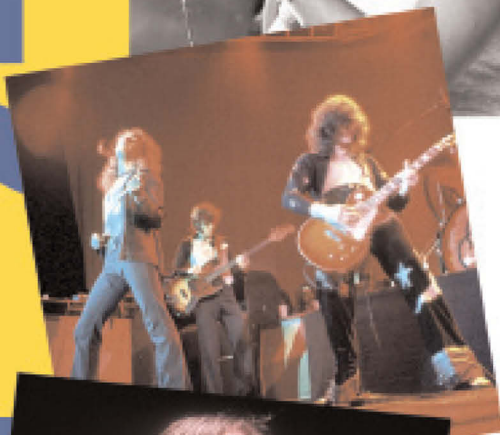
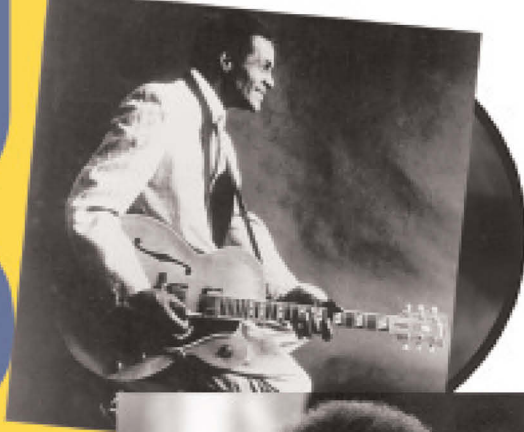


# Rock & Roll



*Paul Friedlander*

**A SOCIAL HISTORY**  
SECOND EDITION

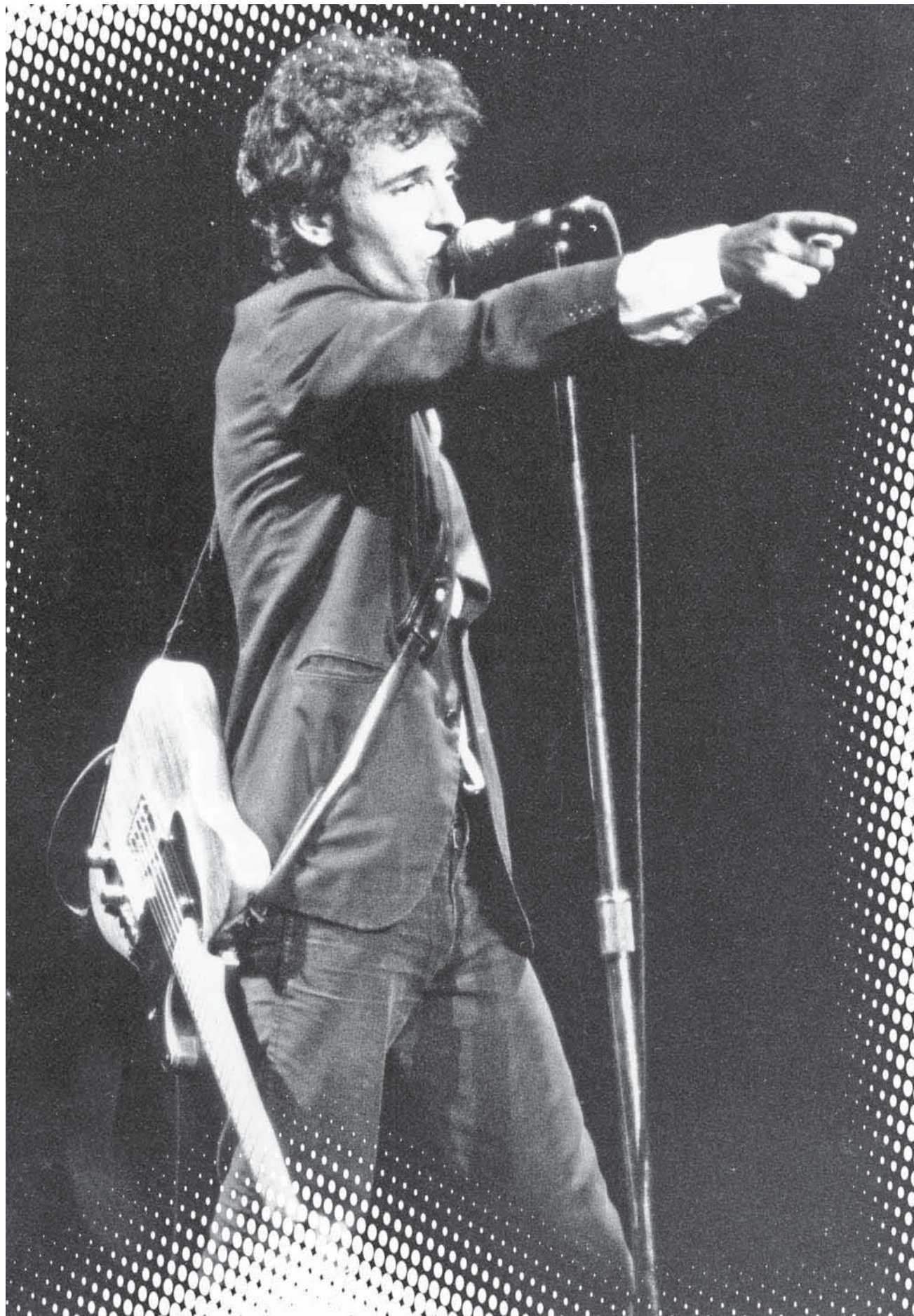


# ROCK AND ROLL

A SOCIAL HISTORY

2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION





# A SOCIAL HISTORY

2ND EDITION

*Paul Friedlander*

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO

WITH

*Peter Miller*



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group  
New York London

ROCKFOL

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	List of Illustrations	vii
	Acknowledgments	ix
<b>1</b>	I Can See Clearly Now: Twenty Rock and Roll Lenses	1
<b>2</b>	The Roots of Rock and Roll: I Went Down to the Crossroads	15
<b>3</b>	Classic Rockers—the First Generation: Just Give Me Some of That Rock and Roll Music	25
<b>4</b>	Classic Rockers—the Second Generation: There's Good Rockin' Tonight	41
<b>5</b>	Doo-Wop: Street Corner Serenade	61
<b>6</b>	The Early Sixties: The Calm Before the Storm	67
<b>7</b>	The Beatles: Because the World Is Round It Turns Me On	75
<b>8</b>	The Rolling Stones: It's Only Rock and Roll but I Like It	101
<b>9</b>	The Who: People Try to Put Us Down	117
<b>10</b>	Bob Dylan: Somethin' Is Happening, but You Don't Know What It Is	131
<b>11</b>	Folk-Rock: So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star	145
<b>12</b>	Soul Music: R-E-S-P-E-C-T	155

# CONTENTS

<b>13</b>	Motown: Hitsville, U.S.A.	169
<b>14</b>	The San Francisco Sound: People in Motion	185
<b>15</b>	The Guitar Kings: And I Gave Her the Gun	205
<b>16</b>	The Seventies: Dazed and Confused	227
<b>17</b>	Punk Rock: Buzzsaw Bravado and Shock Politics	243
<b>18</b>	The Eighties: The Revolution Will Be Televised	257
<b>19</b>	Notions from Underground: The Alternative Rock and Rap Uprisings, <i>by Peter Miller</i>	273
<b>20</b>	We <u>Should</u> Be Together: Festival Frenzies, Electronic Dance Music Culture, Heavy Metal Metamorphoses, and the Deregulation of Radio and File Sharing, <i>by Peter Miller</i>	293
	Appendix A: Some Artists Who Fell Through the Cracks	313
	Appendix B: The Rock Window— One Way to Listen and Understand	319
	Notes	333
	Discography, <i>by John Etheredge</i>	341
	Selected Bibliography	351
	Index	359

Bruce Springsteen	ii
Frank Zappa	1
Muddy Waters	15
Hank Williams	20
Chuck Berry	25
Little Richard	37
Elvis Presley	41
Buddy Holly	52
Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers	61
The Beach Boys	67
The Beatles (Early)	75
The Beatles (Late)	91
The Rolling Stones	101
The Who	117
Bob Dylan	131
The Byrds	145
Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young	149
The Eagles	151
Aretha Franklin	155
James Brown	158
Otis Redding	162
The Supremes	169
The Temptations	178

# ILLUSTRATIONS

Stevie Wonder	181
Janis Joplin	185
Jefferson Airplane	190
The Grateful Dead	193
Creedence	
Clearwater Revival	200
Jimi Hendrix	205
Cream	212
Led Zeppelin	227
The Sex Pistols	243
The Clash	252
Talking Heads	255
Bruce Springsteen	257
Live Aid	262
Madonna	265
Van Halen	268
Public Enemy	271
Nirvana	273
U2	275
R.E.M.	277
Tupac Shakur	286
The Beastie Boys	290
Metallica	293
Phish	295
Beck	300

Good music simply means  
music that moves the listener  
into a heightened state of being.

—TOM MANOFF,  
COMPOSER AND SCHOLAR

Thanks to friends and colleagues Chris Ballantine, Eric Hammer, Herman Frankel, Carl Woideck, Stephen J. Paul, S. Lea Jones, Linda Nettekoven, Bob Pfefferman, Dan Mack-Ward, Drew Traulsen, and Linda Willis-Kilgore, who provided invaluable assistance in refining the history and ideas contained in this book. I appreciate the vision and support of the late Robert Trotter. Special thanks go to my rock history students at California State University, Chico, the University of Oregon, Lane Community College, and the University of the Pacific. They inspired the Rock Window model and continue to remind me that rock music lives and has meaning.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my father, Mark, and my mother, Miriam Friedlander, who helped to shape the intellectual tools with which I now view the world.

This volume is dedicated to my son, David, a drummer who embodies the excitement and spirit of music—for him to learn about the past, gain perspective of the present, and be poised for the future.

—PAUL FRIEDLANDER

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# I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Twenty Rock and Roll Lenses

## 1 Chapter



*Frank Zappa*

[Rock and roll is] the most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear. [It is written and sung] for the most part by cretinous goons [and] by means of its imbecilic reiterations and sly—lewd—in plain fact dirty—lyrics . . . [it] manages to be the martial music for every sideburned delinquent on the face of the earth.

—Frank Sinatra at 1958 congressional hearings, as quoted in Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock and Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry*

If it screams for truth rather than help, if it commits itself with a courage that it can't be sure it really has, if it stands up and admits that something is wrong but doesn't insist on blood, then it is rock 'n roll.

—Pete Townshend of the Who

Rock 'n roll, at its core, is merely a bunch of raving shit.

—Rock journalist Lester Bangs

One crucial way in which the institutions of popular music try to maintain their dominance is through ignoring musics which contain elements of alien discourses (e.g., politics, obscenity, explicit sexuality), for if those elements are brought into popular music, they may have a disruptive effect. When they are brought in . . . there are procedures for incorporating those external elements (be they rhythms, hairstyles or lyric statements) to minimize their disruption of orderly consumption.

—Music-history scholar Dave Laing

The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side.

—Journalist Hunter S. Thompson

**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN TO THE EYE DOCTOR to get fitted for a pair of glasses or contacts and they put this apparatus in front of you that contains a series of lenses? You look through the machine to an eye chart on the wall, and they say, “Is it clearer with this lens?” Then they switch lenses and say, “Or this one?” This chapter will explore twenty concepts, or lenses, gleaned from many different disciplines. Each one is designed to make some aspect of reading about, listening to, or analyzing rock music clearer, more understandable. As you think about the music, from time to time try peering through one of the lenses and see what perspective and knowledge the experience brings.

## One: You Can Listen on Different Levels

.....

*There is always some kind of combination of feeling and thinking in our responses to music, some combination of emotional and intellectual elements.*

—MUSIC EDUCATOR JOSEPH KERMAN

*You can intellectualize about a lot of rock and roll music but it's primarily not an intellectual thing. It's music, that's all.*

—ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE FOUNDER-EDITOR JANN WENNER

Most people first experience rock music on an emotional, or visceral, level. They listen and it makes them feel . . . you can fill in the blank yourself. The music is received at an intuitive level, one that contains a rich variety of knowing and feeling without the process of logical thinking that accompanies what we usually think of as understanding. For example, were we listening to James Brown’s version of “I Feel Good,” our intuitive reaction might include “Right on!” and “Oh, yeah”—based on feelings evoked by the song.

Another way to engage this music is to follow an approach that is best described as “analytical.” It involves listening to a piece of music with the goal of collecting a wide range of specific information about it. The listener, then, is in the position to make judgments for herself about the nature of the music, its quality relative to other music, and its societal context. Using the previous example, our listener might wonder why this song is so powerful, listening to see what instruments are being played and what beats emphasized. She might also reflect on Brown’s gospel background in order to explain the potency of his voice. And she might examine the artist’s personal history or current lifestyle to find a situation that gives the artist’s exclamation additional power.

Discovering, organizing, and making judgments about the meaning of a broad range of relevant information enrich our understanding of the piece of music. Thus, the two

levels of engaging a piece of rock music, the intuitive and the analytical, are valuable and complementary. They enhance our ability to “know,” feel, and understand, and they make listening to the music we love a richer experience.

## Two: The Rock Window— One Way to Understand Music

.....

If we are going to use this analytical approach to experiencing a song (or artist), it would be beneficial to organize what information we collect so that we arrive at an appropriate starting point for a discussion of the song, artist, or genre.

To this end, I offer you the “Rock Window,” a method of information collection and organization. Envision looking at a song through a window divided into a series of small panes, each focused on a segment of information contained in the song, its creation, or the surrounding societal context. If you look through one pane, you can see only the ensemble, or what instruments are playing; looking through another, you see the early career of a particular artist.

This device was developed during my twelve years at the University of Oregon School of Music and since refined, with help from my students, at the University of the Pacific and California State University, Chico. Using the Rock Window, the listener collects relevant information with which to begin assessing the nature of the material and its place within a historical perspective. Further, when contrasting one song and artist with another, one is able to compare the same elements of the same categories—apple to apples and bicycles to bicycles.

The following provides a description of the Rock Window categories and is intended to point out some major components of rock music, lyrics, artist histories, societal context, and performance. Try to broaden your understanding by collecting some of this information the next time you listen to your favorite music.

### I. Music

- Ensemble: What instruments are present?
- Rhythmic Emphasis: What is the dominant beat? What instrument or instruments carry this beat?
- Vocal Style: What words would you use to describe the vocal delivery? What musical styles does this vocal style come from?
- Instrumental Solo: Is there an instrumental solo (generally defined as an improvised melody in the absence of lyrics of one verse or more in duration)? What is its stylistic derivation?
- Harmonic Structure: What chords are present?

## II. Lyrics

- What are the song's major themes? Does it tell a story? Suggested topical classifications: romantic love, sex, alienation, justice/injustice, introspection, rock music, and others.
- Is there an explicit or underlying political or cultural message?

## III. Artist History

What are the important elements of the artist's personal history and career that enhance your understanding of the music? This information can be divided into three areas:

- psychological, social, and economic conditions during youth;
- musical history; and
- important career landmarks.

## IV. Societal Context

How did the surrounding political and cultural climates influence the artists and their work? This information can be divided into three areas:

- youth culture and its relationship to society;
- cultural and political movements, including the struggle for civil and human rights for minorities, peace and antiwar movements, and establishment of counterculture alternatives; and
- the music industry and its current point of development.

## V. Stance

Which elements of the artist's live performances and public actions or behavior provide us with a clearer understanding of the music itself?

Some rock music fans believe that the collection and analysis of information detracts from the intuitive experience of the music. I have found that the more I know, the richer my experience. See Appendix B for an example of how the Rock Window can be applied using Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode," the Beatles' "Strawberry Fields," Nirvana's "Smells like Teen Spirit," and Public Enemy's "Fight the Power."<sup>1</sup>

## Three: Music Borrows



The natural process of musical creation is to borrow from existing or past songs and styles and incorporate them into a fusion of elements that becomes an original work.

This process can be conscious or subconscious and, I would contend, is the most common and accurate manner to describe the way in which artists create music. Because there is a popular (mis)conception that good music is totally unique music, this hypothesis, normalizing the borrowing of music and lyrical ideas, flies in the face of traditional notions of originality and authenticity. Creative leaps and extreme originality are rarely identifiable. Popular music is best viewed as a reordering of historical and contemporary content, sometimes encompassing startlingly unique ideas.

#### Four: Authenticity

.....

Often, in heated discussions about rock music, you might hear the argument that one artist is the real musician while others are just commercial junk or “sellouts.” These notions of authenticity are ubiquitous and powerful to students of the style. Yet the concept is difficult, if not impossible, to define and may, in the long run, not be useful to the discussion.

According to Bonnie Wade (2004), original definitions of authenticity were tied to the notion that “folklore was authentic wisdom, folk music the true music of the people.”<sup>2</sup> The interjection of music as a commodity and its distribution by industry has complicated the discussion, some arguing that authentic folk music cannot exist in today’s industrialized society.

We can carry this idea forward about most genres: the blues, folk, punk, heavy metal, or hip-hop. Which incarnation of these styles was “authentic”? We often define the emergent artists as definitive, tied to concepts of the past, embedded in early cultures. Or, as Joli Jensen would point out, some music has been fundamentally commercial in origin and purpose since the 1920s (Wade 2004, p. 144).

#### Five: Music Embedded in Culture

.....

To understand a musical work, one should understand its musical, cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts. How can one possibly understand a song like Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit” without collecting information about the culture of resistance and lifestyle in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury community, the evolving anti-Vietnam War movement, psychoactive-drug experimentation, exploration of divergent musical cultures, and performance codes and media institutions such as light shows and poster art? “White Rabbit” deepens in meaning with these perspectives, a far cry from a children’s parable.

## Six: The Situation of a Song

.....

The meaning of a song is enhanced by understanding the situation of its creation. For example, “Respect” was written by Otis Redding, released in 1965, and grazed the charts at #35. Two years later, Aretha Franklin released “Respect” and it went to #1. Whereas Otis’s version might have been interpreted as another early soul love song, Aretha’s has been credited with significantly greater value. It is commonly interpreted by listeners as a call for racial equality and an early stand for women’s rights.

One reason for Franklin’s greater success lies in her release’s timing. Aretha’s version was released in conjunction with the black consciousness movement of the late 1960s. But there is perhaps a more personal reason for the extraordinary intensity of her version. She was the object of spousal abuse by her manager-husband, Ted White. Understanding the situation of the song brings light to understanding its intended meaning and performance strength.

## Seven: Meaning Can Be Found Outside Lyrics

.....

It’s common for arguments about the meaning of a song to reside solely with interpreting its lyrics. However, artists make statements about their work through many other modes of communication. Two other major sources of textual meaning are the music and the stance (or artist’s performance and public actions). For example, during the early years of punk, bands prided themselves on their lack of musical dexterity, massive distorted textures, frantic eighth-note pulse, and vocal style of machine-gun phrases. In contrast to the musical mainstream of Fleetwood Mac, Abba, and the Bee Gees, these musical elements spoke volumes to their audiences about heightened energy and disgust with the musical status quo.

In addition, experiencing the Sex Pistols in concert could include bruising mosh pits, spittle from the stage, and screams of “I hate you” from the band. Amplify this experience by costumes of torn T-shirts, bondage pants, and safety-pinned skin (rather than mainstream spandex, glitter, long hair, and twirling scarves), and clear messages of rebellion emerge.

## Eight: Meaning Is Generated by the Listener as Well as the Artist

.....

It all seemed so simple at first—a song meant what the artist said. Whether it was classical music, the meaning encoded by the composer and decoded by the educated listener, or a pop song whose lyrics were dissected by adoring fans, the meaning lay within the

fabric of the work itself, awaiting discovery. Then sociologists decided that it wasn't sufficient to interpret the song by analyzing the music and lyrics alone; the work had to be viewed in the context of the song's relationship to surrounding society (or the societal context). It was suggested that, like light going through a prism, the meaning of a song was changed (or refracted) depending upon where you were standing in society.

This opened the floodgates surrounding the notion of fixed versus relative meaning of a song. Sociologists and cultural studies theorists then suggested that every listener constructs her own meaning, depending upon her own life experience. Thus, the song's meaning will be different depending upon who is listening to it.

So we examined the listener's life: his or her demographics (gender, age, location), subcultural group, and family culture. This, we hoped, would tell us about the lens through which the listener interpreted the song. It became apparent that a seventy-three-year-old Lutheran grandmother living in Minneapolis experienced N.W.A.'s "F\*\*\* tha Police" quite differently from a fifteen-year-old African American male residing in Compton, California. Each constructed a different meaning from the text he or she received. Theoretically, therefore, the interpretation of a song's meaning might include a judgment about the artist's intended meaning, an analysis of the work, an awareness of how the listener actively constructs the meaning of the song, and the possibility that society suggests preferred meanings to the song's listeners.

Mass communications scholars have also suggested that we take into account what aspects of the artist's work individual listeners deem crucial. For some, fashion choices, music, and onstage style are more important than lyrics. In fact, studies have shown that many youthful rock listeners don't actually understand the lyrics of the songs they listen to, even those of the songs they classify as their favorites. For other listeners, songs appear shallow and uninteresting unless they contain lyrics that comment on some aspect of society.

## Nine: Oppositional

.....

Some music may contain meaning intended or interpreted as critical of the status quo or mainstream cultural values. One way to clarify this concept is to divide this oppositionality between that which is intended by the artist to educate the listener and organize resistance (conscious) and that which is an unconscious by-product of the artist's rebellion against societal mores (rebellious). The Clash and the Sex Pistols, both seminal and important English punk rock groups, provide a good illustration of this point. The Clash evidenced the punk aesthetic in music, lyrics, and stance but also helped to organize the Rock Against Racism (RAR) concerts in England and openly supported the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. They wanted the audience to become more involved in improving society. The Sex Pistols performed in similar ways, spitting out invective and abuse—"the Queen is a

moron / potential H-bomb”—but without the intention of educating listeners or creating a better world.

## Ten: Aesthetics

.....

Taste is both cultural and individual. In the age-old argument by rock music fans as to the quality of a particular artist or the relative excellence of one musician versus another (you may read Clapton versus Hendrix), the terms *good* and *bad* and ones even more strident and expletive-filled are common. How can we frame this sort of argument so it doesn't degenerate into meaningless epithets or at a useless dead end?

First, it's important to differentiate between the “good versus bad” argument and the “I like versus don't like” argument. The former requires a set of criteria or at least a list of high- versus low-quality characteristics against which the artists can be measured. If they meet an agreed-upon goal, they can be considered good; if not, they fall short of the mark in certain specified ways. For the latter, taste is expressed in subjective ways, and so the debate can be framed as “I like artist A for the following reasons.” Or conversely, “They suck for the following reasons or shortcomings.” Simon Frith and others have also noted that this subjective taste, expressed individually, is constructed from expressions of quality within the surrounding multiple cultures as well as a perception of how immersed the declarer is in the culture of the particular music.

## Eleven: Performance Codes

.....

Musical genres have a set of performance practices and expectations that shape the style. Often, the quality of a particular show or record is measured against expectations of these codes. For example, in hard rock or heavy metal, the band is expected to have a virtuosic guitarist who, during the course of their show, will display a certain level of guitar pyrotechnics. The more the listener is knowledgeable about these codes, the more thorough will be his experience of the music.

## Twelve: Spirituality

.....

Music often contains substantial elements that are linked to existential questions of creation, existence, and the individual's relationships to civilization's acknowledged deities. This spiritual content is considerably more prevalent in cultures outside of Europe and North America. Rock-rooted music of Africa, Asia, indigenous Australia, and South America contains considerable spiritual elements. In the United States, Christian rock

has been making some commercial gains. One can encounter formidable spiritual presence in Western rock in countercultural improvisationally oriented bands such as the Grateful Dead. Dead drummer Mickey Hart calls their performances “working religion”—rituals that attempt to synchronize the three dances, the personal, the cultural, and the cosmic.

