agree. A board of governors, including many top names—Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger, Brian Wilson—was formed, but it was obvious that the major movers would be Phillips and his producer, Lou Adler. Soon, Shapiro quit in a clash with Adler, who is not noted for his humility. Shapiro suspected him, reasonably enough, of lust for contacts and prestige. He also claimed that Adler wanted to transform the festival from a "significant musical event" into a conglomeration of top-forty acts.

That may have been what Adler wanted—indeed, there is a sense in which a pop festival should be just that—but it wasn't what happened. Instead, the bias of the festival turned out to be Californian and avant-garde. Teeny acts were not invited, and many groups from England and the East were either excluded or felt that way—the Young Rascals, for instance, were later heard complaining about "a clique among music people." An even more serious limitation was the paucity of black acts. Rock is basically Afro-American music; until the Beatles changed the world, 80 percent of the good stuff was black. But Redding was the only soul singer at Monterey. Lou Rawls and Dionne Warwick, the two nightclubbiest singers in soul, both signed, but Warwick was later forced out by the hotel she was working in San Francisco. The Impressions agreed to come but didn't show. Chuck Berry refused, as always, to perform free. Smokey Robinson, of Motown Records, was on the board, but no Detroit artists appeared, Robinson's Miracles included. The rumor spread that this was "whitey's festival."

In a way, it was. The house band, made up of top studio musicians, was integrated, and so were ten of the thirty acts, a significant trend. But every attraction at Monterey appealed to the hip white audience—even Redding is without question the love crowd's favorite soul singer, far ahead of James Brown or Wilson Pickett. The festival was dominated by serious white rock music. Until recently, this music has been based in Los Angeles, where most of this country's good studio work is done. Now the excitement has moved to San Francisco, where there are hundreds of experimental bands, all geared to live performance. White rock performers seem uncomfortable with contemporary black music. Most of them like the best of it or think they do, but they don't want to imitate it, especially since they know how pallid their imitation is likely to be. So they hone their lyrics and develop their instrumental chops and experiment with their equipment and come to regard artists like Martha & the Vandellas, say, as some wondrous breed of porpoise, very talented, but somehow . . . different.

And their audience concurs. This attitude is anything but condescending (sometimes it is almost reverent), but the black performer, who prefers his music to any other, is understandably disinclined to regard himself as a cultural oddity.

In any case the talent lineup was designed for the love crowd. Excitement began to grow, among the surfers on the Southland beaches and the lumpenhippies in the Haight and students and groupies and potheads everywhere. . . .

When Monterey Police Chief Frank Marinello, who was already unhappy about the festival, read that his city was going to be invaded by every penniless young nonconformist in California, he became much more unhappy. And Mayor Minnie Coyle nearly hit the roof. An amiable grandmother in her second term, she was particularly disturbed by his talk of Diggers in the papers. "If there are young people hungry, feed them," she said, like the good liberal she is. "But don't advertise free food for everyone who wants it. That encourages youngsters to leave home."

So on May 15 the festival flew to Monterey for lunch. Phillips—tall, balding, faintly Edwardian in his sparse beard—was very suave. Everyone received a copy of the Articles of Incorporation: ". . . charitable, literary and educational in nature and is particularly to initiate, sponsor, promote and carry out plans and cultural and artistic activities which will tend to further . . . ." That didn't sound like any hippie get-together. Papa John assured the burghers that festival profits would "not go to a hippie organization" and insisted that "the show is designed for those in the nineteen-to-thirty-five age group. We haven't invited the sort of groups that inspire acting up on the part of the audience. If that happens, we'll pull them off the stage." In any case the town had no choice. Phillips agreed to advertise that no grounds admissions would be sold; the town agreed to find accommodations for the inevitable unbelievers who would show up anyway.

But if the burghers were fairly happy, the antiburghers (read: San Franciscans) were not. The Diggers were bristling over Taylor's misuse of their good name. Several of the underground groups were beginning to feel used. They wondered where all the money—including a \$400,000 film contract with A.B.C.—was going to end up. ...

The San Franciscans had the cards—the Angelenos needed them badly. "Be happy, be free; wear flowers, bring bells," the brochure read. In other words, act like hippies, mingle with hippies, and hear hippie music. With a few exceptions, the artists from Los Angeles didn't fit the description—they were established hit-makers. Some of the San Francisco groups had never even recorded, which strangely enough was a kind of inducement. The whole setup was an implied bow to the "rock underground," which apparently existed only up north. In L.A., if you don't make it, you're just a flop.

But San Francisco did not appreciate the compliment. Dan Rifkin envisioned an enormous, secluded campground at Fort Ord—so the M.P.'s could protect everyone from the Highway Patrol—where all the real groups would hold an antifestival, and began to implement his plot. Meanwhile, Chief Marinello alerted six hundred National Guardsmen in training at Fort Ord to be prepared for trouble at the Fairgrounds. The staff in L.A., mostly volunteers, was working frantically. Hell's Angels and soldiers were reported excluded. Radio stations featured interviews with festival staff and performers, then advised listeners not to attend without tickets and accommodations. The Berkeley *Barb* swallowed the same shuck. The Beach Boys dropped out. The Byrds, who hadn't given a decent concert in a year, were practicing like mad, and many lesser acts seemed jumpy. The festival office in L.A. was even jumpier. Nobody knew whether it would come off, and just about everybody was worried.

It came off.

Crews began to set up amplification equipment and prepare the stage at the beginning of the week. On Thursday about twenty-five love people arrived, mostly by thumb, to work on the Fairgrounds in return for food, shelter, and admission to the arena. Other workers were recruited from Monterey Peninsula College, about a mile from the Fairgrounds. The college had also agreed to provide a camping area on its football field.

Next day the love crowd attacked in force. Traffic was jammed from midafternoon, not only with long-haired kids but with short-haired gawkers. Roads both north and south were full of hitchhikers, and getting a ride was never easier. The brochure had gently suggested that blankets might be useful, and most of those from up north took the advice, but sun people never seem to understand about cold weather in June—one gang of kids on the beach in Santa Monica decided to drive up at the last minute in nothing but shirts and swimsuits and were not seen after Saturday. A small group of Hell's Angels roared in late Friday, and soldiers attended all concerts. Those invaders who weren't in costume—cowboys and Indians was the favorite masquerade—wore spectacularly new or spectacularly old clothing, usually the latter. Bells, tambourines, beards, painted and decaled faces, bare feet and bare thighs, were all in evidence. So was the smell of incense, and of course there were flowers. Longhairs outnumbered shorthairs, despite twelve hundred press people

(Taylor accredited nearly everyone with a hustle), a lot of recording and radio professionals, and several thousand locals. (None of these groups bolstered the shorthair ranks as decisively as might have been expected.) Many of the celebrants looked under nineteen, and not many were over thirty. The few families were very new ones.

As the crowd grew—there were at least thirty thousand by Friday, and estimates for the weekend ranged up to ninety thousand, with fifty thousand a conservative figure—the police became more and more nervous. In addition to his own men, Marinello had called in a hundred extras from surrounding towns. He dismissed suggestions that they exchange their guns for flowers, but by dusk there were quite a few beflowered cops. What can you do when a barefoot girl smiles and offers you a daisy? The rule of love was beginning to take hold.

The rule of love did not begin as a rule, although it has certainly become one, with many would-be hippies murdering their own impulses to keep the law. It began as a feeling—a feeling that it was possible to live freely without hassling everyone. A capacity for generous self-effacement is one of the many things about the hippies that turn the love crowd on.

... they went on their best behavior, just to prove love could work, and they succeeded. All those who had come neutral or slightly apprehensive caught the mood, and the largest crowd in the history of the Monterey Peninsula became the best-behaved. ... Of course, the police could have risked the fury of the love crowd and made marijuana arrests, but they didn't. Nor did they seize any of the thousands of acid tabs that were distributed free all weekend. There are even stories of policemen walking away from obvious turn-on sessions; in one the cop goes so far as to empty a vial into the bushes, shake his finger at the offender, and intone: "Be cool." Once the love crowd felt the vibrations, it abandoned paranoia. Love worked. But the grass helped, too.

The major turn-on, though, was the music—twenty-two hours of it. There is a lot of talk about the new rock audience—critical, unhysterical, intelligent. The festival was predicated on such talk. But the issue is more complicated. The love crowd is an intelligent and mature audience, but it demands to be turned on—that is, its attitude toward intelligence and maturity is stubbornly emotional and childlike. ...

The love crowd also reacted very readily to preconceived symbols—the spade, the supergroup, the guru—but of course not exclusively. The biggest exception performed Saturday afternoon: Janis Joplin, of Big Brother & the Holding Co. Janis is a good old girl from Port Arthur, Texas, who may be the best rock singer since Ray Charles, with a voice two-thirds Willie Mae Thornton and one-third Kitty Wells, and a fantastic stage presence. Her left nipple erect under her knit pantsuit, looking hard enough to put out your eye, she rocked and stomped and threatened any moment to break the microphone, or swallow it. She got a reaction based solely on her sweet tough self. ...

The next afternoon something similar happened with Ravi Shankar, who complimented his audience on their choice of incense, threw back their orchids, and geared his invention to what he knew would delight them. Such delight is the good kind of autohype, the obverse of showmanship, and only a very warm crowd can generate it. Of course, when someone who looked like Paul McCartney walked down the aisle toward the end of the concert, the whole house craned for a peek. A superstar tops a guru, anytime.

A mood of sanguine goofiness dominated the whole weekend. Everything was beautiful. Those who had money spent it on food and trinkets; corn on the cob and a metallic pinwheel were big sellers. But the Los Angeles Diggers were there with free fruit, so those without money didn't go very hungry. Sleep was the same. Motel beds were full, and floors were often occupied. One local designated his field a "Sleep-In" and charged a buck to park the night. The lazy just rolled out their gear at the Fairgrounds. But the hip core of kids hiked over to the designated sleeping area at Monterey Peninsula College, where Dan Rifkin had set up his antifestival. ....

Even before the last concert began, on Sunday, there was a sense of something ending. A few had already left, and many who had hitched coming were setting up transportation home. One of the ushers wore a sign



that said "Oregon" along with his "Seat Power We Love You" hat-band. (He got his ride.) Starting time was seven-thirty, and as usual, it was accurate.

The Blues Project did a short set. Janis Joplin and Big Brother came back for a reprise. The Group with No Name bored everyone into thinking them up: the Lead Balloon, Grundy's Kite Tree, the Bummer, Lou Adler's Lonely Hearts Club Band. David Crosby, of the Byrds, sat in with the Buffalo Springfield, the only such admixture of the festival. Then the Who came on.

Although it has never fired in the States, the Who is one of the finest groups in England, famous for a stage technique invented by leader Peter Townshend and eventually adapted by Michelangelo Antonioni for *Blow-Up* (with the Yardbirds—because, Townshend claims, his group was too difficult to manipulate). For over a year of steady performance in Europe, Townshend ended every show by smashing his guitar into the amplifier while Keith Moon attacked his drums and Roger Daltrey hit things with the mike. Welcoming applause was rather light, but as always the group put on a good show. Moon is a spectacular drummer to watch, with a trick of bouncing one stick ten feet off the snare, then catching it on the beat. Townshend flailed his guitar as if he were sending semaphore signals. And Daltrey, wearing a fringed shawl that looked about fifty years old, did the group's best songs. But although they performed in a class just below the top of the festival, the audience wasn't with them.

Then they did "My Generation." The song is raucous, hard-driving, hostile, and it really caught the crowd. Somewhere among the refrains the destruction started. The rumor is that the Who is bored with the whole routine, but they were obviously up for this audience. As bassist John Entwistle kept the beat, Daltrey crashed his mike against the cymbals, and Townshend thrashed the amplifiers. A smoke bomb exploded. The audience was in pandemonium, and the stage crew, which had been magnificent all weekend, was worse. One hero tried to save a mike and nearly lost his head to Townshend's guitar. Lou Adler, frantic and furious, protected one bank of amplifiers. The love crowd was on its feet, screaming and cheering. Backstage, Jimi Hendrix was heard to wonder how he was going to top that.

But the task of following the Who fell to the Grateful Dead. Originally scheduled for Friday, seen lurking in the wings until Buddy Miles broke things up Saturday afternoon, the Dead finally made their appearance in a sunburst of San Francisco warm. "You know what foldin' chairs are for, don't you?" asked Bob Weir, his dirty-blond hair hanging down past his shoulder blades and over his face. "They're for foldin' up and dancin' on." As the group drifted into "Viola Lee Blues," the hangers-on in the wings started to dance, slowly gravitating toward the center of the stage, and some of the audience got up as well. But Adler's compulsive streak was really beginning to show, and before too long he helped the stagehands hustle the dancers off. The ushers did the same in the aisles. There was no real resistance, but the dancers were annoyed, and the Dead looked as if they might leave the stage themselves. Then Peter Tork appeared.

Tork, the neurotic Monkee, had surprised everyone by emceeding part of Friday night and drawing a good many teeny shrieks. The surprise was not only the presence of Monkee fans amid the love crowd; it was also because Tork himself had written a little apology in the program, explaining that the group couldn't appear due to prior commitments. Yet both he and Mickey Dolenz were around all weekend, doing their best to be likable. The Monkees want to be liked. Ever since their first album appeared with someone else playing the instruments, rock professionals have snickered at everything about them except their money.

Tork's mission was to quash a small riot. All weekend there had been Beatle rumors: Their equipment was backstage; they were holed up in a motel; they were mingling incognito ("disguised as hippies," added Derek Taylor). *Sgt. Pepper* played in all the concession tents. The Beatles are kings of the love crowd, and everyone wanted desperately to catch a glimpse of them. Now some kids were trying to get in backstage and hunt. Who better than a second-hand Beatle to stop them?

"People," Tork said, "this is me again. I hate to cut things down like this, but, uh, there's a crowd of kids, and this is to whom I'm talking mostly, to whom, are you ready for that?—and, um, these kids are like crowding around over the walls and trying to break down doors and everything, thinking the Beatles are here. . . ."

Phil Lesh could no longer resist. Lesh, the Dead's bassist, is twenty-nine, classically trained, a Bay Area native, and there, right there, stood Los Angeles, this square, manufactured teen idol, the mouthpiece of safe and sane Adlerism, everything Lesh couldn't stand.

"This is the last concert; why not let them in anyway?"

". . . and, um, last concert, all right, except that they're trying to break things down, crawling over ceilings and walls, and like, they think the Beatles are here and they're not, you, those of you, they can come in if they want."

"The Beatles aren't here, come in anyway," Lesh said.

There were cheers. Tork laughed nervously and mumbled, "Uh, yeah, there's great things happening anyway." "If the Beatles were here they'd probably want you to come."

"Yeah, except that, uh, just don't, you know, bring down ceilings and walls and everything, and, uh, carry on."

The cheering was for Lesh, and Tork knew it. As he limped off, crowds of non-ticket-holders pressed through rear gates and filled the empty field behind the stadium. The "Seat Power We Love You" college kids did not try to stop them, and the Dead did the carrying on, much enlivened. By the end of the set Weir and Jerry Garcia were riffing back and forth in the best guitar-playing of the festival.

But their performance was quickly obscured by that of the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Hendrix is a black man from Seattle who was brought from Greenwich Village to England by ex-Animal Chas Chandler. A smart move—England, like all of Europe, thirsts for the Real Thing, as performers from Howlin' Wolf to Muhammad Ali have discovered. Hendrix, joined by two good English sidemen, came to Monterey recommended by the likes of Paul McCartney. He was terrible.

Hendrix is a psychedelic Uncle Tom. Don't believe me; believe Sam Silver of the East Village *Other*: "Jimi did a beautiful Spade routine." Hendrix earned that capital S. Dressed in English fop mod, with a ruffled orange shirt and red pants that outlined his semierrection to the thirteenth row, Jimi really, as Silver phrased it, "Socked it to them." Grunting and groaning, on the brink of sham orgasm, he made his way through five or six almost indistinguishable songs, occasionally flicking an anteater tongue at the great crotch in the sky. He also played what everyone seems to call "heavy" guitar; in this case that means he was loud. He was loud with his teeth and behind his back and between his legs, and just in case anyone still remembered the Who, Hendrix had a capper. With his back to the audience, Hendrix humped the amplifier and jacked the guitar around his midsection, then turned and sat astride his instrument so that its neck extended like a third leg. For a few tender moments he caressed the strings. Then, in a sacrifice that couldn't have satisfied him more than it did me, he squirted it with lighter fluid from a can held near his crotch and set the cursed thing afire. The audience scrambled for the chunks he tossed into the front rows. He had tailored a caricature to their mythic standards and didn't overdo it a shade. The destructiveness of the Who is

consistent theater, deriving directly from the group's defiant, lower-class stance. I suppose Hendrix's act can be understood as a consistently vulgar parody of rock theatrics, but I don't feel I have to like it. Anyway, he can't sing.

The Mamas & the Papas, who can, provided the anticlimax, a feathery landing back into the land of music, love, and flowers. Outfitted in royal robes, with Mama Cass fatter than ever in a shift and Phillips beaming like the great white father of his tribe, they bestowed their somewhat patronizing blessing on all of us. "Hasn't this been something?" Cass began. "Something we can be proud of. Everybody. We're gonna have this every year, you know. You can all stay if you want. I think I might." ...

Mama Cass was right—yea verily, the festival was something for everyone to be proud of, even to the least teenybopper. The press was ecstatic, with the trades and the underground and the teen magazines and the big-city dailies concurring with *Newsweek*: "They landed at Monterey last week and built a city of sound, a hippie heaven of soul and rock blues and funk." But no one stopped to wonder how soul and rock and blues and funk meshed with the "peace and acceptance" (*Newsweek* again) of Monterey. The new rock has no more peace and acceptance about it than the old. To the adolescent defiance of the fifties has been added not only whimsy and occasional loveliness but also social consciousness and the ironic grit of the blues. The big beat has been augmented by dissonance, total volume, and a science-fiction panoply of electronic effects.

But the paradox is on the surface. The music isn't peace itself; it is a means to peace. It is how the love crowd mediates with an unfriendly environment. And Monterey was the love crowd's simpleminded stab at a replacement, a little utopia to show the bad old world it might be done.

In Monterey, however, where the example should have had its strongest effect, a kind of posthallucinatory reaction set in. Mayor Minnie Coyle had faced the press Saturday afternoon and told us our music was a pleasant surprise and our crowd just wonderful. On Sunday Chief Marinello appeared and was even friendlier. He said he had "never encountered such peace-loving people" and planned to tour the Haight first chance. On Monday, after everyone had gone, Mayor Coyle announced that she had drafted a City Council resolution that would prevent more pop festivals. A week later, Chief Marinello of the "Flower Fuzz," inundated with thank-you letters, described his admirers as lawbreakers who had avoided capture and said he agreed with Mayor Coyle. And while the only businessmen who oppose the festival as a group are the bar owners, there is scattered opposition everywhere.

Townpeople who hope the love crowd returns—and there are many—are sure the proffered excuses, which revolved in a narrow ellipse around lack of space and lack of kulchuh, are only covers for the real problem, which is style. And they're right. Especially if the difference between marijuana and alcohol is granted to be mostly a matter of legality and taste, style is the whole problem. The festival wasn't merely love and good vibes. It was also good business—almost hip show business, in fact. ...

But the love crowd doesn't want anything spectacular. It just wants peace, tolerance, and the chance to work things out for itself. If Monterey doesn't want the festival, well, the festival isn't so sure it wants Monterey either. Repeating yourself is just a big drag anyway. Entrepreneurs in the East are talking about holding their own festival, in New York or Boston.

Phillips has considered London and Stockholm. And Victoria, Australia, has offered to pay for everything if the festival will come to Melbourne next year.

It won't be Monterey. The love crowd may never come together again. But something will happen, which is all that matters.

## 7. Michael Lydon, "The Who in San Francisco," *New York Times*, September 1968

THE WHO PLAY rock "n' roll music ("it's got a back beat, you can't lose it," says Chuck Berry). Not art-rock, acid-rock, or any type of rock, but an unornamented wall of noise that, while modern and electronic, has that "golden oldies" feeling. Four Mod kids who started in 1963 as the High Numbers in London's scruffy Shepherd's Bush, the Who play a tight driving music which is a descendant of the rock of Elvis, Bill Haley, Gene Vincent, and even the early Beatles.

In San Francisco near the end of a ten-week, fifty-city tour, the Who were at their best, packing the huge Fillmore West three nights straight, their single show nightly as an hour and a half of brilliantly intense excitement capped by the climactic smashing of the guitar and drums that is their trademark. They played old songs and new, drawing each out into long rocking statements that had wild but economical power. The smashing is by now almost off-hand, and gone is their audience hatred (almost: Pete Townshend did kick the fans who scrabbled too eagerly for his broken guitar). Jumping around with smiling hilarity and dressed in street clothes rather than their former outfits—pop art suits and Regency lace—the Who just played the music.

"We're getting used to the fact that to play more music we have to sacrifice some of the visual bit," said Townshend. "The costumes used to get in my way, and I don't want to look like James Brown anymore. The whole violent style happened because we couldn't play—it covered that up and expressed our frustrations. Now we're getting more musical, so we don't need the anger like we did."

He scratched his neck for a moment, grinned dourly, and continued in thick cockney. "But we still like the smashing. If some creep yells for it, we'll do it and be happy. Whatever there is in our systems we don't get out playing, we get out with the smashing. It's inherent to us. It is the Who."

But the Who are more than their nihilistic ritual (from which Antonioni built the nightclub riot scene in *Blow-Up*). In their five years they have toured England endlessly, done five American tours, and produced several polished albums and a series of hits. Though without the overwhelming success in America that makes pop stars millionaires who can retire from public life while still adolescents, the Who are in a secure middle status: not as big as the Beatles or Rolling Stones, but with a demonstrated staying power, both creative and popular, lacked by groups like Cream and Jimi Hendrix.

The men Who are: saucy-faced Keith Moon, presiding madman at the drums; the painfully skinny and bleached blond Roger Daltrey, who sings lead and writhes for the ladies; stolid basist John Entwistle, who writes a few songs, including the group's most requested number, 'Boris the Spider'; and Townshend, a pleasantly moody 23-year-old who, besides playing lead guitar, is the group's leader, main songwriter, spokesman and theorist. "Talk to Peter," said Entwistle, "he'll spin out the rubbish as long as you're willing to listen."

Townshend did, sprawled out bonily on a sofa in his motel room. "Maybe we play rock 'n' roll, but if we play it, it's because we're in the one big rock 'n' roll movement. There's not Chuck Berry and Fats Domino and the Beatles and the Who, all playing different music. There's just rock 'n' roll, full stop. We're in it, it's not in us."

He stopped and sneered a classic Townshend sneer. "Rock's just about dead in England, the scene there has had it. England is a European country filled with boring people who like boring things. It must have been an accident that the Beatles got their sound together there. Do you know that Engelbert Humperdinck"—he almost spat at the name of a currently popular English ballad singer—"is a bigger property now than anybody? Rock 'n' roll is happening in America like it always did. We love it here. The Byrds, Steppenwolf, Booker T., Moby Grape, that's rock 'n' roll.

"You can tell what is and what isn't rock 'n' roll. To be the real thing, a song has to have an awareness of rock history. It has to have the beat, that undulating rhythm. Even while it feels history, it has to say something new.

And, most important, it has to have crammed into it all the poignancy and excitement of youth because that's what it's really all about."

The Who live the definition. Their biggest early hit was 'My Generation', with the lines, "Things, they say, look awful cold, Hope I die before I get old." 'Summertime Blues', a hit of singer Eddie Cochran's from the mid-'50s, is still in their repertory. Townshend carries tapes of Cochran (killed in a car crash in 1960) wherever he goes. All four are big fans of what English pop fans call "flash," the hard-edged charisma of fame, sex, power, and lavishly spent money. While in San Francisco, Townshend bought a Lincoln Continental Mark II and will have it shipped to London. "I love American cars and this one's a classic," he said. "All gold paint, leather seats, and the engine is painted bright blue." They tour not just for the money—they make up to \$7,500 a night—but because gruelling one-night stands are part of rock tradition.

"We're travelling on our own now, but I'd rather tour with a lot of groups, a couple of dozen blokes jammed into a bus having the time of their lives. If we stopped touring, we'd go off. Dead.

"Playing on stage, though, we're playing history. New ideas come from sitting down by yourself and working. That's where the spark is, work. I don't respect groups who won't work. And the spark, you have to get that on the records. So we don't mess around with all the fancy studio stuff, tracking and tracking a thing into obscurity. We want to make sure that on record the impact of the idea is captured in all its vibrancy and dynamite—that's what we're after. We've never put out a record that didn't say what it was supposed to."

What Townshend and the group want to say has changed. From the first days of pure aggression, they have moved through the humor of 'Happy Jack' and 'Tattoo' to the zinging unearthliness of 'I Can See for Miles' and 'Magic Bus', their latest release. Some of the anger is still there, in part because Townshend grew up hating people who laughed at his enormous nose; his songs often feature deformed little boys who get back at the cruel world. Now Townshend is testing new directions for the album the group will record in the fall.

"I am incredibly excited. I know people want something new. They want a new reason to go to a rock 'n' roll concert. What we are going to try is opera, not something trashy like the pompous arty types do. They do fancy things because they can't play. We've done mini-operas, now we want a long thing around a theme—I've been thinking about a story about a blind, deaf kid—with dialogue, songs, and an incredible finale. I want to get into stuff that will leave the smashing way, way behind."

Townshend started to pace the room. "We'll be into impressionistic music, music like Wagner and Mahler, music that conjures up things more powerful than you can handle. Music can create fantastic high points in people's minds. We want to take those minds," and as he spoke, he raised his hands high above his head, then whipped them down as though hurling a boulder into the innocent sofa, "and bomb them open!"

## **8. Paul Williams, "Outlaw Blues," *Crawdaddy*, February 1968.**

"I WISH I was on some Australian mountain range...."

People who work in mass media are supposed to be half manipulator and half prophet; and all around the mulberry bush now producers, performers, and persons who just like to rap are wondering about the Future of Rock (and roll). They talk about stuff like the following:

During 1967 rock music, thanks to Beatles Doors Airplane etc., greatly expanded its audience to the point where maybe two-thirds of the people buying any records at all were buying rock albums. Meanwhile, also thanks to Beatles Doors Airplane etc., the number of creative musicians and groups within the field grew even faster.

Situation: during the summer of 1967, by some awesome coincidence, the size and interests of the buying audience coincided nicely with the quantity and quality of rock albums newly available to them, and hence the considerable success of people like Jimi Hendrix, Country Joe & the Fish, the Doors, the Mothers, Moby Grape, and so on. Lots of creative people making it pretty big with creative stuff, and this in turn led to unrestrained enthusiasm on the part of large record companies, who've been spending unbelievable amounts to make sure that any group that sounds talented to them will in the future record on their label. In the same manner, successful groups have pushed and shoved their way into the studios, sparing no expense, taking as much time and using as many tools as might seem necessary to really Do What They Want To Do. Because it looks like the enthusiasm of the audience for good stuff will make it all worthwhile.

But already in December 1967 the difficulties are becoming apparent. For one thing, there are quite a number of good groups making records, and they all expect a slice of the pie. Can the same audience that—phenomenally— put the Beatles, the Doors, the Stones, and Jefferson Airplane in the top five on the lp charts at the same time, can they purchase enough records now to put Donovan, Love, Country Joe, Judy Collins, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, the Beach Boys, Van Dyke Parks, the Hollies, Paul Butterfield, Jefferson Airplane, the Incredible String Band, and Buffalo Springfield in the top five at the same time? All of the above have released new albums in the last month, as I write this, and the Who, the Kinks, Moby Grape, the Byrds, Jimi Hendrix, Randy Newman, the Grateful Dead, the Mothers, and the Velvet Underground have stuff scheduled for the immediate future. Elbow room! cried Dan'l Boone. Every one of these groups expects to be able to spend \$50,000 or more recording an album, and if this much good stuff is going to be released every two months, who's going to pay for it?

The immediate answer is clear: expand the audience. But since we've already moved in on most of the existent music audience, this means a very heavy undertaking: we have to increase the number of people who are actually listening to and buying any music at all. We have to not only show why rock music is good music, but why Music Itself Is Good For You and so on and on. And maybe even the quantity of really good stuff being released nowadays will help us do it.

But there's one word back there you might have overlooked. *Coincidence*. What if it suddenly turns out that what Country Joe & the Fish (or even the Beatles) feel like doing with all that expensive recording-time freedom is not the same thing as what our dear expanding audience wants to listen to? What if good creative art is not always appreciated by huge numbers of people the instant it's available?

That's What People Are Talking About, folks. And it's all fairly relevant to the albums at hand. The Beach Boys, a group that class prejudice prevents many of us from appreciating, released in the summer of 1966 an album called *Pet Sounds*, to me one of the very finest rock albums of all time. It was not exactly Far\*Out, but it was kinda subtle compared to the previous Beach Boys stuff; and partly for that reason, and mostly because of timing, *Pet Sounds* was the first Beach Boys album in several years *not* to be a million-seller. The timing factor was one not unfamiliar to us in 1967—the big hit on the album, “Sloop John B,” made it in December 1965, but because of the amount of studio time required to do the album right, *Pet Sounds* wasn't released till June and lost its impact as a result. And the mere fact that the record was really beautiful wasn't enough to salvage the situation. Fans don't always care about that.

But the fans *loved* the group's previous album, *Beach Boys Party*, a million-seller which most of us heavy rock listeners looked down upon as a sloppy, drunken recording of moldy oldies from 1961. Not even good (we thought then) in the context of the Beach Boys, let alone as a Rock Album. Yet the record sold terrifically, despite its dollar-extra price (a gala gatefold presentation) and the fact that there was another Beach Boys album, released just before it, competing for the fans' attention.

So maybe Beach Boys fans are stupid, and we can dismiss the whole thing. But maybe that's a pretty snotty attitude to take; maybe something is happening here that we just ought to know about. *Beach Boys Party* is an excellent album containing excellent music *that is easy to relate to!* And that's why the fans dug it, dug it more than that other excellent lp *Pet Sounds*, and that's the real reason people buy records—not because they're dupes, but because they like music, and the better it is the more they like it as long as they are still able to relate to what's good about it.

Not that I want to say that if lots of people like something, it's good. We all know what Humpty Dumpty said, and since I'm the one who's stuck with whatever definition of the word I care to accept, I'll feel more comfortable believing it's “good” if I feel it is rather than it's “good” if it wins the popularity polls. But we are talking about the relationship between what a performer feels like doing and what a large audience—large enough to pay for that performer's studio time—feels like listening to. So the extent to which large bunches of people are able to relate to things is pretty important.

I said the *Beach Boys Party* album is excellent, and I was talking about my own subjective response, of course. Yet that's an educated response—i.e., in 1965 I didn't like the record, I really put it down, and now after two more years of listening to rock intensively I feel that the album is a very good one. My opinion now is probably more valid than my opinion then—not because of any directionality of time but because I'm writing for an audience of people most of whom have also listened to a great deal of rock in the last two years. They can relate to my present point of view, at least in terms of common experience.

Let's drop this for a moment. Do you like the new Stones album? I hope you do. I went through a

period of about a week (after loving it initially) where I was really unsure if I liked it or not. I liked many parts of it, but I wasn't quite comfortable with the whole thing. I stuck with it, of course—there hasn't been a Rolling Stones album yet I've disliked, after giving it a little time to sink in—and pretty soon I lost my uneasiness, so that now I am quite convinced it's a great record, and I'm at a loss to explain my moments of doubt. Sometimes you have to listen to a record for a while before you can accept it on its own ground. And the *quantity* of good stuff coming out this month might have made me doubt my good judgment. Anyway, happy ending.

The Stones always come through. I didn't like *Flowers* at first, and now I realize how incredibly difficult it was to design an album so unassuming that it could be released in June 1967 and not be compared to *Sergeant Pepper*. After the initial shock of seeing two songs on *Flowers* that were on the previous album, and realizing that the rest of the record was a chaotic assortment of rejects from *Buttons*, *Aftermath*, and *The Rolling Stones Sing Motown*, I now listen to the record with great pleasure, I feel that "Ride On Baby" is surely one of the great rock songs and that the Stones, faced with the problem (among others) of releasing some great 1966 songs in 1967, met the situation head-on with a thoroughly successful anachronistic album. And the fans didn't care (another million-seller). Only the critics were ruffled.

The Stones always come through. It's not a coincidence. I remember in 1965 I just assumed that you couldn't judge a song the first few times you heard it. "Satisfaction" felt great the first time through, but I couldn't *hear* anything at all. Piece by piece the structure of the song, as I listened again and again, came clear to me from all that confusion. "Get Off of My Cloud" sounded like pure noise the first ten times through on a transistor radio. The form of a song is something you see all at once. When it comes to you, you suddenly find a picture of the entire song in your head, and at any given point you're aware of the context, the whole thing. Until you get that picture, you just follow a line through the song—you hear something, you hear something else, finally the song is over. The more you listen, the more you begin to sense a shape replacing that line, until eventually the song is familiar to you and you're not lost any more ("gestalt perception"—you can perceive a thing as part of a group, you can perceive a group as a collection of things).

And it's not a coincidence. Because the one thing the Stones are absolute masters of—and it certainly shows on the new album—is structure. If you take the Rolling Stones and maroon them in the swirling vacuum of space, stranded with nothing but ether, that imponderable stuff of the universe, to play with, they'll take that ether and mold it into a space ship and come chasing back after you, and they're the only rock group that can do that.

Again and again, not just on this album but throughout their procession of not-quite-a-dozen albums, the Rolling Stones incorporate chaos by creating entirely new structures out of it, and never are they incoherent. If you listen to a Stones song long enough you'll *always* see the picture, always perceive the whole and feel relaxed at the naturalness of it all...no matter how much of a struggle it was for you to break through to that naturalness.

And the Stones love to fool around. They sound sloppy—they don't want you to feel comfortable till you get there. They give the impression of incoherence so that their uptight listeners will buzz off and not bother them, and so the people who care will not relax on the surface but will continue to penetrate the song until they've really got to it. "Open our minds let the pictures come...."

This applies not only to songs, but to albums. *Their Satanic Majesties Request* sounds like a wild



assortment of stuff the first time you hear it, and ends up being a monolith. Having a brand new Rolling Stones album in your hands is like being a virgin, on the brink. The first rush is ecstatic. And when you finally get *there*, you marvel at the Stones, you can't believe they've really done it again, you're overcome with the sense of wonder. Sure feels good.

And feeling good, let's wallow around in the album awhile, since that's what's fun in a review. Take a song and notice some things about it, petty pleasantries, universal truths, anything to give us that nice feeling that we're all listening to the same songs and hearing something like the same sort of thing.

"Sing This All Together" is a nice idea. I don't want to get too involved in comparing it with the idea of *Sergeant Pepper*, because I really don't think they have much in common—on the surface they do (in fact, both concepts hark back to the end of *Between the Buttons*), but it's immediately apparent that the Lonely Hearts Club Band is a structural convenience, a cute outer shell, whereas "Sing This All Together" is a musical and emotional concept in which every track on the album is deeply involved. *Sergeant Pepper* isn't a very significant musical influence on *Satanic Majesties*—it's an experiential influence. That is, the Beatles took the Stones on a *Sergeant Pepper* trip, and the Stones returned and created this album. The audience, too, obviously listens to *Satanic Majesties* in the context of just having lived with *Sergeant Pepper* for lo, these several months, and thus the experience of the Beatles album is a strong influence on both the people who recorded the Stones lp, and the people who are listening to it. *Satanic Majesties* is influenced by but does not resemble *Sergeant Pepper*.

On page two of any British passport is a sentence which starts, "Her Britannic Majesty...requests and requires," etc. And "Citadel" is about New York City. I read that in the *New Musical Express*. But it's really about Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, a 1926 science-fiction flick envisioning City of the Future, with huge evil buildings run by steam, nightmare machines, and tiny people running every which way. The broken reentry in the middle of the song is kind of like the entire musical history of the Who in one half of a note; and maybe Candy and Taffy know that it can be pretty nice to live in a citadel. But if you've seen Mick stand there on stage after the girls have broken through the cop line, you know he doesn't want to be protected.

Oh, well, as Mick says toward the end of "Citadel." Bill Wyman is probably the only Stone who could have written a Gilbert (tarantara!) & Sullivan rock song. But the best thing about "In Another Land" is the tremendous sense of relief each time the sleeper wakes and finds himself surrounded by the Rolling Stones, drums, chorus, and all. In fact, no matter how far into the dim recesses of outer space this album may take you, you always get the comforting feeling that the Stones are right there beside you, and the situation's completely under control. Things may seem to be getting out of hand—look at all that stuff on the front cover of the jacket—but the bored faces of the Stones remind you once again that it's all right.

And this certainly is a science-fiction album. While Bill Wyman, Jimi Hendrix, and Grace Slick were home reading each other's comic books, Mick and Keith must have been down at the movies, digging Robbie the Robot in *Forbidden Planet*. *Their Satanic Majesties Request* is full of ancient empires based on decimal computers, and monsters from behind the Id. Sandy Pearlman may think the Byrds sing about the way the earth turns, Bill Wyman in *Wonderland* accidentally wonders "Is this some kind of (cosmic) joke?" but Mick and Keith *know* that Old Sol (our mr. sun) is the best we can do for a local center of activity, and they never wonder where the yellow went. "Sun turning round with graceful motion." Solipsism is for the byrds. "Pictures of us spin the circling sun." Bill Wyman's

probably afraid to close all his eyes together, by this time.

“2000 Man” is like the Incredible String Band’s “Back in the 1960’s.” The structure of the song is breathtaking, a further step along the trail blazed by the Association with “Windy.” And the phrase “don’t you know I’m a 2000 man?” reflects an absolute mastery of rock lyrics.

A good thing, too, for the next track is an instrumental, sort of a “Now I’ve Got a Witness” (Stones album one, if your memory is failing) for “Sing This All Together”—a true Nanker Phelge creation. “Sing This All Together (See What Happens)” is my favorite track on an album that doesn’t really have favorite tracks. Some people think it’s silly, but they’re wrong. It’s even possible that “See What Happens” is influenced by “Goin’ Home” via Love’s “Revelation,” which would be magnificent, but that’s not important. What is important is that there’s always something going on in this mosaic, and it’s always not-quite-familiar and always worthwhile. See, the nice thing is not that they’re doing “this kind of stuff”—any old Pink Floyd or John Fahey can do this kind of stuff, but in the case of the Stones the stuff itself is incredible. Brilliant raw music, the same stuff as very early rock and roll but without the words or much of the instrumentation. The same Music, though, don’t you see? The Rolling Stones’ instincts are absolutely musical, and that’s one of the reasons they can’t do anything wrong.

D. G. Hartwell points out that the reprise at the end of “See What Happens” is an electronic “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” And it’s worth noting that in terms of timing and impact, this is the first Christmas album since *Rubber Soul*.

“She’s a Rainbow” is a popular crowd-pleaser; and it’s kind of relevant to our whole theme here to discuss how the Stones manage to keep turning out hit singles. Pretty melodies—this one reminds me of “Never on Sunday”—help, of course, but mostly I think they make it because they know how to knock people out and make them feel comfortable at the same time. “She’s a Rainbow” is easy to relate to. It sounds like a song the very first time you hear it, and anyone can tell it’s about how nice this girl is. So there aren’t any obstacles to the casual listener’s enjoyment of the song...but that doesn’t mean it’s superficial. Like “Paint It Black” or “Ruby Tuesday,” “Rainbow” gets you deeper involved each time you hear it. And beneath that secure, surface feeling of order and accessibility, there’s a lot of stuff happening here—much too much to immediately resolve and store away in some part of your mind, more than enough to make the song continually fresh and worthwhile. I don’t want to pretend I’ve solved the mystery of what makes a hit record, but I think we can agree that “Rainbow” is the prettiest, and the most accessible, song on the album. That’s interesting data.

“The Lantern” is another structural masterpiece, with those incredible sweeping transitions, perfectly placed feedback, echoes, guitar whispers and screams that never intrude, until you suddenly feel part of some exceedingly formal cosmic hopscotch game that has gone on for millennia. The song sounds absolutely right, without sounding like anything that ever was before. It’s a Diogenes trip (and Bob Dylan said, “Don’t ask me nothin’ about nothin’; I just might tell you the truth.” But the Stones aren’t even afraid of being really serious).

“Gomper” (I’m reading the *New Musical Express* again) is supposed to be “the Tibetan term for the incredible journey some Tibetan monks make while under hypnosis.” It sounds like a great outdoors trip to me—some kind of sexual encounter at the beginning, then lots of open meadows, afternoon sunshine, running and smiling, growing things and wildlife and a real sense of wonder. The music, which is just too good to describe, carries you further and further away, till all of a sudden you can’t

see the place you started from, and the music starts doing little fear things as the pleasure fades, and you're 2000 light-years from home. Which may sound contrived, but it works, over and over again. So the Stones can even create something completely open-ended, and give it that firm feeling of structure.

As for "2000 Light Years," it's really Twilight Zone stuff. Like Manzarek in "The End," the organist creates the whole song in the context of one note (another D. G. Hartwell revelation) while the bass and guitar go through some obscure variations on "Gloria." What you get is this sinuous, ethereal song that really feels like it could absorb dozens of adjectives like that with no trouble at all. And you learn all about the acceptance of alien surroundings. "Gomper"/"2000 Light Years" is really just a very subtle reworking of the theme of "Waterloo Sunset."

Each song on this album is different, but not really separate, from the others; the works are interconnected on almost every level. So you can apply your gestalt perception to the whole album, and this makes "On with the Show" a special pleasure simply because it's the final song. Everything is resolved, and you really feel good about it, like maybe you really did see, for a moment, where we all come from. And the other side of the coin is that "On with the Show" tells you you don't have to take it all too seriously ("Sergeant Pepper Reprise" told you you didn't have to take it all seriously *except* "A Day in the Life"). The way it works in the context of the Stones album is you can get as involved as you like while you're there, while you're listening to it, and you don't have to think about it at all once it's over. It's an experience we all have together, the Stones and us, and it's not meant to have any further significance. The Beatles say they'd "love to take you home with us"; the Stones aren't polite, but they'll "get you safely to your door." What more could you ask? And the best thing about the cover is that they didn't spoil it by making it *too* good.

*Two words are really significant to Jefferson Airplane's sound and appeal: complexity and kinetics. Familiar words, and fairly simple ones. Complexity: there's a lot going on, all the time. Kinetics: the listener is caught up in the motion of the songs. After Bathing at Baxter's is the best Jefferson Airplane album, in terms of both overall quality and the extent to which it captures the life style of the group. Had it been released in January 1967, I think it would have been generally recognized as the crowning achievement of the dawn of American rock, 1965–1966, just as The Rolling Stones Now! is the summation and peak of the young rock scene in Britain, 1963–1964. The mere fact that Baxter's arrived inappropriately in December 1967 does not take away its real importance. This is the album that all us young Byrds, Paul Butterfield, Lovin' Spoonful fans were waiting for.*

Waves of "Pooneil," washing over the listener, carrying him back. It's always a nice transition into "Pooneil," from whatever album you were listening to, the cleansing feedback which is almost thematic in *Baxter's* and then that "Memphis" bass & drums opening which will outlive Chuck Berry and all the rest of us. The Stones album is nice to make noises to, blare at the brass parts and just be friendly with, but the Airplane lp is from the good ol' days when you'd move your whole body, or pretend you were playing along with the lead guitar. You can almost see Grace and Marty asking the audience to dance.

The complexity is apparent immediately. The Airplane don't have the inherent sense of structure that has blessed the Rolling Stones, but they know the rules, know them well enough to break them masterfully. "Watch Her Ride" and "Won't You Try/Saturday Afternoon" both take off from basic Byrds/Stones/Beatles concepts and then employ such daring and casually self-confident variations (watch what happens to the "watch you ride" phrase, for example) that it takes a while to realize what they're getting away with. Paul Kantner is on the verge of becoming a major rock architect.

“Pooneil” is a stunning achievement, a five-minute song that flows as one line (with a loop) from beginning to end, never stopping long enough to let the listener see it as a static shape.

Complexity. In “Pooneil” Paul and Marty trade off lead vocals, sometimes sing together and sometimes sing together with Grace. Grace also has one brief solo moment, and may even act as a second voice to Paul or Marty. So you have vocals by A, B, A&B, A&B&C, C, A&C, and B&C. In addition to which Grace acts as a sort of shadow throughout the song, repeating what the lead voice sings in her own very special I-am-a-background- instrument style. Since the last album Grace has really gotten into the art of group vocals, and—like everyone else in the group she can’t do the simplest thing without being clever and individualistic and creative about it—this really adds to the richness of the Airplane sound.

Complexity. So many personalities, and each completely independent of the others; each man integrating his music into the whole thing, but also using his instrument as a means to impose his personal style on whatever’s going down. When the Stones do a song, there’s some general feeling of “this is how it’s gonna be,” and while each musician’s style is apparent and important, it’s pretty well understood that the song should express whatever the songwriters had in mind. With the Airplane, the songwriter is considered just one of six group members, and so a song like “Wild Tyme” is created by a sort of committee consisting of one songwriter, three vocalists, a bass player, a drummer, a solo guitarist, a rhythm guitarist, and a guy with a tambourine. It sometimes takes a while to get all these heads together (seven months, in the case of this album), but in the end there is a real musical confluence, a feeling on the part of every group member that everything’s in place.

But it wouldn’t be very important *how* the music was created, were it not for the fact that you can hear the difference with your very own ears. A Stones song is listened to as a song, and you pretty much feel you hear the whole thing every time. Sometimes it doesn’t hit you as hard as other times, but it’s all there. With an Airplane song, it’s very easy to hear different stuff each time you listen. Try it. Listen to “Wild Tyme,” and then listen to it again concentrating just on what the lead guitar is doing. Then dig the rhythm guitar, the interaction between Paul on rhythm and Jorma on lead and the huge differences between the two guitarists even when they’re playing essentially the same part. The personalities of these musicians come through very clear in their playing—they aren’t self-conscious, nothing is held back, it’s all there for the listener to groove on. Pay attention to what the drums are doing. Try to feel the movement of the bass guitar, which is really buried on this track. Listen to the vocal very carefully, trying to pick out the quieter things that are happening. Listen for the separate personalities of the vocalists in the harmony parts. Pick up on the *way* each word is mouthed. There’s a lot going on.

And you don’t have to put in a lot of conscious effort to enjoy all this. One of the reasons the Airplane album is so fresh, so endlessly attractive, is that you do hear new stuff each time you listen. You can’t help it—there are an awful lot of specifics on this album, crying out to be heard and appreciated, and they’ll jump out at you no matter how you ignore them. Despite “Two Heads” being mostly Grace’s song, with a heavy emphasis on her friend the percussionist, sooner or later you’re sure to discover the sweetness of the bass part, the brilliance of what Jack is doing in there. The joy of complexity, when the music is good, is that every pleasure is pushed further by the constant discovery of yet *another* great thing going on, and there’s just too much music, appreciable on too many levels, for it ever to grow tiresome. The sheer fun of the music is increased sixfold by the extent to which everyone’s into it.

“Pooneil” is the masterpiece, every moment orchestrated, every musician loving it. And with all that activity, it’s still just a Pooh trip: there wasn’t That Much to learn out today, but it sure does feel better knowing it. Just another day, and who but the Airplane could get so much out of it? Who but JA would say “armadillo”?

“A Small Package of Value Will Come to You, Shortly” is great ad lib theatre, stretched and structured by the cleverness of the concertmaster and his tape recorder and his percussion collection. Spencer reaches out, grabs “Pooneil” with one hand, “Young Girl Sunday Blues” with the other, and ties them together with a wonderful word bath in concentric and overlapping circles, “Joy to the World” in the center for punctuation. The closer you listen to this, the more you like it; what makes the Airplane or the Stones more important than so many other clever people is that their cleverness holds up under inspection, in fact turns out to be real valid groovy music. And it’s nice to be so careful without ever being too cautious.

“Young Girl Sunday Blues” is a pleasure: real Marty Balin lyrics, such as you don’t hardly find anymore. Mick’s great “Don’t you know I’m a 2000 man?” is equaled and surpassed by Marty’s “Don’t you know [careful emphasis on each of the three words] what I have found—maybe you’ve found it too?” Not that either of these guys really wants to get into the social psychology of knowledge, or whatever; it’s just that so much in rock depends on the singer’s attitude toward the listener. Mick assumes absolutely nothing, so he can cheerfully pretend his audience knows everything, even things they might not know *how* to know. But Marty takes his listeners very seriously, and don’t think “young and new” girls don’t appreciate that. And what has Marty found? “Today is made up of yesterday and tomorrow—young girl Sunday blues and all her sorrow.” Can you honestly say you didn’t know *that*?

But I’m not kidding when I say I think Marty is the best lyricist in Airplane. Paul has a really nice feeling for words that don’t mean very much, but Marty is just rational enough and just irrational enough to really set you free. “So much can be heard,” he sings, and Jorma just goes right on playing “Get Out of My Life Woman” on his guitar.

Paul Kantner has David Crosby’s rhythm and Gene Clark’s mind. But none of these three guys is a member of the Byrds. “Martha she keeps her heart in a broken clock” (“she’ll always be there, my love don’t care about time”). “I didn’t know you were the one for me, I couldn’t see, but you were waiting” (“I have never been so far out in front that I could ask for what I want and have it any time”). John Kelehor told me about Crosby’s incredible rhythm, and he should know (Byrd-for-a-day). But John also sat in for John Densmore in Portland recently; and Paul Rothchild and I both agree that Paul Kantner is one of the few people in the world who could be a Door. I only bring this up because Paul K. thinks *Crawdaddy* is too serious a magazine sometimes, and I wanted to show that we are.

And “Martha” is a pretty song. Unlike the Stones, the Airplane finds nothing mysterious in the great outdoors. Instead, they’re comfortable enough to do verbal acrobatics (“she weeds a part through a token lock,” very nice) and pull off a Lear Jet eggshell landing near the end. Everybody slows down, and Jorma is very careful; Paul recites, and the opening of “Wild Tyme” at that moment is about as perfect as anything on the album, or anywhere else.

“Wild Tyme” mostly borrows words from other songs on *Baxter’s*, but that’s okay for a genuine rave-up in the Yardbirds’ “Strolling On” *Blow-Up* tradition. “I’m here for you any old time,” and that’s

the Airplane—accessible.

Jorma's song is an assault, but it comes after so much other stuff that the listener is practically numb. I like the auto accident in the middle.

And there's more to the Airplane than accessibility. But their only air of mystery comes from their being so obvious on the surface (the words of the songs) and yet always so perceptibly better-than-obvious. It's always been a source of confusion to me that I get so much pleasure from the overfamiliar lyrics of "Today" or "Blues from an Airplane"—there must be more going on than the obvious, stereotyped stuff, or why do I like it so much? And Sandy's article on Jefferson Airplane's use of the cliché (*Crawdaddy* 9) by no means answers all my questions. Because Sandy doesn't really like Marty's lyrics; he only appreciates them.

Grace, in fact, sometimes suffers by seeming less obvious than the rest of the group. "White Rabbit" came on with an air of mystery, but was so utterly decipherable that, for me, it rapidly lost its impact. "Pooneil" pretends to no mystery at all, but the more you listen to it the more subtle it seems. Something's happening here. Grace's songs on this new album are both very good, easy to respect, but hard to really get into. There's no place to hide. When you wonder if "Two Heads" is about hypocrisy, the double standard, you do that on a very intellectual level. As you listen more, you don't get involved in the song; instead you get hung up in the very interesting, very exciting things that she does with her voice. Maybe you groove on the instrumentation. But you groove on its quality more than on any particular emotion it might inspire. Grace makes everyone, especially herself, a studio musician.

That isn't a put-down. But I think we're all aware of the good qualities of stuff like "rejoyce" and "Two Heads," and it's strange that the area in which Grace falls down is exactly that thing that the Airplane as a whole does best, the conjuring of emotions out of motion and involvement. Grace's stuff is not exactly static, but fluid—her singing has no real motion, since motion really cannot be divorced from the idea of movement in a direction, but rather flows from place to place without covering any ground to speak of. This is confusing. You can hear what I mean by listening to "rejoyce." "...I got his arm...I got his arm...I've had it for weeks...I got his arm Stephen won't give his arm to no gold-star mother's farm war's good business so give your son and I'd rather have my country die for me!" Even from the words you can see that she shifts from phrase to phrase without any apparent sense of overall direction. When you listen, you'll see that she also does it with absolutely no hesitation, shifting emotions timelessly from pleasure and possessiveness to pride, a sort of stark innocence, warm female sensitivity, righteousness and derision and finally anger building to fury. If you tried to clock her speed in moving from one emotion to the next, you'd feel pretty silly, for she doesn't move in time in the sense that "Pooneil" or "Young Girl Sunday" moves. She merely shifts, now I'm here, now over here, now somewhere else, like that. In "Two Heads," toward the end, she flows like liquid on some nonabsorbent surface, splattering by sheer will power. This is the sort of thing we mortals can only sit back and watch, and maybe that's just as well. "Rejoyce," which used to be and should have been called "Ulysses," is a detached "work of art," not flawless but certainly impressive, and that's Grace doing all that fine piano and recorder stuff. The last line is regrettably unintelligible; reliable sources inform me she's saying "but somehow it all falls apart." She sure is cynical.

In opposition to this, we have Jefferson Airplane, including Grace as a harmony voice, with their incredible Airplane kineticism. Kineticism all started in rock 'n' roll with the basic desire to get the audience off their feet and dancing. So you employ every trick you know to make your listeners not

just feel each beat, but feel the succession of beats, feel them more and more until they anticipate each beat and throw their bodies into it. And then you discover some simple devices that accent each movement even more than the audience expects, so that no matter how much they're moving, the song says, "Faster! Harder!" and pretty soon the people have forgotten all about the individual notes or beats and they're just moving with you, entirely caught up in the music.

There's a lot of technique that goes into kineticism, and none of the people who are best at it—the Who ("Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere"), the Kinks ("Milk Cow Blues"), Them ("Mystic Eyes"), the Four Tops ("Reach Out, I'll Be There")—need to think about it very much. They strain to make the music move, and it moves. It moves because the singer holds back a little on the vocal while the music tries to plunge ahead, which is something like sitting on a ticking bomb. It moves because the bass and drums set up a powerful rhythmic constancy and then the rhythm guitar starts coming in on the beat, but just a tiny fraction late, pulling the listener ahead of the music. Tension is established. And once you've got a little tension, then you just make things a little louder and a little faster, harder, louder, faster, harder, faster, harder, louder, faster, faster, boom! More than one listener has had his head blown off by kinetic resolution.

Airplane kineticism won't blow your head off, but it should get you excited—it's high quality roller-coaster stuff. "Watch Her Ride" is high kinetics—the first two verses run along with Paul, Jack, and Spencer building it up nicely, Jorma hinting at better things to come with his truncated solo runs off to one side. Things break loose after "for me" in the second verse. Single guitar notes, punctuated by bass runs, are used as waves of sound, each wave rising from the crest of the one previous. Vocals break in on the fourth wave and sustain both the wave motion and the feeling of building intensity, while Jorma allows himself the luxury of three or even four notes to drive the vocals harder.

The word phrases themselves are kinetic—"times don't change" moves into "times don't ever change"; "the only thing in my world, the only thing that my mind could find for love for love and peace of mind for me...for me." Grace's gliding solo on "for me" carries the force of this section nicely into the third verse of the song.

Kineticism is very much a group thing—if everyone in the band doesn't cooperate and work toward the same end, nothing will happen. But the single most important contributor to the kineticism of the Airplane is the interaction between lead guitar and bass. Jack and Jorma have been playing together since long before the formation of the Airplane; they understand each other's music and work together with a closeness that is unusual to rock. They tie the group together, because the musical ground between bass and lead guitar is such that drums, rhythm guitar, and vocals can fit right into whatever motion is going on between them. The complexity of the group is likewise based on this bond; in the end, it is only the alliance between Jack and Jorma that allows one unified piece of music to emerge as the product of six highly individual minds.

The Casady-Kaukonen relationship is explored in depth on *Baxter's* in a jam guitar/bass/drums jam entitled "Spare Chaynge." Jefferson Airplane is fearless in a pleasantly insignificant way: they're not afraid of stuffing an album with good unaesthetic doodling (on the inside sleeve), photos that don't look like them (the centerfold), bad puns ("Spare Chaynge," "rejoyce," "How Suite It Is"), structureless nine-minute jam sessions, etc. Sometimes they really are ballsy in their pointless fearlessness. By making the "suites"—two or three songs segued together—look like single tracks, they make it extremely difficult for any dj to play individual songs off the album. This in spite of the fact that it is easy—the Rolling Stones did it—to link the songs with spiral grooves that will both make the music continuous and make the individual songs identifiable to anyone looking at the disk.

In other words, the Airplane has the balls to stand up to dj's even for no reason at all.

The way to listen to the jam is position yourself before the speakers so that Jack is on one side, Jorma is on the other, and Spencer is somewhere in the middle. By consciously listening to what each guy is doing in relation to the others, you can really get at the heart of this track—it's a dance, a ballet interaction between three persons. And interpretation is entirely up to the listener. The piece starts—for me—with hesitation, not much music, kind of an uptight scene that has to be loosened for anything to happen. Jack assumes the burden of getting things going—he works at getting Jorma involved in the music, he hesitates, tries one tack, then another, never pushes too hard, plays very gently as he starts to get Jorma's interest, kindling the spark...Jorma loosens up under this foreplay, tries a run or two, still isn't quite comfortable—but he's coming alive. Spencer withdraws when he sees the tension of the situation, and the importance of leaving the two of them alone until Jack gets Jorma going. Jorma really starts to unwind, plays something nice, Jack coaxes him along, Jorma stops, comes back with a really satisfying thing, gets completely involved in his playing, almost immediately Jack lets loose for the first time, Spencer comes back in with dignity once the ice has been broken, and now, four minutes into the track, real music is happening. Music as an interaction, a conversation analogous to an intellectual or sexual meeting of minds, but separate from them, something that only musicians can experience. "Spare Chaynge" is, for me, a vicarious thrill, an exciting presentation of not music as external art, intended to reach some sort of audience, but music as personal, internal communication and understanding between three people. A jam like all others—but so clear, so easy-to-relate-to that it becomes one of the most important pieces of music in a long while.

Which leaves us with "Won't You Try," only one of the most optimistic performances in the history of rock and roll. The Airplane, despite everything, have absolute confidence in their audience. It's kind of like the early American preacher, in front of his congregation, looking out at the faces of every worst kind of sinner, and knowing that every last mother's son of them is going to be saved. It makes no difference at all that Paul Kantner said, in "Watch Her Ride," "Times don't ever change for me." Now the only truth—and it's noble, glorious, exultant—is this: "Times can change. It's what I say is true. All is real, and I'll come through for you." It doesn't even make much sense, but you know he means every word of it. They all do. You don't have to listen to the words—this song is the peak of the Airplane in terms of expressing pure emotion through complexity, loudness, movement. Every conceivable thing is going on, and it comes through as straightforward and plain as could be. If you're in any kind of good spirits, this song will raise them through the roof. And isn't that what we really want from rock music?

\* \* \*

*That's what we get from the Beach Boys. Beach Boys Party is a friendly, pleasant record, recorded by people who really understand the common ground between "Papa-Ooom-Mow-Mow," "Mountain of Love," and "The Times They Are A-Changin'." "It's all rock," as R. Meltzer or anybody would say, and the Beach Boys really know what that means. It means this is music that's "here for you any old time," and that means you if you're a performer pleasantly fooling around at a party, or you if you're a kid camping out at Big Sur with a baby phonograph and a copy of "Light My Fire."*

And you've got to give the Beach Boys credit (especially if you don't want to). Because this album was recorded two and a half years ago, and it's full of the sort of understanding that most rock performers are just beginning to get into. Street noises were nice before John Cage put his signature



on them; and what's the difference if the Beach Boys really *had* a party, and the Stones just pretended to have one?

I mean, I'm talking about the perception of things. It's all in how you see it. In *Crawdaddy* 11 we ran a centerfold of Jim Morrison, "Cancel My Subscription to the Resurrection." It was sort of designed as a poster, but we didn't indicate that in the magazine, because we thought it might sound silly. So a lot of people thought it was a paid ad. Then Jefferson Airplane sent us a thousand dollars, and a two-page ad of group doodling related to their new album. We ran it as a centerfold in number twelve, and naturally it looked like copy; it didn't look like an ad at all. But so what? Both spreads were quite attractive, and does it really matter *which one* brought in some cash to help put out the following issue?

What's important is that our readers enjoyed this stuff. Maybe even got something out of it, on a personal level. And what matters in music is what's there, what's audible and recognizable and "meaningful" in any way whatsoever to the person listening (and to the people playing). Intentions, motivations, circumstances...those are for historians. They're interesting, nice to know about, useful and even important, but they don't have to do with the music and the immediacy of listening to it.

And context notwithstanding, the thing that makes *Beach Boys Party* a good album (to me) is the fact that it's nice to listen to. But what makes it an excellent album is that while I'm listening to this record-that-is-nice-to-listen-to, I get a lot of extra stuff: I get moved on an emotional level, I get insight into the nature of rock music and the creative impulse itself, I get impressions of the world and the way people feel about it, I get a lot of just plain good reactions. Stuff that stays with me. And at no added cost, which kind of makes this record better than just any nice-to-listen-to album.

And the same is true of the Stones and Airplane albums, and lots of other stuff. The Beach Boys deserve historical credit for understanding and expressing something (a certain attitude toward music) first, but the value of the record *now* has nothing to do with when it came out. And it's obviously not necessary to read this review in order to appreciate any of these records. It might be nice to listen to some stuff after getting a really detailed look through another person's eyes (ears), but that's a different pleasure. I wrote a whole article in *Crawdaddy* 11 about the aspects of listening to rock in a particular environment, the extent to which the context can be part of the musical experience. Groovy. Now I want to make it clear as can be that the *creation* of the music is noncontextual, that we've gone beyond the days when rock was specifically designed for everybody's car radio. The musician, the performer, *cannot* create music for people in other recording studios, who also have Altex 605 speakers, or whatever, to listen through. He can't become involved only in what his own ears perceive, at the moment of creation and the playback five minutes later.

Or rather, he certainly can. I correct myself. I'd be the last person to urge restrictions on anyone's freedom, and I sincerely believe that creating for an audience of ten, or one, or zero, is just as valid as anything else. Certainly the quality of something is not measured by multiplying it by the number of people who dig it.

But what I'm really talking about, of course, is that old coincidence. I'm talking about the performer who expects to spend as much money on recording time and engineers and instruments and whatever as is needed to do what he wants to do. No matter how you divide up the wealth of the world, there is not at the present time sufficient time- money-energy on Earth to give every person alive an engineer, a set of musicians, all the instruments he wants and five weeks of time in a well-equipped

studio. So anyone who wants all those privileges had better either be a fascist, or a person who is creating for more than a half a dozen people. Because if people will pay for these records that cost so much to make, fine. If you want to spend all that money making the music, and they're willing to spend all that money to listen to it, nothing could be fairer.

But beware the coincidence. I've spent a lot of time in this article trying to get at some of the reasons *why* people are willing to buy what the Stones, the Airplane, and the Beach Boys are trying to do. Why people enjoy the stuff, what they get out of it. What makes it all worthwhile. There are a lot of records I couldn't justify as well. Some of these records cost a lot of money (and I'm not talking about dollars, I'm talking about people, and the time spent by people other than the artist on all the aspects of this process, including earning the "money" to support the process). And some of the artists who made these records are beginning to think they have a god-given right to take up as many people's time as they want in order to do their thing. Jabberwocky!

Beware the baldersnatch, my son. Beware the confusion that comes at the top, that comes from thousands of people waiting for your new album, that comes from record companies standing in line for the right to spend money on you, that comes from fourteen-page magazine articles about how great you are. Remember you are only you, remember that your prime concern should be doing what is most important to you, but that you have a responsibility, a very real responsibility to every person other than yourself who gets involved in the achieving of your personal goals.

That doesn't mean hey sing "White Rabbit" for us, Grace. No, the point is not to think that you have any responsibility to anybody because they've bought your records or whatever they did in the past. The point is to think about the present, think about whether what you're doing is worth whatever is going into it. Because, forgetting the morality of the thing, what happens to our creative artists if nobody buys their new albums and they have to go back to recording in a garage?

Rock music is the first good music in quite a while to achieve a mass acceptance. It is also one of the few really worthy side-effects of the current state of mass media in the Western world. Because many rock musicians, rock producers, rock etcetera do not appreciate the significance of this, we are in serious danger right now of blowing the whole bit. With the best intentions in the world, the ideal of serving pure art and pure individual creative instinct, we may drive ourselves out of the recording studio and the mass media and back into our garages and audiences of half a dozen friends. If we don't try our damndest to make music that is both of high quality *and* accessible to a fairly widespread audience, we may look pretty silly a year from now complaining that no one pays us any attention.

But I don't want to end on a polemical note. Why, it might cut down the pleasure value of my own creating! And anyway, I think Ray Davies must be the only man ever to have written a song entitled "There's Too Much on My Mind."

"I got no reason to be there, but I imagine it would be some kind of change."

December 1967

## 9. Gregg Akkerman, “Beggars and Thieves,” from *Experiencing Led Zeppelin: A Listener's Companion* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Blue Ridge Summit, 2014)

Led Zeppelin originated as a grand vision of guitarist Jimmy Page, who was faced with the need to fulfill contracts booked by his previous band, the Yardbirds. Zeppelin came together as two pairs of musicians, a configuration that would have a lasting impact on their music and group dynamic. While Page and bassist John Paul Jones were already successful studio musicians in London, vocalist Robert Plant and drummer John Bonham hailed from the Black Country outlands of Birmingham, where their talents had yet to be fully measured. The quartet's first album, eponymously titled *Led Zeppelin*, was financed by Page and recorded in only thirty hours of studio time. Not surprisingly, it included several live vocal and instrumental takes with no overdubs or corrections. In the light of such a compressed time table, the biggest problem confronting Zeppelin was a lack of developed songs worthy enough to make a good showing on both a concert stage and, more importantly, a new album. At their first rehearsal they had trouble picking even one song they all knew and finally settled on “Train Kept A Rolling.”

This lack of common material didn't bode well. In order to expedite the set list shortcoming, the band turned to the blues and a couple of tunes Page had already been performing with the Yardbirds. The recording sessions began September 27, 1968, after the band had only been together for less than three weeks. With only fifteen hours of rehearsal and a scant ten gigs performed, the band entered the studio with the plan to essentially record a live version of their concert set, leaving out obvious cover songs like “Train” and “For Your Love.” With this down- and-dirty plan, it is remarkable how this album contained all of Led Zeppelin's trademark characteristics already intact and fully formed: heavy metal timbre, blues-based riffs, wailing vocals, acoustic folk influences, and high-quality audio production.

The first song on Led Zeppelin's first album is an immediate double-punch to the gut: “Good Times Bad Times.” The first two notes are among the most recognizable in rock music and it only gets better from there. All the band members get a turn to shine on this one. Bonzo is killing it with his triple-hit kick drum, Jones brings the bass to the front row, Page presents a clinic on how to play a molten solo, and Plant takes it to the rafters. The background harmonies in the chorus are hopelessly dated to the late 1960s, but on the plus side there is the right amount of cowbell. For a complete guided listening experience to a live version of “Good Times Bad Times” performed in 2007, see the “Closer Look” section of chapter 10. Had there never been a “Stairway to Heaven,” “Babe I'm Gonna Leave You” would have ruled as the archetype Zeppelin ballad. It was rather cheeky of Zeppelin to place a ballad as only the second song on the album when slow tempos are usually placed further down the playlist. But Page knew what history has confirmed; a song this good shouldn't have to wait in the shadows. Like “Stairway,” the introduction is played on acoustic guitar with rolling chords in same dark minor key. And also like “Stairway,” the song builds toward a power-chord sequence filled with passion and energy. One aspect favoring “Babe” over “Stairway” is that Plant's lyric is a straightforward love letter of sadness and confusion rather than obscure poetry about hedgerows and shining white light. The out-of-tune last chord is annoying at first but after hearing it enough times, you wouldn't want it any other way. A beautiful woman is even more memorable when she makes no effort to hide a blemish.