**Thirteen: Commercial Success and Roseburg Status**



Throughout this book you will read a lot about hit records and mass commercial success. There is a definitive difference between artistic success (as judged by listeners and critics) and commercial success (mass popular acceptance based on radio airplay and nationwide product sales).<sup>3</sup> Those artists with a sufficient level of mass penetration are said to have achieved “Roseburg status.” Roseburg, a city in western Oregon, had a population of approximately 20,000 and one top-40 radio station during the sixties. We hypothesize that if a song received airplay in Roseburg, it had sufficiently penetrated the commercial marketplace to be available to the listeners and purchasers in the rest of the United States. Classic rock artists like Elvis achieved Roseburg status; rhythm and blues (R&B) greats like Ruth Brown did not. Soul artist Aretha Franklin crossed over to the popular (white) music charts; fellow soul artist Solomon Burke barely touched them.

**Fourteen: Themes That Transcend the Eras**



Two themes, romance and rebellion, transcend temporal and stylistic boundaries and are major components of most rock genres. As to each era, however, these themes are manifest in different ways, depending on the musical style and its relationship to contemporary values and standards.

Romance was the dominant theme for popular music long before the birth of rock and roll, and continued to dominate rock as the music celebrated its silver anniversary (around 1979). In the fifties and again in the seventies, teens were rock’s primary target. It is not surprising, therefore, that romance—and its Siamese twin, sex—were the music’s major preoccupations. Studies of songs show that 67 percent of fifties classic rock hits, 65 percent of a sample of 1966 hits, and 69 percent of early seventies #1 hits were love songs.<sup>4</sup>

Rock music wasn’t as saturated with rebellious lyrics as critics and defenders would have one believe. This doesn’t mean, however, that artists and their audiences weren’t participating in conscious as well as unconscious acts of rebellion. The lyrics themselves provide only part of the picture. When Jerry Lee Lewis commanded, “Shake it, baby, shake it” (“Whole Lot of Shakin’ Going On,” 1957), critics viewed it as a lewd, immoral suggestion. Lewis was engaging in startlingly rebellious behavior, what James T. Carey would call “newer-value” lyrics (which Carey defines as critical of conventional roles or society or both, in contrast to

older-value lyrics, which depict acceptance of conventional values, morality, and relationships). Yet these sentiments from Lewis would hardly have raised an eyebrow, and probably would not have even been interpreted as rebellious, during the 1970s.

It is important, therefore, when evaluating whether behavior, music, lyrics, and dress contain rebellious elements, to understand how that behavior relates to what is considered normal for the period—the societal context. The Rolling Stones classic “Let’s Spend the Night Together” was controversial in 1967, but it would have been blasphemous in 1957 yet gone unnoticed in 1977. Blue jeans, T-shirts, and black leather jackets—de rigueur attire for any true-blue rocker—were rebellious symbols in the fifties, merely fashion statements in the eighties. It is important to be able to look and listen with the eyes and ears of the era you are reading about.

## **Fifteen: The Anatomically Correct Rock and Roll Doll**

.....

One interesting way to learn about an artist or group, and to judge the impact of a song or album, is to ask yourself, “What part of the body is most affected by the music?” We created the Anatomically Correct Rock and Roll Doll for just such an exercise.

MIND (intellectual)  
HEART (emotional)  
GENITALIA (sexual)  
FEET (dancing/movement)

Consider the three major British invasion groups: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the Who. My students would say the Beatles and the Who appeal to both the head and the heart—even though they don’t sound very much alike. The Stones appeal to the genitalia and feet. What do you believe? Try it with other artists.

## **Sixteen: Music Industry**

.....

The process of recording, producing, manufacturing, marketing, and selling music as a commodity helps to shape its nature and its accessibility to the listener. In order for a song or artist to achieve mainstream visibility, radio airplay, and record sales, an artist must be recorded by, manufactured by, and/or distributed by one of the four multinational corporations that own the major record labels. These record-label gatekeeper functions allow certain stylistic elements and genres of music into the popular culture mainstream while rejecting other artists and styles as not marketable or appropriate. These marginalized artists tour and sell records but have little or no access to the substantial sales and the institutions of the mass culture.

## Seventeen: Transmission

.....

Before the twentieth century, musicians learned popular and folk music via the oral tradition and listeners experienced it through live performance. Books and sheet music were also available to musicians who could read music. With the advent of recorded music, musicians could learn specific versions of a song and the audience became separated from live performance. This time shifting, or listening to a recorded piece of music (i.e., music frozen in time and listened to later), has expanded the audience but changed the very nature of the listener's experience.

## Eighteen: Dividing the Years into Eras

.....

There exist natural divisions during rock music's first three decades, the boundaries of which can be best delineated by the occurrence of major creative explosions. During these explosions, dynamic new genres arose from the existing musical landscape. These new genres didn't spring forth from thin air, but were crafted by creatively fusing elements from existing styles. The new styles tended to emerge and exist at the regional level, hidden from the greater public, before exploding into mass awareness. This developmental dynamic was true for all six major rock explosions (classic rock, the British invasion, the guitar kings, hard rock, punk, and rap). Aside from these major creative explosions, there are also important minor ones, such as the folk-rock synthesis, soul, and Motown—the difference being the level of impact on the course of rock music history.

Major identifiable rock history landmarks are: first, 1954–1955—classic rock and roll; second, 1963–1964—the British invasion; third, 1966–1967—the guitar kings turn the focus to a single instrument; fourth, 1967–1972—the golden era (the synchronous maturation of artists from several genres, including the first British invasion, soul, the San Francisco sound, and the ascendance of the guitar kings); fifth, 1969–1970—hard rock; sixth, 1975–1977—punk; and seventh, 1979–1980—rap.

## Nineteen: Life Cycle

.....

As the one constant in music is change, musical styles usually go through life cycles. These cycles can be observed in single small genres as well as in rock music as a whole. In the beginning, emerging styles seek form and shape, in a process that can be called formulation. Like the proverbial growing alien species from a sci-fi B movie, they borrow available elements from nearby sources on their way to becoming a survivable form. The next stage is a process of maturation, when artists experiment with ways to improve and

enhance the basic form and work to become better crafters. The final stage is when artists achieve a period of normalization, often unwilling or unable to evolve further in any significant manner. At this point, the form may stagnate and become a caricature of itself, losing touch with its initial values and exchanging them for symbols and images. The final two stages generally coincide with the greatest commercial success.

## Twenty: Objectivity and Bias

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Some historians claim objectivity; none achieve it. The best an author can do is alert the reader to personal biases—to let the reader know where you’re coming from. I grew up in New York City, exposed to the world’s wonderful music. My father taught me guitar and sang folk songs from Woody Guthrie and the Weavers. Pete Seeger was my summer camp music counselor and taught me how to sing from my heart. A few years later, my friends and I hung out on Queens street corners, hitting doo-wop harmonies while our a cappella group, the Chapters, serenaded captive audiences in hospitals and nursing homes.

The late 1950s saw a surge in the popularity of bluegrass music in, of all places, New York City’s Washington Square Park. There I learned to play the banjo and to sing falsetto. After college I found an apartment near Greenwich Village and joined in the sixties folk boom. We later went electric, and I said hello to the seventies on bass, playing original rock music. For the next seven years, it was life on the road in rock’s medium-fast lane. Following a few years in “the business,” I ascended the ivory tower. There I remain—although I have never hung up my rock and roll shoes.

This musical odyssey has helped to shape my rock music tastes. I trust that rocker-mortis has yet to set in. However, I do especially enjoy certain things: singers who can control their voice and exhibit some emotion, vocal harmony, rhythmic diversity, and lyrics of substance (the human condition, humor, politics, love, and so on); sweaty performers; and new musical horizons. I also believe that rock music listeners should have access to a broad range of musical styles. Musical and cultural diversity and pluralism must be maintained at all costs.

Our narrative will begin in the pre-rock era, when the styles of blues, gospel, big band jazz, folk, country, and rhythm and blues provided the essential elements for the music that we will call rock and roll. Please fasten your seat belt.



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# THE ROOTS OF ROCK AND ROLL

I Went Down to the Crossroads

## Chapter 2



*Muddy Waters*

Oh Lawd, I'm tired, oh Lawd, I'm tired a' dis mess.

—Traditional rural blues lyric

Folk music is my music. Folk music is sincere, there ain't nothin' phony about it. When a folk singer sings a sad song, he's sad. He means it.

—Hank Williams

**E**ARLY ROCK AND ROLL was primarily African American music. The syncopated rhythms, raw vocal emotionalism, and work-chant “call and response” are all part of the African musical heritage and became building blocks for rock and roll. This chapter provides an overview of rock’s musical roots, both black and white. We begin with early-twentieth-century rural blues and describe the nature and development of urban blues, gospel, and jump-band jazz. The fusion of these four African American styles would become the pivotal form of the early-1950s black music called rhythm and blues—rock and roll’s major musical foundation. The traditional white styles of folk and country music, themselves a synthesis of black and white forms, also provided important ingredients for early rock and roll. Rockabilly, a midfifties white southern fusion of country music, blues, gospel, and rhythm and blues, provided the musical and emotional catalysts for many white musicians to move past the boundaries of traditional country music and on to early rock and roll.

## Black Musical Roots

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In the early and mid-twentieth century, blues existed in a number of different forms. The popular blues style, with vocalists like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, was performed in theaters, tents, and concert halls, primarily east of the Mississippi River. The artists sold millions of records, achieving significant commercial success even in the white community. Unemployed black men, carrying battered guitars, crisscrossed the South during the bitter days of the Great Depression singing about their lives of hardship and pain. This rural blues contained very specific stylistic elements: most songs were twelve measures (or bars) in length, contained only three chords (a I-IV-V harmonic progression), and repeated the first line of the verse twice before offering a different third line (A-A-B lyric structure).

Blues lyrics were about struggle, adversity, and, on occasion, celebration. Most singers accompanied themselves on the steel-string acoustic guitar, occasionally using a burnished bottleneck (or slide) to mimic the emotive wail of the vocal style. Sometimes one or more companions joined in on harmonica (commonly referred to as

a “harp”), a second guitar, or percussion sticks called “bones.” Many prominent rural blues artists came from the Mississippi Delta, the fertile lowland region formed by the confluence of the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers in the northwestern part of the state. Delta blues stylists Son House and Robert Johnson, Texan Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Louisiana-born Huddie Ledbetter (or Leadbelly) were especially influential.

Southern rural blues performances on the back porch, in the roadhouse, or in the town square diminished in importance in the decade following World War II—to be replaced by its northern and western counterpart, urban blues. The venues became the smoke-filled bars of Chicago’s South Side, as well as other urban centers and theater stages. A massive black migration during the Depression and the World War II years created numerous large African American communities in the country’s northern urban centers by the war’s end in 1945. The newness and alienation of urban existence, and removal from the rural homestead, extended family, and its emotional and nutritional support, helped to create the context in which urban blues flourished.

The late Muddy Waters (born McKinley Morganfield), a former cotton picker and rural blues artist from Mississippi, formed a seminal Chicago-based blues band in the late 1940s. Drums, string bass, electric rhythm guitar, and piano made up the basic rhythm section, or “core,” of the band. A lead electric guitar and harp were added as solo instruments. This core band became the model for the modern rock band, and, later, many classic rockers adopted this ensemble (or group) format. The urban blues vocal style maintained the emotionality, slurred lyrics, and bent (“blue”) notes of its southern predecessor; however, the lyrical topics were expanded to include the urban landscape and some positivity and boastfulness to go along with rural depression and catharsis. Its line pattern often transcended the rural three-line A-A-B format (the Muddy Waters recording of “Hoochie Coochie Man” is an example).

Other urban bluesmen rose to prominence. In Chicago bass player Willie Dixon wrote songs that were recorded by Howlin’ Wolf (“Spoonful”) and harmonica great Little Walter (“My Babe”). Elmore James was known for his bottleneck-style guitar playing, and John Lee Hooker created and recorded story songs about the “hard life.” In other locations, guitarists Riley “B. B.” King (Memphis), Aaron “T-Bone” Walker (Los Angeles), and Lightnin’ Hopkins (Texas) represented regional blues efforts. Urban blues, with its expanded core ensemble, heightened role for the electric guitar, and departure from solely depressing topics, represented a major step toward the birth of rock and roll. Subsequent rock generations, including pioneer guitar players such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, and Keith Richards, would turn to urban blues for inspiration.

A focus on emotionality and a harmonically complex vocal style characterized a second vital black root of rock and roll, the religious music called gospel. Gospel had roots in the “invisible church” of the late slave era and was a form that included hand clapping, call and response, rhythmic complexities, a persistent beat, melodic improvisation, and percussive accompaniments. All of these stylistic roots would find their way into rhythm and blues, many eventually into rock music itself. In the early twentieth century,

composers like Thomas Dorsey created a contemporary version of gospel that we can easily recognize today.

Groups like the Soul Stirrers and the Swan Silvertones became popular, emphasizing interpretive phrasing, emotional expressiveness, and vocal excellence. Singers would soar into falsetto one measure and emit a bass growl the next. Highly syncopated rhythmic improvisation on the melody was common. Call and response—rooted in the African work chant—featured a song leader and congregation response. Gospel also inspired enthusiastic and uncensored body movements by both performers and congregation. Each of these elements also became components of R&B and, later, rock and roll.

Jump-band jazz, as epitomized by Louis Jordan and his Tympani Five (or Six), was the third style that contributed significantly to rhythm and blues, and thus to rock and roll. It emerged at the tail end of the big-band era after World War II, a cheerful style with a small five- or six-piece ensemble and prominent saxophone solos. Its size belied its power; this small jazz band really “swung.” The generally upbeat swing feeling and tenor saxophone instrumental solos were two elements that young players carried over from jazz to R&B.

In the late 1940s black music visionaries transformed elements of blues, gospel, and jump-band jazz into the style known as rhythm and blues. This fusion later became the basis for rock’s first era, classic rock and roll. R&B’s musical synthesis consisted of the core blues band plus jazz’s tenor saxophone soloist. Like jump-band jazz, the feeling was predominantly upbeat. The gospel-generated emphasis on the second and fourth beats of the measure (or “backbeat”), played primarily on the snare drum, created a bodily movement that excited the listener. Vocal virtuosity and onstage showmanship, both gospel legacies, were important components of R&B—displayed by stylish tenor lead singers like wailer Clyde McPhatter and crooner Sonny Till. Vocal emotion, slur, and blue notes were carried over from the blues. The instrumental solo, most often by the tenor saxophone, combined the improvised fluidity of jazz with the long slurs and repetition from the blues.

The worldview of rhythm and blues was more optimistic than that of its predecessor, Depression-era blues, although it was still firmly rooted in uncensored, real-life experiences. Some classic R&B artists were hard-drinkin’ (like Stick McGee, “Drinkin’ Wine Spo-Dee-o-Dee,” 1948), were hard-partyin’ (like Roy Brown, “Rockin’ at Midnight,” 1948), or, like Ray Charles, celebrated women, as in his 1954 classic “I Got a Woman.” Life could still contain the blues’ struggles, but romance and sexual innuendo were more common subjects—much to the chagrin of most whites and many blacks. R&B’s musical power, rhythmic emphasis on the backbeat (“the beat”), and lyrical authenticity attracted a burgeoning audience of post–World War II young black listeners.

## Country and Folk Music

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Some forms of classic rock and roll also had significant roots in white folk and country music. Coincidentally, two major contributors to both styles, Jimmie Rodgers and the

Carter Family, were discovered in the space of two days in August 1927 by talent scout Ralph Peer. Rodgers, dubbed “the father of country music,” wrote ballads and blues about his wanderings as a railroad brakeman. Many of his lyrics followed the traditional A-A-B blues pattern, and Rodgers even titled tunes “Blue Yodel #1” (or “T for Texas”), “Blue Yodel #2,” and so on. He was this country’s first recording star, selling more than 20 million records in the six-year period between 1927 and his death in 1933. Rodgers’s music, actually a synthesis of folk and rural blues, was eventually labeled as country and western.

The Carter Family, who began recording at the same time, mixed traditional Anglo-Saxon ballads, hymns, and other church melodies with harmony and acoustic guitar and autoharp accompaniment. They left a legacy of string-band accompaniment to songs of a wholesome and religious nature. Interestingly enough, even these legends of traditional American folk music recorded an occasional blues tune (for example, “Worried Man Blues”).

While the United States enjoyed the big-band era (the late 1930s and 1940s), country music formed its own equivalent, the western swing band. Texas and Oklahoma were the homes for this style—which included the genre’s most popular adherent, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. Wills, a fiddler steeped in both country and blues, formed a dance band with a basic lineup that included fiddle, electric guitar, bass, drums, steel guitar, piano, and tenor sax (at times, more horns and fiddles were added). His repertoire, a mix of blues, country, and traditional fiddle tunes, was innovative—as was his use, in country music, of steel guitar (from Hawaiian music) and drums.

By the mid-1940s the stage was set for Hank Williams, the father of modern country music. He grew up in Alabama, listened to and played with blues artists, learned guitar from a black street musician, and finally left home to perform as a country singer. Williams’s songs cataloged the spectrum of experiences and emotions in the everyday lives of ordinary people. His forthright accounts of lost love, sexual infidelity, and hard drinking were atypical of the song subjects then available to white audiences—typically, positive love-struck fantasy tales. This “modern” country music, like blues and R&B, provided an alternative to the “June, croon, spoon” worldview of contemporary popular music. Although Williams’s audience was generally perceived to be southern and white, he also had a substantial black audience.

During live performances, Williams would hunch over the microphone and deliver stories with that fabled trembling sincerity in his voice; his country string band featuring fiddle, acoustic and electric guitars, steel guitar, and bass conveyed the songs with great emotionality. During his short six-year recording career—Williams died on January 1, 1953—the proliferation of the radio and increased record sales catapulted Williams and country music in general to great commercial success.

By the mid-1950s some youngsters, influenced by Williams, yearned for more. Conscious of the power and emotionality of rhythm and blues, they sought to add “the beat” to authentic country music. Mississippi-born Elvis Presley, then living in Memphis,



*Hank Williams*

entered Sun Records one July evening to record a rural blues tune titled “That’s Alright, Mama.” Recording with only an acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and bass and singing with tremulous, reckless abandon, Elvis created the country/blues/R&B synthesis known as rockabilly. Later, drums were added to the ensemble, and rockabilly became a transitional genre for some white performers, attracting stars like Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Roy Orbison to Sun Records before the decade was out. After recording five rockabilly songs at Sun, Elvis signed with RCA Records. In January 1956 he recorded “Heartbreak Hotel.” In the wake of Elvis’s success, classic rock’s commercial future was ensured.

## The Fifties, Kids, and Rock and Roll

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The story of classic rock and roll is not only about the evolution of musical styles and their acceptance by the young American mainstream. It is also about the growth of small independent record companies and their success in producing underground music. In addition, it is another tale of how R&B and early rock music practically saved radio from its seemingly inevitable destruction by the new technological behemoth, television. And, finally, the story must describe how some youth, emboldened by the rising expectations of America’s economic and political successes, sought and found a life different from the one portrayed on television’s *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*.

Rock music was adopted by a generation of teenagers who eventually came to question some tenets of the dominant culture. During a slow process of disillusionment, this newly recognized age group—adolescents—formulated the questions that would be-

come rallying cries a decade later. But, as Don Hibbard and Carol Kaleialoha point out, the cries were still only whispers in the 1950s. “In essence, rock and roll provided its predominantly middle-class audience with a vent for its discontent, a form of excitement, and a sense of group identity, while it pursued socially prescribed goals.”<sup>1</sup>

Some models of dissent existed, but in the era of McCarthyism and the cold war, they were much maligned and not very popular. Activity in the peace and civil rights movements was at a low ebb. The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy protested against the bomb, and a few activists came out against U.S. involvement in the so-called police action in Korea. The U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (1954) deemed separate-but-equal school segregation unconstitutional and helped to spur the civil rights movement. The next year citizens in Montgomery, Alabama, organized a successful boycott to desegregate the municipal bus system. One of the boycott’s leaders was young Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

On both coasts, countercultural types—in this case, the “beat generation”—lived out free-love alternatives to the prevailing repressed sexuality, embraced daring poetry, and, in general, criticized the rigid, uptight, and restrictive environment that was the fifties. Still, however dynamic and creative, these movements were marginal and did not touch the lives of most young Americans.

What did concern young America was leisure. For the first time, many teenagers did not have to work to support their families. Besides school, teens had few burdensome responsibilities, and with the advent of allowances they acquired some disposable income. U.S. business, recognizing the existence of a new consumer group, rushed to fill the void, providing “essential” items such as clothes, cosmetics, fast food, cars—and music. Teens proved an especially malleable consumer group, spending money in predictable conformity. The record industry, however, produced a “Hit Parade” that was banal and bland; it lacked any identifiable reference to the everyday lives of this new consumer class.

However, on small black radio stations, and in increasing frequency on larger popular music stations in major urban markets, rhythm and blues and its progeny, classic rock, were being programmed. This music, excited by a throbbing backbeat and often offering a daringly suggestive treatment of romance, appealed to this generation of teens who had been taught by their parents to want and expect more than they were getting.

In the summer of 1954, “Little Things Mean a Lot” by Kitty Kallen dominated the pop charts. This syrupy ballad played in stark contrast to “Work with Me Annie,” the suggestive, up-tempo counterpart #1 on the R&B (black music) charts. Teens in major urban centers like Cleveland, Philadelphia, and New York could choose to tune in to either song on their radios. By 1955 young people were listening to, and buying, R&B in record numbers. Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo point out that in 1952, at the Dolphin Record Store in Los Angeles, 40 percent of R&B music customers were white, a complete departure from a few months earlier.

The major record companies, who controlled the prevailing pop music, were agitated by the growing young white interest in black music; their pop music-oriented sensibilities

were severely disturbed. For one thing, not only were these new styles musically simplistic, but they were also perceived as being overtly sexual in both lyrics and performance—and this bordered on immorality. Second, the “majors” (the big-three record companies—RCA, Columbia, and Decca—and other film industry-based labels like Paramount and Capitol) didn’t own the sound. Having abandoned black (or “race”) music and country music as unprofitable during World War II, the majors had no R&B artists on their labels.

Rhythm and blues, blues, and subsequently classic rock were left to small regional independent record companies, called “indies.” These small one- or two-person operations recorded, pressed, and distributed black blues and R&B artists in the late 1940s. By 1954 many had gone national, with major artists and million-selling records. A few of the best-known examples are Atlantic from New York with Ray Charles, Chess from Chicago with Muddy Waters, Imperial from Los Angeles with Fats Domino, and King/Federal from Cincinnati with Hank Ballard.

At first, the majors ignored R&B. By 1953 R&B record sales and radio airplay provoked them to “cover” R&B hits. For majors, the cover phenomenon meant paying royalties for the rights to record a song, often cleaning up lyrics and softening the music’s harder edges, and releasing their own version recorded by a pop artist that they held under contract. For approximately three years (1953–1955), this practice had the effect of smothering the original black versions. The indies simply could not press enough records and lacked the network to distribute them nationwide—and they did not have the necessary friendly relations with radio station personnel to ensure radio exposure.

Thus, while the original “Sh-Boom” by the Chords failed to be listed on the top-40 popular charts, the cover by the white Crewcuts was successful enough to become #1. Similarly, Ivory Joe Hunter had an R&B hit with “I Almost Lost My Mind,” but it was Pat Boone, a notorious cover artist, who had the pop #1. The McGuire Sisters, Gail Storm, Perry Como, and many more singers used R&B covers to maintain pop-chart prominence.