The first blues-based song on Led Zeppelin is “You Shook Me” and the band sets the bar exceedingly high. In the late 1960s into the 1970s, rock bands treated the blues as a placement test that needed to be taken very seriously. There was a deep respect for the blues among British musicians and

including a blues on a record was a standard-issue move. White bands playing the blues in later years were labeled as pandering, trite, or (kiss of death) derivative, but not so at the end of 1968 and Zeppelin fans are better for it. “You Shook Me” could hardly be slower or any better. Jimmy Page “borrowed” the basic structure for “Dazed and Confused” and had performed a version with the Yardbirds enough times to know that there was unmined potential. With Zeppelin, he had found the horsepower to develop “Dazed” into a mind-bending psychedelic trek. Jones and Bonham were strong enough players to handle the change in tempo and Plant had vocal skills well beyond those of Keith Relf. So while it’s true that Zeppelin didn’t invent “Dazed” from scratch, they own it like no other. Put on some headphones, turn out the lights, sit in the dark, and get rocked as your imagination sails “for so long it’s not true.” If you bought the Led Zeppelin album new in 1969, you probably would have been so blown away by the first four songs that the only option was to keep playing side 1. But eventually, you would have settled down enough to move to side 2 and the first song is “Your Time Is Gonna Come.” If the album has a weak link, this is it. “Your Time” is not a bad song. In fact, the organ introduction is downright respectable, the chords are good, and the melody and lyrics start out with an attractive sense of melancholy. But when the boys take you to the chorus, the bottom falls out. To hear poor background vocals, and Plant’s dull melody telling us repeatedly that our “time is gonna come” just doesn’t live up to the promise of the verses.

It’s no wonder that Page veered away from conventional pop song-forms like the one on “Your Time” and they would seldom be heard on Zeppelin records. It was typical for Page to have an acoustic guitar feature at some point in a Yardbirds concert and he carried the tradition over to Zeppelin. “Black Mountain Side” demonstrably states that Zeppelin is a band led by their guitarist. Setting aside two minutes in which the other three musicians are sidelined gives Page the space to educate fans that he is more than just a blues-based rocker. The man spent years practicing his craft as a complete guitarist capable of finger picking, alternate tunings, and complex time signatures, and he isn’t embarrassed to share those hard-won skills. “Black Mountain Side” is not flashy and the album would be just as strong in the song’s absence, but it set a precedent for acoustic features in later years that were not to be missed.

The word swagger is used a few times in this book to describe a mostly indescribable aspect of Page as a guitarist. There’s just something about his rhythmic groove that sways and bends around the tempo in a loosely tight (or is that tightly loose?) manner. When seen in concert, his swagger is all the more evident, but on Led Zeppelin it can clearly be heard on “Communication Breakdown.” Had Zeppelin only released this one song as a single and then quickly broken up, they still would have taken a sledgehammer to the future of guitarists all over the world who, upon hearing the song, shout out, “That’s how I want to play!” Zeppelin did not invent hard rock or heavy metal, but they codified the parameters and formulated the mission statement for others to adopt as their own. It lasts less than 2:30, but that’s all the time it takes for “Communication Breakdown” to change the road you’re on. The second blues on Led Zeppelin is “I Can’t Quit You Baby” written by Willie Dixon. Like the most popular blues-based songs, “I Can’t Quit You Baby” is based on a twelve-measure progression of chords that is repeated as necessary for verses and solos. The last two measures of the pattern feature a clever lift in the chords that creates tension and release but the idea came from Dixon. What is striking about this track is that it is recorded completely live with no overdubs. No extra guitars, background vocals, keyboards, or percussion are heard. Zeppelin plays it straight through and has the guts to leave it just the way it went down on tape. And they nailed it. “A Closer Look” at a live version of “I Can’t Quit You Babe” is found in chapter 9. “How Many More Times” closes out the album and, like “Dazed and Confused” on side 1, is a vehicle for Zeppelin to stretch out as songwriters and improvisers. Unlike the raw “live” quality of “I Can’t

Quit You Baby,” the band takes the time here to orchestrate many textural layers and complex changes in rhythmic feel. Much more than end-of-the-album filler, this is epic rock and roll that cleared the path for later Zeppelin iconoclasts like “In the Light” and “In My Time of Dying.”

### **A CLOSER LOOK “Communication Breakdown”**

You settle the needle in the groove of “Communication Breakdown” and are quickly knocked back by the guitar in full overdrive and making formidable use of the aggressive lowest-pitched string as Jimmy Page piles on with nine hammer blows in rapid succession followed immediately by three powerful chord hits. This crushing introduction from “Breakdown” on the second side of Led Zeppelin’s first album laid down a new gauntlet in rock music that is still being responded to decades later. This song was the archetype for the emerging heavy-metal sound in the late 1960s and part of the reason Led Zeppelin is still regarded as a founding father of the genre. If any band now or in the future wants to rain down heavy-metal thunder, they could do no worse than conjuring their own version of “Breakdown.”

During the second airing of the riff, the drums and bass join in for short, accented hits that support the guitar and build momentum toward the inevitable, energetic release of the caged rhythm Jimmy Page uses as bait to attract the listener. Mercifully, the instrumental trio begins the song in earnest on the fifth incarnation of the riff as John Bonham begins his classic, driving rock beat under the high-note entrance of Robert Plant’s vocal: “Hey girl, stop what you’re doing.” The pop-songmarketing mentality of singers performing songs designed for group participation through easy melodies in the medium vocal range for nonprofessionals was shattered by the time Plant arrives at the word girl. He is not leading a campfire sing-along. Instead, he announces himself as a new breed of rock vocalist that belts out bluesbased subject matter in an elevated range leaving the amateurs behind.

Considering Plant’s youth (age 20) at the time of this recording, you might be utterly amazed at his pure gall, or perhaps even offended by the same, but the one thing you likely cannot do is easily sing along. He is essentially saying, “Don’t even bother mate—I’ve got this.” The vocal verses take place over eight repetitions of the opening riff before charging directly to the chorus without any transitional material. The chords finally move away from the home base but stay well within the traditional sonic landscape of the blues and feature a nice syncopation of unexpected rhythmic hits throughout the chorus. Plant’s vocals take on a decidedly thicker tone at this point due to the technique called double tracking in which two different recordings of his voice are heard at the same time. The lyrics of the hook “I’m having a nervous breakdown, drive me insane” call out timelessly to disenfranchised youth and Plant further paints the picture by holding the word insane with a brief but wailing descent. To add further emphasis to this moment, the band pulls back by returning to the opening riff in which the guitar is heard by itself before the drums and bass rejoin. Thus, the flow of energy is brought back down, only to explode all over again for the second verse.

As Plant calls out to a woman who has surely done him wrong, “I’m never gonna let you go, ’cause I like your charms,” we are led to the next chorus, but this time the two vocal parts deviate. In traditional double tracking, there is an attempt to have the multiple recorded takes mimic each other as accurately as possible, as if to add to the overall volume of sound but not distract the listener by presenting conflicting versions of the melody. Not so on “Breakdown,” where two distinct “Roberts” are heard singing simultaneously at the end of the second chorus.

While one voice cuts off “insane” similar to the earlier chorus, a second drifts in seemingly pained

suspension until reluctantly releasing the listener to the impending guitar solo on the word suck. Page dominates the song at this point with a blistering and high-pitched opening to his guitar solo played over the riff used for the verse. And unlike pre-Led Zeppelin recordings of Page where the mixing choices were made by pop-minded, radiofriendly producers who view solos as something to quickly get out of the way between vocals, this lead work is placed unapologetically in the forefront as a featured component.

Led Zeppelin is announcing in "Breakdown" that they are a band featuring not only an incredible singer, but also a guitarist of rare talent that will not be undervalued. Page had been telling Peter Grant for a year that he had some strong ideas of what his next band would sound like and here it was in full glory. One peculiarity of the solo section is that it takes place over only seven occurrences of the main riff rather than the predictable eight as heard during the vocal verses. This choice was not duplicated on other versions of the song played by the band in concert as can be heard on BBC recordings and suggests Led Zeppelin was pandering to radio stations by keeping the total recording time of "Breakdown" to a more commercially accessible length. Regardless, the solo continues underneath Plant's return for the final chorus in which he concludes with an even more elongated and dramatic fall on the word insane. The song then drives to its conclusion as the main riff is repeated and slowly fades. During this egress, the song title is sung several times by the band in less-than-perfect harmonies while both Plant and Page offer up some final improvised interjections. Ending in less than two and a half minutes, "Breakdown" is the perfect example of a heavy-metal hit: the band builds the song upon a short, fast, and immediately recognizable riff; the guitar is raucous and distorted; the vocals emphasize pure energy over lyrical depth (or even comprehension); a guitar solo is the featured centerpiece; and the whole thing is over in well under three minutes.

## 10. Geoffrey Cannon, "Joni Mitchell: Clouds," *The Guardian*, 24 June 1969

JONI MITCHELL has written songs for Tom Rush, and the Fairport Convention have used her songs on both their albums.

In each case, I'd had the idea of an intricate delicacy; but tiny intonations in both interpretations indicated that the singers didn't own the songs they'd chosen. Rush is one of those singers whose songs lose tautness through musing; and Judy Dyble, the original Fairport singer, although she feels her songs, fails to charge them. An English girl singing "All alone in Carolina, and talking to you," for example, loses a crucial sense of place. Fairport Convention, however, are a beautiful band, with a light, tactful thoughtfulness that is good for moments of waking or drowsiness.

All the songs on *Clouds*, Joni Mitchell's album, are her own. Her voice is pure, and she sings with spare acoustic guitar accompaniment. When I say that her songs are her own, I don't merely mean that she wrote them. She owns them, because each of them, different from the others, concerns herself, and paints—in a different part of the mind of a valuable person, unique in place and time, who affects us and enters us precisely because she will tell only her own story.

She is Canadian, from Alberta. Her background is placed into her songs by means of names and nouns used because of what they mean to her. "Valentines and maple leaves/tucked into a paperback"; butterscotch; rain on shingles, rooftops round the harbour. "There's a sun show every second/Now the curtain opens on a portrait of today."

Without wishing to be alone, she has become accustomed to herself. She has the absorption of childhood,

and, with self-consciousness informing her emotional trceries, an ability to look at herself, and the other person, which makes truth mandatory, even at the cost of loss. "What will happen if I try/to put another heart in him?" "Picked up a pencil and wrote 'I love you' in my finest hand/Wanted to send it, but I don't know where I stand." "It's love's illusions I recall/I really don't know love at all."

She can't grab, and so may appear passive. Because she can describe herself as well as others she can be a spectator of herself. Now, she's in another land, the contacts that once she made face to face are available to her by long-distance communication. "Telephone, even the sound of your voice is still new/All alone in California and talking to you."

Life seems a gallery of mementoes, infecting her and her landscape. She has songs which have a Carson McCullers flavour: she gazes at objects so long and avidly that they become more charged with meaning than the people who are now gone who placed them where they are. Her mind resembles that of the American South, is fed intently upon itself. Nevertheless, she is young. She'll not find love by seeking it out, but by it embracing her with an entirely personal magic.

Because she thinks and feels and means every item in her good songs ('The Fiddle And The Drum' is her only failure, because its metaphors don't have her living in them), her faintest inflexion of voice or guitar can clearly indicate miles and years of particular emotion.

Coarsening her voice with "Reflections of love's memories" shows many failed offers. The high guitar, held that way, with her voice singing above and below it, in 'Chelsea Morning' has the mood of one single day held pure and joyful. She refers to Dionne Warwick, delicately, in "I don't know where I stand," giving the song a poignancy not in the words. The odd slang word in 'Roses Blue' concerning a lady lost in mysticism, makes the song clearly about a real person, and not just a pretty story.

"It's life's illusions I recall/I really don't know life at all." But she knows herself, and fills the images of her illusion with herself.

Joni Mitchell is extraordinarily talented and moving, because she is herself, and her self is beautiful.

## **11. Lester Bangs, "Of Pop and Pies and Fund: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, on Who's the Fool? (1970)," from *Psychotic reaction and Carburator Dung*, ed. by Greil Marcus (Anchor, 2003)**

### **PART ONE: ANATOMY OF DISEASE**

Like most authentic originals, the Stooges have endured more than their share of abuse, derision, critical condescension and even outright hostility. Their stage act is good copy but easy grist for instant wag putdowns. At first glance their music appears to be so simple that it seems like anyone with rudimentary training should be able to play it (that so few can produce any reasonable facsimile, whatever their abilities, is overlooked). While critics have a ball crediting John Cale with the success of The Stooges, their first album (as I did), and relegating them to the status of a more than slightly humorous teenage phenomenon, theme music for suburban high school kids freaked out on reds and puberty and fantasies of nihilistic apocalypses, the majority of the listening public seems to view them with almost equal scorn as just one more blaring group whose gimmick (Iggy) still leaves them leagues behind such get-it-on frontrunners in the Heavy sets as Grand Funk, whose

songs at least make sense, whose act shows real showmanship (i.e., inducing vast hordes of ecstatically wasted freaks to charge the stage waving those thousands of hands in the air in a display of marginally political unity 'nuff to warm the heart of any Movement stumper), and who never make fools of themselves the way that Stooge punk does, what with his clawing at himself, smashing the mike in his chops, jumping into the crowd to wallow around a forest of legs and ankles and god knows what else while screaming those sickening songs about TV eyes and feeling like dirt and not having no fun 'cause you're a fucked up adolescent, horny but neurotic, sitting around bored and lonesome and unable to communicate with yourself or anybody else. Shit. Who needs songs like that, that give off such bad vibes? We got a groovy, beautifully insular hip community, maybe a nation, budding here, and our art is a celebration of ourselves as liberated individuals and masses of such—the People, dig? And antisocial art simply don't fit in, brothers and sisters. Who wants to be depressed, anyway?

Well, a lot of changes have gone down since Hip first hit the heartland. There's a new culture shaping up, and while it's certainly an improvement on the repressive society now nervously aging, there is a strong element of sickness in our new, amorphous institutions. The cure bears viruses of its own. The Stooges also carry a strong element of sickness in their music, a crazed quaking uncertainty, an errant foolishness that effectively mirrors the absurdity and desperation of the times, but I believe that they also carry a strong element of cure, a post-derangement sanity. And I also believe that their music is as important as the product of any rock group working today, although you better never call it art or you may wind up with a deluxe pie in the face. What it is, instead, is what rock and roll at heart is and always has been, beneath the stylistic distortions the last few years have wrought. The Stooges are not for the ages—nothing created now is—but they are most implicitly for today and tomorrow and the traditions of two decades of beautifully bopping, manic, simplistic jive.

To approach Fun House we've got to go back to the beginning, to all the blather and arbitration left in the wake of notoriety and a first album. Because there is a lot of bad air around, and we've got to clear away the mundane murk of ignorance and incomprehension if we're going to let the true, immaculate murk of the Stooges shine forth in all its chaotic prisms like those funhouse mirrors which distract so pointedly. I don't want to have to be an apologist for the Stooges. I would like it if we lived in sanity, where every clear eye could just look and each whole mind appreciate the Stooges on their own obvious merits (even though, granted, in such an environment the Stooges would no longer be necessary—as William Burroughs counseled in one of his lucider epigrams, they really do work to make themselves obsolete). However, since conditions are in the present nigh irremediable mess, with innocent listeners led and hyped, and duped and doped, taught to grovel before drug-addled effeminate Limeys who once collected blues 78s and a few guitar lessons and think that that makes them torch-bearers; a hapless public, finally, of tender boys and girls pavlov'd into salivating greenbacks and stoking reds at the mere utterance of certain magic incantations like “supergroup” and “superstar”—well, is it any wonder your poor average kid, cruisin' addled down the street in vague pursuit of snatch or reds or rock mag newsstands, ain't got no truck with the Stooges?

So, to facilitate the mass psychic liberation necessary, it's imperative that we start with the eye of the hurricane, the center of all the confusion, contention and plain badmouthing, Iggy Stooge himself. Now, I've never met Iggy but from what I've gathered listening to his records and digging the stage act and all, he's basically a nice sensitive American boy growing up amid a thicket of some of the worst personal, interpersonal and national confusion we've seen. I mean, nowhere else but in America would you find a phenomenon like Iggy Stooge, right? I was at one time going to write a letter to Malcolm Muggeridge over in England telling him all about Iggy and the Stooges, but I



didn't because I finally decided that he'd just mark it up as one more symptom of the decline of Western civilization. Which it's not. Not finally, that is—it may be now, in some of its grosser, semi-pathological trappings, but then look what it came out of. There's always hope for a brighter tomorrow because today's mess spawned stalwart crusaders for something better like Iggy. And, presumably, the rest of the Stooges.

So, Iggy: a pre-eminently American kid, singing songs about growing up in America, about being hung up lotsa the time (as who hasn't been?), about confusion and doubt and uncertainty, about inertia and boredom and suburban pubescent darkness because "I'm not right / To want somethin' / To want somethin' / Tonight..." Sitting around, underaged, narcissistic, masochistic, deep in gloom cuz we could have a real cool time but I'm not right, whether from dope or day drudgery or just plain neurotic do-nothing misanthropy, can't get through ("You don't know me / Little Doll / And I don't know you ...")—ah well, wait awhile, maybe some fine rosy-fleshed little doll with real eyes will come along and marry you and then you'll get some. Until then, though, it shore ain't no fun, so swagger with your buddies, brag, leer at passing legs, whack your doodle at home at night gaping at polyethylene bunnies hugging teddy bears, go back the next day and dope out with the gang, grass, speed, reds, Romilar, who cares, some frat bull's gonna buy us beer, and after that you go home and stare at the wall all cold and stupid inside ...

Pretty depressing, eh? Sheer adolescent drivel. Banal, too. Who needs music with a theme like that? What does it have to do with reality, with the new social systems the Panthers and Yips are cookin' up, with the fact that I took acid four days ago and since then everything is smooth with no hangups like it always is for about a week after a trip? Feel good, benevolent. So what the fuck does all that Holden Caulfield garbage Iggy Stooze is always prattling about have to do with me? Or with art or rock 'n' roll or anything? Sure, we all know about adolescence, why belabor it, why burden "art" (or whatever the Stooges claim that caterwauling is) with something better left in the recesses of immature brains who'll eventually grow out of it themselves? And how, in the name of all these obvious logical realities, can any intelligent person take Iggy Stooze for anything but a blatant fool, wild-eyed, sweaty and loud though he may be?

Well, I'll tell ya why and how. I've been building up through lots of questions and postulations and fantasies, so not one dullard reading this and owning a stack of dated, boring "rock" albums but no Stooze music can fail to comprehend, at which time I will be able to get on to the business of describing the new Stooges album. So here comes the payload. Now, to answer the last question first, because the final conclusion of all Stooze-mockers is definitely true and central to the Stooges: you're goddam right Iggy Stooze is a damn fool. He does a lot better job of making a fool of himself on stage and vinyl than almost any other performer I've ever seen. That is one of his genius's central facets. ...

So now you see what I'm driving at, why the Stooges are vital, aside from being good musicians, which I'll prove just as tangentially later. It takes courage to make a fool of yourself, to say, "See, this is all a sham, this whole show and all its floodlit drug-jacked realer-than-life trappings, and the fact that you are out there and I am up here means not the slightest thing." Because it doesn't. The Stooges have that kind of courage, but few other performers do. ...

But the Stooges are one band that does have the strength to meet any audience on its own terms, no matter what manner of devilish bullshit that audience might think up (although they are usually too cowed by Ig's psychically pugnacious assertiveness to do anything but gape and cringe slightly, snickering later on the drive home). Iggy is like a matador baiting the vast dark hydra sitting afront

him—he enters the audience frequently to see what’s what and even from the stage his eyes reach out searchingly, sweeping the joint and singling out startled strangers who’re seldom able to stare him down. It’s your stage as well as his and if you can take it away from him, why, welcome to it. But the King of the Mountain must maintain the pace, and the authority, and few can. In this sense Ig is a true star of the rarest kind—he has won that stage, and nothing but the force of his own presence entitles him to it.

Here’s this smug post-hippie audience, supposedly so loose, liberated, righteous and ravenous, the anarchic terror of middle American insomnia. These are the folks that’re always saying: “Someday, somebody’s gonna just bust that fucked-up punk right in the chops!” And how many times have you heard people say of bands: “Man, what a shuck! I could get up there and cut that shit.” ...

The first thing to remember about Stooge music is that it is monotonous and simplistic on purpose, and that within the seemingly circumscribed confines of this fuzz-feedback territory the Stooges work deftly with musical ideas that may not be highly sophisticated (God forbid) but are certainly advanced. The stunningly simple two-chord guitar line mechanically reiterated all through “1969” on their first album, for instance, is nothing by itself, but within the context of the song it takes on a muted but very compelling power as an ominous, and yes, in the words of Ed Ward which were more perceptive (and more of an accolade) than he ever suspected, “mindless” rhythmic pulsation repeating itself into infinity and providing effective hypnotic counterpoint to the sullen plaint of Iggy’s words (and incidentally, Ig writes some of the best throwaway lines in rock, meaning some of the best lines in rock, which is basically a music meant to be tossed over the shoulder and off the wall: “Now I’m gonna be twenty-two / I say my- my and-a boo-hoo”—that’s classic—he couldn’t’ve picked a better line to complete the rhyme if he’d labored into 1970 and threw the I Ching into the bargain—thank God somebody making rock ‘n’ roll records still has the good sense, understood by our zoot-jive forefathers but few bloated current bands, to know when to just throw down a line and let it lie).

Now there’s a song just packed with ideas for you, simplistic and “stupid” though it may seem and well be. A trained monkey could probably learn to play that two-chord line underneath, but no monkeys and very few indeed of their cousins half a dozen rungs up on the evolutionary ladder, the “heavy” white rock bands, could think of utilizing it in the vivid way it is here, with a simplicity so basic it’s almost pristine. Seemingly the most obvious thing in the world, I would call it a stroke of genius at least equal to Question Mark and the Mysterians’ endless one-finger one-key organ drone behind the choruses of “96 Tears,” which is one of the greatest rock and roll songs of all time and the real beginning of my story, for it was indeed a complex chronology, the peculiar machinations of rock ‘n’ roll history from about 1965 on, which ultimately made the Stooges imperative.

## **12. Robert Christgau, “Creedence: Where Do You Go From the Top?,” *Village Voice*, Feb. 1970**

Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Berkeley, California rock band, recently spent thirty thousand dollars on a party designed to attract attention. Since 1970 Creedence was the leading record-seller in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, Canada, Israel, Switzerland, Norway, and El Salvador, this would appear a somewhat redundant exercise, albeit tax-deductible, but in fact it wasn’t. For Creedence finds itself in a quandary as perplexing as it is enviable. Riveted onto the most inflexible hard-rock framework this side of the Stooges and Grand Funk Railroad—which is to say,

a framework with just enough variety in the vocals and hook riffs to qualify for the second station of rock fixity—the band has turned off the kind of fan who exults every time he identifies a chord change, who assumes a hit single is a bad record, and who talks about rock rather than rock and roll. Worse still, Creedence has not infused its public—a category that subsumes a remarkable range of high-school students, truck-stoppers, heads, and miscellaneous—with the kind of ardor public idols are expected to expect. The trouble is, both failings are inextricable from the success they accompany, which is based on a fanatical devotion to the music of rock and roll.

The most reasonable complaint about Creedence's music is that it always sounds the same, excuse enough for the chord-change crowd to put it down. ... *Cosmo's Factory* is in a dozen tiny respects an elaboration. The most obvious change is in the songwriting, especially the lyrics, but there are others, e.g.: John Fogerty's singing has become surer and more subtle, the four musicians are more integral, the sound of the recording is fuller, "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" apotheosizes "Suzie Q"'s artless concept of rock improvisation, and so forth. ...

Maybe this only proves the natural superiority of music to hype. In the end, it says here, devotion to craft—or art, if you insist—prevails. ... John Fogerty's flannel shirt is as apposite as all of Jimi Hendrix's pirate finery. As Fogerty is forever insisting, this is a bad time for media flash.

In practice, this means that Fogerty has no taste for public sexuality—that is, for sexiness. It is really the *music* of rock and roll that animates his devotion, and thus he calls into question all of our glib generalizations about the sexual purport of fifties rock. Fogerty possesses a classic (unique and yet tradition-defined) rock voice of the rough-edged variety. He goes sweet and smooth only occasionally, usually to communicate something very close to spirituality—listen to "Lookin' Out My Back Door" with that in mind—rather than the husky come-on of Presley or Morrison. His voice has much in common with John Lennon's, but unlike Lennon he has never written songs about women, love, romance. Fogerty derives from "Blue Suede Shoes," "School Days," and "Rip It Up" rather than "Don't Be Cruel," "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," and "Long Tall Sally." This is a significant and perhaps even neurotic limitation. ... Fogerty's compositions (two big exceptions: "Proud Mary" and "Lookin' Out My Back Door") fall into two approximate categories: choogling songs about rock and roll (forerunner: "Rip It Up") and songs of social and personal protest (forerunner, I insist: "Blue Suede Shoes"). Supposedly, there is no way to write an effective protest song; the genre is corny by definition. But Fogerty, the richest source closed to him, finds the way again and again, not just in famous successes like "Fortunate Son" and "Bad Moon Rising" but in minor pieces like "It Came Out of the Sky" and (a personal favorite) "Don't Look Now," which manages to encapsulate the class system in two minutes and eight seconds. The two categories come together in "Down on the Corner," which is about poor boys who choogle.

The energy implied by coinages like "choogle" and "ramble tamble" has more to do with vigor than with potency, more to do with simple activity than with sexuality. That distinction has its parallel in Fogerty's politics, which are less apocalyptic (and revolutionary) than activist (and liberal)—the politics of agape rather than the politics of eros. Don't underestimate the honest liberal: The Airplane sings up against the wall, but Creedence puts its royalties where its voice is and underwrites the Alcatraz Indians. ...

### 13. Robert Christgau, "Rock 'n' Revolution," *Village Voice*, July 1969

A riddle for you.

Q.: Why is rock like the revolution?

A.: Because they're both groovy.

Now, I am aware that this is not the standard argument. Rock and roll, as we all know, was instrumental in opening up the generation gap and fertilizing the largely sexual energy that has flowered into the youth life-style, and this life-style, as we all know, is going to revolutionize the world. Well, not exactly. A noted commentator on such subjects, Karl Marx, once observed: "A revolution involves a change in structure; a change in style is not a revolution." In that sense—rejecting any optimistic projections about how small changes in style can transform structures incrementally—rock is clearly not revolutionary at all. The other kind of revolution—the kind that permits Columbia Records to call its artists *The Revolutionaries*—is a revolution in style. It can make nice changes for people, yes. But all that means is that it's groovy.

The fact that a small minority of young politicians actually understands this only proves how drastically the politics of generation has outstripped its own origins. Without doubt, the way rock and roll intensified youth consciousness was a political phenomenon—that is, it affected the power people had over their lives. In fact, there was probably a time when rock could be called, without too much hyperbole, the most socially productive force in the Western world. It educated kids to ways of living that their approved education glossed over, and it provided a bond for the young and the youthful. But even though something of the sort is still happening, the formal precocity of rock—the rapidity with which it expanded and too frequently exhausted itself—distorted its political usefulness. As the best performers elaborated their music, they narrowed their audience, and too often the gospel of sexual liberation and generational identity became a smug ritual, with the wider audiences left to the lifeless myths of the schlockmeisters the rock artists deplored.

Anyway, the new youth gospel was greeted with unanticipated hostility by the old capitalists, who still had most of the power, and there was precipitous escalation, most of it rhetorical, on both sides. Suddenly, sexual liberation and generational identity (together with expanded consciousness, a last-minute attraction) were understood by both sides as facets of an inevitable social upheaval. It was all the same big revolution. But was that what Danny & the Juniors meant when they told us rock and roll was here to stay? ...

People's Park represents an excellent departure from the abstract politics of the past few years because it is an issue with broad, concrete, and self-evident appeal that embodies a radical concept, the inhumanity of institutionalized private property. In other words, it combines the groovy revolution with the structural one. It is significant that rock groups are working for People's Park (Bill Graham sponsored a bail benefit at which the Airplane, the Dead, and Creedence Clearwater appeared) when they don't move for the Panthers or the Chicago Seven.

It ought to be remembered that musicians have never tried to be in the political vanguard—whatever their metaphorical proclivities, artists usually like peace and quiet as much as, if not more than, anyone else. The musicians never called for revolution in the first place, only certain of their fans. It took about eighteen months—from early 1967 to late 1969—for the idea of "revolution" to evolve from an illusion of humorless politniks to a hip password that, like everything hip, was promulgated free (both vitiated and made more dangerous) by magazines, networks, and even advertising agencies. The hype, as we in the music biz call it, imbued the movement with an apparent strength that intensified its infatuation with itself. There are still many would-be revolutionaries who talk about full-scale wish-fulfillment by 1975.

That is extremely unlikely at best. After all, People's Park also has a rather decisive negative side. As of

now, the people (a term that for once is relatively accurate) haven't even gained their park ... I'm afraid there may be another answer. I'm afraid that many people—not only the grown-ups, whose apprehension seems to increase geometrically with every new atrocity, but also almost all the kids—are very chary of the revolution. The reason is simple: Real revolutions are unpleasant, not groovy. You can get killed and everything....

But it also seems to me that it is cowardly to worry too much about such details—if it happens, it happens, and everyone chooses sides. All of John Lennon's rationalizations are correct. Violence does lead to more violence, and the tedium and rigidity of effective politics are antihuman. ... Anyone who is serious about changing things ought to be willing to prove it by taking risks. Right now, that means engaging in what I would call prerevolutionary politics, politics that test the system's vaunted flexibility. It means finding out now whether imperialism, racism, sexism, the destruction of the ecosystem, and the robotization of human life (not to mention trivial problems like military slave labor, starvation, and organized crime) can really be ended without overthrowing the state. It means accepting the labor of organizing now and remembering that violence may be necessary later, not as catharsis but as tactic. And it means being ready to give up your comforts if things turn out to be as bad as they seem.

It does not mean that every musician should give himself to the movement. Art and politics rarely mix, and good music is always good for the world, which is finally what politics is about. ... Perhaps the best demonstration of this approach to music is three lines of a long agitprop poem by a veteran Bay Area activist called "Berkeley, May 15-17, 1969": "O my God they're shooting! Hardly anyone is blinded. Many people die./ Many women are born, and men seeing for once as clearly as women./ Keep running. Breathe even. Listen to the Band when you can."

In the worst of times music is a promise that times are meant to be better. Ultimately, its most important political purpose is to keep us human under fire. John Lennon and Bob Dylan, both of whom seem to sing their best when they are thinking their worst ("The Ballad of John and Yoko," "I Threw It All Away"), are often better at keeping us human than trusty propagandists like Phil Ochs—I wish I could add another name, but singing propagandists are rare these days.

Still, we don't just respond to music—we respond to what we know about it. Rock is good in itself, but it is also good because of what it does for people. We have always loved it for political reasons; the praise of vitality, after all, is a populist judgment. And at this moment in history politics are an index of vitality. It is puritanical to expect musicians, or anyone, to hew to the proper line. But it is reasonable to request that they not go out of their way to oppose it. Both Dylan and Lennon have, and it takes much of the pleasure out of their music for me. ...

I know much of this is going to be misconstrued, so let me try to be more explicit. I am not putting down Johnny Cash's music because he likes Nixon, or Dylan's because he likes Cash, nor am I suggesting that Dylan endorses Cash's politics by participating in his music. I'm not even dismissing Cash's politics. There are good reasons for conservatism, and I suspect Cash is sensitive to most of them; Dylan certainly is. That does not mean, however, that either is right. I enjoy and admire and learn from their celebrations of individualism and the simple life, but I remain aware of their limitations. In the case of Dylan, and Lennon, the limitations become really distressing because I know each is capable of much more. Furthermore, I think my reservations are aesthetic. What I really don't like is softheartedness. "Revolution" is as artistically indefensible as, oh, "Love Can Make You Happy," and for many of the same reasons.

For similar reasons, I like the MC-5. I like them even though I think their political position is rather dumb,

based on an arrantly sexist analysis. The new pop has managed to discard a lot of myths, but because male supremacy is rarely perceived as the political issue it is, because it is on the contrary often taken as folk wisdom, most popular music works to reinforce the existing system of male-female relations. ...

I think people who reject the 5—even if they object in terms of the music, which emphasizes the violent, low-life aspects of rock that the art-subtlety-taste crowd would just as soon ignore—do so for political reasons. "They're trying to shove the revolution down everyone's throats," one kid has complained to me. Of course, he's right. The 5's methods have been very crude. If they don't respond to real needs within their apparent (and their music) to achieve the popularity they want, then they will have failed, artistically and politically.

For that is the final irony of rock 'n' revolution. The political value of rock is a function of how many people it reaches, yet as rock becomes more political, it reaches fewer people. Almost everyone knows this, but no one knows what to do about it....

#### **14. Alice Echols, "Hope and Hype in Monterey," from *Sweet Paradise: The Life and Times of Janis Joplin* (NY: Metropolitan books, 1999)**

Monterey is very groovy, man," yelled an obviously stoned Michael Bloomfield from the stage. "This is our generation, man. All you people, man, all together, man, it's groovy. Dig yourselves 'coz it's really groovy.... We love you all, man." Bloomfield's giddy Love Generation rhapsody echoed the feelings of the fifty-five to ninety thousand people who attended the Monterey International Pop Festival the weekend of June 16, 1967. The three-day outdoor festival felt like one big contact high. "Hippie heaven," declared Newsweek. More discerning was the music critic Robert Christgau, one of twelve hundred journalists covering the festival. "There are no hippies—they have disappeared in an avalanche of copy."

The hype notwithstanding, everyone remembers Monterey Pop as the cool, laid-back festival where musicians (even stars like Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones) mingled with the hoi polloi. "You could get food," recalled Grace Slick of the Airplane.

"You could go to the bathroom. People could see things. It wasn't too big. "When it was over and you wanted to go home, you could just get in your car and drive there." Woodstock would grab all the headlines two years later, but Monterey was a landmark, the festival that signaled that what was happening on the streets of Haight-Ashbury was going national. America was turning. "Everywhere you looked beautiful people were in the majority," enthused the Barb, Berkeley's underground newspaper, in its report on Monterey. Otis Redding marveled at the scene. "Oh, these fucking hippies, man. They're smoking dope and shit like it's legal out here. See, everybody's high." For Redding and many others, the scene at Monterey looked like nothing short of a "cultural revolution." ...

Monterey is not remembered, however, for San Francisco's hippie bands like the Dead, the Airplane, or Big Brother. The stars of Monterey were Jimi Hendrix, the Who, Otis Redding, and Janis Joplin. Hendrix's otherworldly, acrobatic guitar playing (between his legs, behind his head, with his teeth) and the "vengeance" with which he "took back" and reworked the blues, as the Who's Pete Townshend put it, awed the audience. To Townshend, it felt almost as if Hendrix were telling white rockers, "You've taken this, Eric Clapton, and Mr. Townshend, you think you're a showman. This is how we do it ... when we take back what you've borrowed, if not stolen." Few

understood Hendrix's aggression the way Townshend did, but everyone responded nonetheless. Once relegated to the background in Little Richard's band, Hendrix dominated the stage at Monterey, playing with what the critic Nelson George called the "revenge of the R & B sideman." He even managed to "out-Visigoth" the stage- trashing Who, burning and smashing his guitar after humping both it and the amplifier.

With his charisma, dynamism, and intense, turbocharged vocals, Otis Redding succeeded in knocking out "the love crowd," as he called it. Redding had been wowing black audiences for years, but few besides Janis in Monterey's overwhelmingly white audience had ever seen him perform. Decker out in a snug blue suit, "Otis was king," the Berkeley Barb declared. One of the few African Americans to play the festival, Redding packed so much raw emotion into his singing that he went over with the crowd despite his tight, slick, soul revue act. By contrast, the nightclubbish routine of the twenty-year-old Laura Nyro (her first public performance) seemed weirdly affected and was so out of sync with Monterey's this-ain't-show-biz vibe that within the music industry "the phrase 'almost as bad as Laura Nyro' "became for a while "the definitive put-down for an inept performance."

And then there was Janis. Phillips and Adler hadn't expected much from Big Brother, whom they scheduled to appear on Saturday afternoon, distinctly non-prime time. Even the Dead, who were still pretty amateurish, had been given a coveted nighttime slot. Several other San Francisco bands were consigned to Saturday afternoon's program as well, which is why Chet Helms was appointed to emcee it. By the time of the festival Big Brother had been playing together with Janis for exactly a year, but they were not yet one of the city's top draws. The Fillmore's Bill Graham hadn't started booking the band regularly; he didn't like Janis's singing and took offense when she told a tiny underground paper that his ballroom was for sailors and weekend hippies, while Chefs Avalon was the real thing. So the Monterey Festival was the band's first big unveiling and Janis was nervous. Peggy Caserta recalls a long-distance call from Janis, who yelled frantically into the receiver, "Peggy, I don't have a thing to wear!" She was barely exaggerating. Peggy suggested she wear her peace dress, a plain shift with peace symbols all over it that was popular in the Haight, but Janis appeared onstage that Saturday in jeans and a top. Janis was worried about more than her clothes, though. She was terrified of bombing, Peggy remembers. She told Janis to sing as if it were her only chance, which is precisely what she did.

Janis had appeared on a small side stage at the Monterey Folk Festival four years earlier, but Saturday she was center stage, facing her biggest crowd yet. "Janis was so nervous, it was crazy," recalls John Phillips. "But as soon as she hit the stage she just stomped her foot down and got real Texas." Janis ripped through the band's old standby, "Down on Me," and "Road Block," both fast-tempo numbers. Then she took her time with a haunting version of Willie Mae Thornton's "Ball and Chain," finally tearing down the house. By all accounts, the audience went berserk. "Where did she come from?" asked Lou Adler, stunned. Of the Bay Area performers, Janis was "the scene- stealer." The critics seemed to run out of superlatives; without a doubt, this was Janis's moment. Those who were hearing her for the first time were struck by the "terrible energy" she harnessed and "brutally compressed into the moment," as the rock critic Michael Lydon wrote, capturing the orgasmic quality of her performance. "In great shouts that send her strings of beads flying and knot her face into grimaces, the energy explodes and explodes again, sending out waves of electrical excitement." The jazz critic Nat Hentoff wrote similarly, claiming that, when Janis performed, "her voice and body hurled with larruping power" that left her "limp" and him feeling that he'd been "in contact with an overwhelming life force." Janis went so far out there when she sang that Greil Marcus, another critic, wondered how she ever managed to "get back." "Ball and Chain," in particular, always left Janis drained because, she

explained, "it's about feeling things.... I can never sing it without really trying." Big Brother had totally overhauled the song. Now there was "this big hole in the song that's mine," Janis said, "and I've got to fill it with something."

And fill it she did, with all the pain and joy of her passion. "When I sing," she later told Michael Lydon, "I feel, oh, I feel, well, like when you're first in love.... I feel chills, weird feelings slipping all over my body, it's a supreme emotional and physical experience." You could see the "weird feelings" flashing across Janis's face, what Lydon called "the fierceness of joy breaking through anguish." More than Janis's irrepressible (and undeniably sexual) energy, more than her powerful voice, it was this quality of feeling that mesmerized audiences. In contrast to most other Monterey showstoppers, Janis "got a reaction based solely on her sweet tough self," said Robert Christgau. To Clive Davis of Columbia Records, Janis seemed "choked up at one point, laughing at another.... She seemed bursting with emotion; and it was so pure." If Monterey's ultimate put-down was "plastic," then its highest compliment was "pure." Greil Marcus saw more contrivance than other critics did, but he considered it an asset: "By marshalling an array of blues and soul mannerisms, she contrives an act that in certain moments-and you can hear them coming-ceases to be any kind of act at all. The means of illusion produce the real." Janis always maintained there was no artifice in her singing. "It's real, it's not just a veneer, it's not just a performance," she said. Of course, she was giving a performance, but unlike the emotions many other singers summoned, Janis's seemed utterly unmediated, on the verge, even, of overtaking her.

Filmmaker D. A. Pennebaker was there with a crew that Saturday afternoon working on the 1V documentary Monterey Pop, yet the only person caught on film as Janis sang was Cass Elliot of the Mamas and the Papas. Janis's killer performance was lost to posterity because Big Brother's new manager, Julius Karpen, had barred the producers from filming. Like several other Bay Area band managers, Karpen balked at signing a release form granting worldwide rights for use of the film "to the festival" without receiving some money in return. The band may have agreed with Karpen before their performance, but when Big Brother walked offstage they were sorry: the film was a rip-off, but they knew how hot they'd been; without doubt, they would have benefited in the long run. Backstage, Phillips accosted the band: he would let them perform again if they'd consent to being filmed. "Listen, you guys are blowin' it by not bein' in this movie," he counseled. But Karpen wouldn't budge. He was beginning to

pose a problem for the band. A former Merry Prankster, Karpen was known as "Green Julius" because of his habit of conducting business while high. "He wouldn't do any business with anyone unless they got high with him on marijuana," Bob Seidemann claims. "So that put a real curb on his negotiating style." In fact, Big Brother only ended up with Karpen because Quicksilver's manager, Ron Polte, whom Peter Albin had asked to manage them, was too busy to take on another band and suggested his friend Karpen for the job. Unfortunately, Karpen knew next to nothing about the business, which may be why he approached every deal as a potential rip-off. Jim Haynie, who managed the Fillmore for Graham, heard that people were reluctant to do business with Karpen because of his paranoia. In any case, he was hurting the band.

Janis turned to the hippest, shrewdist manager of all, Albert Grossman, to advise the band. Albert was at Monterey to see two of the acts under his management-the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and Michael Bloomfield's new outfit, Electric Flag. He was also there to sign up promising new groups. Albert's major moneymaker, Bob Dylan, had been out of commission for almost a year since a motorcycle accident and showed no signs of returning to his hectic touring schedule. Albert was



backstage with his wife, Sally, who remembers Janis as "totally frantic, screaming at Albert about what she needed." Janis and Albert "had a connection just like that," according to Sally Grossman, and he began to help her. He told Big Brother they'd be fools to hold out for film money, although he refused to let his own band, Electric Flag, take part in the documentary. Faced with a mutiny, Karpen relented and the organizers arranged a second slot for Big Brother on Sunday night. After her encounter with Grossman, Janis was heard saying, "Julius Karpen doesn't know it yet, but he has just lost Big Brother and the Holding Company."

When the band took the stage on Sunday night Janis was wearing a brand-new gold lame pantsuit. "She pronounced it 'lame' to rhyme with 'fame' as in 'This outfit is really lame,' " recalls Sam Andrew. "We were mocking ourselves for grabbing at that brass ring, but we grabbed all the same." The band's second performance of "Ball and Chain" is captured in Pennebaker's Monterey Pop, and it's hard to imagine their Saturday set had rocked any harder than this encore. The audience went wild once again. As Janis turned away from the crowd, she beamed, a little shyly, at all the adulation. With sweat dripping through the gold lame, she was euphoric as she first trotted and then skipped offstage.

At Monterey Pop, it became clear that the real turn-on was Janis's raw, uncompromised presence. Janis wasn't conventionally pretty and didn't put on the usual kind of sexy show, but her performances would leave men, in particular, panting for her. Robert Christgau wasn't the only man to comment on her sexuality. The L.A. Free Press ran an article, "Big Brother's Boobs," in which the writer raved that Janis "makes it for me, like holy mojo lips caressing the dick of my soul." Richard Goldstein put it less crudely in the Village Voice: "To hear Janis sing 'Ball and Chain' just once is to have been laid, lovingly and well." Janis turned men on precisely because her emotional nakedness seemed almost obscene compared with the dolled-up, painted femininity of her time. And, of course, Janis was high-voltage, which many saw as a barometer of the ferocity she'd bring to any sexual encounter.

For Janis, Monterey was the ultimate vindication. The very thing that had gotten her into so much trouble back in Port Arthur—her inability to control her feelings, "to keep them down," as she said—now made her the darling of the counterculture. People everywhere were raving about the way she let all those powerful, unruly feelings take hold of her. She'd gotten that admiring reaction before, but usually in places like the funky Avalon. Several months after Monterey, Janis talked to Nat Hentoff about having grown up handicapped by her feelings. Her mother had always urged her to "be like everybody else," Janis said, but she just couldn't. "It nearly tore my life apart." Her openness to her feelings made her susceptible to "superhorrible downs," she went on. "I was always victim to myself. I'd do wrong things, run away, freak out, go crazy." Singing with Big Brother had changed that. "I've made feeling work for me, through music, instead of destroying me. It's superfortunate. Man, if it hadn't been for the music, I probably would have done myself in." ...

No one was more taken with Janis than Albert Grossman and Clive Davis. Albert was willing to advise Janis on the film but didn't press the issue of representing the band. Clive Davis, the newly appointed president of Columbia Records, however, was so entranced he wanted to sign Big Brother on the spot. Upon returning to New York, Davis was reportedly "berserk with ecstasy. He loved Monterey Pop and he loved Janis." Although Janis was his favorite performer to emerge from Monterey, Davis also went after the Steve Miller Band and Quicksilver, only to find himself outmaneuvered by Capitol Records. RCA had paid \$25,000 for the Airplane the previous year, but in the wake of the Airplane's success nobody came that cheap anymore. Capitol shelled out \$40,000

each for the Steve Miller Band and Quicksilver, and Davis paid \$50,000 for Electric Flag.

Monterey Pop marked "the creative turning point" for Clive Davis; it tipped him off, he said, to the social and musical revolutions of the sixties and led him to stake his company's future on rock music. It was a smart move, since Columbia Records was immensely powerful but financially troubled. His decision wasn't, however, just a cynical business move. Most record executives sneered at rock 'n' roll as music that "smells but sells." This attitude led to some remarkably stupid decisions, most notably Capitol Records' initial refusal to release the Beatles' first singles, produced by EMI, Capitol's English parent label. Columbia Records, which prided itself on tasteful music, was especially stodgy. Transforming "the label of Robert Goulet into the label of Janis Joplin," as Fredric Dannen put it, was a bold move, particularly because Mitch Miller, Columbia's leading A & R man, openly and publicly loathed rock 'n' roll. Davis made many enemies in the makeover, both in-house and outside the company, as he snatched up musicians who would go on to become the most critically acclaimed artists and biggest hit makers in the new field. Within a three-year period Davis signed Janis and Big Brother, Santana, Chicago, Laura Nyro, and Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Davis's legend (and his ego) grew accordingly. Joe Smith, his rival at Warner Brothers, had a convention audience in stitches when he introduced Davis by saying, "Let me read the official biography.

Clive was born in a manger in Bethlehem." ...

Monterey Pop lasted a mere three days, but the festival's reverberations were still being felt many years later. In their wildest dreams, Lou Adler and John Phillips could never have imagined all that would happen in the wake of their event. The whole rock juggernaut—not just Woodstock and Altamont—had its origins in the festival. Within months Jann Wenner launched *Rolling Stone* magazine, featuring, ironically, a cover story lambasting the festival's promoters for lining their own pockets. Record companies now courted rock musicians and made *Rolling Stone* required reading for their executives. Rock 'n' roll was no longer the bastard child of the entertainment industry but its shiny new jewel. An especially "happy accident" for the music industry, Monterey Pop spawned "the next billion-dollar business," in the words of Robert Christgau. In 1962, record sales totaled \$500 million; by 1996 they grossed over \$20 billion, largely on the basis of rock 'n' roll.

Until this transformation, rock musicians, however popular, had earned far less money than what they made for others. In the new order, they gained control over their creative output and made money for themselves and not just for the businessmen. On tour, rock acts had long been consigned to the world of lousy Hat rates, while "class" acts like Danny Thomas and Harry Belafonte received some 60 percent of the gross, always a more lucrative arrangement. Todd Schiffman was one of the first booking agents to buck the system whereby rock was "subsidizing the Thomases and Belafontes." He began demanding 60 percent for his acts, not the standard \$5,000 flat fee that most bands—even the Rolling Stones—received. No longer the "asshole" of the entertainment industry, rock musicians like Janis and Big Brother were now in a position to negotiate with managers, booking agents, and promoters.

Warner Brothers Records had a preview of this changed world three months before Monterey Pop when two of its executives appeared at a Grateful Dead concert to present the band with copies of the band's freshly pressed first album. Joe Smith—the company's vice president—and his boss, Stan Corwyn, couldn't have looked more out of place with their short hair and official Warner Brothers blazers. Smith stepped up to the mike. "I just want to say what an honor it is for Warner Brothers Records to be able to introduce the Grateful Dead and its music to the world," he said. As Smith

and Corwyn stood onstage, quintessential company men, the Dead just rolled their eyes. Finally, Jerry Garcia took the mike back and offered his droll response: "I just want to say what an honor it is for the Grateful Dead to introduce Warner Brothers Records to the world." To help negotiate the shores of the new music world, Warner Brothers hired Andy Wickham, a music lover and freak, to assist with the transition.

Columbia also brought in its own "house hippie," Jim Fouratt, who had worked closely with Abbie Hoffman in the Yippies. Columbia even began to promote its acts with the much-ridiculed "But the Man Can't Bust Our Music" ad campaign. Most veterans of the San Francisco scene thought it simply a crass attempt to cash in on the youth revolt, but the FBI reportedly worried about the money record companies were pouring into the coffers of radical underground newspapers with such "hip" ads. For a while it seemed as if Lenin's maxim that capitalists would sell the rope with which to hang themselves might come true.

The line between hooking up and cashing in was precariously thin.

Clive Davis, a Harvard-educated lawyer, claimed his Monterey weekend not only marked the "creative turning point" in his life but had changed him "as a person." Walter Yetnikoff, who had worked for Davis at Columbia, didn't buy his former boss's breathless enthusiasm. "I went to the Monterey Pop Festival, and I was instilled with Love, and Joy, and the Flowers were in the Air," he said, mocking Davis. "Then I came to Los Angeles, and a Cop stopped me. Can you believe what they did to the Love? Then I signed this, and I signed that. . . ." "What is this bullshit?" Yetnikoff asked. The festival may have loosened Davis up, but, as Yetnikoff points out, it in no way interfered with his interest in making money. The whole Haight-Ashbury shtick was easily recuperated by the music industry. Christgau would write a year after Monterey, "Art and social commentary were absorbed, almost painlessly, by the world's schlockiest business." Citing as evidence a trade journal's review of a new single as "a highly commercial rock allegory of perishing society," he would grouse that, "apparently, society itself would perish before the record industry." The humorist Cynthia Heimel recalls the time in June 1967 that she and her hippie friends spied a press kit for Moby Grape, one of the new San Francisco bands. "It looked psychedelic, yet it was done by ad people. I believe the word 'hype' was coined that very day."

But the commercial takeover of rock 'n' roll wasn't the straightforward assault that myth has made of it. According to the familiar story, sixties rock set out to change the world and found itself transformed instead. Journalists began sounding the alarm as soon as the music became commercially viable, but the account—a remarkably durable boomer myth—exaggerates the bands' hostility to the commercial music industry and minimizes the significance of the cultural revolt wrought by Janis and her peers. San Francisco bands promoted sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll and saw themselves as an alternative to AM teenybopper fare, but they were never averse to making money, much less at war with capitalism. In 1967 Bob Weir of the Dead, the least commercial of all the bands, told a reporter, "If the industry is gonna want us, they're gonna take us the way we are. Then, if the money comes in, it'll be a stone gas."

It was a gas for the Airplane and Big Brother and, years later, for the Dead, which through perseverance, and thanks to sixties nostalgia, would profit far more than any of the other San Francisco bands. And once the money began coming in, they all did what successful entertainers have always done—they bought fancy cars and expensive homes. San Francisco's *nouveau riche* rockers also spent lots of their flashy money on expensive marijuana and hashish and on harder drugs as well. The Bay Area music scene quickly "turned into who can buy the most cocaine," Nick

Gravenites said. As the bands became more successful, they also became quite insular. Opinion varies on the cordiality of relations between the bands, but Ed Denson, who managed Country Joe and the Fish, claims that "a lot of the bands hated each other. They wouldn't let each other on the same bills, formed little cliques."

According to Bill Thompson, the Airplane's manager, the bands didn't work cooperatively and form their own label because "everyone had their own fiefdoms." Even Bill Graham felt it was a "tragedy ... that the musicians never really did anything communally." Bill Belmont of the Fish adds, "The bands were created by the audiences, but did they ever do anything for the audience? Did they ever pump anything back in?" Perhaps the radical activist Abbie Hoffman, who was thrown off the stage at Woodstock by Pete Townshend of the Who, said it best when he called rock musicians "the high priests of our culture" but added, "unfortunately, most of them are assholes."

By contrast, Janis avoided ostentation, buying a used Porsche and, in the last year of her life, a less-than-palatial Marin County home that she filled with secondhand furniture. She loved making money, though, and might well be said to have been among the first rock 'n' roll stars to find a corporate sponsor—of sorts. While the Airplane became flacks for Levi Strauss, then under fire for exploitative labor practices, Janis decided the Southern Comfort folks owed her for all the free publicity she was giving their product. She directed Albert Grossman's office to flood the company with newspaper clippings mentioning her fondness for Southern Comfort, and the company ended up giving her a check for twenty-five hundred dollars, which she put toward the purchase of a lynx coat. Once she got the coat, Janis plugged herself, not the product. "Oh man, that was the best hustle I ever pulled—can you imagine getting paid for passing out for two years?"

Although the bands may have allowed themselves to be "swallowed by the voracious maw of corporate America," in Heime's words, they transformed the country's cultural landscape in the process. The Airplane's Bill Thompson recalls the band's gig at Grinnell College's homecoming dance. There they were in Iowa: "The girls were in ruffled dresses all the way down to the ankles with corsages, and their families were there. We started the light show and we had three sets to do that night. The first set, it was like we were from Mars." The parents ducked out early, and by the second set "people started dancing a little bit.... The third set, people went nuts. Off came the corsages. Shoes were coming off. Guys were ripping off their ties. They went nuts. It was one of the greatest feelings I ever had. It was like the turning of America in a way. We went out and played everywhere and did that. We were the first band to do that out of San Francisco."

Janis saw herself quite consciously as a cultural provocateur. "Kids from the Midwest, their whole fucking thing is to sit in row Q47 and be still.... It's never occurred to them that they could not go in the army. You know, it's a thing I do.... If you can get them once, man, get them standing up when they should be sitting down, sweaty when they should be decorous, smile when they should be applauding politely . . . I think you sort of switch on their brain, man, so that makes them say: Wait a minute, maybe I can do anything.' Whoooooo! It's life. That's what rock 'n' roll is for, turn that switch on, and man, it can be all." Claiming that she and her performance were one and the same, Janis nevertheless understood her power as an iconic figure. "People aren't supposed to be like me, sing like me, make out like me, drink like me, live like me," she later told reporters, "but now they're paying me \$50,000 a year for me to be like me. That's what I hope I mean to those kids out there. After they see me, when their mothers are feeding them all that cashmere sweater and girdle — [expletive deleted by the New York Times], maybe they'll have a second thought—that they can be themselves and win." If the bands didn't manage, or even set out to, overthrow corporate America, they did encourage American youth to trample on all the old certainties.

When bohemia finally went mass—largely through the success of the bands—Haight-Ashbury paid a heavy price. Rock music had made San Francisco the epicenter of hipness, but it was an honor veterans of the Haight would have gladly palmed off on any other city during 1967's disastrous Summer of Love. That spring, the crowds in the Haight had grown so thick—and progressively thicker every weekend—that people realized the neighborhood was on the cusp of a much larger influx. The Diggers predicted a hundred thousand newcomers would descend on the district that summer, and along with the Straight Theater, the Oracle, the Family Dog, they formed the Council for the Summer of Love to organize celebratory events and serve as a liaison to the straight world. The coming invasion of kids had prompted entrepreneurs to convert anything and everything into Love Cafes and Love Burger stands. In a one-month period, fifteen storefronts either changed hands or changed their names to capitalize on the hippie craze. In April, the Gray Line Bus Company began its Hippie Hop Tour, advertising it as "the only foreign tour within the continental limits of the United States." Pete Townshend visited the Haight around the time of Monterey and was surprised and saddened by how thoroughly commercialized the area had become. Bob Seidemann shot a Summer of Love photo essay in which he recorded young people making their journey through Haight Street. "You don't see any hippies. You see people looking for hippies," he observed. As the newcomers progressed up Haight Street they'd stop in boutiques so they could "get their act together." They'd buy an earring, then a groovy T-shirt, followed by a hip pair of bell-bottoms.

Increasingly, the crowds at the Fillmore and the Avalon neither knew nor cared about the origins of the scene. They cared only about the music. The Red Dog Saloon, 1090 Page Street, and Ken Kesey's Acid Tests were largely forgotten. Less than two years after the original 1965 benefits, the Fillmore held another dance for the San Francisco Mime Troupe. "Some of the musicians remembered us from the old days," said its founder, Ronny Davis, "but the new rock fans . . . knew the bands but not the Mime Troupe." He tried talking to them, but "it was like speaking into a cotton candy machine." By the Summer of Love, the scene had changed, growing, as Ken Kesey observed, "tighter and stranger."

Seventy-five thousand kids spent their summer vacation in the Haight, and by the end of the Summer of Love, "Haight Street was lined with people with problems," Don McNeil reported in the *Village Voice*. "Behind the scenes, there were only more problems." The streets of the Haight were "griseous and filthy, psychedelic weirdburger stands springing up in mutant profusion," wrote Ed Sanders in his book about Charles Manson. It was "like a valley of thousands of plump white rabbits surrounded by wounded coyotes." A community that had relied on long hair and weed as the badges of authenticity and cool found itself vulnerable to the faux-hippie con artists flooding into the neighborhood and other hip enclaves across America. "There was a six-month period," recalled the folksinger Arlo Guthrie, "when you could look down the street and you could tell who was your friend and who wasn't. . . . You knew who had a roach on him . . . but soon after you had guys who looked exactly like you sellin' you oregano." Oregano was the least of it: bad drugs, stickups, rape, and venereal disease were now increasingly common in Haight-Ashbury and other "love ghettos." Racial tension escalated as thousands of middleclass white kids came to divest themselves of the very material goodies that were beyond the reach of the vast majority of African Americans. Bob Seidemann says, "Blacks began showing up on Haight Street and they weren't looking like Jimi Hendrix. They were looking like bad guys." And, of course, there were the cops, who in October 1967 busted the Grateful Dead's house on 710 Ashbury Street.

Before long the old Haight habitues either fled or stayed indoors. "Uh oh, the street people have become the house people," Raechel Donahue, a KMPX deejay, recalls her husband, Tom, saying.

The Dead began moving away soon after the bust. Janis and Linda Gravenites stuck it out longer than many, but by the beginning of 1968 they too moved. "I didn't realize I'd been looking a block ahead for bad trips until I moved and didn't have to anymore," says Linda. The community lay in shambles as the bands pulled up stakes and escaped, usually to Marin County, that "outpost of Nirvana." After the triumph of Monterey, the Haight's swift decline came as something of a shock. "Ain't nothing like it ever gonna happen again," Janis said of Monterey Pop in late fall 1967. "For a while there were kids who believed they could make it better by being better. And they were better and it didn't make a bit of difference." Though she confessed to some bitterness, Janis wasn't going to lose any sleep over her disenchantment. After all, she'd never been much of an optimist or a true believer. "I've always believed people are screwups and are gonna lie," she once said. By the fall of 1967 Janis was betting on Janis. To many, the Summer of Love stood as a cautionary tale about the perils of publicity and hype. On the brink of superstardom, Janis need only have looked around the ravaged Haight to see what a bitter harvest hype could reap.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# 1970: Singer-songwriters, Prog & Glam Rock



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## 1. Robert Christgau, "Rock Is Obsolescent, But So Are You," *Village Voice*, Nov. 1970

It was sometime in the middle of 1968, a year or so after *Sgt. Pepper*, that the rock-is-dead movement began, and it has done nicely ever since, picking up adherents at a slightly slower rate than the music itself. The result is a virtual standoff that often discomforts those who regard their commitment to rock as binding, but it really represents a healthy balance. People who were turned on by rock early, which by today's lax standards means around the time of *Rubber Soul*, (often) weary of the music and move on to Webern or politics or astrology or teevee, but there are always others who gradually intensify their interest until they too reach a peak, turn off for a while in turn, and then (often) return to a more natural level. This has also been the publicity pattern. After the febrile coverage of 1967 the big media overreacted against that-youth-shit for a while, but now the music receives more or less the quantity (if not the quality) of attention it deserves. You could even say rock is better than ever. Record companies are once again signing new groups, although not, thank the powers, with the greedy enthusiasm of a few years ago. The LP charts are much heavier with Our Music than they were during the golden era. The concert business thrives despite exorbitant performance fees and seat prices. And a new phenomenon, the rock movie, is a sudden fad among nervous cinemoguls.

Yet it would be willful to insist that there hasn't been a lessening of anticipation and excitement, and many would claim the letdown is basically artistic. I agree only from my own peculiar perspective, because by "artistic" I do not mean "musical." The most unequivocal portents, after all, transcend music per se—Joplin and Hendrix dead, the festival disasters, and the breakup of the Beatles. Not that the music is all good; I don't like a lot of what is popular myself. I am uncomfortable with horn groups like Chicago and Blood, Sweat & Tears, which fill me with nostalgia for the (retrospectively) unpretentious crudity of white blues. I am saddened by the humdrum success of CSNY, which never makes records as vibrant as its live performances; Steppenwolf, which grinds on long after having exhausted its originality; and Grand Funk Railroad, which charms me in theory and oppresses me in practice. I am no longer entirely sanguine about AM radio, which with a few brilliant and significant exceptions seems to have returned to the pre-Beatles level, enjoyable enough but less than thrilling. Meanwhile, black popular music, which ought to be getting us out of this mess, founders in self-conscious racial confusion, much as it did a decade ago.

The good, though, can be very good, and there is a lot of it. ... Musicianship, so long just a shibboleth, has become a communicative reality—the list of innovative guitarists seems to lengthen with every round of concerts. Talented singer-songwriters continue to mature or arise fully grown from the head of Bob Dylan. The end result, at least as I calculate it: There has been no significant (downward) change in the number of satisfying rock albums released annually since 1966. If anything, the number has been going up.

Three factors contribute to the illusion that there has been a decrease. One is the tendency of superstars to stagnate and/or detour into temporary ruts. Two is the glut of rock albums and the consequent high shit ratio. But most important is three, the cycle of excitement and ennui I have described. What this means, even for me, is that it is harder to get off on good music than it used to be. That is why we tend to ignore the good music, and the reasons for our lowered response suggest the true shape of rock's artistic decline.

The aesthetic originality of rock never inhered in its strictly musical qualities. Even its stubborn simplicity—the stupid beat, the changeless changes—was anticipated in a more sophisticated way in

the visual arts. But the visual artist, for all his multiples and collage elements and found objects and stories in *Harper's Bazaar*, could barely approximate one effect that rock achieved fully and naturally. That effect was public presence. Because it was popular, rock implied broad new settings for creative force. Two of its most pervasive characteristics—its unrelenting eclecticism and the perceptual distortions endemic to the star system—also helped extend this contextualizing power, this ability to make new connections between things already known, to dignify the ephemeral and demean the profound. It was contextualizing power that provided the ground for rock's most appropriate aesthetic effect: shock. ... it is that sense of discovery, that startling perspective that can skew the whole world for a week or a year of instants, that renders rock truly important.

In the past, one aspect of rock discovery had to do with a sense of unity with listeners who were often quite different from oneself: ghetto kids, heads and hippies, bikers, prepubescents. Now that communion has been sundered into sects, often friendly but always in some sort of competition.... Not that the related ideals of broad-based appeal and stardom and eclecticism have been abandoned. On the contrary, the last two years have seen the development of a new phenomenon, which I call semipopular music. Semipopular music is music that is appreciated—I use the term advisedly—for having all the earmarks of popular music except one: popularity. Just as semiclassical music is a systematic dilution of highbrow preferences, semipopular music is a cross-bred concentration of fashionable modes....

I suppose semipopular music is decadent. It wouldn't be the first time that decadence has been the source of acute aesthetic pleasure. And indeed, the way it is so often enjoyed—quietly, stoned perhaps, in the company of a few friends, on a sound system that can convey its technological nuance—is very insular. But because it originates in a certain fondness for what other people like—a kind of musical populism much more concrete than that of the folk music of the early sixties—I think it is basically salubrious, a source of private strength that doesn't recoil from public connection.

We really were very unrealistic, for some part of us expected music always to suffuse our world, and not only that but reshape it as well. That it could seem to do so for even a few years was something of a miracle. Now the time has come to regroup. I am no proponent of the politics of change-your-head, but I do believe public action must be balanced with personal resilience. Maybe the Beatles, each retreating into the personal for a while, are still our vanguard. Oh, I know, not really. But it's a kick to look at it that way for a time, isn't it?

## **2. David Browne, *Fire and Rain: The Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, James Taylor, CSNY, and the Lost Story of 1970* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2011)**

### **Crosby, Stills Nash and Young**

On the night of January 6, McCartney settled into his seat at the Royal Albert Hall. Along with five thousand others in the elegantly domed theater with boxed seats, he was about to witness the London debut of the band everyone was calling the “American Beatles.” (One of them was actually English, but a catchy press moniker couldn't be denied.) Thirteen months earlier, George Harrison had passed on signing them to Apple, but now they were stars on a headlining tour of Europe. In one sign of their stature, their massive sound system, complete with a lighting rig specially designed for them, had arrived in London from the States by boat. They were put up in the city's five-star

Dorchester Hotel—where the grand reception party for the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* had taken place in now far-off 1964—and the Rolling Stones lent their managers an office in town. Whatever David Crosby, Stephen Stills, Graham Nash, and Neil Young wanted, they received.

They were a little nervous, with ample reason. All the major newspaper critics and a host of celebrities—not merely McCartney but Donovan and Ahmet Ertegun, the worldly, Turkish-born head of their label, Atlantic—had assembled to scrutinize them in person. Nash, who'd grown up in Manchester, knew some of his fellow countrymen were skeptical because he'd left the beloved Hollies and his native country to join this new band in Los Angeles.

Before they began the show, they calmed their nerves by indulging in one of their pre-show rituals, a shared joint. By the time Crosby, Stills & Nash took the stage—with Young to follow later—Crosby was either so high, nervous, or energized (or some combination of the three) that he didn't notice a stagehand slapping an "L" sign—the British learners permit for driving lessons—on the back of his brown fringe jacket as he walked out."

The audience guffawed as one; everyone knew Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young were hardly newcomers. The public had first become aware of them eight months earlier with the release of *Crosby, Stills & Nash*, made before Young joined up with them. The bands they'd once been members of—the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, and the Hollies— had made some of the most dynamic, sparkling music of the '60s. Yet the public embraced the new configuration in ways it had only occasionally taken the other bands to its bosom. The California-sun-drenched embrace of their labored-over, multitracked harmonies, the three distinctive-looking men reclining on an outdoor couch on the album cover, the variety of music from the dramatic, postapocalyptic soar of "Wooden Ships" to the turbulent churn of "Long Time Gone": Whatever it was, *Crosby, Stills & Nash* quickly went gold, selling a half-million copies. As 1970 began, it remained firmly lodged in the top 10 in the States.

Starting with their name, which read more like a law firm than a rock band, they wanted everyone to know they were a paradigm for a new, more liberating era in rock and roll. The group format, they insisted, had become too restrictive, too limited, too Establishment. (To hammer that point home and tweak his former life, Crosby would sometimes play a few seconds of the chimey twelve-string lick of the Byrds' "Mr. Tambourine Man" onstage, which always drew a laugh: *The Byrds? A pop group? How quaint!*) As the Royal Albert Hall crowd witnessed, they didn't even resemble a traditionally cohesive band. Crosby, at twenty-eight the veteran, had the bushy hair, serpentine walrus mustache, and stonerbliss smile of the hippie commune leader next door. Nash, who'd be turning twenty-eight the following month, had a head engulfed in sculpted brown hair and a wardrobe of vests and floral-print shirts that embodied modish counterculture. Stills was younger than both—he'd turned twenty-five three days earlier—yet more conservative in attire (white-button shirts, dark suit jackets) and hairstyle (sideburns and prematurely thinning dark-blond hair framing chiseled cheekbones). Young, the relative baby at twenty-four, opted for patched denim and whitelace shirts. His furrowed brow and shoulder-length locks set him apart from the others as did the way he'd lurk behind them, near the guitar amps, during their shows. ...