Following the lead of the independent record companies, small radio stations in urban areas with sizable black populations started to regularly program blues and R&B. Young white teenagers, hearing these exciting new sounds over the airwaves, began to search for them in local record stores. This created a demand in white retail outlets for rhythm and blues and, accordingly, on radio stations where these stores advertised. Reeling from competition with television, radio station managers were forced to compromise their personal reticence over playing “low-class music” in favor of potential economic salvation. Stations in major markets, using both black and white disc jockeys, began to program rhythm and blues.

The best known of the white disc jockeys who programmed rhythm and blues was Cleveland’s Alan Freed. Originally a classical musician, he was persuaded, after seeing a crowd of white teens purchasing rhythm and blues discs at a local record store, to offer an after-school R&B show called *Alan Freed’s Moon Dog Rock and Roll House Party*. His 1951

WJW radio broadcasts were syndicated to other stations, and in March 1952 his Moon Dog Coronation Ball attracted 18,000 fans to the 10,000-seat Cleveland Arena.

Freed moved to New York City, and lowly station WINS, in 1954. For four years he held down the 7–11 PM slot, and his *Rock and Roll Party* quickly became New York's top popular music show. "Cousin Brucie" Morrow, later New York's top evening DJ, once said of Freed: "Alan Freed became one of the bravest men ever to be a part of the radio industry. There can be no question that it was a kind of integrity that led him to play the R&B music that no one else would touch."<sup>2</sup> This popularization of R&B on radio stations took hold nationwide. Hunter Hancock in Los Angeles, "John R" Richbough in Nashville, and George "Hound Dog" Lorenz are a few examples of white DJs who promoted R&B.

By 1955 radio airplay of R&B and classic rock gave young listeners a choice of versions. Although their music was condemned by local PTAs, government committees, and church leaders, American teens chose the authentic, the original. Viewing rock as a passing fad, some majors, like RCA and Decca, signed only one artist—Elvis and Bill Haley, respectively. They then chose to wait out the inevitable demise of rock and roll. Instead, the classic rock and roll artists described in Chapters 3 and 4 reshaped American popular music. Rock and roll was here to stay.



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# CLASSIC ROCKERS— THE FIRST GENERATION

*Just Give Me Some of That  
Rock and Roll Music*

*Chapter*

3



*Chuck Berry*

Rock and roll in the 1950s attacked, often indirectly, many of the institutions that helped to control young people. . . . During the otherwise silent years of the Eisenhower administration's authoritarian attitudes, rock and roll's suggestive stage manner, guttural vocals, double entendre lyrics were seen as attackers of sexual decency and the stable family. Rock and roll fostered the separation of youth from parental control.

—Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock and Roll Is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry*

Rock and roll is poison put to sound.

—Cellist Pablo Casals

Combine a traditional European ballad form with an irregular Afro-American rhythm, a vocal and/or instrumental ejaculation to break up or distort the melody, and in 1955, you have a new sound.

—Rock historians Don J. Hibbard and Carol Kaleialoha, *The Role of Rock*

Rock and roll is just rhythm and blues. It's the same music I've been playing for 15 years in New Orleans.

—Fats Domino, from an interview on *Heroes of Rock and Roll*, a 1981 ABC-TV special

## I Found My Thrill

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**I**N 1954 TEENS GROWING UP IN SPRINGFIELD—whether in Maine, Missouri, Oregon, or Illinois—had probably never heard of rock and roll. The local radio station and television's *Your Hit Parade* were playing the same old pop songs—conformist, fantasy-oriented lyrics and soporific, beatless music. This popular music appealed to both parents and their kids and featured a mixture of artists: older song stylists like Perry Como, Frank Sinatra, and Nat “King” Cole; newcomers like Eddie Fisher, Patti Page, and Rosemary Clooney; and the slightly more emotional singers like Frankie Laine, Guy Mitchell, and Johnnie Ray.

Public awareness of rock and roll grew slowly. Although rhythm and blues was becoming popular in cities with large black populations, also developing a “cult” following among some white teens, most young white Americans were unaware of their impending musical liberation. Once rock and roll did emerge, it so threatened the prevailing societal equilibrium that Columbia University's Dr. A. M. Meerio was moved to conclude

at the time, “If we cannot stem the tide of rock and roll with its waves of rhythmic narcosis and vicarious craze, we are preparing our own downfall in the midst of pandemic funeral dances.”<sup>1</sup>

Rock and roll music was not musically complex—it contained elements from rhythm and blues, blues, and gospel mixed with varying amounts of country music and pop. There were emotion-laden vocals. There was an emphasis on the two and four beats of the measures (one-TWO-three-FOUR); listeners rocked on the one and three and rolled on the TWO and FOUR. Young people reacted emotionally to the music, moving their bodies in sympathetic vibration as the performers moved theirs. The lyrics told teen tales about romance, dance, school, music, and sex—just simple stories about everyday life.

In an era of the organization man, when dutiful parents strove to belong and conform, rock music became a catalyst for teens to form their own group identity—a comradeship of those who felt good about, and identified with, the music. Many youth of the fifties viewed rock and roll as an expression of both rebellion against and a growing uneasiness with the perceived rigidity and banality of an era dominated by conservative Republican politics and Mitch Miller musicality. It gave them a sense of community, as would the antiwar protests of the next generation.

To most adults, however, there was something unnerving about the music. To parents, many of whom were socialized by training in the military, the hierarchical structure of workplace and home, and the conformist societal climate, this music produced a frighteningly spontaneous and sensual reaction in their children. Their offspring reacted in an unauthorized manner. And adult antagonism toward rock music also reflected the inherent racism of the era. Having correctly perceived rock music as fundamentally black in both origin and nature, most white parents judged it bestial and subhuman. For example, the Alabama White Citizens Council announced a campaign to rid the country of this “animalistic, nigger bop.” Many government, religious, and educational spokespersons echoed those sentiments, characterizing the music as immoral and sinful—and its purveyors as lazy and shiftless juvenile delinquents.

So young people had a problem. Father, teacher, and parson all said that rock and roll was bad for them. But, lying in bed cuddling their radios or after school at a friend’s house, young people knew that listening to rock music made them feel good. Dad and Mom, if they talked about it at all, said that songs with double-entendre lyrics about sex and romance were wrong. However, since parents seemed to be involved in the sexual activity that they prohibited for their teenage offspring, it appeared like a “Do as I say, not as I do” scenario. Life for teens was beginning to lose its safe predictability. The infallibility of the family and the honor of society were at stake, and maybe, just maybe, father didn’t know best.

Like their audiences, the classic rockers sought musical and emotional outlets. Having been exposed to both black and white musical roots, these rock pioneers forged a fusion of styles. There emerged two distinct generations: predominantly black artists

who became popular before 1956, and the Elvis-led, white, country-rooted group who parlayed the genre into its extraordinary commercial success. The first generation of classic rockers—Fats Domino, Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard—rose to prominence between 1953 and 1955. They led the rock and roll explosion, establishing the classic rock genre as a viable commercial force in popular music. Their music remained close to its roots in rhythm and blues, blues, and, in Haley’s case, country, creating mostly upbeat rock songs about dance, romance, and teen lifestyles. Yet their stories show how they were just ordinary folks who exhibited an abundance of creative talent and a passion for their music.

## Antoine “Fats” Domino

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*He was a performer of great charm but little charisma. . . . [His musical style] was dominated by a warm vocal style and a thick, chunky, boogie-woogie bass New Orleans piano.*

—ROCK HISTORIAN PETER GURALNICK,  
*FEEL LIKE GOIN’ HOME: PORTRAITS IN BLUES AND ROCK ‘N’ ROLL*

In 1949 Antoine “Fats” Domino recorded his first rhythm and blues hit, “The Fat Man,” which sold 1 million copies by 1953. Yet Domino didn’t become rock and roll’s first superstar. Though he was an accomplished pianist and he cocomposed most of his hit songs, his stage show, and consequently much of his public persona, lacked the explosive rebelliousness of Elvis or Little Richard. Domino and his music were too easygoing. White America would have to wait for its king of rock and roll.

One of nine children, Domino was born in New Orleans on February 26, 1928. His family spoke mostly French Creole at home and was steeped in the rich musical tradition of the city. His father was a well-known violinist, but Domino learned to play mostly from his uncle, jazz guitarist Harrison Verrett. Verrett, who had worked with jazz pioneers Kid Ory and Papa Celestin, taught the nine-year-old Domino by writing note letters on the white piano keys with black ink. Within a few years the youngster was playing in local honky-tonks for tips, and earning \$1.50 a day mowing lawns.

In December 1949 New Orleans bandleader and trumpeter Dave Bartholomew suggested to Lew Chudd (president of Los Angeles-based Imperial Records) that they go see Domino perform. Chudd was impressed, and Domino, with Bartholomew’s band, went into the studio to record “The Fat Man.” This began a collaboration that lasted into the sixties. The combination of performer-composer Domino and bandleader-arranger-producer-composer Bartholomew is credited with more charted rock music hits than any classic rock artist except Elvis Presley.

The studio, in this case, was J&M Studios, located behind a furniture store at the corner of Rampart and Domaine in New Orleans. Like many other studios (Sun and Stax in

Memphis, Motown in Detroit, Chess in Chicago, and Atlantic in New York), J&M was a place that captured the sound of a region—the New Orleans R&B sound. It featured a specific group of musicians, led by Bartholomew; the studio sound was engineered by owner Cosimo Matassa; and local recording stars like Domino, Lloyd Price, and Huey “Piano” Smith charted new waters.

By today’s standards, recording conditions at that early J&M location were primitive. Producer Robert “Bumps” Blackwell once described it this way:

The studio was just a backroom in a furniture store, like an ordinary motel room, for the whole orchestra. There’d be a grand piano just as you came in the door. I’d have the grand’s lid up with a mic in the keys and Alvin Tyler and Lee Allen (saxes) would be blowing into that. Earl Palmer’s drums were out of the door, where I had one mic as well. The studio bass man would be over on the other side of the studio. You see the bass would cut and bleed in, so I could get the bass.<sup>2</sup>

“The Fat Man” entered the R&B charts in April 1950 and rose to #6. The title was no anomaly; although only five-foot-five, Domino weighed 224 pounds. He released five more gold (million-selling) records before 1955. In July 1955 “Ain’t It a Shame” (#10) reached the top-40 popular music charts, allowing Domino his first major access to teenage America. Pat Boone’s cover of the same tune hit the charts simultaneously and eventually climbed to #1.

Throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the team of Domino, Bartholomew, and the “Cosimo” sound created a series of thirty-five top-40 hits. Based on the traditional R&B ensemble of drums, bass, piano, electric guitar, and saxophone(s), Domino’s sound, called rhythm and blues in 1954, was heralded as rock and roll by 1956. Although Domino never had a #1 hit, his ten top-10 hits included: “Blueberry Hill” (#2, 1956); “Blue Monday” (#5, 1957); “I’m Walkin’” (#4, 1957); “Whole Lotta Loving” (#6, 1958); and “I Want to Walk You Home” (#8, 1959).

Like most classic rockers, Fats Domino came from humble beginnings in the South. The rich musical tradition of New Orleans provided him with a variety of influences. His piano style drew from boogie-woogie players such as Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, and Pete Johnson. Domino’s recording band (Dave Bartholomew’s group) contained some of the finest R&B players available in New Orleans. His musical blend included Domino’s own Creole-accented lilting vocal style—“I found my three-ill on Blueberry he-ill”—strong drums and bass; jazz-flavored, melodic saxophone solos; and that syncopated honky-tonk piano.

Despite Domino’s failure to score a #1 hit on the pop charts, he was still one of the most commercially viable of the classic rockers. Early in his career, Domino took his uncle’s advice and retained the songwriting royalties to his compositions. Thus, Domino received substantial sums of money, whether songs he penned gained popularity through his own recording or were covered by other artists.

Rock and roll artists who achieve a top level of commercial success do so not only because of individual talent but also because they are surrounded by a team of gifted, highly motivated individuals working in support. Fats Domino had such a team. Cocomposer Dave Bartholomew was a skilled musical director and record producer, Cosimo Matassa's studio and engineering blended perfectly with the "New Orleans sound," and Lew Chudd's Imperial Records was one of the largest independent record companies in the nation—with sufficient resources, motivation, and talent to market its stable of artists. Although Domino didn't have an influential manager the caliber of Elvis's infamous "Colonel" Tom Parker, Harrison Verrett provided him with sound business advice and direction. This "team" of support personnel is absent for many of the less successful artists of the era.

Fats Domino's legacy is a musical smile—the sound and feeling that come with his "good time" rock and roll. His music was bouncy, attributable in part to that wonderfully syncopated honky-tonk piano. His lyrics, which portrayed an unspoiled, romantic lifestyle and were reinforced by his relaxed delivery and stylish drawl, presented a relatively asexual, nonthreatening vision for youth and parents. Domino fostered this safe image by remaining seated at the piano during his live performances. Although he lacked the charisma and sexual energy of Little Richard and Elvis, Domino was the era's second most successful recording artist—collecting eighteen gold awards and selling more than 30 million records. He has survived rock's first five decades and continues to perform into the twenty-first century.

## Bill Haley

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In the spring of 1955 Bill Haley had everything going for him. His third top-20 hit, "Rock Around the Clock," had gone #1, he fronted an exciting rock and roll band, and he had an entrée into mainstream success because he shared the same skin color as his (mostly) white audiences. Yet Haley would fail to emerge as rock and roll's first teenage heartthrob. At twenty-eight, he lacked the youthful charisma and sexual swagger to become the king of rock and roll. The world would have to wait for Elvis Presley. Haley was, however, one of rock and roll music's pioneers. Incorporating his intuitive feel for, and experience with, country music, blues, jazz, and rhythm and blues, Haley consciously created a collage of up-tempo, beat-driven dance music chronicling the rocking and rolling of fifties teens.

William Haley was born in Highland Park, Michigan, on July 6, 1925. His father had moved from Kentucky to the Detroit area to find work, but when the Great Depression hit he settled his wife and two children near Chester, Pennsylvania. Haley Sr. found steady work in the Sun Shipyards, which gave his family a reliable income at a time when rural neighbors barely got by.

When Bill was seven, he taught himself guitar and entered amateur contests in an outdoor country and western park near his home. Haley came from a musical family—

his mother taught piano, and his father played mandolin. Starting out as a country and western singer, he soon met Hank Williams: “Hank taught me a few chords and he did influence me. He was a great blues singer and he stimulated my interest in rhythm and blues music, race music as it was called then.”<sup>3</sup> Haley was also listening to the jump-band jazz of Louis Jordan, Lionel Hampton, and Lucky Millender.

By age fifteen Haley had joined Cousin Lee, a group with a regular radio show on WDEL in Wilmington, Delaware. Haley became a professional country and western musician and traveled widely in the Midwest, but he eventually quit the road, got married, and returned to Chester, where he worked at WPPA as a disc jockey, sports announcer, and emcee of his own live music show. Onstage, the yodeling, guitar-strumming singer was shy and reserved, which stemmed from the self-consciousness of being blind in one eye.

Chester, Pennsylvania, contained a thriving music scene. Not only did the Four Aces and Frankie Avalon hail from that area, but Haley also worked clubs in the black section. “Back then, we worked colored nightclubs and there was no problem with either the musicians or the patrons. And I worked on the same bill at Pep’s Music Barn with B. B. King, Fats Domino, Lloyd Price, Ray Charles, Nat King Cole—no hang-up whatsoever.”<sup>4</sup>

Haley was a visionary, in that he made a conscious effort to integrate his country roots with rhythm and blues. “I felt that if I could take, say, a dixieland tune and drop the first and third beats, and accentuate the second and fourth, and add a beat that the listeners could clap to as well as dance, this could be what they were after.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Bill Haley was a sideburned, cowboy-booted country and western singer when, in 1952, he recorded an R&B tune titled “Rock This Joint” on the small independent Essex label. His band, the Saddlemen, was a country band that contained an accordion and a steel guitar, along with bass, drums, guitar, and piano. Haley had written “Rock-a-Beatin’ Boogie” for another group and found out that disc jockey Alan Freed was using it to open his radio show in Cleveland. The words “Rock, rock, rock everybody / Roll, roll, roll everybody” were infectious.

The time for Haley’s personal transformation was clearly at hand; off came the sideburns, boots, and country name, out came the tuxedos. Bill Haley and the Saddlemen became Bill Haley and His Comets. The country group became a powerful rock and roll ensemble consisting of drums, bass, two electric guitars, piano, steel guitar, and tenor saxophone. Haley began to instill more emotion in his vocals, and Rudy Pompelli’s saxophone solos and R&B-derived “down on your knees” stage antics drove the audience wild. They recorded “Crazy Man Crazy,” which sold more than 1 million copies and reached the Billboard top 20 in 1953. The group garnered interest from all three majors (Columbia, RCA, and Decca); it signed with Decca.

In April 1954 the group assembled at New York’s Pythian Temple for their first Decca session. Rarely has there been a more auspicious first session. They recorded “Rock Around the Clock,” a song written by a pair of white middle-aged music-business veterans.<sup>6</sup> Although it sold a healthy 75,000 copies, the record failed to make much of an

impact. The band also recorded their musically and lyrically sanitized cover version of Big Joe Turner's R&B hit "Shake, Rattle, and Roll," and it reached #12. The decision to use "Rock Around the Clock" behind the opening credits of the 1955 movie *Blackboard Jungle* secured the song, and Bill Haley, a place in the history books. Teens acquired an anthem of rebellion, as they added the words "whether you like it or not" to the title—and parents found a target. The song rose to #1 and stayed there for an incredible eight weeks. It has since sold 30 million copies.

Haley became the first white rock and roll star. He toured with the major package shows, headlined concerts, and became a rock idol in Europe. At the end of 1955, Haley was named *Downbeat* magazine's Rhythm and Blues Personality of the Year, which evidenced that Haley was also popular in the black music community. He reached the top 20 once more in early 1956 with "See You Later, Alligator" (#6). But America was still looking for a teen idol, and the slightly balding, pudgy, somewhat shy Haley didn't fit the bill. Consequently, other white artists, including Elvis Presley, surged past him in popularity. Haley continued to tour for the next two decades, becoming a star in the rock nostalgia movement of the late 1960s. By the late 1970s he was in severe physical and financial distress. His sax player and musical director, Rudy Pompelli—who had stayed loyal through it all—died in 1976. Bill Haley lived his last years in Harlingen, Texas. He drank heavily, slipping in and out of reality. On February 9, 1981, he died alone.

Bill Haley was the first white musician of the fifties to synthesize black and white musical styles and have a major impact on popular music. He combined a strong backbeat with a clear and forceful vocal style, Rudy Pompelli's outstanding tenor saxophone solo work, and a lyrical content that reinforced the joys of dancing to rock and roll. Before Elvis, Chuck Berry, and Buddy Holly, there was Bill Haley, who introduced teenage America to classic rock and roll.

## Chuck Berry

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*Berry was the first performer to demonstrate that rock and roll could be philosophically and artistically worthwhile as well as good to dance to. . . . [Berry put] a measure of quality into rock and roll.*

—ROCK HISTORIAN LOYD GROSSMAN, *A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ROCK MUSIC*

*Hail, hail rock and roll*

*Remember it from the days of old. . . .*

*Long live rock and roll*

*The feelin' is there, body and soul.*

—CHUCK BERRY'S "SCHOOL DAYS" (CHESS RECORDS, 1957)

Charles Edward Anderson Berry was the father-poet of classic rock and roll. He chronicled the fifties teenage experience with a literacy and musical creativity unmatched by his contemporaries. His stories of struggle, romance, and dance provided the listener with a lyrical pastiche reflecting the first stab at self-sufficiency by the era's youth. Chuck Berry the person, however, remains somewhat of an enigma. His struggles with the law have left him embittered and uncommunicative—so much so that, until the release of his autobiography in 1987, even the year and place of his birth were in doubt. Now we know that Berry was born on October 18, 1926, in St. Louis, Missouri, the second of three boys in a family of six children. Although these were the Depression years, his father was a building maintenance contractor, ensuring his family a relatively comfortable existence. Both parents were active in the Baptist church, and young Charles sang in the choir at age six.

In addition to his church music, Berry's vocal interests lay in the era's popular music: "My favorite singers . . . are Nat [King Cole] and Frank [Sinatra], in that respect, because I'm moody, and Nat sang moody music."<sup>7</sup> His clear enunciation on his material reflects these pop vocal influences. St. Louis was perfectly positioned, geographically speaking, as a musical crossroads. It was close to Kansas City, the jazz mecca of the big-band era, and astride the Mississippi River; the city also was an important way station for the railroad and river traffic that brought southern blues musicians to the industrial North. Making his home along these routes, Berry was inundated with various styles of music throughout his youth.

Berry was a self-taught musician, proficient in guitar, saxophone, and piano. As the father of rock and roll guitar, he would fuse elements from the blues (repetition, choke, and bend) with country-derived speed and slides. His developing guitar style was clearly influenced by regional black jazz and blues artists as well as by the country and western music that he followed avidly on the radio. When asked about his guitar influences, Berry cited "a person named Charlie Christian, guitarist for Benny Goodman, T-Bone Walker, and Carl Hogan (Louis Jordan's guitarist)."<sup>8</sup> One important innovation, often overlooked in chronicling the development of rock guitar, is Berry's rhythm-guitar style. Using E-fingering bar chords, Berry would strum an eighth-note pulse on the bass strings of the guitar while alternating with his pinkie every two beats four frets above the bar. This created a forceful, driving foundation to Berry's material that continues to be used by modern rock guitarists.

Berry's first brush with the law occurred in 1944. He and two companions were arrested for auto theft and robbery, and Berry spent nearly three years in reform school. Later, Berry obtained a job at the General Motors plant while he and his sister studied to become hairstylists at the Poro School of Beauty Culture. In the early 1950s, with a wife and two children to support, Berry supplemented his income by leading a small blues combo. A local piano player named Johnny Johnson invited guitarist Berry to replace a departed sax player, and the quartet eventually became popular enough to rival larger local combos such as Ike Turner and the Rhythm Kings.

Berry's rise to fame is steeped in legend. Mythology has it that Berry, ostensibly in town for vacation, stepped onto a Chicago stage to join blues great Muddy Waters during a jam session. Berry disputes this but acknowledges that Waters did recommend that Berry visit Chess Records head Leonard Chess. By 1954 Chess Records was the premier proponent of the Chicago urban blues sound; its artist roster included Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Willie Dixon, and many others. Berry viewed himself as a blues artist, but Leonard Chess was more interested in a medium-tempo song named "Ida May" (also identified as "Ida Red"). He instructed Berry to rework the tune at a faster pace and change the name.

Returning to Chicago, Berry recorded the song, now titled "Maybellene," on May 21, 1955. Leonard Chess rushed "Maybellene" to New York and disc jockey Alan Freed. The country's most prominent rock and roll disc jockey gave it his enthusiastic support—and Chess gave Freed one-third of the songwriter's royalties. With the assistance of New York airplay, "Maybellene" reached #1 on the R&B charts and #5 on the pop charts that summer.

Whereas most classic rockers wrote tales of love, Berry wrote tales of teen existence that exhibited a freshness, humor, and literacy reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley professionals. It is paradoxical that a man who was already thirty years old by the time "Roll Over Beethoven" was a hit in 1956 could so accurately speak for a generation of teens that was tasting rebellion for the first time. Perhaps the indelibly etched experience of being a black youth from the border South gave Berry insight into the oppression and frustration felt by a new generation of adolescents. A man with a high school education became rock's first poet laureate.

Chuck Berry recorded eight more top-40 hits during the next four years. "Roll Over Beethoven" (#29, May 1956) alerted the nation to the excitement of the new sound, chiding classical music composers Beethoven and Tchaikovsky to vacate the scene and make way for rhythm and blues (that is, rock and roll). In 1957 "School Days" (#3) chronicled a typical school-day experience from "Up in the morning and out to school" to day's end at the local gathering place, where they all "hail, hail rock and roll." Of special note in "School Days" is the call and response between the vocal and the guitar during the verses. In an era of live recordings, this almost perfect call-and-response synchronization of the guitar to the meter and pitch of the vocal melody and phrasing was a marvelous accomplishment.

Berry once again celebrated the new sound with "Rock and Roll Music" (#8, November 1957) and introduced his audience to their first teenybopper in "Sweet Little Sixteen" (#2, February 1958). "Johnny B. Goode" (#8, May 1958) was one of rock and roll's first biographies—the story of a young Louisiana guitarist out to make it big. I don't know of another song that has permeated live rock and roll to a greater extent. Request "Johnny B. Goode" at any rock and roll club, and you're likely to get it played on the spot; its anthemic "Go, Johnny, go!" has become a rallying cry for the entire genre of rock and roll.

Berry developed a performance style that excited his audiences (though he was not as wild onstage as Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard). Bent over in a crouch, his head bobbin' and weavin', Berry would strut across the stage doing his famous duckwalk. Down through the years, this and other Berry performance practices have been emulated by rock guitarists.

Berry's strong sense of artistic and personal integrity was challenged the first time he appeared on Dick Clark's network TV show, *American Bandstand*. Like all other performers, Berry was expected to lip-synch (move his mouth without singing) the words to his song while the record played on the air. Berry balked. Luckily for Berry, Leonard Chess was present to point out the potentially cataclysmic results of a standoff with Dick Clark. Berry eventually saw the economic wisdom of this argument, lip-synched, and later even named his St. Louis club Chuck Berry's Bandstand.

Movies were another medium where rock music received additional exposure. With the success of "Rock Around the Clock" in *Blackboard Jungle*, Hollywood jumped on the rock and roll soundtrack bandwagon. Berry's first movie effort was *Rock, Rock, Rock*, which was followed by *Mr. Rock and Roll* and *Go Johnny Go*. During this era, approximately twenty-five major movies were devoted to the subject of rock and roll.

As with many of the other classic rockers, Berry's career and financial security were illusory. In December 1959 Berry was charged with a violation of the federal Mann Act, which prohibited transporting a minor across state lines with intent to commit prostitution. According to Berry, he added a twenty-one-year-old woman to his entourage during an El Paso tour date and gave her a job as a cigarette girl in his club. She began turning tricks as a prostitute, was assaulted by a customer, and possibly traded testimony against Berry in exchange for the goodwill of the authorities. The prosecution contended she was only fourteen years old.

The first trial verdict (a conviction) was vacated on appeal due to the blatant racial prejudice of the presiding judge. The second trial sealed Berry's fate. Again convicted, he entered federal prison in Terre Haute, Indiana, in February 1962. By the time of his release in the fall of 1963, he had lost his club and found his career in shambles. The experience changed him. Carl Perkins noted that the man who had once seemed so friendly and easygoing was now terse and moody. In Patrick Salvo's 1972 *Rolling Stone* interview, Berry even denied that he went to jail.

In 1964 Berry went head-to-head with the British invasion. Although he had three top-40 tunes—"Nadine," "No Particular Place to Go," and "You Never Can Tell"—it was a losing battle. Many sixties groups recorded Berry's songs and often cited him as a major influence in their development, but he never again achieved his previous popular status. Ironically, in 1972, a live recording of the suggestive "My Ding-a-Ling" became Berry's only #1 chart hit. Fifty years after his first hit record, he continues to perform, thrilling fans with his masterful version of classic rock and roll.

Chuck Berry created the most literate, stylistically innovative, and original music of the era—he was a complete musician who was not only a vocal stylist like Elvis but also

a composer, instrumentalist, and bandleader. Whereas most other performers limited their scope to various permutations of the boy-girl romance formula, Berry's songs dealt with important adolescent concerns such as romance, sex, work, school, cars, dancing, parents, and rock and roll music. As a guitarist, he created the baseline for the genre. But Berry, the era's "brown-eyed, handsome man," fell from grace, as did many other classic rockers. However, his massive legacy and the man himself are still a vibrant part of the rock and roll community.

## Little Richard

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*When Jerry Lee [Lewis] hits the piano keyboard with his butt, bangs the keys with the boot of his heel of an outstretched leg and leaps on top, it's Little Richard. When Presley chokes-gasps-gulps his words and swivels his pelvis, it's Little Richard. When the Beatles scream "yeah, yeah, yeah" and gliss into a high falsetto, it's Little Richard.*

**—POP MUSIC SCHOLAR ARNOLD SHAW,  
THE ROCKIN' '50S: THE DECADE THAT  
TRANSFORMED THE POP MUSIC SCENE**

Richard Pennimen always wanted to be acknowledged as the king of rock and roll. He exploded into the first era of rock and roll with a string of top-40 hits. His unique stage appearance and live performance style were imitated by many of his contemporaries. His persona and penchant for a controversial lifestyle were unmatched. But Richard was simply too outrageous, too raw, and too black to capture the crown he so desperately wanted. America would await another's ascendance to the throne.

Little Richard was born on December 5, 1932, at his home in the comfortable Pleasant Hill neighborhood of Macon, Georgia. He was the third child, and second boy, in a family that eventually numbered twelve children. His father, the son of a preacher, was a brick mason and sold moonshine on the side. His mother, Leva Mae, was probably being kind when she stated once that "Richard was the most trouble of any of them." Richard was rambunctious, a practical joker, and uncontrollable into his teens. As an adolescent, he claims to have been "experienced" with men, boys, women, and girls.

At age thirteen, Richard's wild behavior landed him on the streets. He hit the road as a vocalist for Dr. Hudson's Medicine Show selling "tonic." Upon his return to Macon, Richard was taken in by a white couple, Ann and Johnny Johnson, who ran a nightclub called the Tick Tock Club. From this point on, Richard set his sights on a career in music.

The outstanding feature of Little Richard's music was his unique vocal style. This highly emotive singing, soaring falsetto, and screams of praise all came from his gospel background—singing in choirs, contests, and revival and camp meetings. Whether it be



*Little Richard*

the Pentecostal, AME Methodist, or Holiness Temple Baptist Church, the gospel style was emotional and musical. Richard was apparently good enough to become lead vocalist in a number of church-affiliated singing groups, including Ma Sweetie's Tiny Tots. These roots are evident not only in his vocal style but also in his active performance style.

In 1951 at the age of eighteen, Richard won a recording contract with RCA Records in a talent contest. The eight sides that he cut had little impact but enabled Richard to assemble a fine rhythm and blues band, the Upsetters. The core rhythm section and powerful saxophones created a potent sound that later included Georgia natives James Brown and Otis Redding as Upsetter vocalists. Richard recorded additional tunes with the Peacock label in 1953 while developing a regional following.

According to rock legend, Little Richard was washing dishes in Macon's Greyhound Bus terminal when "the call" came from Art Rupe of Los Angeles-based Specialty Records. What the legend omits is that Richard was already an established regional artist with a top-notch band who had pestered Rupe unmercifully about the demo tape he had submitted seven months earlier. Specialty sent Little Richard to J&M Studios in New Orleans to record with producer Bumps Blackwell (the musical mentor of Quincy

Jones and Ray Charles). Blackwell described the session this way: “When I walked in, there’s this cat in this loud shirt, with hair waved up six inches above his head. He was talkin’ wild, thinkin’ up stuff just to be different, you know. I could tell he was a mega-personality.”<sup>9</sup>

Richard’s first time through “Tutti-Frutti” left Blackwell in a quandary; the music and feeling of the song were explosive, but the words were beyond suggestive: “Tutti frutti, good booty / If it don’t fit, don’t force it / You can grease it, make it easy.” New Orleans blues writer Dorothy La Bostrie was called in to rework the lyrics, and Richard, with backing from Bartholomew’s studio band, recorded the tune in fifteen minutes. By January 1956 the song was #2 on the R&B charts and #17 on the pop charts. During the next two years, Little Richard had eight more top-40 hits. His chart success was followed, like that of Chuck Berry and others, by inclusion on the star-laden package tours that crisscrossed the United States.

If the lyrics of Richard’s songs were any indication of his life, it was pretty unidimensional. He simply enjoyed “rocking,” “rolling,” and “balling” with his coterie of R&B belles. They ranged from Sue and Daisy, representing the sanitized version of “Tutti-Frutti,” to Miss Molly, Long Tall Sally, Lucille, Jenny, and more. Either white society was oblivious to the sexual double entendres in these songs or it relished the thrill of those in-temperate references.

The Hollywood Little Richard of “Don’t Knock the Rock,” “The Girl Can’t Help It,” and “Mr. Rock and Roll” was fairly sedate. Live audiences were treated to his megapersonality onstage. His appearance was outlandish. There were silver lamé or multicolored suits, boots, and capes. His processed hair (straightened and shaped) stood anywhere from six inches to a full foot above his forehead. He wore pancake makeup, mascara, and eyeliner. Charlie Gillett describes a Richard who was “dressed in shimmering suits with long drape jackets and baggy pants, his hair grown long and slicked straight, white teeth and gold rings flashing in the spotlights, he stood up, and at times on, the piano, hammering boogie chords as he screamed messages of celebration and self-centered pleasure.”<sup>10</sup>

During the fall of 1957, at the peak of his career, Little Richard announced that he was giving up secular music and enrolling in Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama. At this Seventh-Day Adventist school he would pursue a course of Bible study to ready himself for the ministry. He had reached this conclusion, according to rock mythology, while on tour in Australia. The details are cloudy, but Richard saw, heard, or felt a sign from God. According to legend, this sign came in the form of an apocalyptic vision, an engine fire on a tour charter aircraft, news that the Soviet Union had just launched Sputnik, a fireball over the concert stadium, or some or all of the above.

This abdication from rock music took Specialty Records by surprise. They weathered the storm by releasing previously recorded sessions, including “Good Golly Miss Molly,” well into 1958. Richard studied, sang, and recorded gospel music. But while on tour in

England in 1962, he reversed his direction, performing many of his old hits to the delight of his fans (who included another group on the bill, named the Beatles). This jumping between two genres (classic rock and gospel) continued into the eighties.

Little Richard attempted a major comeback in the late 1960s, recording soul-flavored material on the Okeh label. He later cracked the top 100 twice on Reprise in 1970. This was the time of mirrored costumes, talk-show tiffs, and the revelations of Richard's bisexuality. However, no matter how outlandish his behavior became, Richard maintained that the effect of his music was a healing one: "I believe my music is healin' music . . . because it inspires and uplifts people."<sup>11</sup>

Although his song catalog didn't have as much impact on subsequent rock generations as those of Berry and Holly, Little Richard's live performance style and emotive vocal style were major building blocks of sixties rock and roll. Richard's androgynous stage persona is reflected in the performance styles of Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, Prince, and others. Teens of the fifties may not have been ready for a scabrous black rock messiah, but, even in the twenty-first century, Richard is still making the congregation rock.



Between 1953 and 1955, the first classic rock and roll generation (Fats Domino, Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard) appeared on the popular music charts. Three of the four were black, and all played a music that reflected primary roots in blues or rhythm and blues. Domino's lilting visions of courtship and dire straits were driven by a pulsating piano and the beat of a forceful rhythm and blues band. Haley shouted his calls of dance and romance over his own driving country- and R&B-rooted ensemble. Chuck Berry was an exceptional innovator. Firmly rooted in blues, Berry defined certain elements of rock music. He focused the instrumental solo on guitar, then created its stylistic parameters. His lyrical vision included most of the major concerns of the adolescent audience. Finally, Little Richard brought the most bawdy parts of the rhythm and blues legacy—the howl, the harem, the musical power—to his rock audience.

As a group, they were pioneers of rock and roll. Each paid his dues in another style before crossing over to the popular charts—their average age was twenty-six at the time of their first pop hits. Staying close to their black musical roots, they maintained that unrestrained, rebellious exhortation in their lyrics. In addition to songs about romance, there were also some about sex, school, dancing, and rock and roll music itself.

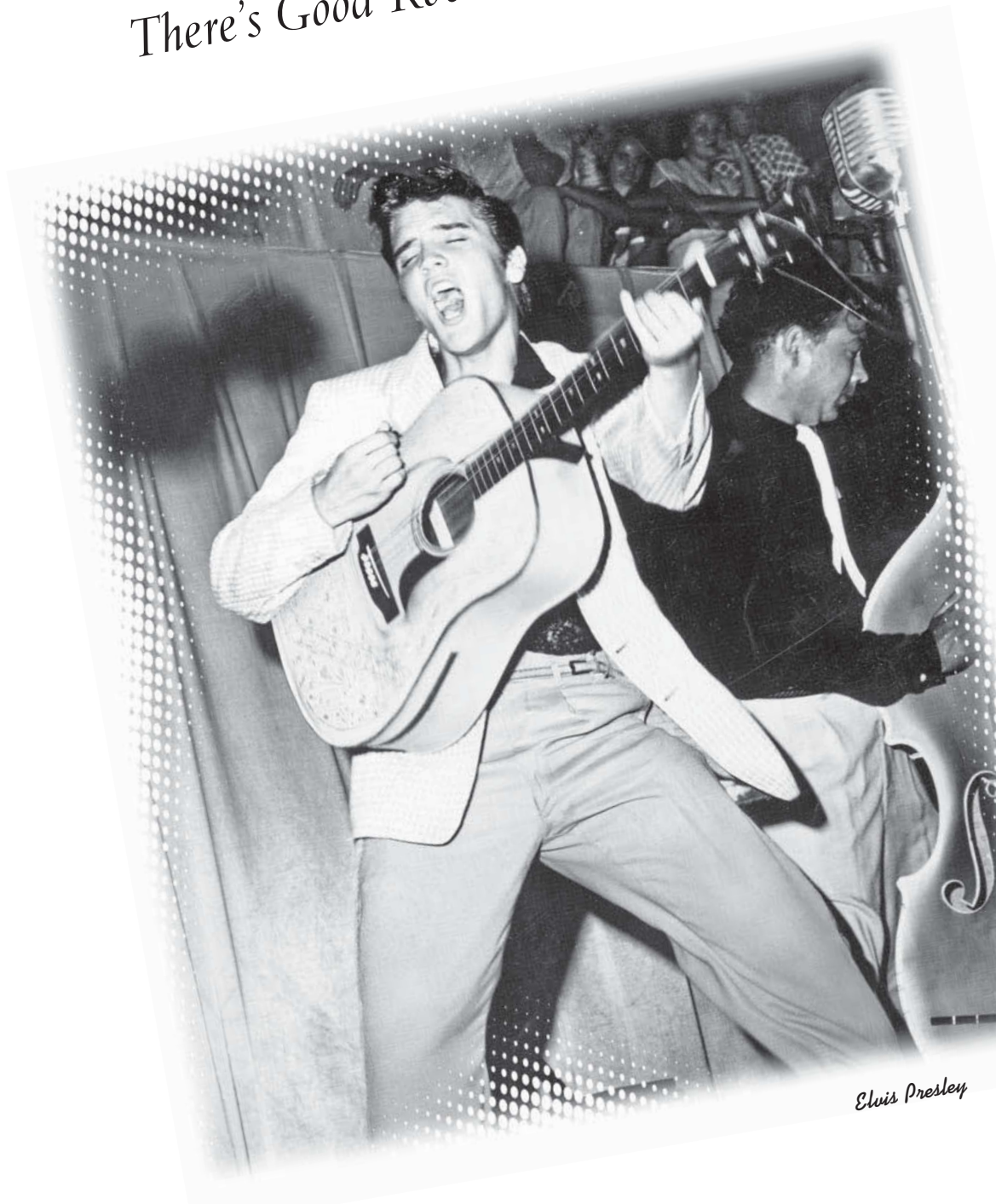
Though some of the lyrics were subliminally "wicked," few songs were overtly critical of the system. It wasn't until the sixties that some rock lyrics called decisively for change. Lyrics and music of the classic rock era redefined adolescent lifestyles. They opened a Pandora's box—filled with both a spontaneous, emotional response to this essentially black music and an evolving sense of teen identity and community.

By 1955 young, white, country-rooted musicians populated the South, listening to rock's first generation and adapting those sounds to their own creative visions. Soon, these men—Elvis, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Everly Brothers—would explode on the scene. As classic rock's second generation, they would bring guitars to the forefront, return to an almost exclusive emphasis on romance, and reap commercial success and economic rewards beyond their wildest dreams.

# CLASSIC ROCKERS—THE SECOND GENERATION

*There's Good Rockin' Tonight*

4  
Chapter



*Elvis Presley*

**T**HE SECOND GENERATION OF CLASSIC ROCKERS—Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Buddy Holly, and the Everly Brothers—forged to the forefront of rock and roll by 1957. Their particular brand of country-rooted rock and roll placed more of an emphasis on the guitar-oriented string band, the electric guitar instrumental solo, and a worldview that was almost exclusively focused on romance. As opposed to rocking around the clock with Bill Haley and dancing in the “juke joint” with Chuck Berry and his “School Days” characters, this generation chose mostly to “Love Me Tender,” as with Elvis, and yearn for “True Love Ways,” with Buddy Holly.

## Elvis Presley

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*This cat came out in red pants and a green coat and a pink shirt and socks . . . and he had a sneer on his face and he stood behind the mic for five minutes I'll bet before he made a move. Then he hit his guitar a lick and broke two strings. . . . So there he was, these two strings a-dangling, and he hadn't done a thing yet, and these high school girls were screaming and fainting and running up to the edge of the stage, and he started to move his hips real slow like he had a thing for his guitar.*

—BOB LUMAN DESCRIBING ELVIS AT KILGORE, TEXAS, IN 1956

*When Elvis turned forty, the media had a field day; he was fat, depressed about it, and didn't get out of bed all day. It seemed to be a continuing battle against creeping mortality, and Elvis was not winning.*

—PETER GURALNICK, *LOST HIGHWAY:  
JOURNEYS AND ARRIVALS OF AMERICAN MUSICIANS*

*From the beginning I could see he had a different outlook on things, just the way he dressed, the way he wore his hair. He was a rebel: really without making an issue out of it.*

—SCOTTY MOORE, ELVIS'S GUITARIST

Elvis Presley was a poor white kid from northeastern Mississippi who lived the American Dream. One moment he was singing in a school talent show, the next he was appearing on nationwide television. One moment he was strumming his battered acoustic guitar in the school lunchroom, the next he was recording in Nashville with the best backup musicians money could buy. Like other classic rockers, Elvis was on the creative cutting edge of the era. What separated him from the rest was that he became the vehicle for the mass popularization of the genre. He became the King of Rock and Roll. Endowed with a pleasing voice, the innate ability to select the right material, and an abundance of charisma, Presley ascended to, and for most Americans has since personified, the pinnacle of classic rock and roll.

Yet many other rockers had similar combinations, plus more instrumental and song-writing talent. But they didn't have "the moment," and they didn't have "the team," which made all the difference. The moment was a brief period during which white teens were becoming increasingly exposed to rhythm and blues and the early classic rockers through the medium of radio. Excited by its beat and suggestive lyrics, they were ready to recognize and embrace a rock messiah. The team—brilliant promotion and management by Colonel Tom Parker and the big recording sound and clout of RCA Records—perceived the moment, captured it, and sold it to America.

Elvis's music went through three developmental periods in the forties and fifties. First, Presley spent his youth listening to a wide variety of musical styles. Following high school graduation, Elvis began to mold elements from these roots of blues, R&B, gospel, and country into the style known as rockabilly. Finally, upon his signing to RCA Records, Presley created his unique version of classic rock and roll. Developmentally, it was the three Rs: roots, rockabilly, and rock and roll.

Elvis Aaron Presley began life amid humble surroundings. He was born at home—a two-room shotgun shack—in Tupelo, Mississippi, on January 8, 1935. His twin brother, Jesse Garon, died at birth. Elvis was doted upon by his mother, who continued to walk him to school until his freshman year in high school. His mother's feelings were reciprocated; Elvis worshiped her. The Presleys were active church members, and Elvis grew to love gospel music: "We were a religious family, going around together to sing at camp meetings and revivals."<sup>1</sup>

Presley never lost his love of gospel vocals and harmonies, and later, in Memphis, he would spend days at the "sings" where many of the best white gospel quartets, such as the Blackwood Brothers and J. D. Sumner and the Sunshine Boys, performed. For a short time he even became a member of the Memphis-based gospel group the Songfellows. Two black radio stations in the Memphis metropolitan area, WDIA and KWEM, broadcast blues, gospel, and R&B, and Elvis claimed to have been an avid listener. Many famous black artists—B. B. King, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Howlin' Wolf, for example—even broadcast live from Memphis at the time. Radio also provided Elvis with a rich variety of country artists. He was particularly fond of Jimmie Rodgers, Bob Wills, and radio station WSM's *Grand Ole Opry* from Nashville featuring Roy Acuff and Ernest Tubbs. At age eleven, young Presley performed the song "Old Shep," which he learned from an *Opry* broadcast, and won second prize at the Mississippi-Alabama Fair and Dairy Show during the "Kids' Day" talent contest.

In 1948, with hopes for a better life and steady employment, parents Vernon and Gladys Presley packed all their belongings into their car and drove to Memphis. Vernon, who hadn't been able to find steady work in Tupelo, took work driving a truck. The Presleys upgraded their housing, moving to a federally funded housing project, Lauderdale Courts. Elvis enrolled in L. C. Humes High School, the white school, but did little to distinguish himself, majoring in shop and trying out for the football team. By his

senior year, the once shy Elvis began to bloom. He brought his guitar to play at school and eventually won the talent show in the schoolwide musical review. He also adopted an appearance just this side of outrageous: his hair was styled in a DA (duck's ass, that is), kept in place with a generous application of pomade. At Lansky Brothers, a clothing store on Beale Street, Memphis's black Broadway of music, Elvis picked out a multicolored array of finery.

Given his previous economic condition, Elvis was quite happy to secure a truck-driving job with Crown Electric after graduation. One Saturday in mid-1953, Elvis stopped at Sun Records/Memphis Home Recording Service. For \$3.98, he recorded two sides of a 45-rpm disc, "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin"—two songs by the popular black vocal group the Ink Spots. According to Marion Keisker, an administrative assistant at Sun Records, "Over and over . . . I remember Sam [Phillips, Sun owner] saying 'If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars.'" <sup>2</sup> Keisker jotted down Elvis's name and a neighbor's phone number, but when Phillips returned to hear the end of the session, he was not impressed.

Phillips recommended that Elvis get together with two other musicians, guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black. On the night of July 5, 1954, the trio met at Sun Records. Scotty Moore describes the scene:

Well, we tried three or four things. . . . Then we were taking a break, I don't know, we were having cokes and coffee, and all of a sudden Elvis started singing a song, jumpin' around and just acting the fool, and then Bill picked up the bass and he started acting the fool too, and you know I started playing with them. Sam, I think had the door to the control booth open—I don't know, he was either editing some tape or doing something—and he stuck his head out and said, "What are you doing?" And we said, "We don't know." "Well back up and try to find a place to start and do it again." <sup>3</sup>

The song was "That's All Right (Mama)," written by black Tupelo bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. It was not only Elvis's first commercial recording but, more important, that synthesis of blues and country music that would come to be called rockabilly. Essentially, it was an Elvis Presley construction, combining the raw, emotive, and slurred vocal style and emphasis on rhythmic feeling from the blues with the string band and strummed rhythm guitar from country. Scotty Moore's guitar solo, a combination of Merle Travis-style country fingerpicking, double-stop slides from acoustic boogie, and blues-based bent-note, single-string work, is a microcosm of this fusion. The style became a musical magnet for rebellious white southern youths wanting to combine the raucous emotionality of black music with their country roots. As Elvis became more popular and the music spread, future stars like Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, and Roy Orbison flocked to Memphis in search of the Sun sound.