The new issue of *Life* magazine, dated May 15, spilled out onto the breakfast table along with the food. "Tragedy at Kent," announced the cover line, over a photo of students leaning over the body of another. The eleven pages that followed constituted the first, most extensive, and most unnerving look the public received of the shootings: gas-masked Guardsmen aiming to fire, a distraught girl kneeling beside Jeffrey "Miller's lifeless, jacketed body. Young looked away. He turned back and looked again. As Crosby watched, he walked over, grabbed a nearby guitar, and began writing a

song. In fifteen minutes, out came an irate chant he simply called “Ohio”; Crosby worked on a harmony part while Young was writing.”

Since Crosby and Young were due back in Los Angeles soon to begin rehearsals for the resuscitated tour, Crosby called Nash at home that night. Crosby rarely wavered in his role as the most excitable member of the band, but this time he was noticeably charged. “You won’t believe this fucking song Neil’s written,” he told Nash, before ordering him to book time in the studio as soon as possible. The fact that Young had written a topical song—an extremely rare occurrence, especially next to Crosby’s and Stills’ work—was doubly shocking. Business obligations were pulling them inexorably back together, but so were the times. ...

At the soundstage over the next few days, everyone worked hard to play nice. Diltz stopped by on the afternoon of May 21; as he snapped away, the band traded grins while rehearsing, and Stills and Young huddled together in conversation. Laura Nyro, the alternately earthy and flighty New York singer, songwriter, and pianist (and Geffen client), visited, and she, Crosby, Nash, and Stills gathered around a piano, harmonizing on her song “Eli’s Coming.” The mood was convivial and nonconfrontational; the fact that Elliot Roberts was on the set, keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings, also helped.

That same night, Bill Halverson was at the Record Plant studio, setting up to resume work on Stills’ album, when he received a call. The entire band, not just Stills, would be arriving shortly to record a new song—Young’s “Ohio.” (“Neil needed us *back*,” Stills cracked.) Although Halverson had been an eyewitness to tension in San Francisco six months before, the four men who strode into the Record Plant and set up in a crammed corner of the studio exuded a more unified front. Stills thought the song needed another verse and had conflicting thoughts *to* this,” he recalled. “I’m sure a lot of the guys in that platoon were told they didn’t have live rounds. Some part of me went, ‘Guys just don’t *do* that—that’s too much like the Germans. We’re more honorable than firing into unarmed civilians.’”

But since they’d been rehearsing the song all day at the soundstage, the recording was remarkably efficient. In two takes with no overdubbing, they had a finished track; even Crosby’s improvised finale, pained screams of “Four, how many more,” was live. The recording, particularly the interplay between Young’s twisty opening guitar figure and Stills’ coiled-up leads, had a crackling energy and group dynamic rarely heard on *Déjà vu*. When it was done, they gathered around four microphones and recorded a B-side, Stills’ “Find the Cost of Freedom,” written but rejected for the *Easy Rider* soundtrack. In contrast to “Ohio,” “Find the Cost of Freedom” was quiet, almost elegiac: a simple, dramatic showcase for their voices and Stills’ acoustic lead. Young had the A-side, with Stills’ song on the flip, but for once the old Springfield wars failed to materialize. “They were on a musical mission to get this done and out,” Halverson recalled. “It was, ‘We’ve got to get on the same page and make this right.’”

The tape was flown to Atlantic’s offices in New York. For financial rather than political reasons, some at the company weren’t thrilled: The label was in the midst of pressing up 45s of “Teach Your Children,” the next single from *Déjà vu*. But “Ohio” felt like the right move at the right moment.

### **James Taylor**

From the plaintive sound of Taylor’s voice to the crisp, woodsy crackle of his fingerpicked guitar, *Sweet Baby James* was undeniably old-fashioned—pre- rather than post-hippie. The songs referenced

country roads, the Berkshires, and highways. A version of Stephen Foster's "Oh, Susannah," a song the Taylor family had tackled together back in the "dough-gies" for "doggies" on "Sweet Baby James"—felt more Midwestern than southern Californian.

Asher and Taylor knew they'd overplayed their hand on his first album, which was too ornate and fussy. The comparatively uncomplicated arrangements worked out in Asher's living room for *Sweet Baby James* were intended to ensure that Taylor would now be the focus. *Sweet Baby James* shared several things in common with its predecessor. Each contained songs that focused mostly on voice and guitar, each had infusions of brass and horns, and each alluded to inner pain. But if *James Taylor* was the musical equivalent of a British tea parlor, its follow-up was an unvarnished log cabin. "Sunny Skies" was nudged along by arm-in-arm acoustic guitars and a temperate drum tap. "Fire and Rain" was a masterpiece of production accents, from the dramatic tumble of Kunkel's drums before the final verse to the use of a cello (played by another session man, Bobby West) instead of an electric bass to underscore the melancholy on the song. Asher only let loose as a producer on the album's last track, "Suite for 20G," which piled on horns, Kunkel's toughest beat on the record, and Kortchmar's sputtering electric leads. ...

In the year and a half since the making of *James Taylor*, rock and roll had gone through another of its seismic shifts. By early 1970, the music's unplugged kick—instigated in part by Dylan's *John Wesley Harding* and some of the Beatles' White Album, both from 1968—no longer seemed like merely one of its periodic makeovers. Everyone wanted in, the more denim jackets the better. Thanks to acts like Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, acoustic guitar sales were surging for the first time since the mid-'60s folk boom. "Many groups are completely abandoning amplification," *Billboard* noted in January, quoting instrument store owners who were grappling with boxes of unsold electric guitars and amplifiers. Egged on by their friend Crosby, even the Grateful Dead were trying their hand at rustic melodies and harmonies, recording (in just nine costefficient days) an album that would eventually be called *Workingman's Dead*. The movement was a perfect musical-cultural storm, rooted partly in the "back to the land" scene that begat books like the *Whole Earth Catalog* and in the rock and roll fans now pushing thirty and wanting less aggressive soundtracks for their lives. ...

Beyond Laurel Canyon, the country felt like it was exploding, often literally. Despite a rash of nonviolent protests that included the October Moratorium in Washington, the pro-peace movement's growing frustration over Vietnam was turning into a depression. That depression was turning into anger and desperation, and the desperation was turning to destruction.

The exact number of bombs set off by a variety of radical offshoots depended on the source. CBS News placed the nationwide tally between January 1969 and the spring of 1970 at 4,330, about twenty a week in *Rat*, an underground newspaper, and a man *Time* described as a "health faddist." In February 1970, the detonations in the New York area continued—at a GE center in Queens and outside the home of State Supreme Court justice John Murtagh, who presided at a pretrial hearing involving Black Panthers accused of trying to blow up public spaces. ...

The campus circuit was another, more welcoming matter. By the spring of 1970, more kids in their late teens and early twenties were attending colleges and universities than ever—over seven million, a 30 percent increase from 1965. Young, confused, and disillusioned, they began responding, albeit slowly, to *Sweet Baby James*. At a record store at the Madison branch of the University of Wisconsin, the album went top 10, just behind juggernauts like *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and *Déjà vu*. Realizing the importance of this market, Asher began booking Taylor into a string of college dates, including

Harvard on April 21 and Cornell on May 2. ...

### **Simon & Garfunkel**

Smack in the middle of a workweek—Wednesday, February 11—Mort Lewis took the type of call any music business manager longed to receive. A friend at Columbia Records informed him that the company had officially shipped one million copies of Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. At a time when the bar for success was the gold album for sales of half a million, the figure was especially remarkable. ....

The creation of their fifth album stretched back to January 1969, when the duo went to Nashville to record—or, it turned out, start recording—one of Simon's new songs, "The Boxer." The track began simply, with Simon and session guitarist Fred Carter Jr. fingerpicking the gentle sway of Simon's melody on Martin guitars. Then Simon, Garfunkel, and their coproducer and recording engineer, Roy Halee—a Columbia staffer and native New Yorker who had become an intrinsic member of their tightly knit team—began layering the track to enrich the sound. Only later did Simon add lyrics—the story-song of a worn-down prizefighter meant to be a metaphor for Simon and the criticism sometimes leveled at his work. ...

A few months later, in the summer of 1969, Simon and Garfunkel left their hometown and decamped to Los Angeles. Simon rented a house on Blue Jay Way in the Hollywood Hills, a home previously occupied by George Harrison, who'd immortalized it in a droney piece of psychedelia of the same name on the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*. With the Beatles still on his mind, Simon brought with him a new song he'd begun in New York. His lawyer Michael Tannen had first heard it when Simon showed up late at Tannen's birthday party on Manhattan's Upper West Side. "I've just written my 'Yesterday,'" said Simon, who, despite fending off a cold, sang it for the partygoers.

As with "The Boxer," "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," as it was first called, was no painless undertaking. Starting with the simple strum of an acoustic guitar, Simon's demo of the song was understated and gentle. "When peace is all you seek, I will be there," he sang, almost as if he were back in the British folk clubs he'd played earlier in the decade. Then, reflecting one of his newfound musical passions, his voice glided up into a falsetto inspired by Claude Jeter of the Southern gospel group the Swan Silvertones. (It was the Silvertones' "Oh, Mary Don't You Weep," with its line "I'll be a bridge over deep water if you trust my name," that inspired Simon to write his own variation.) At the Blue Jay Way house, Simon sang it for Lewis and Garfunkel. Lewis loved it right away, and Simon suggested it as a showcase for his partner. Surprisingly, Garfunkel initially demurred, not feeling the song was a perfect fit for his voice. Simon persisted, and Garfunkel eventually agreed. ...

They'd been friends and competitors as long as anyone could recall. One day in the fall of 1957, when they were both sixteen, they'd gone shopping together for sweaters. Even though they were mere Queens high-school students, they'd actually placed a song on the charts, "Hey, Schoolgirl," and needed to spruce up their wardrobes. In the store, they began arguing: Simon wanted one type of sweater, Garfunkel another. In the end, they couldn't agree on what to wear and wound up leaving with nothing. A few hours later, they laughed about it, and the cycle began again. ...

Like many of his peers, Simon glommed onto the folk music boom that arrived after the Kingston Trio and then Peter, Paul and Mary brought strums and hearty harmonies to the masses. Before long, he'd ditched the doo-wop affectations and was transforming himself into a socially conscious

singer-songwriter, just like Bob Dylan and all the newgeneration balladeers playing in nearby Greenwich Village. One night in his parents' bathroom—either 1962 or early 1964, depending on the source—he began writing a new song about the alienation his generation was starting to feel. (The opening reference to “darkness” referred to the way he’d sing in the bathroom with the lights off.) During his part-time song-plugger job, Simon would often drag along his guitar and play his own songs for publishers. One day, he played “The Sound of Silence” for Tom Wilson, a Columbia Records executive. Wilson liked the song and decided to cut it, so Simon brought along Garfunkel, with whom he’d reconciled after a chance meeting on the streets of Manhattan. Wilson, a young black producer, was impressed with Garfunkel’s white Afro—it was the first he’d ever seen—and before long, the former Tom and Jerry had been signed to the same label as Dylan. ...

In the middle of 1965, with folk-rock the industry rage thanks to the Byrds’ cover of “Mr. Tambourine Man” and Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone,” the strangest thing happened: Without Simon or Garfunkel’s knowledge, Wilson overdubbed electric guitar, bass and drums onto the original “The Sounds of Silence.” The transformation made all the difference: The electric guitar made the song spooky and spectral, as if listeners were walking into a long, darkened tunnel. Simon was in England when he heard the news, and from London, he read each week, stunned, as the song began climbing the charts. ...

Lewis wasn’t kidding; within two months, they were playing colleges on weekends and taking home thousands of dollars a night. They quickly capitalized on the hit with an album, *Sounds of Silence*, largely comprised of dour melodies Simon had written in London: songs about recluses and suicides (“Richard Cory,” “A Most Peculiar Man”), isolation (“I Am a Rock”), failed romance (“April Come She Will”), and premature nostalgia (“Leaves That Are Green,” in which Simon looked back wistfully at his life of a few years before). For all its rainy-day ambience, the album was meatier, in both production and material, than their debut. From the second it began, with Simon’s doleful opening guitar lick, “I Am a Rock” found a middle patch between cranky isolation and record-making smarts and became their next hit.

By early 1969, when work on the *Bridge Over Troubled Water* album commenced, the two could look back on an astonishing three years. Each album had sold better than the one before and, just as important, advanced their art as well. *Sounds of Silence* gave way to late 1966’s *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*. The album was more precious than *Sounds of Silence*: “Scarborough Fair/Canticle” and “Cloudy” twinkled like stars, and “The Dangling Conversation” worked in references to Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost amidst its pointed sketch of an erudite couple on the rocks. Simon’s “A Simple Desultory Phillipic” couldn’t decide whether it was a mockery of protest songs or an attempt to copy Dylan. (Likewise, bleating organs throughout *Sounds of Silence* were directly lifted from a Dylan record of the period.) But the duo’s creative balance—Garfunkel’s tendency toward the opulent and grand, Simon’s toward reflection and sheltered intimacy—played out beautifully in “Homeward Bound,” “Flowers Never Bend with the Rainfall,” and a cascading Garfunkel showpiece called “To Emily, Wherever I May Find Her.” Simon was loosening up as well: Featuring members of Dave Brubeck’s band, “The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin’ Groovy)” added a slice of jaunty bounce to their repertoire.

The following year, director Mike Nichols used some of their older songs—and a new, unfinished one originally called “Mrs. Roosevelt” but renamed “Mrs. Robinson”—for his film *The Graduate*. When the movie became a smash by capturing post-Kennedy assassination disaffection, complete with a Jewish leading man in Dustin Hoffman, Simon and Garfunkel were embedded even further

into the mass consciousness.

### 3. Robert Christgau, "Carole King: Five Million Friends," *Newsday*, Nov. 1972

Carole King's *Tapestry* is a triumph of mass culture. In less than two years it has sold well over five million copies, putting it in a class with the best-selling albums of all time, and it is still on the charts, moving from 59 to 52 in the October 29 *Cash Box*, for instance. Such statistics are so overwhelming that they seem to transform a mere record into some sort of ineluctable cultural presence, and in a sense they do. But five million people isn't everybody—there are a hundred million phonographs in this country. How would you estimate the overlap between *Tapestry* and the two albums that have sold even more, *The Sound of Music* and Simon & Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*? Obviously, *Tapestry* shares a lot of its audience with *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, but one way of explaining the difference between the two is to guess that twice as many *Sound of Music* owners also own *Bridge Over Troubled Water* as own *Tapestry*.

All three of these albums are smooth, well made. But technique in itself is neutral—it can be bane or benison, manipulation or revelation. *The Sound of Music* exemplifies its perils, and the perils of popular culture in general. Pauline Kael wrote of the film that its audience became "the lowest common denominator of feeling: a sponge" and that it epitomized "the sentimental American tone that makes honest work impossible." By offering simplistic solutions to problems that are unreal in the first place, it can only separate its audience from the details of their real-life difficulties, thereby exacerbating them. In contrast, *Bridge Over Troubled Water* is often funny and honest. It breathes life. Yet I suspect that its flawless, rather languid loveliness is ultimately sporadic, whereas *Tapestry* is in many ways an eye-opener.

Not that Carole King approaches the bitter hard-rock perspicuity of Bob Dylan or Mick Jagger. Why should she? If such work were suddenly to sell five or six million units, it would probably be for the worst sadomasochistic reasons. These things happen in stages, and Carole King has achieved unprecedented honesty and innovation within her range of appeal. Those who dismiss her sanguine worldview as sentimental either aren't listening or are afflicted with a constitutional inability to understand that many people do attain genuine contentment without wearing blinders. *Tapestry* functions as a pacific listening for rock fans with similar aspirations. On the two albums preceding *Tapestry* her old group, which later became Jo Mama, tended to jar this serenity with uneven mixes and slightly jazzy settings. Then Lou Adler decided to produce her. The result goes down easy.

*Tapestry* had its chin-up song ("Beautiful") and its pastoral-escape song ("Way Over Yonder") and its inane life-is-cosmic song ("Tapestry"). But it also evoked the joys of physical (not necessarily sexual) love and the pain of the geographical separation that is the curse of romance in our mobile paradise. It contained a true and sentimental standard about friendship and a true and ironic standard about breaking up. It praised an outlaw. And it affirmed the continuity of life with two apt classics from her pre-performance rock and roll composing career. But most of all, it established Carole King's individuality as a woman.

For Adler's production was so smooth that it slipped a real, potent woman past five million half-suspecting Americans. Carole King is genuine. She is beautiful not because her features are ideal—she is the greatest thing to happen to the Jewish nose since Barbra Streisand—but because her face is open, pleasant, honest, warm. So is her piano style—the first widely recognized instrumental signature ever developed by a woman. And so is her voice—not crystalline folksy or hog-chomping funky, just a speaking voice that



catches and breaks and even quavers as it conveys melody and emotion. Men had been permitted colloquial vocal styles for many years, and by 1970 they were the norm, but women, objectified in the male-dominated culture, were expected to conform to the old instrumental norm or else ooze sex. Carole King destroyed that expectation, perhaps forever. No matter how many I-will-follow lyrics she writes and sings, that ought to be worth a footnote in anyone's history of cultural revolution.

#### 4. Robert Christgau, "Carly Simon as Mistress of Schlock," *Newsday*, Jan. 1973

The first time I heard Carly Simon's "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" I almost stopped the car to cheer. In the wake of that stark opening, hooking as effectively as the catchiest guitar riff—"My father sits at night with no lights on"—the calculated drama of the song would probably have grabbed me in any context. The married people the lyrics described sounded like friends and acquaintances whose suffering belied pop music's wedding-bell clichés, and the persona singing the lyrics was any number of women I knew. But that wasn't why I was excited. I was excited because they were all on the radio.

It was relatively unimportant that a truth I knew had been articulated. In the subculture to which that truth applies, articulation is commonplace. In fact, it is frequently a cop-out, a substitute for doing something more concrete—like proffering support to isolated fellow spirits over the radio, for instance, or promulgating a new image of woman. A man spurning marriage because love ties you down, babe, is one thing. A woman questioning marriage because marriage so often destroys love is another. I liked the nonethnic directness of Simon's vocal stance, neither phony funky nor sweetly sickening. Good propaganda, I thought.

That was late fall of 1970. I heard the song a few more times, but it wasn't a hit, and when I got the album, I was disappointed. That nonethnic accent turned out to be pure ruling-class honk—Carly was from a ritzy publishing family—and her brother had contributed some high-tone cover photos that did as much for the image of woman as an issue of *Vogue*. More important, only two songs on the album really came through: "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be," with lyrics not by Simon but by Jacob Brackman ...

Instead, the album got good reviews—mostly because its sociocultural milieu was so familiar to reviewer types, I suspect, although the distinctiveness of Simon's singing style can't be denied. Many months passed before the single finally hit and the pressure of radio exposure blew it apart. "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" is in the noble tradition of "Leader of the Pack" and "Society's Child." In all three a young woman's challenge to the social limitations of romance is milked for melodrama, and in all three, realistically enough, she capitulates. Of course, Simon's song comes on more sophisticated, although it's worth noting that "Society's Child" seemed equally sophisticated five or six years ago. In any case, sophistication ruins Simon's song. Only in such a painstakingly precise song would the hazy outline of its persona—who talks like a recent college graduate yet claims that her college friends have already alienated their children, a process that normally takes ten years or so—be so noticeable. And only in such a wordy song would the basic principles of schlock pop-melodrama production be flouted so arrogantly. Its shock absorbed, the song was simply no fun to hear. I can only assume that those who bought it would rather contemplate a record than listen to it.

As her career progressed, I liked her less. It seemed to me that she epitomized women's lib as an

upper-middle-class movement. Girls and young women empathized with her problems and her projected independence without understanding that her independence was primarily a function of economic privilege. Boys and young men found her attractive because she was autonomous in theory and dependent in practice, the ideal combination. Then she married James Taylor, which I took as a cross between Julie Nixon marrying David Eisenhower and Warner Bros. merging with Elektra.

And then there was "You're So Vain," a record so wondrously good-bad that it eventually overcame every one of my prejudices. Verbally, it is so overblown that I can only assume Simon is parodying her own hubris. Why else would she rhyme "yacht" (in a simile that shilly-shallies instead of specifying), "apricot" (in one of the song's numerous syntactical awkwardnesses), and "gavotte" (a dance that has been dead for two hundred years) or stick in impossibly clumsy qualifiers like "strategically" and "naturally"? What does "clouds in my coffee" mean? Why does she transgress against colloquial speech rhythms at every opportunity? And who cares?

Not me, because the song is recorded the way I always thought "That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be" should be. ... From the unmistakably eerie percussion that introduces the track right through Mick Jagger's off-harmonies on the final chorus, the song is a schlock masterpiece. It puts Ms. Simon exactly in her place.

In the name of honesty, in the name of what is fair, I have to admit that Simon's third album, *No Secrets*, is much superior to the first two. ... It is appropriate that the song that establishes Simon's stardom more or less permanently, "You're So Vain," is about the aristocracy of pop decadence in which she moves so easily, albeit with all the usual easy misgivings. I'm so vain that I know the song isn't about me, and I hope everyone who feels the same is as glad about that as I am.

## 5. Robert Christgau, "Little Stevie Grows Older," *Newsday*, Feb. 1973

Back in the summer of 1963, when his first number-one record was on the radio, it was easy enough to dismiss (Little) Stevie Wonder as a one-shot. "Fingertips" was a freak hit on an independent label by a blind twelve-year-old. It did not promise durability. Even if Motown Records prevailed as no black-owned label ever had, there was no reason to expect even its most solid artists to prevail along with it. Rock and rollers just didn't prevail—except for Elvis Presley, every one of the original geniuses had already passed into oblivion, or so it seemed. No one would have predicted that in 1973 Motown would be the hottest entertainment complex in the country, with Smokey Robinson, the singer-songwriter of the Miracles, its vice-president, and Diana Ross, the anonymous lead singer of the unknown Supremes, née Primettes, on her way to an Oscar nomination for portraying Billie Holiday. As for Little Stevie, he was destined for the reject pile as surely as Frankie Lymon and Annette Funicello.

But Stevie kept coming on: just like everyone else at Motown, he was tenacious. "Fingertips" was basically a novelty instrumental—as any record featuring a prepubescent harmonica player and a live audience had to be—and its follow-ups were also novelties. In the usual pattern, the follow-ups didn't do anywhere near as well as the original. In the fall of 1965 there was a surprising vocal version of "High Heel Sneakers," but it went nowhere. And then, that winter, came "Uptight."

In a way, "Uptight" was a novelty, too, predicated on the ghetto catch-phrase it immortalized, but it was also a great record in a more conventional way than "Fingertips" because it established a vocal identity.

Wonder's strength, unlike that of most Motown performers, turned out to be freedom from discipline—the wild innocence of his harmonica carried over into his singing. Like the other Motown wild man, Levi Stubbs, of the Four Tops, Stevie was held partly in check by the rigorous Motown production machine, but whereas in the Tops' music the resulting tension often grated, in Stevie it only increased the excitement. He never wallowed in emotion. Instead, he soared above it.

There were no major successors to "Uptight" until the following year, when Stevie turned to ballads, to this day the most dubious aspect of his musicianship. Even his version of "Blowin' in the Wind"—a major departure for Motown, which was still in the dance business but acceded to the protests of their own irrepressible sixteen-year-old—was a little soupy, and the equally successful follow-up, "A Place in the Sun," was downright fatuous. Then, just when he appeared to have drifted into soul limbo, he came up with "I Was Made to Love Her."

"I Was Made to Love Her" is not much of a song, which makes it the perfect vehicle for Stevie's classic performance. Against the smooth, fast-flowing Motown arrangement he grunts and gasps and growls and gulps, not in the usual melodrama but more or less at random, by surprise, as the spirit moves him. He never stops singing the lyric, never pauses for a moment of what other singers would classify as interpretation, and yet the lyric is obviously not what is happening—it's just a track to run his voice down.

"I Was Made to Love Her" should have established Stevie as a source of potential excitement into the indefinite future, yet somehow it didn't. No one anticipated minor pleasures like "Shoo-be-oo-be-oo-be-oo-ba-day" or "My Cherie Amour." The best soul album of 1970, *Signed, Sealed and Delivered*, went almost unnoticed, even though it contained three hit singles. The next album, *Where I'm Coming From*, received even less attention despite its radical departure from precedent. The album sounded more like some smart-ass white kid than a disgruntled black entertainer, and mixed in with the bad poetry and the over-extended message songs was music so peculiar that it's hard to imagine how it survived Motown supervision. Stevie played both parts of a five-minute nondialogue between a black man and The Man and trotted through an absurd silver-lining lyric with its own hooper's beat, exploiting his vocal quirks for new kinds of meaning both times. He showed off not only on drums, piano, and harmonica—the old standbys—but also on various electronic instruments. He even performed credibly on a sappy ballad.

Around the beginning of 1971 Wonder's Motown contract ran out. Again no one noticed—no one but Stevie and Motown. Like any overprotective parent, Motown can be nasty when the kids get ideas of their own. The great Holland-Dozier-Holland production team had to fight years of lawsuits before establishing its own company, and neither David Ruffin nor Eddie Kendricks has survived the benign neglect with which Motown permitted them to leave the Temptations. But in the end Wonder returned to Motown with *Music of My Mind*, an album he had not only produced but also financed himself. There were minor hits on it. Then he and his integrated band, Wonderlove, did a well-reviewed tour with the Rolling Stones. Still he was half-ignored by everyone, including Motown. That stopped when "Superstition" became a number-one single, his second, after almost a decade. The vice-president of Motown presented him with a platinum record for "Superstition" and a gold record for the album *Talking Book* at a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall.

Because he is blind, Wonder has always been compared to Ray Charles. Although both singers flaunt an unembarrassed relish for aural fancy that may relate to their sightlessness, the comparison has always seemed a little inept. Ray Charles did create soul music, after all. Stevie Wonder is just a talented kid. Yet now Wonder is in a position to synthesize something equally far-reaching: He is young enough and rich

enough to put five years of brotherhood and black-beauty and youth-culture and believe-in-music rhetoric into practice. At twenty-two, he plays countless instruments, excelling on the ARP synthesizer. He has been a great singer for at least five years. His music is more than modernized blues/soul/jazz/gospel, borrowing from disparate white sources as well. Unlike Jimi Hendrix, he doesn't have to win over the black audience, and unlike Hendrix and Sly Stone, he doesn't seem likely to destroy himself. He is blessed with an unpretentious natural optimism that proceeds from his experience, for after all, he had all the odds against him and never lost a round. Potentially, Stevie Wonder could be the center of a whole new kind of rock and roll.

Since Wonder approaches his career with the same freewheeling instinct that shapes his music, he may not achieve popular supersuccess—that requires real cunning. But he does say that if he could set an arena dancing the way Sly does, he would never be late for a concert in his life. It's probably true, too. If this is to be a decade of upbeat performers, I'd just as soon they have as much right to the upbeat as Stevie Wonder does.

## **6. Robert Christgau, “Elton John: The Little Hooker That Could,” *Village Voice*, Nov. 24, 1975**

There is something wondrous about Elton John, and something monstrous. The preeminent rock star of the '70s seems out of time, untouched by the decade's confusion. Unlike most of his compeers, he consumes music omnivorously—his tastes suggest fuel rather than food—and he pursues this fame with such single-minded compulsion that to accuse him of escapism sounds silly, like accusing a runaway freight train of antisocial tendencies.

Always the metaphors that arise are mechanical. As the great inheritor of Philadelphia pop-rock, in which rock and roll ceases to be an uncontrolled natural force and turns into a product understood and exploitable, John's records are artifacts rather than expressions of a palpably vital individual. Of course, they share this artifactual quality with some of the best popular music of our time—the exquisitely crafted recordings of Randy Newman or Paul Simon or Steely Dan, or of the current kings of Philadelphia soul, Gamble and Huff. But with such artists the metaphors are from nature—what they create is like a fly preserved in amber. What Elton John creates is more like a Coca-Cola sign.

Not counting a soundtrack and a live album and a greatest hits and a collection of early efforts as yet unreleased here, John's newest LP, *Rock of the Westies*—number one, of course, containing one number-one single so far—is the ninth album (including one double) the singer-songwriter has loosed upon the American public since the time of his debut at the Troubadour in Los Angeles in August, 1970. By the standards established for today's pop, such productivity is gross, proof in itself that Elton must be doing something wrong, and the alacrity with which he works is equally suspect. The songs begin with lyricist Bernie Taupin, whom Elton met in 1967 by answering a want ad; although the two once spent a lot of time scuffling and still tour together, they rarely see each other socially any more. Taupin will write the lyrics for an album over a two-week flurry, spending perhaps an hour on each one, and send them on to Elton, who works out chords and melody for each lyric unchanged, a process that usually takes less than an hour. Recording takes a few weeks at most. John has said he believes pop music should be disposable; the way he grinds it out, he might pass for a garbage processing plant.

Yet there are few people who like rock and roll, or any pop music, who remain unreached by Elton John. It's not just that he's so pervasive, although that helps; quite simply, the man is a genius. No matter how you deplore his sloppiness, or his one-dimensionality, or his \$40,000 worth of rose-colored glasses, you will find yourself humming "Take Me to the Pilot" or "Bennie and the Jets" or "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me." Not all of them, perhaps; maybe not any of those three. But the man's gift for the hook—made up whole or assembled from outside sources—is so universal that there is small statistical likelihood that one of them hasn't stuck in your pleasure center. Or your craw. Or both.

For of course a good hook does not guarantee aesthetic merit—it is merely a means to aesthetic merit, and far from a foolproof one. The chorus of "Take Me to the Pilot" is as compelling a melody as John has ever concocted, but the lyric is gibberish, and every time the melody leads me to the gibberish I resent it more. Or again: John's affected pronunciation of discard ("disz-gard") is a kind of hook in itself, and also a turn-off in itself. In "Bennie and the Jets," on the other hand, the way some fairly standard notions about rock stardom are embodied in the music—the whole damn song is one enormous hook—makes them vivid and convincing.

Hooks are integral to hit singles; they are what makes disc jockeys and radio listeners remember a record. The heedless fecundity of John's recording habits tends to produce hit singles; one cut or another is bound to be right because it's all so hit-or-miss. So when John is praised critically, it is usually as a singles artist. Inevitably, though, some of John's monster singles present him at his most monstrous—not so many any more, granted, but you can't just disregard (or diszard) those that do. His *Greatest Hits* is a hodgepodge. But there is a compensation—John processes so much music that it is possible to sort out the garbage on that jumble of long-playing discs by analyzing their hook content.

On his two worst albums, *Madman Across the Water* and *Please Don't Shoot the Piano Player*, hooks are both rare and dull; the same goes for at least half of the double-LP, *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, and the second side of *Caribou*. On the two early song-poetry efforts, *Elton John* and *Tumbleweed Connection*, the hooks are often there, but the way they drip with nasal sensitivity (wiped by Paul Buckmaster's orchestral embroidery) you wish they weren't. A similar sensibility reemerges in a less fulsome musical context on *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*, the autobiographical *bildungselpee* of earlier this year, but the concept fails, and its failure as a whole diminishes its better parts.

That's already six and a half discs gone, but what's left is at least five years worth of good rock and roll. *Honky Chateau*, album number four, which announced John's and Taupin's escape from the excesses of their own romanticism, sounds even crisper today, when you can be sure it wasn't a fluke. *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* (number six) is uneven but goes places, including not only "Bennie and the Jets" and one of John's two hit Rolling Stone rip-offs, "Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting," but also the unheralded "Your Sister Can't Twist." This raver is one of John's masterpieces, overlaying surf-sound harmonies and midway organ on an intensified send-up of Danny & the Juniors' "At the Hop," itself the most intense Philadelphia pop-rock record ever made. The first, side of *Caribou* (number seven) leads off with an even nastier Rolling Stones rip-off, "The Bitch Is Back," and never lets up. My favorite cut is called "Solar Prestige a Gammon": "Solar prestige a gammon/Kool kar kyrie kay salmon/Hair ring molassis abounding/Common lap kitch sardin a poor floundin."

Which brings us to *Rock of the Westies*, which I didn't like when I first put it on and now think is Elton John's best album. This is nothing new. Despite his considerable commercial skill and fabulous commercial success, John does not suit my (rather permissive) notions about how an artist should behave, and although (or perhaps because) he is five years younger than me, he is not a child of the '60s the way I am. He threatens me, and like most people I know I tend to fear and distrust him, so I write him off all the time. On this record I took a blasé approach, comparing him to the Bic pen, a formerly dependable product which can no longer be counted on to write every time.

Then, in a bad mood one night, I lay down and read the lyrics along with the music. I grew angry. Not that the lyrics were bad in themselves; in fact, they were Taupin's best batch ever, maybe a real goodbye to the yellow brick road. Taupin had written about race and class before, but not with this sort of toughness and clarity and irony; there was even a contribution from a woman, backup singer Ann Orson, about the contradictions of working-class marriage, the first outside composition ever to appear on an Elton John album. But the music . . . arghh, the music. This Bic was not only writing, it was leaking on my shirt; between the band's machine-tooled hard rock and Elton's automatic good cheer, it was crossing the fucking words right out.

The next day, you guessed it, I found myself singing not one but three or four of the tunes—the "Take Me to the Pilot" effect, in a way, although rather than leading me to gibberish the music was, in effect, the gibberish itself. I'll shake this off, I said to myself, but I could not resist playing the record again . . . and again. Both sides. Hooked again. . .

None of this analysis is meant to imply vision or intent. John and Taupin are such good partners because they share, over and above their commercial energy and a certain generalized ripe sentimentality, a blankness of artistic personality. Although it is only Taupin's lyrics that can elevate John's music to anything more than the most trivial aural diversion, John seems as indifferent to their quality as Taupin himself does to what they contain.