“That’s All Right (Mama)” created a stir in Memphis, went to #1 on the local country charts, and enabled the group to start touring. The record earned Elvis an appearance on Nashville’s *Grand Ole Opry*, where he was advised to go back to driving a truck. The band toured the South, appeared regularly on country music’s second most popular radio show, *Louisiana Hayride* on Shreveport’s KDKH, and released four more singles before November 1955. Elvis added *Hayride*’s staff drummer, D. J. Fontana, to his band, making it a quartet.

Elvis’s live performances provided a major impetus to his career. “Everybody was screaming. . . . My manager told me it was because I was wigglin’,” he once said. “Well, I went back for an encore and I did a little more.” Elvis was impelled to move to the music. He ascribed it, in part, to his experiences with black gospel revival meetings. “The preachers cut up all over the place, jumpin’ on the piano, movin’ every which way. . . . I guess I learned it from them.”<sup>4</sup> Seeing the effect Elvis had on his audience, former circus huckster and country-artist manager Colonel Tom Parker (it was an honorary title) signed him to a management contract. Parker was extremely shrewd, hardworking, and a promotional genius; for a sizable cut of the gross (reports vary between 20 and 50 percent), Parker devoted himself exclusively to Elvis’s career. Major labels, grudgingly acknowledging classic rock’s early success, began searching for their own rock artists. RCA outbid Atlantic and Capitol and paid Phillips the considerable sum of \$35,000 for the year left on Elvis’s contract.

The stage was set, the cast of characters was in place, and “the moment” was about to arrive: the rock artist, the major label, the crafty manager, the quality studio, and its legendary musicians were about to deliver the first rock deity. On January 10, 1956, Elvis entered RCA’s Nashville studios—they shared them with the Methodist Church—to record “Heartbreak Hotel” and “I Want You, I Need You, I Love You.” In an incredibly daring move, the label allowed Elvis to begin his first release without instrumentation, singing, “Well since my baby left me.” The gamble paid off as both songs went to #1, and Elvis scored ten more #1s and twenty more top-40 hits during the next four years.

The RCA Elvis was qualitatively and quantitatively different from Sun’s earlier incarnation. At Sun, three kids spun loose, spontaneous renditions of blues and country songs drenched in echo. At RCA, the rock band grew to include drums (complete with a forceful two-plus-four backbeat), piano (studio master Floyd Cramer), backup vocalists (the Jordinaires) singing harmonies, carefully crafted arrangements, and a crispness of sound that was characteristic of a major-label studio. RCA even attempted to duplicate the Sun echo, but the stairway they used as an echo chamber was just not the same. The energetic sensuality of Elvis combined with the polished professionalism of RCA, Chet Atkins’s production, and Steve Sholes’s organizational abilities fashioned a sound that obviously appealed to the broadest cross section of the rock audience. It became some of the best-selling popular music in history.

Colonel Parker’s promotion plan called for media saturation. Presley appeared on national TV at least twelve times in 1956, with many teenagers viewing the visual power of

rock and roll for the first time. After Elvis appeared twice on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, CBS censors prohibited camera shots of Elvis below the waist—none of Elvis’s pelvis for America’s youth. Detractors, a group that included most parents, hoped the tide was turning. Jack O’Brien’s comments in a New York daily were typical of parental feelings at the time: “Elvis Presley wiggled and wriggled with such abdominal gyrations [on *The Milton Berle Show*] that burlesque bombshell Georgia Southern really deserves time to reply in gyrating kind. [Presley] can’t sing a lick, makes up for vocal shortcomings with the weirdest and plainly planned suggestive animation short of an aborigine’s mating dance.”<sup>5</sup> The criticism, however, did not deter Presley’s expanding audience—it may have even enhanced his status with teens.

By the end of 1956 Presley had garnered a string of five #1 hits and seven more in the top 40. He literally dominated the charts. “Don’t Be Cruel” and “Hound Dog” were a double-sided #1. “Love Me Tender,” the title track from his first film, also topped the charts. Unlike Bill Haley and Chuck Berry, who recorded anthems to teen life and rock music, Elvis stuck with a tried-and-true pop music formula. He sang about romance—crying “Love Me,” you “Hard Headed Woman,” because I’m your “Teddy Bear” and “A Big Hunk of Love,” and if you don’t I’ll be “All Shook Up.” Elvis rarely wrote his own material, instead choosing from demonstration records (demos) sent him by his publisher and others. He selected a subject matter that was of utmost concern to his teen audience—the ebb and flow of youthful infatuation. Some of the era’s best songwriters contributed hits for Elvis, including Otis Blackwell, Boudleaux Bryant, and the team of Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller.

Another element in Colonel Parker’s master plan was the movies. Elvis starred in four films—*Love Me Tender*, *Loving You*, *Jailhouse Rock*, and *King Creole*—before entering the army in March 1958. The films became vehicles to keep Elvis in front of his fans and also served as showcases for sets of new songs. Sandwiched between recording sessions and filming was a full schedule of touring. On the road and elsewhere, a large male entourage made up of high school friends and other assorted “good ole boys” accompanied Presley and serviced his every wish. They were dubbed the “Memphis Mafia.” Whatever he did, they did—just a good old gang on salary.

In the late 1950s the only thing bigger than Elvis was Uncle Sam. Colonel Tom and Elvis decided that a compliant Presley was a rich Presley. Thus, Elvis reported for induction and dutifully had his hair—one symbol of a rocker’s masculinity—shorn; he served as an eight-to-five jeep driver in West Germany. Elvis lived off-post, and his cronies waited on him and chauffeured him around in a Mercedes sedan. Many music-business prognosticators speculated that Elvis’s two-year hitch would have a deleterious effect on his career. However, buoyed by the image of Elvis-as-patriot, his appeal actually broadened to include some post-teens. His music softened somewhat as RCA kept up a steady stream of releases.

During this period, Elvis lost his mother and met his future bride. Author Albert Goldman, in his psychologically oriented 1981 biography *Elvis*, contends that Presley

never got over his mother's death. Goldman speculates that "sexually, Elvis was fixated at precisely the age of his typical fan: thirteen or fourteen." Thus, it is not surprising that when Elvis met Priscilla Ann Beaulieu, the fourteen-year-old daughter of an army major, in Germany, he was captivated.

They spent many evenings sequestered in Elvis's bedroom, and when it came time to return Stateside, Presley invited Priscilla along. She lived at his Graceland mansion, ostensibly under the watchful eye of Presley's father and grandmother. While Presley dated numerous starlets and had a series of steady girlfriends, Priscilla attended school and waited. Seven years later, they were married. Nine months later to the day she gave birth to their only child, Lisa Marie, who would marry Michael Jackson in 1994.

By the early 1960s classic rock had run its course. Elvis chose to move closer to the nonrock mainstream. His #1 hits included the syrupy ballads "It's Now or Never" and "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" Presley appeared nationwide in a made-for-TV welcome-back special hosted by Frank Sinatra. Loyd Grossman comments, "Rock and roll was becoming mere entertainment and abandoning its social and artistic role as interpreter of the world for teenage America." Elvis no longer dominated the charts but became simply a major recording artist. He lost his penchant for rebellion and bowed to the will of his manager and to commercial considerations. Between 1961 and 1967, Presley gave no public performances, though he appeared in two to three movies per year, the soundtracks containing his pop hits. The King had abdicated his throne.

On February 1, 1968, Elvis returned to the stage. Exhausted and uninspired by his film schedule, the King appeared in a live TV special from Las Vegas. With old pals Scotty Moore and D. J. Fontana, and accompanied by studio greats Tommy Tedesco and Hal Blaine, Elvis rekindled the spark. Rock journalist Jon Landau reported, "He sang with the kind of power that people no longer expect from rock and roll singers." In January 1969 Elvis returned to Memphis to record *From Elvis in Memphis*. The hometown atmosphere produced a number of critically acclaimed cuts, including the poignant and timely "In the Ghetto."

In the 1970s Elvis's professional life consisted of concentrated touring, Las Vegas shows, and periods of inactivity. It was during this time that some of his old gang became concerned about his self-destructive behavior. Presley's weight fluctuated wildly; he would go on crash diets in order to make public appearances. Drug use became a problem. Three former members of the Memphis Mafia have described Presley as unable to leave his bed on certain days.

He takes pills to go to sleep. He takes pills to get up. He takes pills to go to the john and takes pills to stop him from going to the john. There have been times he was so hyper on uppers that he has had trouble breathing, and on one occasion he thought he was going to die. His system doesn't work any more like a normal human being's. The pills do all the work for him. He's a walking pharmaceutical shop.<sup>6</sup>

On August 16, 1977, at his Graceland mansion, Elvis's tormented body simply gave out.



Elvis was white and handsome, and he had charisma, a rich and expressive baritone voice, and a sneer that seemed to symbolize growing teen uneasiness. His sensual/sexual performances, a direct copy of black tradition, thrilled his adolescent audiences. He had an innate ability to fuse musical elements from black and white forms, creating a commercially viable synthesis. Elvis was neither the first nor the most talented classic rocker. When the prevailing racism of the day prohibited a black artist from appearing as the rock messiah, Elvis seized the chance—and the moment.

His ascendance took place in two stages: the Sun rockabilly era and his mass commercial classic rock success at RCA. The first stage followed normal patterns of the regional artist: a record, airplay, public appearances, and an outward spiral of popularity. His conquest of the national market utilized not only outstanding raw talent but also incisive management, brilliant promotion, and music-industry clout. The marketing plan, which included radio, television, print, films, and paraphernalia, proved to be a blueprint for later pop music careers. The end result was commercial domination. His 107 top-40 singles is still a record; the Beatles are second, with 49.

Only twenty-six months passed between his first RCA hit and his induction into the army. During that time, he succeeded in carrying rock and roll to all corners of the United States, thus helping to solidify rock's permanence as a popular music form. Even as critics chastised rock as a form of nonmusic by and for subhuman juvenile delinquents, Presley's success called these views into question. To his fans, Elvis symbolized rebellion, sexuality, and youthful vitality; these could be ingested in small doses that provided a thrill but no real threat. On the Sun single "Milkcow Blues Boogie," Elvis expressed it this way: "That don't move me, let's get real, real gone for a change."

## Jerry Lee Lewis



*Lewis wasn't like any of the others. . . . If they were wild, he was ferocious. If their music was sexy, his was promiscuous. Presley shook his hips; Lewis raped his piano. He would play it with his feet, he would sit on it, he would stand on it, he would crawl under it and he would leap over it.*

—ROCK JOURNALIST ANDY WICKHAM

They called him "the Killer." Onstage, he pounded the piano with any part of his anatomy that was handy. His private life was a never-ending rock and roll soap opera: three wives by the time he was twenty-two, alcohol and drug abuse, a personality that was a "mixture of brash egotism and bubbling irrepressible charm," and a constant battle with his personal devil. In the tradition of Elvis and Little Richard, Jerry Lee made audiences rock with his music.

In early 1958, at the peak of his career, Lewis was successful enough to challenge all previous comers for the crown. But then he stumbled, as his secret marriage to thirteen-year-old Myra Brown—Lewis's third cousin—was exposed during a British tour. Without the public relations machinery and clout of a major label or a Colonel Tom Parker to smooth things over, Lewis floundered in a sea of bad ink. The scandal was all the establishment press needed to assail rock and roll, and Lewis's rock career never recovered.

Like most classic rockers, Lewis was raised among the working people of the South. Jerry Lee was born near Ferriday, Louisiana, on September 29, 1935. His father, Elmo, was a carpenter by trade who went to jail for selling moonshine. Elmo played the piano and guitar, and Lewis's mother, Molly, was an avid pop and country music fan. Lewis grew up in the rural South during the Great Depression; his parents scratched out a living on a small piece of land, surrounded by a large extended family. His family history also included a fundamentalist interpretation of religion and episodes of hard drinking and violent behavior.

The Lewis family attended the local Assembly of God church, traveled to many revival meetings, sang psalms, and danced to receive the Holy Spirit. Young Jerry Lee intended to become a preacher and for a short time attended Southwestern Bible School near Dallas. Instead, he chose to become a secular musician—a decision that would condemn Lewis to an inner conflict between righteousness and Satan's music. Jerry Lee's religious upbringing was manifested in his expressive vocals and stage activity. When Jerry Lee performed, he testified—an unrepentant, bawdy, rebellious alternative to the constraints of many organized religions.

Lewis mythology has him picking out a passable version of "Silent Night" on his aunt's piano at age eight. His family deemed him a child prodigy, and his father mortgaged the family home to purchase a new piano. Jerry Lee's musical roots are similar to other classic rock piano players. He said, "When I was a young man, I used to go to Haney's Big House, a local dance hall, where Negro bands and combos played. Afterward, I'd try and do the songs I heard and pick up on their styles." Famous blues artists Muddy Waters, Tampa Red, and Sunnyland Slim were among those billed at Haney's. Lewis also listened to recordings of country-boogie artists Moon Mullican and Merrill Moore, jazz-era blues players Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, and the New Orleans piano of Fats Domino. With typical bravado, Lewis stated, "Well I can't see how anyone influenced me. God, man, I just got with it, you know. I created my own style."<sup>7</sup>

Upon returning from Bible school—where his raucous versions of sacred music offended the administration and he experienced a bit of "woman trouble"—Jerry Lee sold sewing machines, led prayer meetings, and established a reputation as a performer. Sometimes, with cousins Jimmy Swaggart and Mickey Gilley, Lewis played a mixture of country music and piano-oriented blues at local functions. He worked in clubs in nearby Natchez, Mississippi, and even traveled to Nashville for a stab at the big time. Like most white southerners, Jerry Lee was raised on a substantial dose of country music. His first

record was a country song, and he subsequently recorded a series of Hank Williams songs for Sun. Lewis revered Williams and considered all others as just pretenders.

Meanwhile, the Sun rockabilly sound was becoming popular throughout the South. Lewis headed for Memphis but was advised to return with a more upbeat repertoire. Jerry Lee's first Sun recording was a rockin' version of Ray Price's country hit "Crazy Arms." For his next release, Sun mortgaged itself to the hilt, gambling that Lewis's appearance on Steve Allen's network TV show would spark national interest in the record, titled "Whole Lot of Shakin' Going On" (#3, July 1957). The show rocked and the single went to #3, eventually selling 3 million copies. Sun believed Lewis was ready to challenge Elvis for his crown.

In November 1957 Lewis released "Great Balls of Fire," which was cowritten by Otis Blackwell and punctuated by "kiss me, baby" and "oooh, feels goood." It climbed to #2, and the Blackwell-penned follow-up, "Breathless," went to #7. In May 1958 Lewis, his band, and his new bride, Myra (who was also the daughter of his bass player, J. W. Brown), left for an English tour.<sup>8</sup> The British press, a conservative yet sensationalist institution in contrast to its American counterpart, crucified Jerry Lee. Myra was his third cousin, merely a child of fourteen years at the time, and Lewis had somehow neglected to secure a legal divorce from his second wife. None of these matters would have caused much of a stir in his rural South, but they outraged the British establishment. One paper sniffed, "We say that the baby-snatching antics of this bigamist are very much the affair of British teenagers and their parents."

Lewis was unrepentant. He paraded Myra onstage and protested his love for her to the audience. The rest of the tour was canceled, and Jerry Lee returned Stateside with his career in disarray. The Killer lacked the public relations skills, insightful management assistance, and label clout to forestall a full-scale assault on him by the Church and the press. He tumbled from the upper echelons of the rock world, soon playing one-nighters in clubs and roadhouses throughout the South. After "High School Confidential" (#21, June 1958), he never again had a major rock hit. In the early 1960s, with his career at its nadir, Lewis signed with Smash Records and started to record country music. He had a series of hits, and for the past forty-five years has been a country and rock music star—sprinkling his live performances with rock and roll hits from the past.

Lewis embodies a struggle common among early southern rockers—that of the rock musicians with deeply ingrained ambivalent feelings about their own rock music due to a fundamentalist religious upbringing. Many churchgoers—especially among the fundamentalist sects in the South—viewed rock and roll, along with blues and R&B, as the devil's music. Thus, rockers, as the purveyors of this music, were condemned to lives of sin and eternal damnation. Little Richard jumped between styles, unable to make the final decision whether to stay within the flock or abandon it. Lewis, resigned to the secular choice, embraced sin with gusto—he abused his body with drink and drugs, was a notorious womanizer (in addition to his six-plus marriages), and often raged out of control.



Jerry Lee played with an incredible intensity—fueled by his internal battles—that made his records and live performances so exciting. Paradoxically, on record he was able to accomplish that same intensity with a very small ensemble that consisted, at times, of only piano and J. M. Van Eaton’s drums. On other cuts, Roland Janes’s guitar and Brown’s bass were added to the mix. Lewis’s expressive vocals, pounding piano, and the not-so-subtle sexually oriented lyrics gave the records that spark. Jerry Lee Lewis, like his piano-playing predecessor Little Richard, was one of classic rock’s most active performers. Some promoters actually provided Lewis with two instruments, knowing one would get trashed. His shakin’ usually started on the ground, but by the end of his set Jerry Lee was on top of the piano, hair flying in front of his face, wiggling his butt and shouting into the microphone.

Blues historian Robert Palmer illuminates Lewis’s behavior in describing the generational reaction to the rural southern background: “There was a rebellion in the new music—rebellion against the double standards that allowed consenting adults to pick each other up at honky tonks while teens were taught to stifle their sexual desires, rebellion against the long furrowed faces and the beat-up cars and dilapidated farm lives of the white-trash south.” Lewis’s legacy was this rebellion: an outrageous personality, a reckless performer, and raucous musical predilection. He didn’t leave a large catalog of material, and his piano virtuosity was difficult to emulate. Nevertheless, the Killer will always survive as an authentic rebellious alternative to the antiseptic pap of the era.

## Buddy Holly



*Buddy Holly's life was an enactment of the American dream, and his music mirrored its spirit. What we long for, we never quite obtain, and yet we keep reaching; and if we have no reason to be sure of the outcome, we cling to our faith that the effort will not go unrewarded.*

—HOLLY BIOGRAPHER JOHN GOLDRÖSEN

Buddy Holly was a homely kid from western Texas who, in the short space of two years, produced a catalog of songs that had a major impact on subsequent rock generations. Holly was a synthesist and an innovator, melding country and black music roots with rockabilly and early classic rock. His lyrics painted a picture of a world populated by young lovers embroiled in various stages of clean teen romance. The brushstrokes were broad, bursting with musical bravado, and delicate, capturing the whispered beat of a vulnerable teenage heart. The masterpieces remain, the artist swept away in a gust of wind.

Charles Hardin Holley (the “e” was excised as he took to the stage) was born in Lubbock, Texas, on September 7, 1936. His father worked as a tailor and later a salesman

at a local clothing store. The youngest of four children, Holly grew up in a stable nuclear family and economic environment—what might later be pictured as the white all-American family. Holly's family attended the Tabernacle Baptist Church, where his father and brothers were church officers. This religious music was void of the emotionalism found in Pentecostal sects. Thus, Holly's vocal style lacks the soaring leaps and slurred lyrics of his black contemporaries. Holly was serious enough about his faith to donate 10 percent of his first record's earnings to the church.

Buddy Holly's earliest interests were in country music. Surrounded by a family that played guitars, a fiddle, and piano, Holly sang with them in his first talent show at the age of five. At eleven Buddy studied piano, but he soon switched to guitar. Buddy began his professional career singing songs by country artists like Hank Williams and bluegrass greats Bill Monroe, Lester Flatt, and Earl Scruggs. He also imitated the high tenor harmonies of the bluegrass artists.



Buddy Holly

Radio was the medium through which most people discovered new music, as high-powered radio stations from Nashville, Shreveport, and Dallas blanketed the South with live variety shows like *Grand Ole Opry* and *Louisiana Hayride*. Holly began to listen to black music shows from Shreveport's KWKH, where he heard the seminal blues figures Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Little Walter. There was not much contact between blacks and whites in Lubbock, and Holly's interest in black music was probably atypical for the area.

In junior high school Buddy met Bob Montgomery; for the next six years the Buddy and Bob Show played to local audiences. Their career together progressed from parties to their own Saturday-night radio show on Lubbock's KDAV. By 1955 they were opening for touring national acts like Bill Haley and Marty Robbins. Buddy and Bob's repertoire came essentially from country music songs by Hank Williams, bluegrass

pioneer Bill Monroe, and blues artists like Muddy Waters. They recorded a series of mostly original material at local radio stations and recording studios.

In early 1955, when Elvis Presley appeared in Lubbock, Buddy and Bob opened the show, and they became friends with rock's messiah. The "Sun Sound" found a receptive audience in Holly, and he went on what a friend once called "an Elvis kick." His vocal range fell from bluegrass-influenced nasal to Elvis-style crooning. He began to play Scotty Moore-style rockabilly lead guitar, and the group added more bounce to the sound. (These Elvis-influenced elements can be heard on his Decca releases.) Holly's big break came when he and Bob opened a Lubbock show for Bill Haley in October 1955. A talent scout recommended that Haley's label, Decca, offer Buddy a contract alone, and Bob bowed out gracefully. The local hero left for Nashville and anticipated stardom.

Decca released five singles from three 1956 recording sessions. The records have that distinct Sun-Sound rockabilly flavor, and at times Holly's vocal timbre resembles that of early Elvis. The band, Buddy Holly and the Three Tunes, toured with rising country stars George Jones and Hank Thompson, but meager record sales left Decca unimpressed. Holly returned to Lubbock at the end of 1956. Early in 1957 Buddy visited Norman Petty's Nor Va Jak recording studio in Clovis, New Mexico. As biographer John Goldrosen points out, "Petty had the equipment, musical training and ability and technical competence to make good records."<sup>9</sup>

In Clovis Petty gave Holly and his new group, the Crickets, unlimited studio time, allowing Holly the chance to put ideas into practice and learn about the technical side of music production. Buddy set about creating his masterful synthesis of three styles: the heartfelt stories, vocal harmonies, and guitar-oriented instrumentation from country; the strong backbeat from black roots and early classic rockers; and the overall freshness and spontaneity of rockabilly.

Between February and July 1957, Holly recorded and Norman Petty produced most of Buddy's early hits at Nor Va Jak. "That'll Be the Day" (#1, August 1957) took three months to enter the rankings, but when it did it climbed to the top of the pop charts and #2 in R&B. The Crickets (bassist Joe B. Mauldin, drummer Jerry Allison, and third cousin Niki Sullivan on rhythm guitar) left for their first big gig at New York's black music showcase, the Apollo Theater.<sup>10</sup> Because of their success on the R&B charts, the Crickets had been hired sight unseen. When they arrived at the theater, the management was shocked; it was unheard-of for a white group to play that venue. For the first two days the audience sat on its hands. Niki Sullivan describes the scene: "Buddy turned around and said 'Let's do Bo Diddley.' . . . [We were] cutting up and working our buns off. I was dancing around in a big circle, going through a bunch of gyrations and Buddy was all over the stage, and Joe B. was bouncing that bass back and forth and laying it down. . . . And when we finished that song people went bananas."<sup>11</sup>

During the classic rock era, most audiences saw their favorite rock and roll performers as a part of package-show tours. Promoters would contract with the current stars for lengthy cross-country tours by bus. For two or three dollars fans could see ten or more

acts in medium-size venues in or near their hometowns. Each artist would sing three or four songs—a few more for the headliners—backed by their own groups or the package tour's rock and roll big band. (This variety-show concept contrasts sharply with the past thirty-five years, where one- or two-act shows go on the rock and roll circuit.)

In the fall of 1957 the Crickets were signed to a package tour called the Biggest Show of Stars for 1957.<sup>12</sup> Many of the era's major artists went, including Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, the Everly Brothers, the Crickets, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, the Drifters, Clyde McPhatter, La Vern Baker, Paul Anka, Eddie Cochran, and Jimmie Bowen. The tour lasted two and a half months without a single day off. All participants traveled by bus; if they were lucky, they grabbed a few hours of sleep at a hotel before the show. An example of 1957's version of life in the not-so-fast lane can be found in a single week's schedule for the tour: Sunday, Spokane, Washington; Monday, Pullman, Washington; Tuesday, Calgary, Alberta; Wednesday, Edmonton, Alberta; Thursday, Regina, Saskatchewan; Friday, Denver, Colorado; Saturday, Wichita, Kansas.

Musical and personal cross-pollination occurred continuously. Niki Sullivan describes his experience:

My whole life or education seemed to occur, right there on that eight-day tour. The most outstanding to me was the camaraderie—everybody living and working together. Color just didn't come up. The Drifters treated me like a kind of white sheep of the family. If I had trouble, or worry, or loneliness, they would always sit down and talk to me. After we got back to New York, we had our farewell party, and when they all got out of the bus to leave, I cried.

Holly appeared on national television and in early 1958 toured England and Australia. Buddy was becoming enamored with New York City, where he was exposed to a smorgasbord of musical styles. While in New York he recorded the unique R&B-flavored "Early in the Morning" (featuring a searing sax solo) and "It Doesn't Matter Anymore," using a lush orchestra. Upon his death, critics would point to his use of strings as a sign that Holly had lost his rock and roll soul.

At the time Holly the lyricist yearned for "true love ways" and expected to find "a love so rare and true," Holly the person was living the dream. In June 1958 Buddy met, fell in love with, and proposed to Maria Elena Santiago—in one day. They were married in August. Maria worked for Peer-Southern Publishing, one of New York's largest publishing houses; her aunt was the head of its Latin American publishing division. Maria helped to ground the idealistic Holly in the real-world practices of the music business.

Holly realized that his loose business arrangements with Petty, which included allowing Petty's name on the band's material, needed renegotiation. As their manager, Petty had turned down movie offers, underpromoted the latest material, and treated the band without much trust. Holly decided to terminate his relationship with Petty, but the Crickets, homesick and alienated by New York, feeling the loss of camaraderie caused by

Buddy's marriage, and tantalized by Petty's promises of continued stardom using the band's name, broke with Holly. Both sides were regretful, but each trudged off in a different direction.

By the end of 1958 Buddy became concerned about the advancement of his career. His initial songs were million sellers, but he hadn't had a top-20 hit since the previous spring. The record company and his wife urged him to get back out in front of his fans. Buddy acquiesced, agreeing to headline the three-week Midwest Winter Dance Party tour. Included in the small package were Dion and the Belmonts, Richie Valens, and the Big Bopper. The weather conditions for this tour were typical for the time of year—frigid temperatures, snow, ice. Leaving Green Bay, Wisconsin, after the February 1 show, the party drove 350 miles southwest, to Clear Lake, Iowa. The bus broke down that night, not an uncommon occurrence, and arrived at six o'clock, just before showtime. Desperate for a good night's sleep and carrying a laundry bag filled with dirty clothes, Holly chartered a private plane for the band's 430-mile leg to the next night's venue, in Moorhead, Minnesota.

J. P. Richardson (the Big Bopper) convinced Buddy's bass player, Holly protégé Waylon Jennings, to relinquish his seat on the plane. Valens flipped a coin with Holly guitarist Tommy Allsup, called heads, and won his seat. The tour's in-house drummer was hospitalized with frostbite incurred during the previous night's breakdown, so Buddy played drums for the opening acts. Holly played his headline set, and he, Valens, and Richardson left for the airport. Just before 1 AM on February 3, 1959, the three artists and the pilot boarded the four-seat *Beechcraft Bonanza* at the Mason City, Iowa, airport. The wind was gusting, the temperature was eighteen degrees, and a light snow was falling. The plane lifted off the runway and headed over the horizon to the northwest. The next morning, the plane was found nestled against a snow fence, eight miles from the airport.



Holly's legacy is enormous, especially in light of the brevity of his two-year classic rock career. Not only did many groups follow his two-guitar, bass, and drums format, but they duplicated the ambiance of the songs themselves. The perky simplicity of the early Beatles work bears more than a passing resemblance to Holly songs like "It's So Easy" and "I'm Gonna Love You Too." Buddy was the master scribe of clean teen romance. Instead of romantic fulfillment, however, many protagonists were consumed by yearning and anticipation (expressed in "Maybe Baby," "Heartbeat," "Oh Boy," and many others). One can imagine the shy boy leaning against the gym wall at a school sock hop staring at his secret love, who is dancing with the quarterback, thinking, "If she only knew how much I loved her."

Holly was also technologically advanced for the time. With Petty's assistance, Buddy spent considerable time acquainting himself with the recording studio. They used multi-track techniques, pioneered by guitarist Les Paul, on "That'll Be the Day" for guitar and

vocal harmony overdubs. Holly was also the first classic rocker to popularize the Stratocaster, a classic guitar manufactured by Fender that would become the guitar of choice for many modern artists. Bruce Springsteen reflected on Holly's legacy this way: "I play Holly every night before I go on, it keeps me honest."<sup>13</sup>

## The Everly Brothers

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*Darling you can count on me, till the sun dries up the sea.  
Until then I'll always be, devoted to you.*

—THE EVERLY BROTHERS, "DEVOTED TO YOU" (1958)

Imagine first a sound reminiscent of the caress of teenage heartstrings, where shimmering notes of a tremoloed electric guitar enchant the listener. Then, as if called forth from on high, two tenor voices chime in, entwined in celestial close-interval harmony. Like love-struck minstrels, they croon of endless love and devotion, "Until then I'll always be, devoted to you." It is the Everly Brothers.

Don and Phil Everly, the last of the classic rockers that we will examine, developed a unique country-rooted vocal style. Their music combined sensational harmonies, crisp production, and a string band dominated by a blend of acoustic and electric guitars. Their hit songs, usually from the pens of husband-and-wife songwriting team Boudleaux and Felice Bryant, painted a masterful portrait of teen concerns, including romance and school, and a sometimes humorous look at adolescence. The unique emotion and uncanny oneness of their singing enhanced the intensity of these portraits and gave us one of the most commercially successful sounds of the late 1950s.

The Everly story is unique. Elvis, Buddy, and Jerry Lee listened to country and bluegrass music and were deeply influenced by it. Don (who was born in Brownie, Kentucky, on February 1, 1937) and Phil (Chicago, January 19, 1939) were born into it. Their parents, Ike and Margaret Everly, were well-respected country and western singers who had their own radio show and toured extensively. The family performed together; the boys made their radio debut at ages eight and six. Ike was also a fingerpicking guitar pioneer who had an impact on contemporaries like Merle Travis.

Intent upon their own career, the boys headed for Nashville, wrote songs, and recorded unsuccessfully for Columbia Records. With the help of family friend Chet Atkins, the Everlys acquired manager Wesley Rose (the son of publishing giant Fred Rose of Acuff-Rose fame) and signed with Cadence Records. Although an independent label, Cadence was large enough to have produced hits for pop musicians Julius La Rosa, the Chordettes, and Andy Williams. They were well on their way to assembling their own version of the "team," and the last addition turned out to be the Bryants. Boudleaux (the husband) was a former violinist for the Atlanta Symphony who had turned to writing country songs.

The Bryants were asked to submit material for the boys. Boudleaux recounts: “One of our biggest songs was shown over thirty times before it was ever cut. . . . It was even shown the very morning of the same day the Everlys heard it in the afternoon. . . . [T]he fella said in rejecting it, ‘Why don’t you show me a strong song.’”<sup>14</sup> The song, “Bye Bye Love,” was cut with producer Chet Atkins on guitar and Floyd Cramer on piano, released in May 1957, and climbed to #2 on the charts. The successful formula of vocal virtuosity and teen tales was established.

“Wake Up Little Susie” (September 1957) provided the Everlys not only with the first of three consecutive #1s but also a bit of controversy. It describes an adolescent’s comic nightmare: a teen couple falls asleep at the drive-in movies until four in the morning. How could one explain the situation to suspicious parents and snickering pals? Due to its suggestive nature, the song was banned on Boston radio—a fact that probably aided its ascent to #1. Musically, “Susie” is more forceful than its predecessor, featuring an accented backbeat (even if only with brushes on the snare) and some tasty electric guitar fills (probably by producer Atkins).

“Dreams” (April 1958) and “Bird Dog” (August 1958) followed this classic at #1, and the Everlys became headliners on the package tours. Dressed in matching suits and strumming identical Gibson acoustic guitars, they looked enough alike to be twins. Their live performances were not the active, raucous, sensual stage shows of most of their contemporaries. Like their vocal delivery, their onstage act was joyous but not rough or aggressive. Their camaraderie with other classic rockers extended into the studio; in 1959 “Till I Kissed You” was recorded in Nashville with Crickets Jerry Allison on drums and Joe B. Mauldin on bass.

The Everlys also had hits with their own material. “Till I Kissed You” (#4, August 1959) was Don’s creation, and Phil penned “When Will I Be Loved” (#8, June 1960). By 1960, with confidence bolstered, they decided to leave the womb and sign with Warner Bros. Records—leaving Cadence, their production team, and the Bryants behind. Their first single for Warner, “Cathy’s Clown” (May 1960), stayed at #1 for five weeks, further emboldening the duo. However, they never again hit the top 5. Classic rock was on the wane, and the Everly sound had become diluted by ornate arrangements and strings. Although they scored a few more top-10 hits, their career never recovered.

A hitch in the U.S. Marine Reserves and personal problems took them out of the limelight. Don fought with substance abuse and spent some time in a sanitarium. The Everlys had a resurgence with the nostalgia craze of the late 1960s, but by the early 1970s their relationship had deteriorated. In a July 1973 concert in California, Phil Everly smashed his guitar and walked off the stage—leaving Don to finish the show. There is a happy ending. In September 1983 the Everlys played a reunion concert at London’s Royal Albert Hall and released an album of new material.



The Everly Brothers, like Little Richard, became popular with a style that remained essentially true to their roots music. The acoustic-oriented country music favored by their parents provided the foundation. Copying bluegrass pioneers Bill and Charlie Monroe, the Everlys developed a close bluegrass duet style. The two important unique musical elements of their classic rock—the acoustic guitar-led string band and precisely phrased harmony vocals—are direct, undiluted descendants from country roots.

Their repertoire of lyrics centered on “malt-shop scenarios.” The lighthearted cameos presented feelings of infatuation, romance, and even helplessness. As victims of circumstances beyond their control—not unlike the era’s teens, caught in parental and societal expectations—song characters often stand helplessly by, as when the police cart off “poor Jenny” while she’s on her first date with the singer.

The Everly Brothers were musical innovators who had a major impact on rock’s next generation. Their symbiotic vocal relationship was unique to a genre that was usually more spontaneous. Musicologist Terence O’Grady credits the Everlys as a major foundation of early Beatles music: “Both the vocal harmony style . . . and the rich acoustical accompaniment, are clearly found in the Beatles’ early music.” Their catalog of songs has been recycled often since (James Taylor and Carly Simon’s version of “Devoted to You,” Simon and Garfunkel’s “Wake Up Little Susie,” and Dylan’s “Take a Message to Mary”). Chuck Berry gave this evaluation: “I didn’t think Presley was as good as the Everly boys.”<sup>15</sup>

**More Shakin’ Goin’ On**  
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A number of successful and innovative artists have yet to be mentioned in this discussion. Bo Diddley (born Elias McDaniel) capitalized on a syncopated beat—which was called “shave and a haircut,” “sham-poo” in the forties—in his 1955 R&B hit “Bo Diddley.” A guitarist with a penchant for odd-shaped instruments, the youngster McDaniel came to Chicago from Mississippi and played violin in grade school. With percussionist Jerome Green, he formed a street band around 1950. Bo Diddley was signed to Chess and became a major performer in black theaters and clubs during the classic rock era. He never made a significant impression on the popular music charts, although many classic rockers covered his songs and penned their own in the same rhythmic style (Holly’s “Not Fade Away” is an excellent example).

Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps had a major hit (#7) with “Be-Bop-A-Lula” in 1956. Vincent came from the “reckless abandon” school of living and performing; hard drinking and active stage movement were limited only by a leg mangled in a motorcycle accident. After his last U.S. top-40 hit in 1958, a wild, adoring English audience made him a major star there in the early 1960s. In 1960 Vincent’s best friend was American rocker Eddie Cochran. The Oklahoma-born Cochran had moved with his family to Los Angeles

and eventually signed with Liberty Records. Cochran's early music included the rockabilly-influenced "Twenty Flight Rock," an early Rolling Stones demo tune.

Eddie Cochran's later material, including the hard-driving "Summertime Blues" (#8, August 1958), "C'mon Everybody" (#35, January 1959), and "Somethin' Else," as well as his songwriting, active stage performance, and good looks portended a promising career. However, while returning from a Bristol, England, tour date, on the way to London's Heathrow Airport, the car carrying Vincent and Cochran went out of control and smashed into a telephone pole. The twenty-one-year-old Cochran was killed; Gene Vincent sustained broken ribs and reinjured his already lame leg. Close friends claim Vincent never recovered emotionally. Vincent died in 1971 at the age of thirty-six.

Ricky Nelson stood somewhere between the raucous classic rocker and the tepid teen idol. His commercial success spanned both periods. Nelson's early material and accompanying band (which included seventeen-year-old master guitarist James Burton) were reminiscent of rockabilly and classic rock, but his weak voice and clean looks resembled the teen idols. From 1949 to 1966, Ricky starred on radio and TV with his parents and older brother in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.

Rock legend has Ricky responding to a date's swoon at a Presley tune by claiming, "I can do that." The musically inclined Nelson responded with twenty-nine top-40 songs between 1957 and 1962, including "Poor Little Fool" (#1, July 1958), "Travelin' Man" (#1, May 1961), and its flip side, "Hello Mary Lou" (#9). In 1972 Rick Nelson returned to the charts with the original composition "Garden Party," a critical retort to nostalgia-show audiences. On tour in Texas, Nelson died in an airplane crash in December 1985.

## Classic Rock at Decade's End

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The classic rock era, which began with a group of primarily black artists creating reconstituted blues and R&B, ended with white artists playing a mixture of rockabilly, early classic rock, and R&B. The first group, reflecting its proximity to black musical roots, presented a relatively uncensored view of life around them—songs of a rebellious and of a sexual nature. The second generation's songs of courtship and rejection lacked the seditious and libidinous edge of their precursors. However, the live performance styles of Little Richard, Elvis, and Jerry Lee were sufficiently scandalous—at least in the eyes of critics—to provide their teen audiences with projected rebellious gratification. The first generation fashioned the music, forging the music's crossover to the popular charts. Elvis and his second-generation progeny appeared, capitalized on the previous inroads, re-framed the musical form, and collected the fruits of classic rock's labors.

By 1960 the classic rock era was over. The players were victims of fate as well as pressure from the government (in the form of "payola" investigations, addressed in the next chapter), the major labels, and church and civic leaders. Artists fell by the wayside or

were neutralized: Berry was indicted, Lewis scandalized, Little Richard got religion, Holly crashed, Elvis enlisted, and Haley just quietly faded away. Fats Domino and the Everlys continued to release material, but none with prolonged commercial success. America would have to wait for the British invasion and the Beatles to listen again to the strains of classic rock. A similar dynamic of ascendance in the midfifties, a shift to white performers, and fade-out in the early sixties occurred to the vocal-based R&B style called doo-wop. In Chapter 5, we start listening to four or five guys singing on street corners and go on from there.

# DOO-WOP

## Street Corner Serenade

Chapter

# 5



*Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers*

## Bay Doom-boppa Doom-boppa Doom-boppa Doe-doe

—Sherman Garnes's bass vocal introduction to "Why Do Fools Fall in Love,"  
by Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers (1956)

**I**N THE MIDFIFTIES YOUNG BLACK MEN often gathered on front steps and street corners in New York and other northern urban centers to "hit some notes." In clusters made up of four or five guys, they would practice harmonizing to rhythm and blues songs, hoping to be discovered by a talent scout for one of the many small independent labels that dotted their city. Some made it to school talent contests, others even further, to local theaters and dance halls, but most never got past the street corner. Not discouraged, they filled their cities with music.

They sang a style of music that has subsequently been labeled doo-wop (in all probability due to the nonsense syllables favored by the background vocalists). Doo-wop's roots can be found in the emotional vocal stylings of gospel combined with the beat-driven music of rhythm and blues. The lead singer, usually in an expressive tenor voice, would pledge his love to a listener or audience member as the rest of the group responded to these urges with close harmonies. Although most songs were created in an informal setting without instrumentation, they were recorded in a studio with a band that normally included drums, bass, piano, guitar, and tenor saxophone.

Doo-wop's earliest proponents, pioneering groups typified by the Ravens and the Orioles, were stylistically close to earlier black popular music groups, such as the Mills Brothers and the Ink Spots. Sonny Till of the Orioles and Maithe Marshall of the Ravens carried on the high tenor virtuoso tradition of Bill Kenny of the Ink Spots. Raven Jimmy Ricks radiated subsonic bass sounds similar to those of Ink Spot Hoppy Jones. The Ravens, and later the Orioles, scored hits on the race music charts (pre-R&B black music charts) in the late 1940s with a wide variety of material that included gospel-flavored ballads and covers of popular songs.

In 1953 the Orioles crossed over to the popular music charts with a #14 hit, "Crying in the Chapel." This opened doors for vocal-oriented R&B to break into the pop music scene. It is also interesting to note that the popularity of the Ravens and the Orioles hatched other groups with bird names: the Flamingos, the Swallows, the Crows, the Cardinals, the Robins, and the Penguins all had major doo-wop hits and many other bird groups, such as the Larks, the Pelicans, the Swans, the Wrens, and the Sparrows, also spread their wings and began to flourish.

By 1955 the Penguins (with "Earth Angel"), the Moonglows ("Sincerely"), the Crows ("Gee" and "I Love You So"), the Platters ("Only You" and "The Great Pretender"), and a few others had crossed over and achieved pop-chart success. Yet in the early days of doo-wop, success was typically only regional—a group recorded on an independent label, received airplay on the local radio station, and developed a regional following.

Sometimes the same song was a local hit for two different groups in two different cities. Nevertheless, doo-wop was on its way to becoming the most popular form of black music in the late 1950s.

As the genre flourished, individual vocal groups frequently formed and disbanded. The transient nature of the small independent record labels was one contributing factor. These labels were usually one- or two-person operations, and their fortunes rose and fell with the successes and failures of their local artists—no hit, no label. As was the case with some of the other independent labels, the ones that eventually did succeed did so because they became large enough to compete in the national popular music marketplace.

The first group to achieve lasting pop-chart success was the Platters. Having previously recorded for the independent Federal Records, their manager and songwriter, Buck Ram (really!), secured a contract for the group in 1955 with major-label Mercury Records. Beginning with two famous Ram originals, “Only You” (#5, October 1955) and “The Great Pretender” (#1, December 1955), the group scored eighteen top-40 hits through 1960. A major factor in their success was lead singer Tony Williams, a brilliant tenor in the Bill Kenny tradition. The group continued its climb with three more #1 hits: a cover of the Ink Spots’ “My Prayer” (July 1956), “Twilight Time” (April 1958), and Jerome Kern’s “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” (December 1958). In a story typical of this genre, the charismatic front man left to pursue a solo career, and neither he nor the Platters garnered much success after his departure.

Doo-wop recordings generally fell into two categories: up-tempo numbers that emphasized the beat, saxophone solo, and, at times, humorous lyrics and slow, romantic ballads with lyrics featuring idealized adolescent yearnings. Some groups, like the Platters with their ballads and the Coasters with their up-tempo selections, recorded predominantly in one style or the other. Sometimes the same group of musicians recorded songs in both styles, adopting a different band name for each, as in the case of the Cadets (with “Stranded in the Jungle,” a humorous rocker in the controversial *Amos ‘n Andy* style) and the Jacks (“Why Don’t You Write Me,” a ballad).

In February 1956 Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers made the charts with “Why Do Fools Fall in Love” (#6). Accounts differ as to the origin of the lyrics and the path the group took to the New York offices of Gee Records, but the reality of a thirteen-year-old singing a major hit sent ripples throughout the industry. Other junior high school kids rushed to start groups and cut records. This included Frankie’s brother, Louie, who with his group, the Teenchords, recorded “I’m So Happy.” Frankie Lymon’s personality, projection, and movements served as models for later child stars, such as Michael Jackson. The Teenagers flourished, touring Europe and the United States, starring in package shows, and scoring several more chart successes.

In predictable fashion, in 1957 Lymon left the Teenagers to pursue a solo career. He had only limited success, in part because his crystalline, expressive young voice took its expected hormonal plunge into the deeper registers. Lymon, whose reported allowance had been only twenty-seven dollars per week in his heyday, then asked for access to his

trust fund, which supposedly contained his past royalties and performance fees. Like many doo-wop artists, Lymon collected little of that accumulated cash. In 1968 at the age of twenty-five, the destitute Lymon died in a Harlem tenement, having overdosed on heroin.

The Coasters were the other doo-wop group able to sustain popular-chart success. Their material was written and produced by white creative wizards Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller. In their youth lyricist Lieber and pianist-composer Stoller moved from the East Coast to California. Each grew up in an integrated neighborhood, listening to both black and white music. They started collaborating in the summer of 1950; by 1953 they had penned R&B hits “Hound Dog” for Big Mama Thornton and “K.C. Lovin’” for Little Willie Littlefield.

In 1953 Lieber and Stoller started Spark Records and produced “Smokey Joe’s Cafe” for the Robins in 1955. The song contained a humorous lyrical style, which would later become successful in hits by the Coasters. It also brought Lieber and Stoller an offer from Atlantic Records for an independent production contract—normal by today’s standards, but quite innovative for the time. The terms called for Lieber and Stoller, who were not on the Atlantic staff, to independently write and produce records by the Robins. Atlantic would then manufacture and market the records.

Only two of the Robins agreed to travel east for this new arrangement, so the new band was renamed the Coasters for the singers’ West Coast origins. Lieber and Stoller polished the comic black idiomatic formula and hit big with their second release, the double-sided “Searchin’” (#3, May 1957) and “Youngblood” (#8, May 1957). In the latter tune the writers introduced another device that served them well in the future—the music stopped to make way for a vocal line spoken in dialect: each singer, starting with the highest pitch, repeated the phrase “Looka there!” during the break.

Like Chuck Berry, Lieber and Stoller covered a broad range of adolescent experiences. They also chronicled some of teen life’s absurdities. The Coasters attained their commercial peak with “Yakety Yak” (#1, June 1958) and its follow-up, “Charlie Brown” (#2, February 1959). “Yakety Yak” contains the threat “You ain’t gonna rock and roll no more” as punishment for not completing banal household chores (sweeping the floor and taking out the garbage). The music is punctuated with the staccato blasts of King Curtis’s tenor saxophone—a style later described as “Yakety Sax.” The subject in “Charlie Brown” is a schoolhouse troublemaker who innocently pouts the phrase, “Why’s everybody always pickin’ on me?” The Coasters continued to score chart successes into the early 1960s. And Lieber and Stoller built upon their earlier successes by writing and producing for Elvis (the entire movie score for *Jailhouse Rock*, including the title cut), the Drifters (“There Goes My Baby,” among others), and Ben E. King (“Stand By Me” and others).