Don't get me wrong—Taupin can be an excellent lyricist, and it's a very good thing that he writes for John. *Captain Fantastic* excepted (and even that had its share of moments), his relative anonymity has saved his superstar mouthpiece from the onanistic banality of superstar lyrics; because he can walk the streets like a real person, it's no strain for Taupin to write songs that are actually about things. But Taupin's wide-ranging historical and cultural subject matter, added to the old romantic staples, serves only to redefine the meaning of commercial songwriting in this time; he treats the various social issues with no discernible commitment or consistency. For all we can tell, they might as well be moon-June-spoon.

And this, how-you-say, impartiality is perfectly suited to John's singing, which is not interpretive in any ordinary sense of the term. The man has a ballad voice, which is adenoidal and sensitive-sounding, and a hard rock voice, which is adenoidal and insensitive-sounding, and he can simulate a few surface effects, like the accents which adorn this album. In its way, his style is quite distinctive—that is his vocal timbre is unmistakable—but it is indubitably mechanical. Its automatism is best demonstrated by that song I quoted from *Caribou*, "Solar Prestige a Gammon," which is written entirely in words that only sound like words or that can't possibly mean what they seem to mean. Needless to say, John sings it with all his usual cheery conviction, which I assume is his way of telling us something.

If you like, what it tells us is monstrous. Such arrogance. That mindless cipher makes untold millions a year; that pudgy robot is a hero and an object of fantasy sex. But to say that Elton John lacks the

lineaments of a conventional artist is not to say he is a cipher; to say that his singing is mechanical is not to declare him a robot. He is a star because people love his music and are immensely attracted to his immense vivacity. The best way to explain him is to steal an idea from Greil Marcus: Elton is the superfan, the ultimate music consumer. This is literally true—his collection of popular records is almost certainly one of the largest in the world, and he seems to listen to all of them. Who knows how much of his listening he puts to use? The most remarkable proof is on this record, which involves his first major personnel switch since the departure of Paul Buckmaster: a half-new Elton John Band. There is a tendency to forget Elton's musicians; since he is a machine, it can't matter who backs him. But that was a good band, and it does make a difference, because these guys kick more ass than the old guys. An especially useful addition is a second keyboard man, James Newton Howard, whom Elton found on an all-instrumental solo LP released awhile back on Kama Sutra. I played that record when it came through and dismissed it, but Elton heard something there. That is the superfan's reward.

And finally, the superfan's reward is the fans' reward. Elton is our tabula rasa—the very sureness of his instinct for sales make him a kind of one-man Zeitgeist. If he can be maudlin or stupid or hedonistic or self-indulgent—the new album is very tight until the song endings, which tend to repeat the same riff ad tedium—so we can we, and those of us who reject those flaws in ourselves will reject them in him as well. But if he can produce incisive music without even willing it, as seems possible, well, perhaps there is more room for optimism there than in the strivings of a lonely artist. Maybe, in fact, Elton John isn't out of time at all. Maybe he is one small indication that some things about the times are already alright.

## 7. Lester Bangs, "Are Black Sabbath really the new Shamans?," *Creem*, June-July 1972

I need someone to show me  
The things in life that I can find  
I can't see the things that make true happiness I must be blind.  
—Black Sabbath, "Paranoid"

The world's comin' to an end. bloom of Beatlemania —British bobby, interviewed on network news in the first

We have met dark days; the catalog of present horrors and dire morrows is so familiar there's not even any point in running through it again. It may be a copout, but people will do almost anything now to escape from the pall. The (first) Age of Anxiety gave way to the clammy retreat of the Fifties, when every citizen kept a tight bomb shelter, then to the sense of massive change in the Sixties, but the passing of that agitated decade has brought a new Age of Implosion, yesterday's iconoclastic war babies siphoned off *en masse*, stumbling and puking over each other at the festivals which were celebrations such a short time ago. Tying off their potentials and shooting them into the void in bleak rooms.

It's a desperate time, in a "desperate land" as Jim Morrison said just when things seemed brightest. If the terminal dramas of the Doors and Velvet Underground were prophetic, their "sordid" plots have now become the banal stuff of everyday life, which certainly doesn't lessen the pervasive dread, but does imply the need for a new music, a music which deals with the breakdowns and psychic smog

on another level and, hopefully, points toward some positive resolution.

We have seen the Stooges take on the night ferociously and go tumbling into its maw, and Alice Cooper is currently exploiting it for all it's worth, turning it into a circus. But there is only one band that has dealt with it honestly in terms meaningful to vast portions of the audience, not only grappling with it in a mythic structure that's both personal and universal, but actually managing to prosper as well. That band is Black Sabbath.

The band's first album made the Top 20 in England, their second went to Number One, the single of its title song made number three on the British charts, and by the time they came to America their record company was ready with a hype fronted by "LOUDER THAN LED ZEPPELIN" banners, though, as lead singer Ozzy Osbourne says, "They had to drop that fairly soon because we just told them not to fuck around." The company has never really known what it has in the group or how to handle them. But it really didn't matter at all, because Black Sabbath wasted no time in repeating their English triumph in this country; all three of their albums were on the charts at the same time for months on end.

The audience, searching endlessly both for bone-rattling sound and someone to put the present social and psychic traumas in perspective, found both in Black Sabbath. They *were* loud, perhaps, with Grand Funk, louder than anything previously heard in human history; they possessed a dark vision of society and the human soul borrowed from black magic and Christian myth; they cut straight to the teen heart of darkness with obsessive, crushing blocks of sound and "words that go right to your sorrow, words that go Ain't no tomorrow," as Ozzy sang in "Warning" on their first album.

The critics and others who just couldn't hear it, whether they were so far from it as to find their spokesman in a James Taylor or merely felt that the riff's essence had already been done much better by the Stooges or MC5, responded almost as one by damning it as "downer music." Since much of it did lack the unquenchable adrenaline imperatives of its precedents and one look around a rock concert hall was enough to tell you where the Psychedelic Revolution had led, the charge seemed worth considering.

Lots of Black Sabbath fans take downs, but there are certainly many that don't and just as many barbiturate and heroin casualties that have no truck at all with the group, including many of those devotees of the mellow acoustic sound who are supposedly into healthier lifestyles than the minions of the music of desperation. But somehow it's easier to picture the kid down the block, as fucked-up as we've watched him become, slumped in his bedroom gorged on Tuinal, listening to Black Sabbath prate of the devil and nuclear war and what a cruel kitchen the world is, nodding to himself as he nods along anyway and finding justification for his cancerous apathy.

That's the public myth. But it's not exactly Black Sabbath's myth, not really, and a consideration of the true vision inherent in their downer rock reveals that phrase for exactly what it is.

You that never done nothin'  
You put a gun in my hand But build to destroy  
And you hide  
from my eyes  
You play with my world  
Then you turn and run farther  
Like it's your little toy when the fast bullets fly.



—Bob Dylan, “Masters of War”

Now in darkness world stops turning Ashes where the bodies burning  
No more war pigs of the power And as God has struck the hour  
On their knees the war pigs crawling Begging mercies for their sins  
Satan laughing spreads his wings.

—Black Sabbath, “War Pigs”

Listen to my last words anywhere. Listen to my last words any world. Listen all you boards syndicates and governments of the earth. And you powers behind what filth deals consummated in what lavatory to take what is not yours. To sell the ground from unborn feet forever.... And what does my program of total resistance and total austerity offer you? I offer you nothing. I am not a politician. These are conditions of total emergency. And these are my instructions for total emergency that if carried out now could avert the total disaster now on tracks: Peoples of the earth, you have all been poisoned ... any minute now fifty million adolescent gooks will hit the street with switch blades, bicycle chains and cobblestones...

—William S. Burroughs,  
“Last Words [of Hassan i Sabbah],” *Nova Express*

Despite the blitzkrieg nature of their sound, Black Sabbath are moralists—like Bob Dylan, like William Burroughs, like most artists trying to deal with a serious situation in an honest way. They are not on the same level of profundity, perhaps; they are certainly much less articulate, subject to the ephemerality of rock, but they are a band with a conscience who have looked around and taken it upon themselves to reflect the chaos in a way that they see as positive. By now they’ve taken some tentative steps toward offering alternatives.

In his book *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Theodore Roszak suggested that given the current paucity of social leaders worth investing even a passing hope in, the coalition made up of the young and the free-form wing of the Left should turn to the ancient notion of the *shaman*, the holy madman whose prescriptions derived not from logic or think tanks or even words sometimes, but from an extraordinarily acute perception of the flux of the universe.

Well, we’ve reaped Roszak's script in spades by now, there's a shaman slouching on every corner and tinhorn messiahs are a dime a dozen. Some are “political” and some are “mystical” and some are building their kingdoms on a “cosmic” stew of both, and each seems to have his little cadre of glaze-orbed acid casualties proselytizing for him.

Then there are also the cultural shamans, Dylan being the supreme artifact: Biblical, rooted in the soil and tradition and his own Old Testament brand of conscience. Burroughs too, of course, and his “Hassan i Sabbah” is nothing more than a particularly malevolent form of shaman, while the “Nova Police” are the benevolent regulation agency out to save the universe from addiction and control. Burroughs has been one of the foremost moralists in American literature; his work amounts to a demonology for our times, portraying the forces currently threatening our planet's survival as evil gods operating from without.

Where Black Sabbath fits into this seeming digression is that they unite a demonology not far from Burroughs’ (if far more obvious) with a Biblical moralism that makes Dylan's look positively bland, although they can be every bit as vindictive as Dylan with the Jehovan judgments.

They are probably the first truly Catholic rock group, or the first group to completely immerse themselves in the Fall and Redemption: the traditional Christian dualism which asserts that if you don't walk in the light of the Lord then Satan is certainly pulling your strings, and a bad end can be expected, is even imminent.

They may deny all this; Ozzy Osbourne responded to a question about how the band's concept came about with a vague "I don't know. I met the guys, we got together and rehearsed for about two years, starved, bummed around hoping for a break and it just happened. You relate to me that it's about doom or something, but I can't relate it to you because I'm in the middle of it."

It really doesn't make any difference how conscious they may be of what they're saying, though. The message is there for anyone with ears, and it's unmistakable. The themes are perdition, destruction, and redemption, and their basic search for justice and harmony in a night-world becomes more explicitly social all the time. On their first album that quality only appears in one song, "Wicked World." But the prevailing mood is a medieval sense of supernatural powers moving in to snatch the unwary soul and cast it into eternal bondage.

The band was named after an above-average British horror flick from Hammer Studios, starring Boris Karloff, and their namesake song actually opens with rain sound effects and a tolling bell that's echoed in the slow, dolorous fuzz guitar that will set the pace for opening cuts of future albums and do much to lend credence to the "downer rock" stigma. Satan appears in their material in this song for the first time, leering and licking his lips as he tots up the fresh-caught souls.

Since the band's name is what it is and the thematic content of this album, as well as its packaging, leaned so far toward this sort of thing, it's easy to see why people should stereotype the group as either exploiting for profit or living and promulgating the form of pop black magic which finds high school girls intently reading books on how to become a witch and trying out spells on prospective boyfriends (and a sharpie like Anton LaVey<sup>10</sup> cleaning up) even as dead (literally)-serious organizations such as the Process carry out their grim rites in Los Angeles, Mexico, New York, and elsewhere, promoting total nihilism and the end of the world, engaging in incredible machinations to, yes, get people in their power (obtaining zombies fit for any job they don't want to soil their own hands with) even committing murder in some instances with the ritualistic precision of absolute psychopathy. There are scheming salamanders like Manson everywhere, finding fantastic utility in this phase when it comes to their own less bizarrely "religious" ends. What black magic is about is absolute control; since rock 'n' roll is power music with strange effects on people, with undercurrent themes of almost fascist dominance and subjection running from the earliest blues through the Stones to Alice Cooper, there were bound to be some psychic and subcultural connections made. No doubt there are Black Sabbath fans who like the group because it seems to reflect their own preoccupation with hocus-pocus and supernatural manipulation, just as people once used the Velvet Underground as soundtracks for the hard-drug movies they're living to the stone hilt.

But the band themselves will have no part of any of this, according to Ozzy: "We never have been into black magic. But one time, just to get a break, we decided to do a thing because it'd never been done before—the crosses and all that, the black mass on the stage, but we didn't intend it to be a thing where you go onstage in a pair of horns, and yet even now people come up and think we're going to put a fucking curse on them. Or if they're not afraid they think we're heavy, heavy heads. After the show once we went back to the hotel, and I could hear a lot of feet walking up and down

the hall outside, so I went and opened the fucking door and there's all these weird people with black candles walking up and down and writing crosses on the doors and things, and they fucking frightened me, I tell ya. We all blew the candles out and sang 'Happy Birthday'" he laughs. "They didn't like that at all."

When you begin to listen to their music with open ears, it quickly becomes apparent that rock 'n' roll sorcery is only a handle devised to make Black Sabbath into a concept more immediately graspable. As much as Satan, the righteously vindictive Old Testament God and spiritual-supernatural agonies recur in their music, they are almost invariably used to make a moral point.

The Black Sabbath vision of life on earth and the machinery of civilization becomes concrete on their second L P, *Paranoid*, whose very first song ("War Pigs") takes the epithet applied so indiscriminately for the past half-decade to anyone the speaker happens to be in disagreement with, and carries it to its ultimate gross characterization in a vignette reminiscent in verbal content and unbridled bitterness both of Dylan's "Masters of War" and the firebrand rhetoric of agitprop pamphlets of the Socialist Workers and other parties farther left dating back to the First World War. I remember seeing old books with vitriolic cartoons of Capitalist Pigs (literally) strolling along in top hats and waistcoats with buttons ready to pop from the accretions of fat, lighting giant Havana stogies with \$100 bills. Possibly the only difference between that and this or Dylan's song is that those cartoons were conscious, inflammatory propaganda and this is (you can accept this to whatever degree you choose—I tend to take it all the way) true folk culture, where the hatred is more organic and sensate, churning straight up from the bowels in catharses of rage as apocalyptic as the End they visualize in this song and "Electric Funeral," probably the two most vicious statements we're ever going to hear from this band. Even Dylan, after finding it in himself to write "I hope that you die," realized that there was nothing more he could say on the tip of that particular limb.

"War Pigs" ends up a fantasy of Judgment Day, the sword of the Archangel cleaving the necks of those who have chosen to serve Lucifer and now must follow him into Gehenna. You can laugh, but Black Sabbath are something like the John Milton of rock 'n' roll: "You turned to me with all your worldly greed and pride/But will you turn to me when it's your turn to die?" The Christianity running consistently throughout their songs is cruel and bloodthirsty in the way that only Christianity can be (which is to say, lopping off heads with feverish pleasure, clad all the while in the raiment of righteousness and moral rectitude). "Electric Funeral" is their picture of atomic war as the Second Coming.

And the vengeance motif ain't just limited to Biblical referents, because "Iron Man," one of their greatest songs, is a piece of almost pure program music utilizing lugubrious drums clomping like the falls of golem feet and a guitar riff that swoops recklessly like a Hulk arm demolishing buildings, to depict a miscreant, much reminiscent of the Karloff Frankenstein's monster who really only wanted to play with the other children, who finds himself ostracized as a total freak because of his size and lumbering lack of grace (maybe Iron Man is really a symbol and fantasy for every adolescent ever tortured by awkwardness and "difference") and responds with understandable rage and a havoc-wreaking rampage. People are strange, when you're a stranger. "Iron Man" is a melodrama of alienation, just as "Paranoid" is a terse, chillingly accurate description of the real thing, when you suddenly find that you've somehow skidded just a fraction out of the world as you have and others still do perceive it. "Paranoid" renders perfectly the clammy feeling of knowing that at this point there is absolutely no one on the planet to whom you can make yourself understood or be helped by. All alone, like a real rolling stone; it's no wonder in such circumstances that the imagination might get a

little hairy, and turn to dreams of science-fiction revenge. I've felt the arctic wedge of disjuncture myself at one time and another, stuck in the painful place where you can only send frozen warnings cross the borderline and those inevitably get distorted. Because they've captured it so well Black Sabbath means a lot to me and a lot of my friends for "Paranoid" alone. With the experience so common these years is it any wonder that this group has conquered the world (so to speak)?

And now that they have conquered it by detailing several of our most prevalent forms of malaise, what have they got to offer as curative? Well, this is where their moralism begins to break down, for many of us at least, because what else would an Old Testament group be offering but Jehovah? Or, to slip across a few centuries into the Greek Scriptures, Jesus. It's not that they're acting as sycophants for the virulent proliferation of hippie fundamentalist sects. *Master of Reality* conveys the impression that with the cloud of gloom hanging over their persona, and the "downer-rock" label, they felt obliged to carry their moralism into outright proselytism, suggested by "Lord of This World" and clinched in "After Forever," which follows a paean to the joys of cannabis (see, kids, we don't take those horrible pills, we use and advocate this healthy stuff...) called "Sweet Leaf" with:

Well I have seen the truth Yes I have seen the light and I've changed my ways.  
And I'll be prepared  
when you're lonely and scared at the end of your days.

The song goes on to assert that, "God... is the only one who can save you now from all this sin and hate" and even includes a line that goes, "Would you like to see the Pope on the end of a rope—do you think he's a fool?" Well, yes, and yes, as a matter of fact, because the Pope is a War Pig if ever there was one, or at least an evil angel. Maybe I'm making a fool of myself but I see this band making an attempt to provide direction for a generation busy immolating itself as quickly as possible. Since nobody else around that I can see seems to have any better advice for them than Black Sabbath, it pains me perhaps unduly to see them suggesting the hoariest copout conceived in 2,000 years. I mean, what's the difference between a vegetable babbling about how much crank he can hold and stay alive, and one locked into repeating a zealot litany with mindless persistence to every stranger coming down the street?

But then, I suppose I shouldn't expect Black Sabbath's answers to be sophisticated. *Master of Reality* has more than one alternative to suggest anyway. "Into the Void" is a fantasy of escape from the dire mess in this orbit via "Rocket engines burning fuel so fast/Up into the night sky they blast..." *al la* the reedy Starship recently promoted by the Marin County Cocaine Casualty Musical Auxiliary. This version of the fantasy at least has the advantage of some solid, pulverizing music behind it.

A much more interesting solution is drawn in "Children of the Grave," a deep, gutty, driving piece that's one of the highlights of their current live show. It couches the expectable hints of looming catastrophe ("Must the world live in the shadow of atomic fear?") in a romanticized picture of the children born in a megaton shadow standing their ground, insistent on the salvation of the planet, with an uncharacteristic happy ending: "They'll fight the world/Until they've won/And love comes flowing through."

Which is fine with me. The song's cloudy romanticism removes it from the limitations of any one faction's Utopia, even if it does bear about as much dialectical meat as Grand Funk singing "People Let's Stop the War."

<sup>10</sup>A media Satanist, author (*The Satanic Bible*), and High Priest of the Church of Satan in hippie-era San Francisco.

## **8. Barney Hoskyns, in: *strange changes, from Glam! Bowie, Bolan and the Glitter Rock Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), n.p.**

*“There’s a new sensation, a fabulous creation...”* Roxy Music

EARLY IN 1971, amidst a morass of novelty schlock and formulaic bubblegum, a siren sound began floating over the airwaves, wafting from the brickies’ transistor radios one passed on the frosty trudge to school. In essence the song was nothing more than a twelve-bar blues, but it had little to do with the crude grit of Chicago’s South Side, or even with the earnest twiddling of the British blues boom. It was a pop blues delivered with mincing swishiness, in a cheek-suckingly camp voice flanked on its fruity ‘la la la’ fade-out by a pair of wailing falsetto clowns called Flo and Eddie. It was called ‘Hot Love’, and it was by T. Rex.

Well, she ain’t no witch and I love the way she twitch, uh huh huh...’

Had I not been waking up to pop music at that very moment, I would have known that T. Rex had had a tyrannosaurus-sized hit (No. 2) with ‘Ride a White Swan’ the previous autumn. But I didn’t know. I didn’t know that pop was anything except Edison Lighthouse and ‘Gimme Dat Ding’. (Sure, my parents had a few Beatles forty-fives knocking around the house, but the Beatles were over and their records part of a vanished world called the Sixties.) I didn’t know and I wasn’t terribly interested.

Hearing Marc Bolan for the first time—before I ever knew what he looked like, before I saw that he weren’t no square with his corkscrew hair—was my password to the mystery of pop’s power and glamour. His was the tacky tune that seduced me and kept me coming back for more and more and more, until almost all I had left were the memories of that primal pop thrill.

Imagine, then, how it felt to see Bolan on telly for the first time—to see him just a few months later, sibilating into the microphone as he sang the words to ‘Get It On’ on *Top of the Pops*, his corkscrew curls bouncing around his tiny elfin countenance. As a vision of pure pop androgyny in glitter and satin pants it was never to be topped. I was transfixed, mesmerized by this puckish punk pixie, part tart and part mystic Pied Piper. Was he a boy or a girl? Would he come on to me or would he lead me to cosmic enlightenment?

Actually, all I could really think was, ‘Please, God, don’t let my mother walk into the room right now...’

What an amazing thing to enter the choppy straits of puberty with the glam rock of Bolan and Bowie and Roxy Music as the party tape you carried around in your head. What a fabulous way to become a pop fantasist! At night I’d lie awake with my tiny transistor radio tuned to Radio Luxembourg, drifting into sleep with images of Marc and his orange Les Paul flashing across the screen in my mind. (All my memories of the period are somehow bound up with guitars, or with 45 r.p.m. record labels: the EMI red and purple of ‘Telegram Sam’, the RCA tangerine of ‘tarman’, the Polydor red of ‘Mama Weer All Crazee Now’.) Glam—or glitter,<sup>1</sup> or whatever you want to call it—arrived at a point when pop was screaming for a new musical wave, a teenage rampage to rival the one with which our older brothers and sisters and cousins had been blessed in that vanished swinging world. Glam was a reaction—exploding, plastic, inevitable—both to the pompous ‘progressive’ rock to which those older siblings were now in thrall and to

the banal bubblegum with which teenagers had had to make do in the era of flared denims and free festivals. (Bowie's 'All the Young Dudes', the national anthem of glam, made this explicit: „*And my brother's back at home / With his Beatles and his Stones / We never got it off on that revolution stuff / What a drag, too many snags*“ .): You'd had this so-called blues boom in England in the Sixties, and people looked pretty denim-y and uninteresting,' recalled B. P. Fallon, T. Rex's publicist.

There was too much grey. What was needed after that was something flash and loud and vulgar and, to some people, annoying. Marc was very shiny. He brought that in, and it actually opened the door for Bowie. Suddenly men were checking their eye make-up. And the music was much more forthright and jumping, much more below the belt. [Marc] created his own image. He wanted adulation and he didn't pretend that he didn't want it. Up until then it wasn't cool to let on that you wanted people to scream at you. People didn't scream at Jethro Tull.'

The pop scene is always waiting for an explosion,' says Laurence Myers, whose Gem Toby Organization was the umbrella management company for both David Bowie and Gary Glitter. 'In the mid-Sixties, there was the breakthrough of bands writing their own music and becoming self-contained: that was the enormous breakthrough. And then the early Seventies was the era of the producer and the songwriter again, so I chose to manage producers and songwriters. Really we would all have been terribly happy if we could have continued making Edison Lighthouse and 'Winchester Cathedral' records, because there was no aggravation. But then along came the Bowies, and people like me became the bridge between the industry and the maverick artists. We were able to deal with the tantrums but we could also understand the problems of running an enormous record company.'

The genius of glam was that it was all *about* stardom. It said: 'Flaunt it if you've got it, and if you haven't got it fake it—make it up with make-up, cover your face with stardust, reinvent yourself as a Martian androgyne'. Glam was prefab, anti-craft, allied to artifice and the trash aesthetic. Its plasticity and cartoonish bisexuality were all about giving pop back to 'the kids', yanking it from the hands of droopy acoustic introverts and pompous Marshall-stacked overlords. It was simple, flash, throwaway, and from 1970 till 1974 it injected more fun into the pop-culture bloodstream than people knew what to do with. Even when the bubblegum boys moved in and served up Gary Glitter and Suzi Quatro, the music and the iconography were preposterously entertaining.

Glam swept the nation in ways that were at once innocent and morally subversive. It called into question received notions of truth and authenticity, especially in the area of sexuality. It blurred the divide between straights and queers, inviting boys and girls to experiment with images and roles in a genderless Utopia of eyeliner and five-inch platform boots. And it flirted openly with a decadence pitched somewhere between *Cabaret* and *A Clockwork Orange* (into which I was sneaked as a twelve-year-old by the roguish father of a schoolchum). Through David Bowie's patronage, the larger pop world was introduced to those *eminences grises* Lou Reed and Iggy Pop, both of them more credible chroniclers of transgression and perversion than the more opportunistic Alice Cooper.

By whatever mysterious underground channels the decadent sensibility has been conveyed from nineteenth-century Paris and London to twentieth-century New York,' the prurient Albert Goldman could write in 1974, 'the fact is that we are living unconsciously, inadvertently, rather casually, the dread, degenerate, opium-dream existence fantasized by radical writers a hundred years ago. Everybody's walking around in crushed velvet and Parisian brothel boots. People's faces are painted up like Toulouse-Lautrec *demi-mondaines*. They're as languorous as dandies, as jaded as aesthetes, as narcoleptic as absinthe drinkers.' Goldman was half right, but there was a world of difference between Lou Reed's 'Walk on the Wild Side' and Sweet's 'Ballroom Blitz'.

There were those who dismissed glam as frivolous, narcissistic, politically evasive. Dick Hebdidge in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) saw Bowie, Roxy and Lou Reed as artists whose 'extreme foppishness, incipient elitism and morbid pretensions to art and intellect effectively precluded the growth of a larger mass audience'. (Just how much larger a 'mass audience' did he think Bowie should have *had*?) Hebdidge even quoted a pair of dour Marxist sociologists to support his contention that 'Bowie has in effect colluded in consumer capitalism's attempt to create a dependent adolescent class, involved as passive teenage consumers in the purchase of leisure... 'instead of questioning 'the value and meaning of adolescence'.

Quite apart from the absurd picture this presents—'Ere, d'yer wanna come round mine and question the value and meaning of adolescence?'—it's strange to suggest that glam fans, of all teenage subcultures, weren't actively challenging the gender types and work-ethic Puritanism of Little England.

In some ways, though, Hebdidge's complaints tally with the way the Seventies have been depicted in the movies and memoirs of the present decade—as a time of kitsch and hedonism, of bad taste and conspicuous waste, rather than as a period of complexity and progressiveness. And while no one is suggesting that we take Suzi Quatro too seriously, the sociological ramifications of glam rock were too far-reaching to be dismissed so lightly. Through glam a generation of sexual misfits was able to accept itself and make its voice heard in the decades to come. Through glam, punk came into being and overthrew the sated rock elite. Rooted in glam, the most interesting artists of the Eighties—from Soft Cell to the Pet Shop Boys—saved that decade from becoming one long rapid promo video.

'When it came right down to it,' reminisced Charles Shaar Murray in a 1977 reappraisal of the period, 'glitter carried with it the seeds of its own destruction, but that's OK too. It was the first real pop thing that happened in the Seventies and it brought a great cast with it, a cast of geniuses and madmen, poseurs and philosophers, winners and losers, clowns and warriors, stars and fools.'

'In a way, I always thought the glam part was the wrong idea to focus on,' says Brian Eno, one of the era's most mercurial figures. 'For me it wasn't about glamour so much as the idea of changing identity or thinking up your own identity. Whether it was glamorous or not was actually accidental.'

Twenty years after glam had withered on the pop vine, Eno sat watching the outrageous Minty perform at the annual Alternative Miss World show—a glam fixture ever since its inception in the early Seventies. 'It made me genuinely glad to be English, to see that much bizarreness and wit and kinkiness and inter-gender flirting,' he noted in the diary that became *A Year with Swollen Appendices* (1996).

Not too much had changed since Eno was mincing around in drag as the deranged synthesizer player with Roxy Music.

#### notes

B. Americans tended to call it glitter rock, principally because of Gary Glitter. In the US, the term 'glam' became more current with the rise of the 'big hair' metal bands in the eighties—of which more in the final chapter.

When *Rolling Stone* arranged a meeting between Bowie and William Burroughs in November 1973, Bowie said that 'people who are into groups like Alice Cooper, the New York Dolls and Iggy Pop' were 'denying totally and irrevocably the existence of people who are into the Stones and the Beatles'. Pop's generation gap, he argued, had 'decreased from twenty years to ten years'.

## 9. Lenny Kaye, "David Bowie: Freak Out in a Moonage Daydream," *Cavalier*, January 1973

AYLESBURY, ENGLAND. He is, as he had planned, magnificent. The stage appears impeccably struck, lights arranged to catch the finer angles of his face, making him seem at times wonderfully ape-like and primitive, at others supremely regal, capable of the grand gesture now and again.

The band stands behind him in a shock of silver reflections, each part steadily notching its integral role – lead guitar flashy, but always a foil; bass hung back just a stride or two to let you hint the presence; drums anonymous, but precise, punctuating, emphatic. There is never any question of whether they will make a mistake, lose their footing, leave a stone unturned. David Bowie has waited a long time for his time, and now that it's here, five years stuck on his eyes, he's not about to let it pass him by.

Nor could he have picked a better place to test his new-found power. The "venue," as they refer to it in the mother country, is Friars Aylesbury, located in this small suburban village north of London. The audience is mainly young, enthusiastic, without being deadly, and, because David had made his formal debut (in his current incarnation) here last September, regard him almost as a local hero.

But Bowie is taking no chances. Why should he, with 'Starman' nudging its way into the English singles charts, with an album (*The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* on RCA) quickly becoming the hottest property in local disc emporiums since Marc "Photographed by Ringo Starr" Bolan? The fact is that now, after a series of progressions which might seem totally illogical to anyone not gifted with a crystal ball and a healthy bribe to the devil, David has finally come upon a moment where all his selves can combine into just that new trick which is generally accorded the title of Where It's At; and if the world thinks it's ready for once. Davy Jones who writes caustic, beautiful songs, proclaims his bi-sexuality and enjoys wearing drag, has a fine dramatic flair and (almost) single-handedly kicked off the movement toward made-up rock and roll bands while letting Anthony Burgess' vision of the future direct him from there... then David, with a little hat-tip in the right direction, is going to show the world that he's the prime candidate for the job...

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*What kind of identity do you think you're dealing with now?*

Well, I've adopted Ziggy for the next couple of months ... I myself don't change, it's usually visual changes... that gives other people the identity more than myself; it doesn't seem to help me much. I mean, I've been changing ever since I was thirteen, and I've never helped myself. I'm my own worst enemy...

*Well, how much of Ziggy is, like, a natural kind of progression, and how much of it is artifice?*

Oh, no... all my progressions are natural progressions. I find that I slip into my skins very easily, and they seem natural... seem a natural way to follow.

*Do you think this is the one that's going to do it for you?*

No, not necessarily. By the time people start realizing about Ziggy, I may be Tom Bloggs or someone. I don't know, I really don't know. I'm having so much fun with Ziggy at the moment, that I'm sticking with



him 'cause he's a gas to work with (laughs).

*How much of a role do the Spiders play in the construction of your music? Do you direct them totally, or do they work sort of independently?*

I think there's probably quite a lot of give-and-take. I have a pretty finalized conception of what the music's going to sound like, and Mick Ronson interprets to the boys for me, because I'm not that brilliant in telling people exactly what I want. Any added parts that need to be written, like the string sections, then Mick and I talk about it and then Mick writes them. But I can only give a feeling of what I want... not being a musician. I'm not a musician. I play composer's guitar, composer's piano, and a little bit of sax.

*Do you use the guitar on stage then more as something to hold rather than as anything to direct the music?*

Um, last night I didn't play very much... no, it's just that I need that rhythm sound there. Eventually, I want to do away with the guitar altogether, but then I shall get someone to play twelve-string for me. But we can't have that freedom yet, it's still a bit early.

*I believe I heard somewhere that there was a time you were very much involved in mime and theatrics. Could you expand a little bit about that?*

Yes. Sure. I went to see a one-man show in London by a guy called Lindsay Kemp, and I'd never seen mime before, and the power of it smothered me completely and I knew that there was nothing else that I wanted to be involved in than what that man was doing, the kind of magic he was projecting. And I went backstage and I asked him how he did it, and he said, well, if you... he knew of me, he had come by some of my early albums... and he said if I would write music for his show he would teach me mime. That's the only way we could work because we both were very broke. And that's what happened, and I stayed with Lindsay for two and a half years, with his company, and I ended up producing and writing with him, and being on stage.

*About when was all that?*

That was immediately before *Space Oddity*

*So then you had done that first David Bowie album on Deram already.*

Oh, that thing... that was on a very semi-professional basis. I was still working as a commercial artist then, and I made that kind of in my spare time, taking days off work and all that. I never followed it up, did any stage work or anything. I just did an album, 'cause I'd been writing, y'know, sent my tape into Decca and they said they'd make an album. Thought it was original.

*How do you think your audience reacts to the ambivalent sexual roles you play on stage?*

There's a lot of ambivalence in our audience (laughs). That comes out a lot.

*Well, how would you hope they'd react?*

I don't hope for a reaction. All I'm content to do is put over my material in the best way I can manage.

Now I know what the reaction to my material is; I've still yet to see what the reaction my performance of my material creates. I'm not looking for a reaction. I'm content to portray my songs my way; all I require, as an artist, is an audience. ...

*Okay, well, now you tell me, aside from any of the obvious.*

Edith Piaf is my particular idol. I've never seen her live, only seen her perform on film and what I saw was the greatest amount of energy given out with the least amount of movement... it was absolutely fabulous. She *is* a mime. I also admire Marcel Marceau. I don't think I could ever really borrow from Marcel Marceau, because that would be ... no, I just couldn't. But Edith Piaf, Marcel Marceau, and there's a thing about Judy Garland I like very much.

*What about in your composing?*

In my composing? Yeah, just about everybody who exists I find pleasure in. I listen to a lot of music and I soak up everything. I'm a great parasite musically. How I interpret what I've heard is for the audience and reviewer to decide; but I do know that I'm influenced terribly by anything I like. Some of it creeps into my music, some not...