Doo-wop also produced hundreds of artists who were often acclaimed by fans but who enjoyed varying amounts of commercial success. Tenor great Clyde McPhatter, for

example, left Billy Ward and His Dominoes (a gospel group turned secular) to form the Drifters. After some initial chart success for his group, McPhatter was drafted and returned to a solo career in the late 1950s. His flair and vocal mastery influenced many later singers. Another early doo-wop pioneering work was the Chords' 1954 hit "Sh-Boom"; it was whitewashed by the Crewcuts and became a #1 pop hit. Other examples of midfifties groups with up-tempo hits are the El Dorados with "At My Front Door" (they were one of the "car" groups, along with the Cadillacs, the Fleetwoods, the Impalas, the Edsels, and the Imperials), the Cadillacs with "Speedo," the Cleftones with "Little Girl of Mine" (some of my homefolks from Queens), the Dell-Vikings with "Come Go with Me" (one of the few integrated groups), and the white group Danny and the Juniors with "At the Hop" (#1, December 1957).

During this period slow-tempo, head-on-the-shoulder dance tunes were equally popular. Some of these dreamy numbers included the Five Satins with "In the Still of the Nite," the Dells with "Oh, What a Nite," the Heartbeats with "A Thousand Miles Away," the Chantels with "Maybe," Lee Andrews and the Hearts with "Teardrops," Little Anthony and the Imperials with "Tears on My Pillow," and Harvey and the Moonglows with the classic "The Ten Commandments of Love." For each of these selections hundreds of songs on the pop or rhythm and blues charts go without mention.

By late in the decade white youths had entered the field. Whereas white groups had previously recorded almost exclusively as cover artists, new younger performers such as Danny and the Juniors (from Philadelphia), Dion and the Belmonts (named for Belmont Avenue in the Bronx), Vito and the Salutations (New York underground favorites), and the Fleetwoods (from the Northwest) emerged. White kids began to hang out on the street corners in major urban centers and harmonize together. My own group, the Chapters, formed in the stockroom of an engineering firm one summer. We practiced in high school stairwells and bathrooms (these places had wonderful acoustics!) and sang to captive audiences in hospitals and nursing homes in the New York metropolitan area.



By 1960 doo-wop, like classic rock, was beginning to fade. The sounds had become softer as the faces became whiter. Still, there were some late successes: the Drifters hit with "Up on the Roof" (#5, December 1962) and "On Broadway" (#9, April 1963), the Marcells cut a remake of "Blue Moon" that went to #1 (March 1961), and the Regents introduced us to "Barbara-Ann" (#13, May 1961). The genre was sufficiently aged to have Little Caesar and the Romans ultimately pine "Those Oldies but Goodies (Remind Me of You)." Groups like the Four Seasons and even the Beach Boys upheld the tradition.

The doo-wop branch of rhythm and blues established vocal virtuosity and background harmonies as commercially viable elements in popular music. Having coexisted with classic rockers of the middle and late fifties, it too faded at decade's turn. Like classic rock,

doo-wop also had a major impact on music of the sixties; it provided the vocal foundation for Motown and, to a lesser extent, soul music. Doo-wop should be remembered as a highly accessible form of music, a style available to anyone willing to sing aloud with friends. Large numbers of urban youth tried it, enjoying varying degrees of success. Some even found the path to the neon lights on Broadway—which is where our next chapter begins.

# THE EARLY SIXTIES

*The Calm Before the Storm*

Chapter **6**



*The Beach Boys*

Many followers of rock 'n' roll history believe that the true spirit of the music died in the late fifties, and that the first few years of the sixties were filled with mechanized and bleached pap heralded by the arrival of the so-called “teen idols.”

—Alan Betrock, *Girl Groups: The Story of a Sound*

Those records had a Wagnerian power and intensity. Phil got so wrapped up in those recordings. Then everything got bigger, and bigger, and bigger until there was no more record. But he wanted to go further, get bigger and bigger, but there was no bigger.

—Ellie Greenwich, talking about Phil Spector

I hear the neon lights are bright on Broadway  
I hear that dreams come true there every day.

—“On Broadway,” Barry Mann, Cynthia Weil, Jerry Lieber, and Mike Stoller (1963)

**T**HE YEARS BETWEEN 1959 AND 1963 were a time of transition for popular music. Classic rock and roll and doo-wop rhythm and blues formulations had essentially faded from the scene. They were replaced on the popular charts by a variety of styles that had little in common besides the absence of a strong beat and a worldview and performance style that contained more clean teen romance and less sexuality. These newer pop styles ranged from the highly successful efforts of so-called teen idols and girl groups to newer strains of an emergent folk music, “ethnic” calypso and other pre-reggae Caribbean instrumentals (mostly featuring electric guitar), California-based surf sounds, and early successes of soul and Motown artists.

Powerful pressure from a combination of religious and secular leaders, governmental officials, and major-label interests within the music industry had combined to hasten the demise of fifties rock. The major record labels and their Los Angeles-based movie-industry counterparts (ABC-Paramount, MGM, and Capitol) had strong self-interest in seeing rock and roll and doo-wop fall—not illogical, given that they owned only a relatively small piece of that action. With the advent of less objectionable music, the majors once again had a chance to dominate the charts. Although the majors didn’t immediately regain control of popular music (however, they did garner a much larger piece of the pie), the process of creating and recording the product returned to a more familiar arrangement.

For a brief moment in the mid- and late 1950s, classic rockers had wrested artistic control away from the music-business establishment. They had written a majority of their

hits, cut them with their own bands, and were responsible for the overall artistic interpretation. However, by the early sixties, the “music establishment” had reasserted its control over the process. According to this new model, recording artists had relinquished their power and returned to the early 1950s role of song interpreters. The process now reverted to the pre-rock, assembly-line model, in which songs were crafted by office-based professionals, recorded by seasoned studio musicians, and produced by major-label or big independent producers.

The music of the teen idols was the most representative example of this turn away from classic rock. The performers, mostly cute and nattily attired young men, sang ersatz rock music that contained little or no beat, saccharine string arrangements, and a multitude of nonsexual, romantically safe messages. The epicenter of this sound was Philadelphia, where the big-three indies—Cameo-Parkway, Chancellor, and Swan—produced pop for new teen audiences. Cameo produced Bobby Rydell while Chancellor countered with Frankie Avalon and Fabian. Displaying varying degrees of vocal proficiency, these three idols courted audiences with a combined thirty-nine top-40 hits. Parkway’s major act was dance king Chubby Checker (Ernest Evans). His cover of Hank Ballard’s song “The Twist” created a national dance craze in the summer of 1960. Subsequently, Checker popularized a multitude of new dances, including the pony, the fly, the limbo rock, and the Freddie.

The cause was promoted by Philly TV personality Dick Clark. The now legendary Clark, whose after-school show *American Bandstand* was viewed nationally on the ABC network, became rock music’s most prominent cheerleader. America watched as popular music favorites lip-synched their hits while regular *Bandstand* dancers (some of whom even had their own fan clubs) strutted the latest steps. *Bandstand* sold America the well-dressed, well-behaved side of rock music. Clark was also deeply involved in the Philadelphia music business, having an interest in three record companies, music publishing firms, a management company, and a record-pressing plant.

The inside interest represented by Dick Clark caused some consternation, and in 1959 the U.S. House of Representatives Legislative Oversight Committee, which had been investigating cheating on TV quiz shows, turned its attention to pay-for-play practices on rock music radio. Payola, as it was called, had been commonplace—radio station program directors and DJs often supplemented their incomes with “consultant fees,” Christmas TVs, and musical credits on records (putting them in line for songwriting royalties). As former WABC DJ Cousin Brucie Morrow wrote, “‘Booze, broads, whatever you want’—this was a standard offer.”<sup>1</sup>

Convinced that radio stations played rock music only because they were paid to do so, congressional investigators held hearings to determine the truth. They found a practice that was common but not illegal at the time. Conflicts of interest such as Clark’s—he was known to have promoted artists that he managed, played songs that he carried publishing rights in, and played up record companies in which he owned stock—were nothing new. Clark admitted to having a personal interest in 27 percent of the records he

promoted on his show. ABC asked Clark to divest himself of his music-business holdings or quit the show. Clark chose to stay with the show, and in the process of cleaning up cleared tidy sums on his earlier investments (in one case more than \$31,000).

Whereas Clark was eventually congratulated by the investigating committee chairman—he was called “a fine young man”—others, like pioneer DJ Alan Freed, continued to be hounded. In 1960 Freed was charged with commercial bribery, to which he eventually pleaded guilty in court. The loyal defender of original rhythm and blues and rock’s most successful promoter, Freed was targeted again in March 1964, this time for 1957–1959 income tax evasion. Unable to find work and in financial distress, Freed died in January 1965.

Many other disc jockeys were called before the committee, but this did not impede the success of popular music. Teen idols, the early 1960s’ less rebellious version of rock music, continued their chart prosperity. Paul Anka, a talented Canadian who recorded for ABC-Paramount, also wrote hits for other artists (including “It Doesn’t Matter Anymore” for Buddy Holly). Others of the genre included Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton, Tommy Sands, and TV’s Edward “Kookie” Byrnes.

Female artists were also successful during this period. They were not usually categorized as teen idols, but their music followed the same pallid formula. Former Mickey Mouse Club Mouseketeer Annette Funicello recorded “Tall Paul” for the Disneyland label. Brenda Lee scored two #1s in 1960 with “I’m Sorry” and “I Want to Be Wanted.” Seventeen-year-old Leslie Gore told tales of heartbreak in the Quincy Jones–produced “It’s My Party” (as in, “and I’ll cry if I want to . . .”) and revenge in “Judy’s Turn to Cry.” Most popular was Connie Francis, who claimed thirty-five top-40 records between 1958 and 1964. Recorded for MGM, these hits included “Lipstick on Your Collar” (#5, 1959) and “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool” (#1, 1960).

In a sign of the times, the most prominent female artists of the period were known simply as the girl groups. These groups produced some of the most memorable and best-produced songs of the era. They include the Crystals (“He’s a Rebel” and “Da Doo Ron Ron [When He Walked Me Home]”), the Shirelles (“I Met Him on a Sunday” and “Will You Love Me Tomorrow”), the Chiffons (“One Fine Day”), the Ronettes (“Be My Baby” and “Walkin’ in the Rain”), the Shangri-Las (“Leader of the Pack” and “Walkin’ in the Sand”), the Cookies (“Chains” and “Don’t Say Nothin’ Bad about My Baby”), and many others.

Though the success of these groups increased both black and female prominence in popular music, the songwriting, production, and financial rewards still rested with the production companies and labels. As in the case of the teen idols, girl groups were simply song stylists. Some of the era’s most talented songwriting teams created the material, producers like Phil Spector directed production, and indies like Phillies, Red Bird, Scepter, and Dimension pressed the hits. Many of the genre’s creative forces were sequestered in office buildings near the corner of Fifty-second Street and Broadway in New York City. The Brill Building at 1619 Broadway listed 165 music businesses in its lobby di-

rectory. Across the street, 1650 Broadway housed the headquarters of Aldon Music and Scepter Records. On Seventh Avenue and Forty-eighth Street songwriters could get demos cut at Associated Studios. Songs were written, demoed, shopped, signed, and recorded within a few blocks.

From a creative standpoint, two players stand out: Phil Spector and Aldon Music. Spector, in addition to being a successful songwriter and producer, started a number of prosperous record companies. He is best known for his sonic creation known as the “wall of sound”—a layered production style heard on many of the era’s hits. His first hit, “To Know Him Is to Love Him” (#1, 1958), was written and recorded with his own group, the Teddy Bears, one month after high school graduation. At the age of nineteen, Spector moved back to New York from Los Angeles and wrote “Spanish Harlem” and “Stand by Me” for Ben E. King. Within four years, Spector was a millionaire, having produced hits by a multitude of artists, including the Crystals, Darlene Love, and the Ronettes.

The impact of Spector’s wall-of-sound production techniques on the industry was tremendous, and he was one of the early pioneers of multitrack recording. His multitracking called for use of a three-track tape machine and several instruments to a track. For instance, on track one, Spector would typically record three to five rhythm guitarists; two or three pianos; two electric basses; a horn section of two trumpets, two tenor saxophones, and two trombones; a drum kit; and additional percussion instruments. Track two contained all the vocals, and strings were recorded on track three. The three tracks would then be mixed down to a one-track (monophonic) final product. This “wall” of instrumentation was so steeped in reverberation that Spector once commented, “I want my records to sound like God hit the world and the world hit back.”

The second creative player was Aldon Music, which was formed in early 1958 by two musician-songwriters named Al Nevins and Don Kirshner. They employed a stable of rock music songwriters that crafted some of the era’s most memorable songs. Early arrivals Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield penned hits for Connie Francis, the Shirelles, and Sedaka himself. Carole King, who worked with husband Gerry Goffin, had a #1 hit (“Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” by the Shirelles) at age nineteen. The King-Goffin string of successes continued with “Take Good Care of My Baby” (Bobby Vee), “The Locomotion” (Little Eva, the couple’s babysitter at the time), “Up on the Roof” (the Drifters), “Chains” (the Cookies), “One Fine Day” (the Chiffons), and even “Pleasant Valley Sunday” by the made-for-TV quartet known as the Monkees.

Other successful songwriting teams of the era include two other couples who eventually married, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich as well as Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann, who wrote songs sometimes independently and sometimes as couples. Between them they wrote many big hits for the genre’s major groups: the Crystals, the Ronettes, the Dixie Cups, the Jelly Beans, Darlene Love, the Shangri-Las, the Righteous Brothers, and the explosive duo of Ike and Tina Turner. Eventually, Aldon was sold, and the youthful collective of songwriters disbanded. They moved on to write hits for other artists as the girl groups were swamped and then pushed aside by the incoming wave of the British invasion.

Because of the commercial success of the girl-group sound, female artists in general returned to prominence in popular music. This did not, however, change their financial or artistic status—women as a rule remained in their role of song interpreter and continued to be relatively low-paid performers. As Shangri-La drummer Joe Alexander describes it: “Nobody knew from royalties. It was just from doin’ what we were doin’. And, when it came right down to it, what else could we do?” Should a group have a million seller, at a 3–4 percent royalty rate, they were grossing \$30,000–40,000. Contracts specified percentages and costs for the manager, producer, studio, arrangers, musicians, and money lost on non-hit records. Thus, many individual members of the groups made very little money, even though they might have had a series of hit records. Ellie Greenwich’s perspective was different: “The girls gave and the girls took. . . . It was just fun, and better than their alternatives.”<sup>2</sup>

Other vocally oriented styles were also enjoying some chart success. Berry Gordy’s Motown label was developing its roster and producing the first hits by Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, the Marvelettes, and Mary Wells. Soul artists like Otis Redding followed Booker T. and the M.G.s to the Stax/Volt studios in Memphis as people began to climb aboard the “soul train.” Some Caribbean sounds became popular. Harry Belafonte’s calypso/Latin recordings of “Jamaica Farewell” and “Banana Boat Song” were followed by Jamaican Millie Small’s 1962 hit, “My Boy Lollipop.”

American folk music, having recovered from the McCarthy-era stigmatization as un-American, was now experiencing a revival. Traditionalists such as Joan Baez toured college campuses, and button-down groups like the Kingston Trio and the Highwaymen had refined top-40 folk hits with “Tom Dooley” and “Michael (Row Your Boat Ashore),” respectively. Another trio, Peter, Paul, and Mary, entered the charts with a tune called “Blowin’ in the Wind,” penned by the then unknown Bob Dylan. Guitar and banjo sales soared as folk music became another seminal style of sixties percolating pop.

On the West Coast, sun, sand, and suburban lifestyles were reflected in a style termed *surf music*. Its musical roots lay in guitar-oriented classic rock with a driving beat, but its worldview contained an affluent, white, suburban, male-dominated society preoccupied with the common adolescent concerns of girls, cars, and surfing. Early proponents were groups like Dick Dale and the Deltones (with their regional hit “Let’s Go Trippin’”) and the Surfaris. The duo of Jan and Dean covered “Barbara-Ann” and then recorded a string of hits, including the #1 “Surf City”—where one could find “two girls for every boy.”

The Beach Boys—a name foisted upon the group by a record company executive—were the most popular and talented of the genre. Sporting a lineup that included the three Wilson brothers, Brian, Dennis, and Carl, cousin Mike Love, and neighbor Al Jardine, this suburban Los Angeles combo created one of the few original sounds of the early 1960s that was derived from classic rock. Their vocals reflected an early obsession with the Four Freshmen, with tenor leads and close complex background harmonies.

Although he didn’t actually surf, Brian Wilson wrote or cowrote paeans to “surfer girls” and to just having “fun, fun, fun.” As he became more self-assured as a producer,

Brian created a layered production sound similar to that of his favorite producer, Phil Spector. All of this creativity and success initially flourished in a household that one friend described as “like walking into twelve soap operas.” Their father, Murray, was an overbearing manager who often hit his boys in the heat of an argument. Their Capitol Records liaison called Murray “a maniac.”<sup>3</sup>

The band overcame their turbulent personal history, though not without consequences. Brian eventually stopped touring, teetering on the brink of emotional instability. Dennis engaged in a variety of self-destructive behaviors for years before he finally drowned in 1983. Creatively, the Beach Boys rarely strayed from their initial formula. They transformed Chuck Berry’s “Sweet Little Sixteen” into “Surfin’ USA.” Their odes to local girls included “Surfer Girl,” “Help Me, Rhonda,” “California Girls,” and “Barbara-Ann.” However, this lighthearted mood was occasionally broken by the introspective and vulnerable Brian, as in the 1963 hit “In My Room.”

The critical high point of their career came in 1967, with the painstakingly layered “Good Vibrations.” It reportedly required six months, twenty recording sessions, four studios, and \$50,000 to create this single, a classic tribute to “good vibes.” The band has survived despite many personnel changes and the pendulum swings of Brian’s mental health. One of the few American groups to remember the classic rockers, they built on that foundation and continued to perform into the twenty-first century.



This period of transition—roughly the first half of the 1960s—contained a variety of new popular music styles. The music of the girl groups and the teen idols, though popular, left little legacy. Production techniques developed by the duo of Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller and the innovative Phil Spector, and the catalog left behind by Aldon Music’s master songwriters, not only have survived but also continue to have a significant impact. The “ethnic” rhythms of Caribbean music would eventually make their mark in the form of reggae and salsa. Folk music, soul, and Motown would withstand the British invasion and would even emerge in their own right later in the sixties. The Beach Boys and the rest were swamped by the first tidal wave of the British invasion, which carried a good many English groups to commercial victory and popular dominance on American shores. That story is next.



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# THE BEATLES

Because the World Is  
Round It Turns Me On

## Chapter 7



*The Beatles (Early)*

**“How do you find America?”**

**“Turn left at Greenland.”**

—Question and answer at Beatles press conference, Dublin, 1964

**There was more good than evil being a Beatle. But it was awful being on the front page of everyone’s life, every day.**

—George Harrison, 1980, quoted in *Rolling Stone*

**They [the Beatles] were doing things nobody was doing.**

—Bob Dylan, 1964

**Whatever wind was blowing at the time moved the Beatles, too. Maybe the Beatles were in the crow’s nest shouting “land ho” or something like that, but we were all in the same boat.**

—John Lennon, 1980, quoted in *Playboy*

**A**S THE LAST STRAINS OF CLASSIC ROCK rang through the American music scene, British youth across the Atlantic, who had been listening all along, became keepers of the beat. In homes and in dance halls, the music thrived. Eventually, a new music—a fusion of classic rock, rockabilly, blues, and pop—returned to the United States. It became the most commercially and critically successful genre of music in popular music history. Both the music and its transatlantic crossing were called the British invasion, and the band that led the charge was the Beatles.

The Beatles followed a road that was unlike any taken before. Their music and lyrics took off in uncharted directions and were closely followed by a procession of other musicians. Their impact on Western culture was enormous. Hair grew to the shoulder (and past), and a multitude of new cultural and political questions were asked and answered. The group’s massive commercial success rewrote the artist’s relationship with the record label and pointed the way to untold record-industry profitability.

The Beatles didn’t unilaterally cause these societal and music-industry changes. However, their massive commercial success, combined with the concurrent explosion in communication and marketing technologies, allowed them to transmit their musical, lyrical, and cultural messages to more people than ever before. And, because of the Beatles’ status as cultural deities, young people listened and, much of the time, believed.

There is little to indicate that, in the beginning, there was anything special about the four boys from Liverpool, a coastal city in western England. They were each born during World War II, and most of their childhoods reflected the turbulence of the war. John Lennon (born October 9, 1940) had a dad who deserted the family, and his mother, Julia,

gave up five-year-old John to her older sister, Mimi. Although raised in comfortable and loving surroundings, John carried scars from his abandonment, and his school years were characterized by an increasing propensity to find trouble. As the charismatic leader of his young cronies, he exercised his caustic, inventive, and quick wit on friends, enemies, teachers, and administrators alike.

Within a year of entering Quarry Bank High School in 1952, his beloved uncle George died, and his mother, Julia, became a more important part of his life. She and John exchanged regular visits. She taught him a few banjo chords, which he transposed to the guitar, and Julia's house became a refuge from his periodic fights with Aunt Mimi. John adopted his mom's mercurial philosophy of "live for the moment and let the rest take care of itself." As suddenly as their friendship blossomed it ended. On July 15, 1958, Julia was run down and killed by a drunken off-duty policeman.

Richard ("Ringo") Starkey Jr. (born July 7, 1940) began life under similar circumstances. Ringo's dad, Richard Sr., and his mom, Elsie, split up when Ringo was young. Where John's legacy was emotional turmoil, Ringo had to overcome poor health and impoverished surroundings. A burst appendix and pleurisy kept him in the hospital for three of his first fifteen years. Describing his neighborhood near the docks, Ringo replied, "There's a lot of tenements in the Dingle. A lot of people in little boxes all trying to get out." At the age of eighteen, while apprenticing as a fitter, Ringo was given his first regular set of drums. They became his ticket out of Dingle.

Jim McCartney, a cotton salesman, and his wife, Mary, a visiting nurse, had two sons, James Paul (born June 18, 1942) and Michael. Paul, having easily passed through his early school years, finally enrolled in the prestigious Liverpool Institute. When Paul was fourteen Mary McCartney died suddenly from cancer. Michael believes Paul turned to his guitar for solace: "It became an obsession. . . . It took over his whole life." While preparing in school for a career as an English teacher, Paul started slicking his hair back and dressing like a rocker. In the summer of 1956 he auditioned for a skiffle group called the Quarrymen, which was led by John Lennon.

The boyhood of George Harrison (born February 25, 1943) lacked the trauma of his Beatles compatriots. He was the youngest of four children and grew up in a close-knit family environment. Whereas John's classroom rebellion took the form of sharp-tongued boisterousness, George wore his long hair slicked back and dressed outrageously. Rebellion didn't stop George from entering Liverpool Institute, and he, too, pursued the guitar with a passion. With his mom's help George purchased a new electric guitar, and he soon formed his own group, the Rebels. He also started jamming with Paul McCartney, who rode the same bus to the institute.

In the summer of 1956 McCartney auditioned for the Quarrymen with the Eddie Cochran tune "Twenty Flight Rock" and his Little Richard imitation on "Long Tall Sally." The intoxicated sixteen-year-old Lennon didn't say much. A week later, because of his guitar proficiency, McCartney was invited to join the band. Sometime in 1958 George Harrison, who had been tagging along with the Quarrymen, was invited to

become a regular member. Although quite a bit younger than John—and slightly in awe of the elder leader—George knew more about the guitar than all the others.

The Quarrymen were originally an informal gathering of friends playing music and having a good time. By 1959 the lineup had solidified to include John, Paul, and George on guitar, with John's art college mate, Stu Sutcliffe, playing bass. A talented and respected art student, Sutcliffe had been coaxed by John to spend the sixty-five pounds that Sutcliffe had earned in a national painting competition to buy a bass guitar. Protesting that he had little musical talent, Stu was nevertheless installed as the regular bass player. He spent much of the next year with his back to the audience, doing his best to pick out the correct notes.