*Have you run into any hostile audiences lately?*

Not since our particular group started rolling. I've had them in the past, I've had a lot of very heavy scenes when I wasn't in the league of popularity that we now find ourselves in over here. But everybody's done a kind of turnabout and... well, it's just been marvelous.

*How does it feel working with Lou (Reed – formerly of the Velvet Underground) and Iggy (Pop – from the Stooges) in the same musical combine?*

It's... well, that's the dream. It's fabulous, especially working that closely with Lou. You know that I'm producing his next album?

*Yes.*

That *is* the most exciting thing that's happened to me for a long time. Really... well, you can imagine. And I've started getting his songs covered, which is...

*I know he's always wanted that.*

Well, I'm also producing a band called Mott the Hoople, they're an English band, and we've done 'Sweet Jane' with them and it's terrific. Lou's written some of the greatest rock classics ever, but people don't... like on a national scale, don't know that. But there is a way... we'll get them.

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YES, DEAR, HE'S BACK, dressed in white this time, combed up, caped, ready to slip into the final body of his show. The songs are tossed off more quickly now they're on the record if you really want to hear them and the audience is starting to sense a climax.

David is making another tribute. "We'd like to extend our appreciation," he says, or something to the effect, "to a man whom I think has written some of the greatest rock classics ever." Lou Reed has

appeared with Bowie the week before in London, to the ecstasy of a Velvet Underground cult which has long revered him in England; but now just his songs will have to do.

And *All About Eve* aside, David does them very well. 'I'm Waiting For My Man' comes off the stage taut and strung out, seconded by a murderous rendition of 'White Light, White Heat' that has Mick Ronson bending over the outstretched arms of the crowd, letting them finger and scratch his guitar strings, creating a maelstrom of noise and sound. David quickly follows, moving along the chain of hands reaching out for his twelve string. Suddenly, as if the thought had struck him by fancy, he delivers the guitar into one of those hands, straightening up, moving back from the edge, broadly grinning. But it's only just begun. Mick R. is standing toward the middle of the stage now, legs spread, ripping away at his instrument. David stalks him, Mick appearing to move away, then back again, as if to welcome the invasion. In a flash David is under him, hands clasped around the guitarist's buttocks, gnawing at his crotch, his Gibson, metaphorically draining him to the tune of assorted plaints and moans from the back amplifiers. As rock theatre, it's undeniably thrilling, though cut with a strangely anti-climactic current, as if in recognition that an ever-expanding sexual revolution has made its shock value practically nil except on the most cloistered of impressionable minds. Then again, the show must go on....

The encore is unnecessarily milked by the old poster-to-the-audience trick – unnecessary since the appeal for more was huge and genuine, seemingly cheapened by the constant exhortations of "They can't hear you!" and is Bowie's finest hard rocker, a bit of cannon fodder called 'Suffragette City'. He's tossing a lot more trinkets to the audience now, feeding their fancy, things like posters and cufflinks and bits of sweat. The best, however, is yet to come.

He takes off his shirt, with a pause for several quick tears at the material. He throws a piece here, a piece there. He dangles the sleeve for a bit, tempting with his eyes, his body, the scrap of white cloth dangling in his hand. He tosses it underhand out over the microphone, rhinestones glittering, over the first row of souvenir hunters. I reach up, feel it ball into my hand, reel it in, slip it inside my jacket before someone can snatch it away.

This is not just a concert, not a mere Saturday evening's entertainment; not really. Someday it will be, when David Bowie no longer has to prove himself when he goes out on stage, no longer has to show that he can knock down and drag out with the best of them. At Aylesbury, he fronted what was in effect a show of force, a fist of stage mastery all the more riveting for its utter calculation; and, as the curtain closed, the p.a. system fading up on the opening bars to 'Lady Stardust', themed as if an imaginary list of credits were waiting in the wings, you too might have felt the same reflected beam of a Starman, waiting in the sky:

*People stared at the makeup on his face  
Laughed at his long black hair, his animal grace  
The boy in the bright blue jeans  
Jumped up on the stage  
And lady stardust sang his songs  
Of darkness and disgrace...*

**10. Hegarty and Halliwell, "The Concept Album," in *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (London: Continuum, 2011)**

Through the 1970s, several high-profile albums made the 'concept album' synonymous with progressive rock. The concept album allowed scope for narrative, for genre mixing, for instrumental development that echoed jazz and sonata forms, and for lyrical complexity that was not possible in shorter form or even in single extended tracks.

From the early to mid-1970s, during the high phase of progressive rock, virtuosity spread into group composition, sometimes at the cost of musical individualism. The full-blown concept album would expand on a theme over many tracks, and match this with musical and formal structures that advanced over the course of an album.

The repetition of instrumental and lyrical conceits would offer an immediate coherence on first listen, only for other resonances to emerge on subsequent hearings. For example, *Sgt. Pepper* reprises the title track, but the sitar gradually works its way into the album, and on a lyrical level music-hall and circus references link together the otherwise diverse slices of life that make up the album. ...

Can an instrumental release be a concept album? To some extent it can, but this needs limiting, or else anything with a suggestive title could be a concept album. ... For this reason, we might be tempted to include Sinatra's *Come Fly with Me* (1958) in the history of the concept album. ... [But the] exotic world of *Come Fly with Me* is like being taken to McDonald's (which opened its first US store three years earlier) in a range of different countries – reflecting a lack of musical progression on the album, which echoes the random sequence of travelling songs rather than forming a tightly plotted narrative.

A similar problem might be seen to afflict late 1960s albums that sought to impart profound lessons about the meaning of life but more effectively described the very local conditions of 1960s English society. The essential difference is that The Beatles, The Kinks, The Zombies and The Who used this contradiction as a tool for album composition. *Sgt. Pepper* and *Pet Sounds* mark the crossover point where an album has both coherence and development (this is not the case with *Come Fly with Me*), but the fame of these two albums has obscured the conceptual elements of The Moody Blues' and Pink Floyd's 1967 albums from the same year, and has hidden the shifts within psychedelic pop towards the structure of progressive rock in the shape of the concept album. In fact, if we are searching for what might define progressive rock as English, then it is to the everyday narratives of The Kinks and The Zombies that we should first look. ...

The Pretty Things' *SF Sorrow* initiates a long tradition of concept albums based on alienation, from King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King* (1969) through Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1979) to Radiohead's *OK Computer* (1997) and beyond... The concept album is rarely about absolute escapism, though, even if it offers the prospect of freedom.

Instead, we need to think of it in terms of immersion, not the sensory overload of psychedelic music but an immersion that engages the intellect as well as the senses. Whether the concept album is straight social critique, or musing on the state of the world, humanity or nature, or simply strolling around alternative cosmology, the recording creates a complete system within which the possibility of sustained narrative alters how an album is listened to. The music itself becomes more complex, even if only to connect up the song-cycle, and the lyrical narrative often demands complementary images on the sleeve to keep the whole album in play: for example, Genesis's *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* retells the whole story over the inner part of the gatefold... The concept album often stretched beyond the single album to take up four sides of vinyl, and its integral artwork became a

way of signalling the musical direction of progressive groups. Jethro Tull produced a stream of concept albums in the 1970s on different themes, including a thematic musical study of the concept album itself on its 1972 release *Thick as a Brick*. ... As such, the concept is both the apotheosis of the album and the pushing of its limits. These forms of continuity can be signalled in the use of an artist with a signature style just as much as in the cover art itself. The classic example is Roger Dean's work with Yes, portraying a succession of fantastic worlds that somehow belong to the same universe. ... The gatefold sleeve signals the immersive intent of an album.

Literally, the listener becomes a reader of images, particularly when the cover picture spreads over two, or even four, 12-inch surfaces. As the concept album exceeds the world of the rock album, so it becomes a contained whole in which the listener is a willing captive. ... The extravagant album art invites in the listener/reader even before the listening act, and has the potential to keep playing once the record has been re-sleeved. *Sgt. Pepper* began this expansion of the album into materiality beyond the playing surface by including extra-musical features: multiple images of the costumed band, the cast of twentieth-century cultural figures on the front cover posing for a photograph, and full lyrics on the back sleeve. This would be more than matched in King Crimson's debut album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*.

The cover of *In the Court of the Crimson King* is a signal of the dystopia that lies in the music – a bright-red face screams and distends over the two outside panels of the cover. On the inside, a smiling moon-faced figure beckons, either in welcome or in demand. The outside face of *In the Court of the Crimson King* is taken to be the 'schizoid man' of the opening track and the inner face is the Crimson King, with whom the album closes: the figure on the cover is presumed to be the alienated victim of the powerful figure inside.

The album opens with the sound of a declining but still throbbing machine, which gives way to the whole group blast of the defining riff of '21st Century Schizoid Man'.<sup>1</sup> This discordant, complex track maps out a world where power is on course to destroy all, and points directly to involvement in the Vietnam War:

*Blood rack barbed wire Politicians' funeral pyre Innocents raped with napalm fire Twenty first century schizoid man*

The vocal is distorted, itself machine-like, emphasizing the infiltrating reach of power and the corruption of humanity. The second track, 'I Talk to the Wind', opens with flute and has a more organic feel. The gentle vocals and instrumentation suggest a pastoral interlude, an alternative to the schizoid world; but this track is just as bereft of hope, as 'my words are carried away' without issue.<sup>2</sup> 'Epitaph' follows with the vision of a decaying empire. All three tracks speak of confusion and question the direction humanity is taking. Side two opens with 'Moonchild', an even sweeter song on first listen, but the subtitle indicates that this is 'The Dream' – again, a false hope or mirage – or, at least, a deferred realization. And the final track, 'In the Court of the Crimson King', brings us directly to the source of power. ...

There is no alternative world, as such, but a sequence of images that prompt the listener to reassess the contemporary world in the context of global, but mostly clandestine, warfare. This is demonstrated in the subtitles 'Mirror' for '21st Century Schizoid Man'; 'Dream' and 'Illusion' for 'Moonchild'; and the creaking power in both of the grandiose epics of 'Epitaph' and 'Court of the Crimson King'. These two tracks (closing each side) demonstrate how power has become rotten at the core, with

buildings and tools cracking apart to reveal nothing within.

The other three tracks, alternatively harsh and pastoral, illustrate the emptiness of all that lies outside power, while the lengthy instrumental section of 'Moonchild' presents a failed pastoral because nature no longer answers. As such, a set of specific connections link tracks, imagery, lyrics and music into a deconstruction of the late 1960s belief in the value of humanity, nature and society. ... the model of the concept album as a vehicle for alienation, dystopia, breakdown and critique is fully developed on *In the Court of the Crimson King*, with a harshness not present on *SF Sorrow*. From ELP's *Tarkus* (1971) to Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973), or from Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* (1971) to The Who's *Quadrophenia*, the concept album would explore different ways of mining alienation, anomie and loss of autonomy. ...

*Tarkus* pictures an unfolding war where there is destruction and nothing else to show for it. The tank-armadillo hybrid Tarkus on the cover crushes all before it, until the hybrid mantichore faces it down: 'like the creatures it destroys, Tarkus is cybernetic; it is as much machine as it is animal, and hence it is "unnatural"'. As Macan argues, 'Tarkus can be seen to symbolize a totalitarian society'.<sup>3</sup> ... *Tarkus* also signifies classical music, as does ELP's take on Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1971), which, by virtue of being literally a transposition of classical pieces, connotes classical music even more strongly ...

Progressive rock, then, not only references and deploys different musical genres but also opens up cultural history as a resource. These sources are sometimes linked to an established genre such as the pastoral, or signal an ancient past through the contrasting use of instrumentation (as practised by the Belgium band Univers Zéro), or centre around the figure of a storyteller (as on Jethro Tull's *Songs from the Wood* or Ange's 1974 album *Au-delà de mon délire*). Sometimes the sources are stories that revolve around a fictional character, as in David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972); Peter Hamill's *Nadir's Big Chance* (1975); Nilsson's cartoon-based *The Point!* (1971); and Gong's 'Radio Gnome Invisible' trilogy, featuring the 'Zero the Hero' character (1973–4). ...

The two most famous concept albums were released within a year of each other – Genesis's *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, in late 1974, and Yes's *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, in late 1973 – and each develops intricate narrations in structures that are both lyrical and instrumental. Each album establishes a parallel reality, with the former an uncanny but nearby world underneath New York City, and the latter a mystical conception of a world that lies beyond appearances. Other than this cosmological unveiling, and their reception as the final decadence of progressive rock, the pair have little in common: Genesis's album is dominated by Peter Gabriel's vocals, lyrics and accompanying version of the story inside the cover; *Tales from Topographic Oceans* features large sections of instrumental work, despite the volume of lyrics, and even when there are lyrics the music often dominates (and the musicality of the lyrics signifies more than their linguistic meaning).

*The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* follows Rael, a New Yorker of Puerto Rican origin, into a netherworld somewhere close to Manhattan. The narrative is dreamlike, held together by a double quest to escape the netherworld and for self-awareness. Rael encounters mystery, torture, physical events, monstrous creatures in the form of the sexually voracious Lamia and the Slippermen distorted by their desire, as well as a mass of near-faceless people caught in the machinations of this parallel city. The story is presented in three forms: the lyrics, an accompanying prose version (written by Gabriel), and a portmanteau of six pictures that nearly match scenes conveyed by the words. The pictures are being looked at by Rael, thereby positioning him both inside and outside of the story – both subjective and objective – as one of many doublings set up in *Lamb*. New York is doubled as

reality and netherworld; Rael is doubled in the form of his brother John, who turns out to be a mirror of the protagonist; Rael himself is doubled by 'the real' – 'it is Real, it is Rael' (on the final track, 'it'); and this closing track doubles the album, acting as commentary on all that preceded it. Numerous moments are reprised: for example, the title track returns in 'The Light Dies Down on Broadway' (mixed in with a return of 'The Lamia'), while the structure and key of the third verse of the title track recurs as the opening to 'Carpet Crawlers'.<sup>4</sup> The first of these reprises links together sides one and four; the second connects sides one and two. ...

Turning to the 1973 Yes album *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, we see another world that has been hidden. Instead of darkness and travail, however, this is a higher world, an all-encompassing reality with which humanity has lost touch. This album charts the attempt to recover this animistic universe. Necessarily more abstract than *Lamb*, it flirts with what Bill Martin calls 'an apolitical New-Ageist otherworldliness'.<sup>6</sup> With little connection to history as lived by humans, *Tales from Topographic Oceans* risks not speaking to those listeners who were realizing their identities through the communal living suggested by the album. Martin is suspicious that 'without dealing with the real struggles that people must confront, including that of "our class", transcendence is hollow, and the "alternative view" is merely a mind-trip'.<sup>7</sup> This is precisely the problem that arises for many with regard to the avant-garde aspirations of progressive rock; given that Martin is a fervent supporter of Yes, it illustrates the suspicion of decadence that even fans of progressive rock can feel in the face of the mystical onslaught of *Topographic*. However, the album is not so simply ethereal, despite its basis on a superficial reference to Hindu mysticism. Its often dissonant and forceful monumentalism makes it a subtle exploration of ecological identity and phenomenological Being-in-the-world. Though the lyrics are resolutely and mystically arcane, the structure of the songs and the inclusion of the lyrics indicate much more of a 'working through, not a contemplative leap beyond'.<sup>8</sup> It is the structuring, rather than the explicit content, that creates the meditation proposed to the listener.

*Topographic* consists of four pieces, one per side of the album (a symmetrical arrangement ignored in the most recent CD reissue, which has sides one to three on the first CD). Each is introduced by a short summary of how the 'story' is expressed musically, on the lyric sheet on the inside of the gatefold cover. Each record forms a system within the whole, with sides one and two focusing on the search to rediscover the lost unity of the earth with humanity; sides three and four develop the interaction of human with 'what lies beyond', and the search for knowledge and respect for nature through ritual. This structure is established on record one by the reprises of elements of side one as side two nears its end, and on sides three and four by percussion and dissonance giving rise to resolution. All four sides end with repetition of a phrase ('For you and you and you'; 'Surely, surely'; 'Along without you/along without you'; 'Nous sommes du soleil' four times), showing not only the unity of all four parts but also that structure is unity. Each side has a resolution, even if 'Ritual', on side four, seems to offer more of a sense of completion. This indicates that the four sides do not make a linear narrative but parallel each other in lateral form, stretching (skywards from the sea) through reiterations. ...

In many ways the apogee of progressive rock's ambitions, *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* and *Tales from Topographic Oceans* also signal an endpoint, prompting the question: how could these albums be exceeded?

Mobilizing existing myths into new forms with complex structures, these albums were possibly too avant-garde to be accepted as popular rock music, despite selling extremely well. The twin

individualism of punk rhetoric and a nascent neo-liberalism would be a call to order against such conceptual ambition, representing a demand for the listener to be in charge again (Yes played *Topographic* in full in live performances before it was released, as did Genesis with *Lamb*, albeit in the latter case because of a delay in its release date).<sup>9</sup> The concept album was far from finished, though, and nor were the engagement with myth, the extravagance of album covers, or progressive rock performance.

## Notes

Sid Smith, *In The Court of the Crimson King* (New York: Helter Skelter, 2007), 59.

Bill Martin argues that 'I Talk to the Wind' 'can be heard both on the level of personal melancholy and as a herald that something in the world is seriously out of joint' (Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 158).

Quoted by Bruce Pilato, *Tarkus* liner notes (2001 CD reissue).

However well CD covers represent the original vinyl issues, through facsimile covers or accompanying text, such moves are seriously compromised in unifying an album as one sequence, rather than as a set of two.

Kevin Holm-Hudson, *Genesis and The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 57. After Nietzsche writes of the 'eternal return', where every moment coexists forever, he takes on its power. See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968), especially §1067.

Taken from one of Gabriel's onstage narrations, quoted by Holm-Hudson, *Genesis and The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, 104.

Martin, *Music of Yes*, 156. 7.

Ibid., 151.

8. Ibid., 147.

9. Holm-Hudson argues that record companies grew tired of the expense of the recording and material cost of the integration of artwork into the album, and, far from being threatened by it, welcomed punk's simplicity as a way of increasing profit margins (Holm-Hudson, *Genesis and The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, 4, 19, 39–44).

## 11. Nelson George, "The Power and the Glory," *The Village Voice*, May 8, 1984.

MARCH 1983—In the motel's living room two women in their late thirties, wearing much too much makeup, and clothes too tight covering too much flesh, hovered over a hot plate, concerned that everything would taste right "for him." In the bedroom, behind closed doors, dressed in a robe and stocking cap, his face covered with a facial mask, Marvin Gaye accompanied by three biceped roadies (bodyguards?) watched a fight on *Wide World of Sports*. Marvin and I sat next to each other in tacky motel chairs, his attention wandering from our conversation to the fight.

I anticipated an upbeat conversation full of the self-righteous I-told-you-so fervor so many performers, back from commercial death, inflict upon interviewers and the public. After all, Gaye was in the midst of one of the most thrilling comebacks in pop music history. "Sexual Healing," some freedom from the IRS, CBS's mammoth music machine in high gear for him, and adoration from two generations of fans, were all part of a wave of prosperity. Even his stage act, in the past marked by a palpable diffidence, had been spellbinding. The night before, at San Mateo's Circle Star



Theater, he had been brilliant, performing all the good stuff, and even reviving Mary Wells's "Two Lovers," one of Smokey's best early songs, about a total schizophrenic, a man who was both lovingly faithful and totally amoral.

Gaye's voice was soft, relaxed, and strangely monotonous (he spoke with almost no inflection). His precise elocution was reminiscent of your stereotypical English gentleman, but he spoke of a world far removed from delicacy and style. These were words of isolation, alienation, and downright confusion. His reviewed acclaim had in no way silenced the demons that made his last Motown album *In Our Lifetime* (despite its premature release by Motown) an explicit battle between the devil and the Lord for his heart, soul, and future.

I said to him, "The times seem to call for the kind of social commentary you provided on "What's Going On."

"It seems to me I have to do some soul searching to see what I want to say," he said. "You can say something. Or you can say something profound. It calls for fasting, feeling, praying, lots of prayer, and maybe we can come up with a more spiritual social statement, to give people more food for thought."

"I take it this process hasn't been going on within you in quite some time."

"I have been apathetic, because I know the end is near. Sometimes I feel like going off and taking a vacation and enjoying the last 10 or 15 years and forgetting about my message, which I feel is in a form of being a true messenger of God."

"What about doing like Al Green and turn your back on the whole thing?"

"That's his role. My role is not necessarily his. That doesn't make me a devil. It's just that my role is different, you see. If he wants to turn to God and become without sin and have his reputation become that, then that is what it should be. I am not concerned with what my role should be. I am only concerned with completing my mission here on Earth. My mission is what it is and I think I'm presenting it in a proper way. What people think about me is their business."

"What is your mission?"

Without a moment's hesitation he responded, "My mission is to tell the world and the people about the upcoming holocaust and to find all those of higher consciousness who can be saved. Those who can't can be left alone."

A year later I reflected on those words while reading the comments of Rev. Marvin Gaye, Sr., Marvin's father, from his Los Angeles jail cell. It had all gone wrong for Marvin since our talk. The physical assaults on others, including his 70 year old father, Marvin's self-inflicted psychological degradation of himself with his "sniffing," and the lack of creative energy it all suggested, meant Marvin's unrest was real. Still, to me, the most frightening comment was Rev. Gaye's response to whether he loved his son or not: "Let's say that I didn't dislike him."

*SUMMER 1958—Stardom was taking its toll on the Moonglows, one of the 1950s top vocal groups. One member had been hospitalized for drug abuse. Another was tripping on the glamour and the friendly little girls. Harvey Fuqua, the Moonglows' founder and most level-headed member, was disturbed to see how the Moonglows were not profiting from their fame. It was during this period of growing disillusionment that four Washington, D.C. teens, called the Marquees, finally talked Fuqua into listening to them in his hotel room. Well Fuqua was "freaked out" by them, particularly the lanky kid in the back named Marvin Gaye. By the winter of*

*1959 two editions of the Moonglows had come and gone when Fuqua accepted an offer to move to Detroit as a partner in Gwen Gordy and Billy Davis's Anna records.*

That Fuqua kept Marvin with him is testimony to his eye for talent and the growth of a friendship that, in many ways, would parallel that of future Motown coworkers Smokey Robinson and Berry Gordy. On the surface Marvin was this seemingly calm, tall, smooth-skinned charmer whom the ladies found most seductive. Marvin was cool.

Yet there was an insecurity and a spirituality in his soul that overwhelmed his worldly desire, causing great inner turmoil. This conflict could be traced to his often strained relationship with his father, a well-known minister in Washington, D.C. Rev. Gaye was flamboyant, persuasive, and yet disquieting as well. There was a strange, repressed sexuality about him that caused whispers in the nation's capital. His son, so sensitive and so clearly possessed of his father's spiritual determination and his own special musical gifts (he sang, played piano and drums), sought to establish his own identity.

So he pursued a career singing "the devil's music" and in Fuqua found a strong, masculine figure who respected his talent. Together they'd sit for hours at the piano, Fuqua showing Marvin chord progressions. Marvin took instruction well, but his rebel's edge would flash when something conflicted with his views. His combination of sex and spirituality, malleability and conviction, made Fuqua feel Marvin was something special. Marvin, not crazy about returning to D.C., accepted Fuqua's invitation.

Marvin never recorded for Anna records. But he sure met the label's namesake, Gwen's sister Anna. "Right away Anna snatched him," Fuqua told Aaron Fuchs, "just snatched him immediately." Anna was something. She was 17 years older than Marvin, but folks in Detroit thought she was more than a match for most men. Ambitious, shrewd, and quite "fine," she introduced Marvin to brother Berry, leading to session work as a pianist and drummer. Later, after Berry had established Motown as an independent label, Marvin cut *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*, a collection of MOR standards done with a bit of jazz flavor. It was an effort, the first of several by Motown, to reach the supper club audience that supported black crooners Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis, and Sam Cooke. It flopped and some were doubtful he'd get another chance. Yeah, he was Berry's brother-in-law (that's the reason some figured he got the shot in the first place), but Berry was cold-blooded about business.

Then in July Stevenson and Berry's brother George had an idea for a dance record. Marvin wasn't crazy about singing hardcore r&b. But Anna was used to being pampered and Marvin's pretty face didn't pay bills. Neither did a drummer's salary. With Marvin's songwriting aid "Stubborn Kind of Fellow" was recorded late in the month. "You could hear the man screaming on that tune, you could tell he was hungry," says Dave Hamilton who played guitar on it. "If you listen to that song you'll say, 'Hey, man, he was trying to make it because he was on his last leg.'" Despite "Stubborn" cracking the r&b top ten Marvin's future at Motown was in no way assured. He was already getting a reputation for being "moody" and "difficult." It wasn't until December that he cut anything else with hit potential. "Hitch Hike," a thumping boogie turn that again called for a rougher style than Gaye enjoyed, was produced by Stevenson and his bright young assistant Clarence Paul. "Stubborn"'s groove wears better than "Hitch Hike"'s twenty years later, yet his second hit was probably more important to his career. Gaye proved he wasn't a one-hit wonder. He proved too that the intangible "thing" some heard in Gaye's performance of "Stubborn" was no fluke. The man had sex appeal. "I never wanted to sing the hot stuff," he would later tell David Ritz in *Essence*. "With a great deal of

bucking, I did it because...well I wanted the money and the glory. So I worked with all the producers. But I wanted to be a pop singer—like Nat Cole or Sinatra or Tony Bennett. I wanted to be a pop singer

Sam Cooke, proving that our kind of music and our kind of feeling could work in the context of pop ballads. Motown never gave me the push I needed.”

Cholly Atkins, Motown’s choreographer during the glory years, remembers things differently. “Marvin had the greatest opportunity in the world and we were grooming him for it,” Atkins says. “He almost had first choice to replace Sam Cooke when Sam passed away. He had his foot in the door. He was playing smart supper clubs and doing excellent, but it wasn’t his bag. He wanted to go on not shaving with a skull cap on and old dungarees, you know what I mean, instead of the tuxedo and stuff. That’s what he felt comfortable doing....But he has his own thoughts about where he wants to go or what he wants to do with his life. And he doesn’t like anybody influencing him otherwise.”

Beans Bowles, a road manager and Motown executive in the mid-60s, remembers Marvin as a “very disturbed young man...because of what he wanted to do and the frustrations that he had trying to do them. He wanted to play football. He tried to join the Detroit Lions.”

In 1970, at 31, Marvin tried to get Detroit’s local NFL franchise to let him attend rookie camp. This was the period after Tammi Terrell’s death when he was, against Motown’s wishes, working on *What’s Going On*. Yet he was willing to stop all that for the opportunity to play pro football. Why?

“My father was a minister and he wanted me in church most of the time,” he told the *Detroit Free Press*. “I played very little sandlot football and I got me a few whippin’s for staying after school watching the team practice.” This parental discipline only ignited Marvin’s contrary nature and his fantasies. “I don’t want to be known as the black George Plimpton,” he said, somewhat insulted by the comparison. “I have no ulterior motive...I’m not writing a book. I just love football. I love the glory of it...there’s an ego thing involved...and the glory is with the pros.”

The Lions, not surprisingly, turned him down flat. Marvin’s attempt didn’t surprise those who knew him then either. At Motown picnics he always played all out, trying to outshine his contemporaries at every opportunity. One time he severely strained an ankle running a pass pattern. In Los Angeles in the early 1970s he developed quite a reputation as a treacherous half-court basketball player. He even tried to buy a piece of a WFL franchise in the mid- 70s.

There were two levels to Marvin’s often fanatical attachment to sports. One was a deep seated desire to prove his manhood, his strength, his macho, in a world where brute power met delicate grace in physical celebration. For all his sex appeal and interest in sexuality (“you make a person think you’re going to do something, but never do until you’re ready”), Marvin wanted to assert his physical superiority over other men.

Linked to this was a need for teamwork, a need to enjoy the fruits of collaboration. All his best work, be it some early hits with Micky Stevenson, *Let’s Get It On* with Ed Townsend, *What’s Going On* with Alfred Cleveland or *Midnight Love* with Harvey Fuqua were done in tandem with others. For all his self-conscious artistic arrogance, he was a team player. In the ’60s Marvin bent his voice to the wishes of Motown, but he did so his way, vocally if not musically. He claimed he had three different voices, a falsetto, a gritty gospel shout, and a smooth midrange close to his speaking voice. Depending on the tune’s key, tone and intention he was able to accommodate it, becoming a

creative slave to the music's will. On the early hits ("Ain't That Peculiar," "Hitch-Hike") Gaye is rough, ready, and willing. His glide through the opening verse of "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" is the riff Nick Ashford, the song's co-writer and producer, has been reaching for all these years. On Berry Gordy's "Try It Baby" Marvin's coolly slick delivery reminds us of the Harlem bars I visited with my father as a child. His version of "Grapevine" is so intense, so pretty, so god-damn black in spirit, it seems to catalogue that world of black male emotions Charles Fuller evokes in his insightful *Soldier's Play*. Listening to Marvin's three-record *Anthology* LP will confirm that no Motown artist gave as much to the music as he did. If he had never made another record after December 31, 1969 his contributions to the company would have given a lasting fame even greater than that reserved for Levi Stubbs and Martha Reeves. But, as Marvin often tried to tell them, he had even more to offer.

In 1971, Motown released *What's Going On*, a landmark that, forgive the heresy, is as important and as successfully ambitious as *Sergeant Pepper*. What?! I said this before Gaye's demise and I still say it. Stanley Crouch, in a well-reasoned analysis of *What's Going On*, explains it better than anyone ever has.

"His is a talent for which the studio must have been invented. Through overdubbing, Gaye imparted lyric, rhythmic, and emotional counterpoint to his material. The result was a swirling stream-of-consciousness that enabled him to protest, show allegiance, love, hate, dismiss, and desire in one proverbial fell swoop. In his way, what Gaye did was reiterate electronically the polyrhythmic African underpinnings of black American music and reassess the domestic polyphony which is its linear extension."

Furthermore, Crouch asserted, "the upshot of his genius was the ease and power with which he could pivot from a superficially simple but virtuosic use of rests and accents to a multilinear layered density. In fact, if one were to say that James Brown could be the Fletcher Henderson and Count Basie of rhythm and blues, then Marvin Gaye is obviously its Ellington and Miles Davis."

Though lyrically Marvin never again reached as far outside his personal experience for material, the musical ambience of *What's Going On* was refined with varying degrees of effectiveness for the rest of his career.

Part of the reason for Gaye's introspection was a series of personal dramas—a costly divorce from Anna, a tempestuous marriage to a woman 17 years *his* junior, constant creative hassles with Motown and antagonism with his father over religion, money, and his mother. Drugs became his escape hatch and his prison. As his *In Our Lifetime* so brazenly articulates, the devil was after his soul and damned if he wasn't determined to win.

*APRIL 1983—Any purchaser of other Rupert Murdoch newstock publications knows the details of Marvin Gaye's death. I expect the trial, if his father isn't declared insane, to be an evil spectacle, full of drugs, sex, and interfamily conflicts. It won't be fun. What was, and will always be my favorite memory of Marvin, was his performance of the National Anthem at the 1983 NBA Allstar Game. Dressed as dapperly as any nightclub star, standing before an audience of die-hard sports fans, and some of the world's greatest athletes, Gaye turned out our nation's most confusing melody, asserting an aesthetic and intellectual power that rocked the house. I play it over and over now. CBS was going to release it as a single. Don't you think they should now?*

1984

## 12. Robert Christgau, "Growing Up Grim With Mott the Hoople," *Newsday*, Dec. 1972

Mott the Hoople is an English rock band that cohered in July, 1969, around a singer from the industrial Midlands named Ian Hunter. Hunter had one freakish specialty—an imitation of the world-weary middle-period Dylan that cut Sonny Bono all the way to 4th Street. As if to prove himself the champion Dylanizer, Hunter did Sonny's "Laugh at Me" on the group's first album. The invitation was difficult to resist. With its revival of a teen tearjerker balanced against its jacket by the kitsch surrealist M.C. Escher, the album was like the two that followed—distinguished only by what it covered and by what covered it. The music itself was a lot of highly undistinguished heavy riffing. ...

These intimations of apocalypse may sound strange here in the land of let's-boogie, but I am talking about England, where there is definitely weird stuff going on in rock and roll. I take it as a combination of the grim English adolescence—most kids there go to work at fifteen—and the distance between English pop and its American roots. For the English, rock and roll has never involved doing what comes naturally. No matter how well off the prospective American rock musician may be, it seems that he is closer to down-home funk than his (often working-class) English counterpart, and (due largely to the inspiration of the Beatles, of course) he is no longer embarrassed about showing it. Occasionally, England will produce some mad blues avatar like Eric Burdon or Joe Cocker, but for the most part the English work out their built-in detachment aesthetically. Invariably, their music redefines that old catchall: art-rock.

I don't want to overgeneralize—Ten Years After and Savoy Brown aren't art-rock, and neither is John Mayall. But the two biggest second-generation English bands—in America, that is—Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tull, dissimilar as they are, can be coaxed into the category, because each relates to rock and roll not organically but intellectually. Each idealizes the amplified beat. For Tull (as for all the upper-middle-class: Yes; the Moody Blues; Emerson, Lake & Palmer) it is a simple, compelling structure into which Good Music can be inserted. For Led Zep (as for Mott the Hoople and Black Sabbath and Slade) it is an end in itself, a kind of formal challenge.

What is most striking about all art-rock is that it isn't very sexy. Bands like Tull make head music, using the physical compulsion of beat and volume to involve the mind. Bands like Led Zep, on the other hand, make body music of an oddly cerebral cast, arousing aggression rather than sexuality. This means that the second kind of English hard rock—Led Zep's and Mott's—has a strange potential double audience. It can attract intellectuals, and it can attract working-class kids. ...

Like everyone else, De Fries and his stable [David Bowie, Mott the Hoople, Lou Reed, and Iggy Pop] want to reach a new rock audience that barely remembers the Beatles. In England this audience has far-out tastes, going for the fey fantasies of T. Rex and the crude generational hostility of Slade where the Americans go for the Osmonds and Grand Funk. But the fact that English tastes once took over America doesn't mean they will again—in a sense, the Beatles were a one shot. Artistically, the English groups are superior, but as phenomena they are no more real. By the time of *Brain Capers* Mott the Hoople had a substantial English following. In America, however, they had a Velvet Underground reputation when they would have preferred an Alice Cooper market. When their U.S. record company dropped them, they were so disheartened they were ready to disband. But De Fries and Bowie persuaded them to give it one more try.

The reason is "All the Young Dudes," a song Bowie wrote and produced for Mott the Hoople. A big hit in England, it made only top fifty here, which, since Mott's new label was pushing hard, doesn't mean a

thing. No matter. "All the Young Dudes" is the most exciting piece of white rock and roll released all year. It recalls the Stones at their peak, when all that ironic density still pertained to us as well as them. Like "I'm Eighteen," the hit single that transformed Alice Cooper from the group that slaughtered chickens to the group that destroyed stadiums, "All the Young Dudes" is an attempt by an over-twenty-five to get under the skins of the new rock audience. But where the American produced a defiant cry of joyful alienation, the English art-rocker tried to suggest paradoxes of power and frustration, solidarity and isolation.

Because Mott the Hoople is produced by David Bowie and opens the *All the Young Dudes* album with "Sweet Jane," a Velvet Underground song, it is generally assumed that the band is flirting with the trendy gayness now threatening red-blooded American boogie. Hmph, just listen to the very first stanza of "Sweet Jane": "Now Jack he's in his corset, and Jane she's in her vest." Only thing is, the crucial line in that song is the next one: "Me, I'm in a rock and roll band." In "One of the Boys," which opens side two, the same identification is reconfirmed: "I borrowed a gypsy Gibson just to show them/ And now I'm a rock and roll star I don't want to know them/ If they want a straight they better go out and grow one."

Lately, the old figure of the self-conscious rock and roll star has been turning into the even more traditional world-weary art hero, with all the effeteness that implies—Mick Jagger's coat is worn and frayed, and he wants to shout, but he can't hardly speak, while Bowie's own persona, Ziggy Stardust, is an androgynous alien trying to conjure some love out of a dying planet. But whereas Jagger really is a fagged-out ten-year music veteran, and Bowie really is an art-scene outsider trying to reach the masses through music, Ian Hunter is the lead singer of a genuine second-level touring band. He is familiar enough with the kinks of the pop world, but fame has not separated him—not totally, anyway—from his own class and generational origins. If he is part of a subculture in which love's sweet sentiment seems a thing of the past, as it does in "Sweet Jane," he can also remember how he grew his hair to scare the teacher as one of the boys: "I don't say much, but I make a big noise."

In "All the Young Dudes" the rock and roller who knows Jack and Jane and the rock and roller who is one of the boys combines to undermine the notion that Jack and Jane are merely weird or the boys merely ordinary. For this is a dying planet in the sense that economic pressures break down traditional roles faster than anyone can find comfortable new ones—Dad wears a secret tummy-flattener to the P.T.A., and Mom affects a suede jerkin around the office. Meanwhile, the kids cope. A generation because they are a market, they band together, fortified by details of style against their own fate: "Don't want to stay alive when you're twenty-five."

Singing against an unforgettable chorus, an inspiring, somewhat brutal-sounding hymn to subgenerational solidarity— one line, "All the young dudes carry the news," repeated over and over—Hunter reveals the cruel limits of such solidarity. Whether the dudes are homosexuals, droogs, mods, rockers, or mockers—or just the boys—doesn't matter. Whoever they are, they are united by a style ("He dresses like a queen . . .") against time, and they're out on the street determined to face it down together (" . . . but he can kick like a mule"). They're not "juvenile delinquent wrecks," they tell us: "We can love, we can really love." But in the end the love and the facedown are inextricable, for the only accessible adversaries are those contemporaries who don't conform to their style. As the chorus repeats to a fade, Hunter calls out: "Hey, you there. You with the glasses. I want you. I want you in the front. Now." Soon, he loves and faces down his victim, who I imagine as some hapless Emerson, Lake & Palmer fan. "How did it feel?" someone asks. Hunter's reply is barely audible, the last word of the song: "Sick." ...

**13. Terry Atkinson, "A FINE MADNESS TO ENGLAND'S ROXY MUSIC,"**  
*Los Angeles Times* DEC. 17, 1972

Intellectual or art-rock bands, especially those so doggedly cerebral as to count John Cage as strong an influence as Chuck Berry, have usually proved to be either interesting but essentially unsatisfying (i.e. The United States of America), or simply excruciating (i.e. the co-efforts of Mr. and Mrs. John Lennon). It is the rare brainy performer who can vie successfully with the good old, more-or-less illiterate brand of rock 'n' roll. Among the exceptions: Yes, David Bowie, Curved Air and Pink Floyd. To that small list of successes, we can now add Roxy Music, a new English band that has been filling music halls with delirious fans in Britain, that counts David Bowie and Elton John among its admirers, and that has a superb first album.

Much of the credit for Roxy Music's first album must go to Bryan Ferry, who composed all the songs, and Eno, who reworks the sound of the other musicians' instruments and operates the synthesizer. Ferry's songs are offbeat and experimental in the extreme, but they're infused with a fine, contagious madness. Some of the widely varying cuts, such as the wild Virginia Plain and the beautiful If There Is Something, are instant classics.

The music is delightfully unorthodox, evoking past styles (of the 1930s and 1950s), inventing new ones, shifting unexpectedly in tempo, churning out rock, then producing the most delicate effects, throwing in film references, displaying a use of dynamics, stereo and - summarily - of sound that is far beyond the results of other current bands.

Ferry is also the lead singer and his voice adapts wonderfully to the very different needs of each song. He's a rollicking robot on Virginia Plain, a 1950s crooner on Would You Believe?, a Valentino on Bitters End. Eno, meanwhile, does wonders with the sound of the band: Andrew Mackay on saxophone, Phil Manzanera on guitar, Paul Thompson on drums and Graham Simpson on bass (he's since been replaced by Rik Kenton).

You would have to search high and far for a better debut album this year. Roxy Music is one of the musical pleasures we have to look forward to in the next decade.

Paul Gambaccini, "ROXY MUSIC: FOR YOUR PLEASURE," *Rolling Stone*  
JULY 5, 1973

Stop doing the stroll, mouse, limbo, eighty-one and peppermint twist. Give the Strand four minutes of your time and you won't think of doing another dance for at least two weeks.

In an album that is remarkably inaccessible, Do The Strand strikes with immediate impact. This lead-off number, written by lead singer Bryan Ferry, is the cleverest use of language and rhyme since I Am The Walrus. "Tired of the tango? Fed up with fandango? ...Bored of the beguine? The sambo isn't your scene? ...Weary of the waltz? And mashed potato schmaltz?" By the time the band has taken off on its mid-flight solo, the listener desperately wants to do the Strand, whatever it is. Turns out it isn't anything, which enhances the magic of what is a total performance. Andrew Mackay's wailing saxophone punctuates Ferry's questions, the rest of the band produces a high-powered backing track, and Ferry sounds perfectly nasty when he says, "We like the Strand."

You'll like it, too, and you can be excused for putting the needle back at the beginning, especially if you hear what comes afterwards. Sadly, the British Top Ten hit Pyjamarama is not included, and the seven tracks that are here are hard to bite into. There are some worthwhile moments, to be sure. Changing rhythms, Eno's use of synthesizer and tapes, instrumental passages. Ferry's odd vocal styling and the group's sudden endings are all worth hearing, but mainly because they are interesting, not entertaining. The only true highlights are the eerie In Every Dream Home A Heartache and the "boys will be boys will be boyoyoyoys" line and Mackay's solo on Editions Of You.

Side two drones on with a nine-minute instrumental that sounds like a rip-off of The Doors' Alabama Song. The title tune ends the album, but is it a tune? It sounds like dogs barking repetitively for minutes on end. Maybe it is Eno's genius at work, but if so you've gotta be Mensa level to understand him or be so stoned you still think the drum solo on In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida is a tour de force.

A great deal of the group's appeal is visual, and even staring at the interior gatefold won't communicate that excitement. If Do The Strand, Pyjamarama and Virginia Plain were all on a maxi-single it would be one of the buys of the year. But the bulk of For Your Pleasure is either above us, beneath us, or on another plane altogether. You can find out where they register on your individual scale. As for me, I shall continue doing the Strand.

Lester Bangs. "ROXY MUSIC: CATCH THE NEXT SENSATION," Creem  
JULY 1974

### **ROXY MUSIC Stranded / BRYAN FERRY These Foolish Things**

LISTEN! I bent your ears about Lou and The Velvet Underground, I told ya to go buy Mott last year and aren't you glad! Damn straight. Well, I'm serving notice right now on everybody to go and wolf down the new albums by Roxy Music and Bryan Ferry. Just try to imagine a lead singer who sounds like a low-warbling cross between Bowie, Lou Reed and Elvis, singing a wide crosscut of punk sneer overlaid with a broad swath of Victorian Romanticism and space noise with mean-ass guitar. Sound like a bit much? Well, that's what I thought at first too, I laughed, but these two albums have been my constant obsessions since I got the British editions two months ago. Once you let them work their venal magic on your inner ear canal you'll know why I'm frothing.

Bryan Ferry has spewed out such a remade/remodeled set of diverse styles that initially you don't know how to take him. So take him as Bowie with guts, maybe, a true dude even though he likes to pose in melancholy pix as poor Byron bowed with victory at the pinnacle of ennui. One thing's certain: he's pulled his chops together from the sometimes strained excursions of the first two Roxy albums - available here on Warner Bros. - in which a multitude of idioms seemed sometimes to be pulling in every direction at once.

Take Street Life, one of *Stranded's* two El Perfectos. Opens with tides of muted noise, then whomps ya with a perfect fuzz hook, organ echoing so off-key it covers all the bases, and Bryan shouting bitterly: Wish everybody would leave me alone / Don't always call me on the telephone / When I pick it up there's no one there / So I walk outside just to take the air / C'mon with me cruising down the street / Who knows what you'd find, who you might meet...

Now I'm blinded I can really see / No more bright lights confusing me... When you hear how he snarls out Gotta take you *downn!*, you know you're dealing with a whole new breed of fey badass.



Sound like your kind of meat? I thought so, and that's only the beginning. Just check Mother Of Pearl. After listening to this twisto masterpiece 5,000 times and cogitating on its cosmic import unending, I have discerned its meaning. This guy goes to a beat-'em-out party where smoky entities hover in the air and angry guitars slash through the sprawled bodies raking associations. Bryan growls through the murk; Get the picture? No, no, no!

Yeah! Walk a tight sideline! Have you a future? No, no, no! Yeah... But you gotta come down sooner or, and he does, into a morning after of scattered final insights: Well I've been up all night party-time wasting it's too much fun / Then I step back thinking of life's inner meaning and my latest fling / It's the same old story... So where's the solution? Nowhere, shmuck. No love in the looking glass world, and every goddess is just a beddown. So turn to your heroes: Every idol a bringdown, it gets you down. So he delves into the must of literary antiquity and trawls up even Nietzsche wanting: Thus even Zarathustra, another time loser. O.K., so why don't you just Berlin slash your wrists? Because you're an old timer, that's why. Bryan Ferry is a Victorian Romantic and suddenly he sees this divine wraithlike faun-angel diaphanously rising from the wreckage of ideals: I have been looking for something I've always wanted, but was never mine / But now I've seen that something out of reach glowing, very Holy Grail... this lady of a sacred world. ... The rest of the album, like Serenade and A Song To Europe, is even more Continentally trapped, but it's all for your pleasure. And the *band* is so good that... well, you'll find out. ...

#### **14. "Robert Christgau Remembers Six Ways 70s Bowie Changed Culture Forever," *Noisey*, January 15, 2016**

David Bowie accomplished several things I wish he hadn't in the 70s, from briefly reinstating mime as a legitimate art form to permanently convincing Britons that their elitist nation was the chief locus of artistic sophistication in popular music. But you have to hand it to the guy--the main reason he accomplished these things is a conceptual fecundity so bottomless that his accomplishments verged on endless. The 60s get the ink, but the 70s were pop's golden years-- economically in that they were when sound recordings became, as the trades trumpeted in 1969, a "billion-dollar business," and artistically because the 60s had opened things up so much that for the entire decade possibilities seemed infinite whether they built on or rebelled against the 60s model. And Bowie was in the middle of so much of it: a punk prophet and an arena-rock pioneer, a free spirit and a proud poser, an adept of black musical vanguards as well as white, a dynamo and an amalgamator and a shrewd hanger-on. In associative rather than chronological order, here are a few innovations I'm remembering as we adjust to a world without him. There are so many I'm sure I'll forget some.

1.) Most important even though he was probably just trying to get a rise out of people, he broke the gay barrier. In biographical fact, he bedded what some estimate as thousands of women. But as a public cross-dresser and private omnisexual who in January, 1972, told *Melody Maker's* Mick Watts "I'm gay and always have been, even when I was David Jones," he made sexual identity a public issue in a music business where in Britain gay management had long been a way of life. Even Elton John, who came up alongside Bowie and was always gay, first declared himself "bisexual" in 1976 and didn't come out officially until 1988.

2.) Not unconnectedly, Bowie also broke the authenticity barrier. The 60s myth was that rock and rollers were "real" men expressing their "real" selves (or, God help us, souls). Starting with *Ziggy Stardust* in

1971, Bowie always ch-ch-ch-ch- changed, sometimes playing new characters with sobriquets like "the thin white duke" and always adjusting if not reversing his musical tack. The idea we all share that pop artists project "personas"? It was true pre-Bowie. But Bowie turned it into a commonplace.

3.) Most of Bowie's pretensions were arty; some would say avant-garde. But because Bowie's concept of art was decidedly theatrical, he pioneered the fully staged arena-rock show. When he toured behind *Diamond Dogs* in 1974, his set was equipped with platforms and winches that enabled him to float suspended in the air and guest dancers acting out the songs.

4.) His sponging was a species of genius, and he gave back. The artists he latched onto early, and whose ideas he freely and sometimes candidly purloined, included Lou Reed, whose calculatedly androgynous, late-1972, Bowie-produced *Transformer* generated Reed's only hit single, "Walk on the Wild Side." He mixed Iggy and the Stooges' seminal 1973 *Raw Power* ("weedily," James Osterberg later complained) and produced Iggy Pop's 1977 solo debut *The Idiot*, also filling the guitar chair in the touring band that promoted it. More obscurely but arguably best of all, he produced and wrote the title song for Mott the Hoople's classic 1972 album *All the Young Dudes*. Check it out.

5.) In his own class among Bowie's collaborators is Brian Eno. Eno had quit Bryan Ferry's Roxy Music to release a string of three iconic solo albums that at that time were strictly cult items, and eventually would go balls-out ambient on 80s albums like *Music for Airports* as well as producing Talking Heads and U2. But listen to what we used to call the "second side" of Bowie's Berlin albums for the true beginnings of ambient and chillout techno.

6.) Well before militantly white *Berlin*, Bowie also discovered weirdly black funk, which in 1975 was still terra incognita to most rock fans. I can't resist recalling the irresistible New Orleans piano that backs "TVC-15," which tops 1976's well nigh danceable *Station to Station*. But the real coup was his first number one single, 1975's "Fame," which sounds like a James Brown rip but is based on a riff devised by Bowie guitarist Carlos Alomar. Brown liked it so much that he quickly recorded "Hot (I Need to Be Loved)" over the same riff. JB stole DB's funk move. Word.

## **15. Lester Bangs, "I Only Get My Rocks Off When I'm Dreaming," in *Psychotic reaction and Carburetor Dung*, ed. by Greil Marcus (Anchor, 2003)**

*Exile on Main Street* came out just three months ago, and I practically gave myself an ulcer and hemorrhoids, too, trying to find some way to like it. Finally I just gave up, wrote a review that was almost a total pan, and tried to forget about the whole thing. A couple weeks later, I went back to California, got a copy just to see if it might've gotten better, and it knocked me out of my chair. Now I think it's possibly the best Stones album ever. ...

The Stones still have the strength to make you feel that both we and they are hemmed in and torn by similar walls, frustrations, and tragedies. That's the breakthrough of *Exile on Main Street*.

*Exile* is dense enough to be compulsive: hard to hear, at first, the precision and fury behind the murk ensure that you'll come back, hearing more with each playing. What you hear sooner or later is two things: an intuition for nonstop getdown perhaps unmatched since the *Rolling Stones Now!*, and a strange kind of humility and love emerging from a dazed frenzy. If, as they assert, they're soul survivors, they certainly know what you can lose by surviving. As they and we see friends falling all

around us, only the Stones have cut the callousness of '72 to say with something beyond narcissistic sentiment what words remain for those slipping away. *Exile* is about casualties, and partying in the face of them. The party is obvious. The casualties are inevitable. *Sticky Fingers* was the flashy, dishonest picture of a multitude of slow deaths. But it's the search for alternatives, something to *do* (something worthwhile, even) that unites us with the Stones, continuously.

They are the masters without peer at rendering the boredom and desperation of living comfortably in this society. If you recognized yourself watching the last TV station sign off at 3 A.M. in "What To Do," chances are you reveled in the rich, sick ennui of "Dead Flowers" and you saw your own partial fragmentation between the sonic iceflows of "Sway."

Most of us didn't get the real words, because at their most vulnerably crucial moments they were slurred and buried in the tides of sound. Jagger *had* to sing it that way, in "Sway" and again in much of *Exile*, because that is the way his pride works. Besides, anything else would make it all too concise and clear—like putting the lyrics on an album cover, which is the most impersonal thing any rock 'n' roll artist can possibly do.

*Exile on Main Street* is the great step forward, an amplification of the tough insights of "Gimmie Shelter" and "You Can't Always Get What You Want." A brilliant projection of the nerve-torn nights that follow all the arrogant celebrations of self-demolition, a work of love and fear and humanity. Even such a piece of seeming filler as "Casino Boogie" reveals itself, once the words come through, to be a picture of life at the terminal.

"Rocks Off" and "Shine a Light" present the essential picture, the latter song addressing the half-phased-out but still desperately alive person who speaks in the first. This music has a capacity to chill where "Dead Flowers" and "Sway" tended to come off as shallow, facile nihilism:

*I always hear those voices  
on the street  
I want to shout  
but I can hardly speak*

*I was makin' love this time  
To a dancer friend of mine.  
I can't seem to stay in step ...  
And I only get my rocks off when I'm dreamin*

Headin' for the overload Stranded on a dirty road  
Kick me like you kicked before  
I can't even feel the pain no more.

The sense of helplessness and impotence is not particularly pleasant, but this is the way it is today for too many. Such withering personal honesty is certainly a departure for the Stones.

"Kick me like you kicked before....": the Stones talking to their audience, the audience talking back. Old lovers who may have missed the bourgeois traps of "Sittin' on a Fence" but got waylaid anyway by various disjuncture; they certainly don't yearn like saps to get back to where they "once belonged" but they do recognize the loss of all sense of wonder, the absence of love, the staleness and sometimes frightening inhumanity of this "new" culture. The need for new priorities.

When so many are working so hard at solipsism, the Stones define the unhealthy state, cop to how far *they* are mired in it, and rail at the breakdown with the weapons at their disposal: noise, anger, utter frankness. It's what we've always loved them for. And it took a lot more guts to cut this than "Street Fightin' Man," say, even though the impulse is similar: an intense yearning to merge coupled

with the realization that to truly merge may be only to submerge once more. A recognition that joining together with the band is merely massing solitudes.

The end of the line and depths of the despair are reached in “Shine a Light,” a visit to one or every one of the friends you finally know is not gonna pull through. A love song of a far different kind:

When you're drunk in the alley baby With your clothes all torn  
And when your late night friends all leave you  
In the cold grey dawn Oh, the Scene threw so many flies on you  
I just can't brush 'em off...

When Mick says he can't brush off the flies, it's not some bit of macho misogyny, but a simple admission that applies to himself as well. The sense of entropy, of eclipse, is as total and engulfing as the sorrow. “Soul Survivor” follows immediately, of necessity, carrying the album out strong and fierce because the Rolling Stones are about nothing if not struggle. They have finally met the Seventies totally.

What *Exile on Main Street* is about, past the party roar, is absorption. Inclusion. Or rather, the recognition of exclusion coupled with the yearning for inclusion: “Let me in! I wanna drink/from your lovin' cup.” When I saw them for the first time in 1964, a friend turned to me and said, “The great thing about the Stones is that the Beatles are so distant and perfect that you feel like they're from another planet. But with the Stones, you feel like you're at home.” And it is still true, except in a much more profound way.

## **16. Hegarty and Halliwell, “Progressive Rock since the 1960s,” in *Beyond and Before: Progressive Rock since the 1960s* (London: Continuum, 2011)**

‘Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?’ asked John Lydon, on stage at Winterland, San Francisco, in January 1978, in his last days as Johnny Rotten. The dream of the Sex Pistols to break free from rock cliché was over, ended in a farce of hype, self-indulgence and musical stasis. Punk was born in 1976 from a fury of destruction and renewal, and its principal target was progressive rock, whose alleged self-indulgence and pretension would be brought to a close by the fresh and angry authenticity of a newly stripped-down version of rock, invigorated through simplicity.

The dominant discourse in music history is that progressive rock was victim to punk's return to basics, albeit a basis that imagined it needed to destroy all that had gone before in order to proclaim a new beginning. In practical terms, nothing of the sort happened. The rock bands that were commercially successful remained so, and some, such as Genesis and Rush, increased in popularity during the late 1970s. Critically speaking, though, progressive rock remained doomed, as a generation of supporters of punk, particularly in Britain and centred on the weekly music paper the *New Musical Express*, moved into academia (with the growth of cultural studies) and into the mainstream press. To this day, a suspicion lingers over anything that recalls the experimentation practised by 1970s progressive rock bands. For example, in 1998, the *Observer* ran an article, ‘Oh No, It's Yes: Where Even Irony Fears to Tread’, which noted the rise of nostalgia for the 1970s but claimed that progressive rock remains ‘utterly unforgiven’ in media circles.<sup>1</sup> The article's author, David Thomas, goes on to say that in 1973–4 many of us huddled against the cold of the power cuts and the three-day week in Afghan sheepskins, earnestly debating the secret

meaning of the latest progressive rock concept album and pondering great questions of life like, who was the best bass player, Greg Lake or John Paul Jones?<sup>2</sup> ...

The obvious approach to a new study of progressive rock is to pretend that its hostile reception around the time of punk simply never occurred. Yet this might lead to a wistful or nostalgic view of 1970s progressive rock, cut dead in its prime by the assault of punk or undone from within by the excesses of the rock industry. ...

The problem is not that punk-inspired criticism is entirely wrong or misguided. The fault lies in the limited view of what progressive rock actually was – and still is. To this day, mention the words ‘progressive rock’ and many will conjure images of long solos, overlong albums, fantasy lyrics, grandiose stage sets and costumes, and a dedication to technical skill bordering on the obsessive. A few moments in its history have come to represent the whole, such as the much repeated image of the massive tour buses that Emerson, Lake and Palmer used to carry around the band’s vast array of musical and stage equipment in the mid-1970s, or Led Zeppelin’s luxuriously fitted Starship One aeroplane used for the band’s 1975 US tour. But these images tend to be a spurious metonymy of convenience. If we move up a notch in ‘what was wrong with prog’, we still encounter a range of references limited to Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP). Although these bands have certainly been responsible for melodramatic moments in their histories, even the most virulent opponent could not deny that they were highly popular in the 1970s and, for the most part, experimental in their compositions, albums and performances.

Beyond these nemeses of authentic rock lie the more interesting cases of King Crimson, Soft Machine and Van der Graaf Generator, bands that never received the same amount of vitriol as the aforementioned foursome, with Lydon himself keen on Van der Graaf Generator and its portentous singer Peter Hammill in particular (much to the disgust of Sex Pistols’ manager, Malcolm McLaren). ... We will argue throughout this book, in different ways according to the type of progressive rock discussed, that prog is an incredibly varied genre based on fusions of styles, approaches and genres, and that it taps into broader cultural resonances that link to avant-garde art, classical and folk music, performance and the moving image. One of the best ways to define progressive rock is that it is a heterogeneous and troublesome genre – a formulation that becomes clear the moment we leave behind characterizations based only on the most visible bands of the early to mid-1970s. To do this, we need to explore the roots and sources of progressive rock; earlier examples of the concept album and song-cycle; the incredible variety of prog during the 1970s; and its legacies and parallels in rock music since the late 1970s, ...

Bill Martin in *Music of Yes* (1996) and *Listening to the Future* proposes a set of guidelines for what progressive rock is and how it works.<sup>3</sup> ... As a style of music progressive rock has five specific traits: 1) it is visionary and experimental; 2) it is played, at least in significant part, on instruments typically associated with rock music, by musicians who have a background in rock music, and with the history of rock music itself as background; 3) it is played, in significant part, by musicians who have consummate instrumental and compositional skills; 4) it is a phenomenon, in its ‘core’, of English culture; 5) relatedly, in significant part, it is expressive of romantic and prophetic aspects of that culture.<sup>4</sup>

... The first part of the definition is essential: for Martin, progressive rock is a type of utopianism interested in social change, even when it seems furthest from concrete political concerns (and especially so in the music of Yes).

Furthermore, it is the pinnacle of rock 'n' roll's nascent avant-gardism. Martin's model is as much about exclusion as inclusion: music after the 'time of progressive rock', in 1978, could not attain the critical function of its high phase because society had lost its utopianism and had descended into social cynicism linked to a more brutal form of capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Following Edward Macan, another way of describing this moment is the splintering of the late 1960s counterculture into a series of fragmented subcultures, of which punk would be one example. ...

For us, progressive rock is both formally and socially avant-gardist, even if the latter becomes harder to see in the mid-1970s ... In terms of Nyman's instrumentalist distinction between 'avant-garde' and 'experimental', we note that prog does both: it crosses this divide even if its critics might imagine that the grandiose musical ambitions of The Nice or Emerson, Lake and Palmer were to be surpassed by more directly authentic music. Martin's argument about rock 'n' roll being avant-garde from the start targets critics of progressive rock who claim that it is a perversion of rock, and that its authenticity can be restored only through the new simplicity of punk.... Formally, although rock 'n' roll might have brought innovations to popular music, it would seem that if it ever thought of avant-garde music, it was to react against it, in a bid to speak to the 'real world' of young Americans. But what if the *audience* was avant-garde? Beyond the negative reception by panicky holders of power in the US in the mid-1950s (repeated slightly later in Britain), open-minded listeners keen on social, cultural and artistic change were successors to the original black audiences for so-called 'race music' in the 1940s or jazz in the pre-World War II period, for whom rock 'n' roll was no bolt from the blue but an organic outcrop of existing musical forms.<sup>6</sup> But this would not necessarily have been a conscious avant-gardism, at least not until the mid-1960s; as Charlie Gillett notes, 'few people in the rock 'n' roll audience deliberately or consciously considered music' intellectually.<sup>7</sup> Much of what white listeners in the 1950s heard as rock 'n' roll would have seemed exotic, but for black listeners its rhythm and blues elements were unremarkable and simply a phase in organic musical development.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, rock 'n' roll audiences, according to sociologist David Riesman, were often elective communities formed around an awareness of new sounds, clubs, fashions and slang ...

This audience helped to produce the musicians of 1960s and 1970s rock who became self-aware avant-gardists, purposely trying to introduce greater formal innovation into a rock format that still conveyed the excitement, rebellion and creative inspiration of rock 'n' roll. The promise or threat of social change and the formal structure of rock 'n' roll – simple lyrics, vocal mannerisms, and repetitive beats, chords and song structures – were easily and rapidly assimilated by the music industry that would triple its sales in the US between 1954 and 1959. It was precisely the affirmative elements of rock 'n' roll that made it so malleable, and progressive musicians of the 1960s would reintroduce complexity into rock, as a way of maintaining rebellious individuality and group identity alike in the face of massive capitalist and cultural recuperation of youth culture.<sup>9</sup> ...

The question of virtuosity is a vexed one for those who want progressive rock to be more than the self-indulgence for which prog is criticized. It is undeniable that many progressive rock musicians, especially in the 1970s, were talented, skilful and creative. The question is whether this hindered or helped musical creativity, particularly as progressive bands were interested in different ways of writing and performing as a group and of developing ideas into integrated concept albums, rather than filling out albums and concerts with tracks featuring virtuoso solos.

Martin is correct to argue that Yes has always been an astonishingly skilful musical group, with its individuals incredibly inventive in ways that foster communal creativity, often in the form of what seems to be five musicians all playing lead at the same time. King Crimson has the same

level of skills in all areas of music-making, but in very different ways from Yes. However, there are two problems with the use of virtuosity as a defining feature of progressive rock. First, virtuosity was often praised for its very existence, hence the move to painfully long concert solos in the 1970s as an extension of jazz group practice. The 1970s music media were full of polls for best bass player and who could sustain the longest drum solo, with an increasing sense that personal technique could override band creativity (and often led key figures to release solo albums during sabbaticals from their bands). ...

Second, and more significantly, it is simply not true that progressive rock either required or always had very skilled musicians. More folk-based prog bands would have had little need for it, while still creating records we would recognize as progressive rock ...

Once we factor in folk music, progressive folk, psychedelia and neo-progressive bands such as Pallas, then we are talking not about England but about all of Britain and Ireland, so the broader point about progressive rock being essentially English requires further comment. Prog rock emerged in Britain when the music industry was successful to the point it could countenance highly experimental music as a potentially viable commercial proposition, which linked together rock, jazz and folk scenes in which the musical and cultural exchange across regions and national borders was an implicit feature.<sup>10</sup>

... although progressive rock arises in England, it comprises elements that arrive from elsewhere; it is built in a specific historical musical phase; and it very quickly travelled across Europe and the Atlantic and, more recently, to other areas of the world such as China, with the Shanghai band Cold Fairyland influenced equally by Jethro Tull and Chinese folk music. ... we will adapt one further idea from Bill Martin: that of 'stretching out'. The most well-known characteristic of progressive rock, for fans and detractors alike, is the length of songs, solos, albums and concerts. To a large extent, there is no such thing as progressive rock without extended form, which is the term we will largely use, but 'stretching out' gives the sense of how extended form arises. The stretch is not just of time but also of practice, recombining different genres and bringing in sounds, ideas and styles that would normally be beyond rock: 'though the phrase suggests longer works, the idea has more to do with stretching beyond established boundaries'.<sup>11</sup> ... Martin delineates two types of stretching out, based on his two exemplars of progressive rock – Yes and King Crimson:

One form of stretching out is akin to jazz, while the other is more akin to Western classical music. One might think of the way King Crimson, for example, has definite affinities with avant-garde jazz, while Yes has affinities with twentieth-century classical music.<sup>12</sup> ... Stretching out connects to the need for prog to reference rock and other musical styles, and it helps us identify progressive rock as being involved in a process that is properly avant-garde and experimental. From the late 1960s onwards, progressive rock functioned, more often than not, as a selfconscious avant-garde, formally and socially. In so doing, as a musical genre it eludes the 'myth of the avant-garde' that the world has been reborn for the first time, and instead adopts the properly modernist attitude of referencing its precursors in continued innovation. ...

Progressive rock was able to solve yet another challenge posed by the psychedelic jam – how to create a sense of direction – by drawing on nineteenth-century symphonic music's fondness for building up tension until a shattering climax is reached, abruptly tailing off, and then starting the process anew.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, classical music would be what distinguished prog from other forms of rock ... choral Anglican

music was important in England over several centuries, and was a key part of the musical backdrop for members of progressive groups in the late 1960s and 1970s, some of whom would have been participants in that scene through their childhood upbringing or their adult practices.<sup>14</sup> ...

Among the various styles of prog, only a handful of groups could be said to be intent on emulating or citing classical music. On *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* (1968), The Nice followed hard on the heels of Procol Harum's borrowing of Johann Sebastian Bach in 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (1967). The Nice reworked classical pieces and wrote in a classical style, such as pieces in sonata form divided into movements. Keith Emerson pursued this vein in Emerson, Lake and Palmer during the 1970s, while longer pieces by Yes sought to emulate the sonata form. This classical tradition is to some extent present in many bands, if only through the simulating warmth of the Mellotron, which bands started to use after 1965 as a sample-playback keyboard that gives a layered texture and richness to the recorded sound. But the sonata form is one among many other elements even when actual orchestras were used, such as in Deep Purple's collaboration with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, released as *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* in 1969. ...

## Notes

1. David Thomas, 'Oh No, It's Yes: Where Even Irony Fears to Tread', the *Observer*, Review (8 March 1998), 5.
2. *Ibid.*, 5.
3. See Bill Martin, *Music of Yes: Structure and Vision in Progressive Rock* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996). Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 100. 13. *Ibid.*, 102–3.
4. *Ibid.*, 121.
5. An example of this can be seen in *Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1974* (2009), the Channel 4 adaptation of David Peace's novel *1974* (1999), in which listening to King Crimson is a symbol of the gloomy cynicism and introspection of the mid-1970s.
6. This is the argument developed by Jacques Attali in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1977] 1985). Attali's broad argument is that 'noise' is deemed unacceptable by mainstream policed society and its 'guardians' (moral or armed), and that musicians have often been the heralds of social change, demonstrated in the reaction of political and religious authorities to them.
7. Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City* (London: Sphere, 1971), 291.
8. *Ibid.*, 42.
9. Such a claim is not to resist rock 'n' roll as a style, as it features throughout Gillett's *Sound of the City* and in places in Glenn C. Altschuler's *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Altschuler describes the assimilation of black music as rock 'n' roll increased in popularity: 'For African Americans, rock 'n' roll was a mixed blessing. At times a force for integration and social respect, rock 'n' roll was also an act of theft that in supplanting rhythm and blues deprived blacks of appropriate acknowledgement, rhetorical and financial, of their contributions to American culture' (Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, 34).
10. This appropriation cannot be disputed, but Gillett notes the multiple sources of rock 'n' roll, including country rock and a range of black popular music styles that varied from city to city, so it is perhaps spurious to talk of a singular or homogeneous 'black' culture. Martin even acknowledges this point, but does not incorporate it into his model (*Listening to the Future*, 137). Gillett goes so far as to claim that Jimi Hendrix is the pivotal figure in the English music scene (*The Sound of the City*, 329).
11. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 180.
12. *Ibid.*, 74.
13. Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 44.
14. *Ibid.*, 40, 147–8.