In 1960 the Quarrymen, an informal arrangement, ceased to exist; the Beatles, a “professional” rock and roll band, took their place. This process included an evolution in names, from the Moondogs (named after Alan Freed's *Moondog Rock and Roll House Party* radio show) to Long John and the Silver Beatles, to the Silver Beatles, and finally to the Beatles. The name was derived from their love affair with Buddy Holly's Crickets—thus the insect beetle—combined with the common name for rock music of the day, which was known as “beat” music.

Barely out of the garage, the band's early work was sporadic; they played art college dances, backed Johnny Gentle on a Scottish tour, accompanied Shirley the Stripper, and made some appearances at local clubs such as the Casbah. Then, in August 1960, the Beatles were sent by club manager Alan Williams to work at the Indra Club in Hamburg, Germany. At the last moment, Paul McCartney asked drummer Pete Best whether he still had his drums. Pete said he did, played a few tunes, and became the regular drummer.

The Beatles' four and a half months in Hamburg transformed the band in many ways. Required to play six to eight hours per night, their repertoire expanded considerably. Playing clubs located in “Reeperbahn,” Hamburg's red-light district, the boys were intimidated by their potentially dangerous audiences. Club owner Bruno Korschmeier implored them to “mak schau,” or make a show. Slowly, the group learned the skills befitting professional entertainers. The crowd enjoyed the beat, and John would occasionally regale them with his impressions and his costumes that utilized underpants and a toilet-seat necklace.

To a group of teenage rock and rollers—John, the oldest, was almost twenty—Hamburg was a garden of delights. In this and successive trips, the lads made friends with the working girls, created a new favorite breakfast (cornflakes and beer with a glass of milk on the side), and swallowed increasing quantities of “prellies,” a diet pill with remarkable stay-awake qualities. They also progressed in status from the Indra Club to the Kaiserkeller, the Top Ten Club, and finally the Star Club. Their accommodations progressed in kind, from a room behind the screen of a ramshackle movie house to barracks above the Top Ten Club.

Hamburg was the beginning of the end for Stu. At the Kaiserkeller he met and fell in love with an art student and photographer, Astrid Kirchherr. She redesigned the group's hair and took their picture on the rooftops of Hamburg. Stu left the band during the group's spring 1961 stay, married Astrid, and enrolled in art school. Rather than add another member to the group, Paul moved over to bass. On April 10, 1962, Stu Sutcliffe died of a brain hemorrhage in Hamburg. The next day, the Beatles arrived for a seven-week engagement.

Upon returning to England from Hamburg in December 1960, the Beatles sought to increase their local popularity by playing the Cavern Club. This former fruit-and-vegetable warehouse became the home of beat music in Liverpool, and the Beatles became its most famous resident band—they appeared there 292 times between March 1961 and August 1963. For all its notoriety, this basement club left much to be desired. Down seventeen steps, three rooms with vaulted ceilings and sawdust on the floors hosted lunchtime and evening crowds. When the audience danced, moisture would condense on the ceiling and rain on the floor.

During 1961 the Beatles developed a strong following in Liverpool and the surrounding environs. They also returned to Hamburg, where they recorded their first sides as a backing group (using the name the Beat Brothers) to British singer Tony Sheridan. During those sessions, which were produced by Polydor A&R (artist and repertoire) man Burt Kaempfert, the Beatles recorded two songs, the pop classic “Ain’t She Sweet,” sung by John, and the Harrison-Lennon instrumental “Cry for a Shadow.” Beatle legend has it that “My Bonnie,” a song from those sessions, was the catalyst for Brian Epstein to sign as the group's manager. Ostensibly, a young man named Raymond Jones walked into the North End Music Store (NEMS) branch at Whitechapel on October 28, 1961, and asked for “My Bonnie” by the Beatles. By coincidence, NEMS manager Brian Epstein was behind the counter. Unaware of the record or the band, Epstein promised to look into the matter. Nearly two weeks later Brian went to see a Beatles gig at the Cavern. In December he signed the group to a management contract.

A more likely scenario is that the record-customer inquiry alerted Epstein to the importance of the Beatles as an emerging local musical force. At the time, Epstein was intrigued by the local music scene. He even wrote a music review for *Mersey Beat*, a biweekly popular music newspaper started by art college student and Beatle friend Bill Harry. It seems highly unlikely that Epstein was not already aware of the Beatles; their picture and a story were on the front page of the July 20 issue of *Mersey Beat*; Epstein's reviews and numerous Beatles stories appeared concurrently in subsequent issues.

With Epstein aboard, the Beatles were beginning to build their version of “the team”—that group of talented, motivated professionals that surround most ultrasuccessful popular musicians. Epstein brought intelligence, upper-class taste, organizational skills, and money to the Beatles. Epstein's parents owned a large furniture-store chain that was headquartered in Liverpool. Brian had spent some time at England's Royal

Academy of Dramatic Arts and had parlayed NEMS record stores into one of the largest in northern England. He was ready for a new project, and the Beatles were it.

As a major retailer, Brian had some clout with the record companies. Decca Records agreed to tape a series of songs designed to demonstrate the talents and capabilities of the Beatles, and the band drove through the snow to London for a January 1, 1962, recording session. They were quite nervous but recorded three originals and a dozen pop and rock tunes, including “Besame Mucho,” “The Sheik of Araby,” “Till There Was You,” Chuck Berry’s “Memphis,” the Coasters tune “Searchin’,” and Phil Spector’s “To Know Her Is to Love Her.”

Decca A&R head Dick Rowe instead chose to sign a London group known as Brian Poole and the Tremeloes. Proximity and perhaps the knowledge that few successful groups came out of the provinces were the deciding factors, and Rowe was marked for life as the man who passed on the Beatles. Epstein made the rounds of the record labels; EMI, Pye, Philips, Columbia, and HMV were not interested in the band. Finally, George Martin, the head of Parlophone Records, expressed a slight interest in Paul’s and John’s singing and the band’s raw energy. Arrangements were made for an audition for Martin in June 1962 at EMI’s Abbey Road studios.

Martin signed the band to a recording contract in July and entered the inner circle. Martin’s background and talents were to later prove invaluable to the band’s professional growth and musical maturation. Trained as an oboist and arranger, Martin had started out as an assistant A&R man for Parlophone, EMI’s “junk label” subsidiary. At the age of twenty-nine, Martin had become the chief at a label that produced the assortment of nonmainstream acts assigned by the parent company as well as a series of successful comedy albums by Peter Sellers, Peter Ustinov, and Beyond the Fringe, featuring Peter Cook and Dudley Moore.

During the Beatles audition Martin mentioned in an aside to Epstein that, should the band record for his label, he would use a studio drummer. Commenting on Pete Best’s drumming, Martin concluded that “it isn’t good enough for what I want. It isn’t regular enough.” Some group members already had strong feelings about sacking Pete, and Martin’s opinion sealed the drummer’s fate. In August the band asked Epstein to fire Pete—a hypocritical procedure not unusual in the music business. After two years of paying his dues and on the eve of the group’s first big record deal, Pete was out and Ringo Starr was in. Ringo was available; acknowledged as a steady, driving, classic rock drummer; and already a Beatles crony from the Hamburg days.

Finally, on September 11, 1962, the Beatles assembled at Abbey Road studios for their first Parlophone recording session. The band and Martin felt some closeness right away. During a playback of their first take, Martin commented, “If there’s anything you don’t like, tell me, and we’ll try and do something about it.” When Harrison rejoined, “Well for a start, I don’t like your tie,” Martin learned about typical Beatle humor. The Beatles recorded Lennon-McCartney originals “Love Me Do” for the A side and “P.S. I Love You” for the B side. Leaving nothing to chance, Martin hired studio drummer Andy White to

join the session. Ringo played drums on one version of “Love Me Do,” tambourine on another (the U.S. and album cuts), and maracas on the second song.

“Love Me Do” was released on October 5, 1962, and to George Martin’s chagrin the tune was only lightly promoted by parent label EMI. Brian guaranteed the record’s availability in Liverpool, and he cleverly ensured it a position on the British Billboard charts by purchasing 10,000 copies for his stores. The Beatles continued to perform in northern England and returned to Hamburg in December, and “Love Me Do” reached a peak of #17. As their second single, “Please Please Me,” moved up the charts on its way to #1, the band recorded their first album (of the same name) in a single wearying thirteen-hour session. The album also went to #1 and remained there for thirty weeks.

The stage was set for the Beatles to explode on the British pop scene. Like Presley before them, they had “the moment” and they had “the team.” Their brand of safe, classic rock—derived rebellion appealed to both girls and boys; the girls found them cute enough to take home, and the boys identified with them as they might a popular athletic squad. The team consisted of the band (who filled the roles of singers, musicians, soloists, and talented songwriters); Brian Epstein as manager; Dick James, who headed their publishing firm, Northern Songs; George Martin as producer, musical consultant, and label head; and the clout of the EMI organization.

Till this point their live performances relied on a repertoire of covers that included classic rock numbers from Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Buddy Holly; rhythm and blues tunes from Ray Charles, Larry Williams, the Isley Brothers, and Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller; several Carl Perkins rockabilly songs; early 1960s American pop tunes from Carole King and Motown; and an assortment of British pop tunes. Now that the Beatles started recording, they determined to focus on mostly original material.

The Beatles shaped an original sound that fused elements from these musical roots. They adopted Holly’s two-guitar/bass/drums format, as well as his generally asexual adolescent vision of romance. Their dexterous manipulation of rock lyrics was reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley and Chuck Berry; Berry’s rhythm- and lead-guitar styles were also well represented. Vocal influences were Little Richard (a fusion of R&B and gospel energy and falsetto) and the Everly Brothers (close tenor harmonies and strummed acoustic rhythm guitar). George Harrison’s electric guitar solos were especially derivative of the rockabilly-classic rock stylings of guitarists Carl Perkins and Scotty Moore.

Throughout 1963 the Beatles’ popularity rose to such heights in England that by the fall audiences were totally out of control. This phenomenon was soon labeled Beatlemania. Starting out the year with extensive touring in England—first as an opening act and finally as the headliner—the Beatles ended it with national television spots and an invitation to appear in the 1963 Royal Variety Show concert. Upon returning from a Swedish tour for the Royal Command Performance, they were met by thousands of screaming fans at London’s Heathrow Airport, delaying the prime minister and forcing the band to fully realize the extent of their massive popularity.

Their Royal Variety Show performance gave them credibility with a broad cross section of the British population. John Lennon introduced “Twist and Shout” with a now legendary quip: “Those in the cheap seats can clap your hands. The rest of you can rattle your jewelry.” The Queen Mother’s response to this witty remark at royal expense? “They are so fresh and vital. I simply adore them.”<sup>1</sup> A band that was mobbed by teenage fans and praised by the Queen Mother could have few detractors. The Beatles were also heralded by most major British newspapers as good clean fun. Fleet Street (a synonym for the mainstream London press) went into a journalistic frenzy, falling over itself reporting the next chapter in the ongoing saga of Beatlemania.

Numerous explanations have been offered for the intensity of Beatlemania—a delirious response that surpassed the excitement generated by American pop idols Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley across the ocean. One has it that England, as with the United States, experienced a baby boom following World War II. The surge of popularity reflected an inordinately large number of teenagers coming of age. Another has it that the country was trying to discover a way to recover from some unusually tumultuous months, which included the Profumo affair (a sex scandal involving the highest government officials), the subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, and the Great Train Robbery. The happy-go-lucky Beatles were a positive diversion, an antidote.

In addition, some credit rests in Brian Epstein’s master plan. In the tradition of his pop predecessor Colonel Tom Parker, he scheduled important national TV exposure. The Beatles’ October 13 appearance on TV’s top-rated *Sunday Night at the Palladium* was seen by 15 million viewers and caused newspapers to report, incorrectly, that the band was forced to escape from 1,000 screaming fans following the show.

The Beatles, through the combination of musical ingenuity, sound management, Tory Party high jinks, and zealous promotion by the Fourth Estate, captured the imagination of a nation. By December 1, 1963, they had released their fifth single, “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” and second album, *With the Beatles*, and were turning their attention across the Atlantic, to the United States. Epstein had already tried twice to convince EMI subsidiary Capitol to release the early singles in the United States. With no British group having ever made a substantial inroad into the American market, Capitol declined. American indies V-J and Swan had Beatles releases in 1963; none climbed higher than #116 on the charts.

Pointing to the rising tide of Beatlemania, Epstein and Martin finally convinced EMI (and thus Capitol) to release Beatles records in the United States. The savvy record company allocated a phenomenal \$50,000 for a promotional budget. Major DJs in America received all the Beatles releases and an interview record and script, which gave listeners the appearance of live interview conditions. Capitol printed and distributed in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles 5 million bumper stickers with the phrase “The Beatles Are Coming” printed in black block letters on a simple white background. That winter, I can remember walking up Sixth Avenue in New York City and seeing the plywood walls sur-

rounding skyscraper construction sites plastered with these stickers. Not having heard the music, I assumed a new horror movie was about to hit town.

When Capitol released “I Want to Hold Your Hand” backed by “I Saw Her Standing There” on December 26, 1963, the American music-industry pump was fully primed. The following week the record entered the American charts at #83, moved the next week to #42, and climbed to #1 on January 15. The lads (as they came to be known), who were struggling through three weeks of lukewarm response in Paris, celebrated with Epstein (who even donned a chamber-pot fedora) and Martin. Besides the record company blitz, Brian had planned other appearances. He convinced Ed Sullivan—who had become stuck in the same October airport traffic jam as England’s prime minister—to book the Beatles on his top-rated variety show. They received headliner billing but little recompense (less than \$10,000 total) for three shows (two live, one taped). Also scheduled were three live concerts: one at the Washington Coliseum and two at New York’s Carnegie Hall.

The Beatles’ conquest of the United States began in earnest on February 7, 1964, when Pan Am flight 101 landed at New York’s Kennedy Airport and the “Fab Four” descended to American soil—to the screams of about 10,000 fans. The hysteria of Beatlemania was obvious from the start. Nearly 200 members of the press were poised to deliver judgment on the Fab Four, but the Beatles were their usual charming, irreverent selves. When asked about a movement in Detroit to stamp out the Beatles, Paul replied, “We’ve got a campaign of our own to stamp out Detroit.” When it got too noisy, John told everyone “Shurrup.” Everyone laughed.

Two days later, on February 9, 1964, a record 73 million TV viewers watched the Beatles perform five songs on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The next day’s press was awash with Beatles stories, and the follow-up February 16 Sullivan performance was watched by even more viewers. As Ringo was to later comment, it was just like before only ten times bigger. The conquest of the hearts and minds of America’s youth was made easier by the recent loss of the charismatic president, John F. Kennedy. The American press would, like the British press before it, be able to focus on something less weighty. The Beatles’ personalities, wit, and mostly upbeat, romance-oriented music offered positive distraction from the grief.

A country that had easily forgotten the beat, rebellion, and authentic emotionality of the classic rock era was now faced with four young Englishmen in their early twenties who dressed in collarless Pierre Cardin suits and bounced happily to the music while giving the occasional nod, wink, or head shake to the audience. For effect, the lads punctuated their performances with falsetto “ooohs” and breathy “yeah, yeah, yeahs.” Epstein had successfully transformed the four raw, sideburned, blue jeans-wearing rockers into a professional team of polished, nattily attired, and safely rebellious rock and roll artists.

Epstein had already planned the next move, and the band returned to England to appear in its first motion picture. *A Hard Day’s Night* (originally titled *Beatlemania*) broke from the typically fabricated rock-movie mold. The Beatles would be themselves. Liverpudlian

Alan Owen tagged along on tour, then wrote the script. Director Richard Lester sandwiched the six-week shoot—on the London streets, live in concert, and while touring by train—between the United States and pending dates in Europe, Asia, and Australia.

The Beatles life was chronicled as a circus, traveling to a show, evading crowds, playing a show, evading crowds, evading management, horsing around, and repeating the process the next day. Some movie critics dubbed them the Marx brothers of the sixties. The movie reinforced the already popular concept that the band did not consist of one leader and three followers, but rather as four separate people with individual personalities. John was the witty extrovert, Paul was cute and smart, George was quiet, and Ringo was the vulnerable, cuddly teddy bear. Female fans had four potential heartthrobs to choose from.

The thirteen Lennon-McCartney compositions on the British *A Hard Day's Night* made up their first all-original album. The strummed opening chord of the title cut introduced the world to the sound of George's twelve-string Rickenbacker guitar. Many later artists, including Roger McGuinn of the Byrds, became enamored with and adopted it. Upbeat tunes like "Can't Buy Me Love" and "Tell Me Why" continued in the "She Loves You" tradition, driven even harder by McCartney's pulsating bass lines. "If I Fell," a ballad written primarily by John, shows off an exotic introductory chord progression. "And I Love Her" was Paul's first in a series of outstanding romantic ballads, which would later include "Michelle," "Yesterday," and "Here, There, and Everywhere." While the thirteen-cut British version of *A Hard Day's Night* was available to most of the world's listeners, Americans received a very different twelve-cut album—the eight songs from the movie were joined by four George Martin-orchestrated instrumentals. Although this album was on the United Artists label, the practice of marketing different versions for Stateside consumption was indicative of a larger distortion of the Beatles' creative efforts. Each time Capitol released an early Beatles album, it removed a number of cuts to be used at some later date.

Most of Capitol's U.S. releases, therefore, contain only eleven or twelve songs. The unreleased songs, which were then released out of sequence and delayed up to six years, can be found on different compilation albums such as *Yesterday and Today* and *Hey Jude*. Thus, "Yesterday," which appeared in the summer of 1965 on the British version of *Help*, wasn't released on an album in the United States until the summer of 1966, on *Yesterday and Today*. Capitol also distorted the artistic balance of the Beatles' album releases. The original (British) *Revolver* contains five John Lennon compositions; the Capitol (American) *Revolver* contains only two. (The other three appear on the compilation LP *Yesterday and Today*.) Some critics became appalled at the Beatles' lack of artistic control over the product.

The Beatles extracted a modicum of revenge against Capitol's taking of these liberties when the lads submitted a somewhat grotesque photo for the cover art on *Yesterday and Today*. The Fab Four were pictured in butcher smocks and Liverpudlian smirks, with raw meat and decapitated baby doll parts strewn about. After American DJs railed against the

photo, Capitol spent \$200,000 to replace it with a different photo. Not surprisingly, most British and American releases, starting with the Capitol release of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, were identical.

Concert audiences all over the world received the same treatment. Between June and November 1964 the band played England, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and twenty-four North American cities. Unlike Elvis, who never performed in Europe, the Beatles purposely and personally spread their rock and roll message worldwide. The shows included local or regional stars as opening acts (in England that meant the Yardbirds and Freddie and the Dreamers, in the United States, Jackie De Shannon and the Righteous Brothers, the latter duo recorded by close Beatles friend Phil Spector).

One only has to listen to a tape of a concert to get a real feel for the experience. Intermittent screams throughout the warm-up acts would grow in intensity until a din had been achieved by the time the Beatles were introduced. From that point on, it was literally impossible to hear anything but the high-pitched wail of adolescent girls. For their own amusement, the band often toyed with the audience; a wink by Paul or off-hand remark by John sent sound meters off the scale.

Not that the Beatles were onstage for very long (in a format similar to the package shows of an earlier era, they played only briefly). Typically, on the U.S. leg of their tours they played twelve songs, lasting a total of approximately thirty-five minutes. The set normally opened with John singing "Twist and Shout" and closed with Paul's version of "Long Tall Sally." Sandwiched between were mostly original songs; George and Ringo each sang a song, and John and Paul split the rest.

This format remained constant throughout the rest of their touring career—a period lasting a scant two years. Their first major American tour started at the Cow Palace in San Francisco on August 19, 1964. Their last performance before a paying audience was at Candlestick Park in San Francisco on August 29, 1966. Between, the band played to audiences each year in England, on the Continent, and in North America. At New York's Shea Stadium in August 1965, they sold an unheard-of 55,000 tickets. In the summer of 1966, while on their final tour, they played Tokyo (where 3,000 security personnel kept order over 9,000 audience members), and Manila (where they barely escaped beatings administered by enraged Marcos officials and supporters).

Life on tour for the Beatles became an insane parody of the parody in *A Hard Day's Night*. Having finally attained deification, the Beatles themselves became mecca for fans. And as fans fought to be in their presence, the Beatles tried to keep from being despoiled. Days were spent holed up in hotel rooms surrounded by security officers, who tried to invent ingenious ways to transport the band from plane to hotel to show to plane.

Life on the road was not, however, without its rewards. Their choirboy image didn't impede their ability to pursue nightly dalliances with specially selected women. John described Beatles tours "like the Fellini movie *Satyricon*. . . . [Women were organized by] Derek and Neil, that was their job." To Ringo, touring was the best of times and the worst of times. The music and excitement were fun, but "it was like 24 hours without a break:

press people fighting to get into your hotel room, climbing 25 stories up drainpipes. It never stopped.”<sup>2</sup> In August 1966 it did. Although the decision was spontaneous, they had known for some time it would end soon. The Beatles heaved a collective sigh of relief and went on to pursue individual interests.

One of the reasons the band stopped touring was the difficulty in performing their increasingly complex music on stage. Their songs had changed since the days of *A Hard Day's Night*. Musically, the Beatles had embarked on a continual expansion of the boundaries of rock and roll. They had added new instruments to their recording ensemble, starting with the piano and then extending to flute (“Hide Your Love Away”), fuzz bass (“Think for Yourself”), sitar (“Norwegian Wood”), French horn (“For No One”), and strings (“Yesterday” and “Eleanor Rigby”). Soon other British and American groups were adopting similar instrumental flexibility in rock music recordings.

The Beatles didn't stop at creative use of instruments; various unidentifiable sounds began to creep onto their recordings. John Lennon recorded feedback on “I Feel Fine” in 1964, claiming to be the first modern musician to do so. *Revolver* contained some “scratching” and coughing on the “Taxman” introduction, and biographer Terence O'Grady describes “the most elaborate and well-developed use of electronic sounds and concrete musical effects” on “Tomorrow Never Knows.”<sup>3</sup> Returning home drunk one night, Lennon played a tape backward in his Kenwood music room and was delighted with the effect—so he introduced backward sounds on the 1966 single “Rain.” The Beatles continued to distance themselves from the I-IV-V blues-based harmonic progression, favoring instead a variety of chord changes and unusual rhythmic syncopations (“Good Day Sunshine” and “She Said She Said,” for example).

Beatles lyrics were undergoing a concurrent topical evolution—enhanced by friends and acquaintances, especially those from the arts, who were experimenting with alternative cultural lifestyles. Like their American counterparts, Britons pursued a philosophical and political examination of the status quo, also offering a solution that consisted of varying degrees of change or escape. The Beatles participated in these changes, reflecting those experiences musically with shifts in both form and subject. Bob Dylan was an early catalyst to these changes. In a legendary August 1964 meeting in the Beatles' suite at New York's Delmonico Hotel, Dylan offered them their first psychoactive experience—a marijuana cigarette. By 1965 their pot intake had increased to such an extent that during the filming of their second movie, *Help*, as Lennon pointed out, “We were smoking marijuana for breakfast. . . . Nobody could communicate with us because it was all glazed eyes and giggling all the time. In our own world.”<sup>4</sup> In 1967 they would call for its legalization.

Dylan not only contributed a chemically expanded consciousness but also pointed out the importance of using its vision in creating consequential lyrics. As Lennon once recalled: “I wasn't too keen on lyrics in those days. I didn't think they counted. Dylan used to say ‘Listen to the words, man.’ And I'd say ‘I don't listen to the words.’”<sup>5</sup> Within a year, Beatles lyrics took on a psychophilosophical cast. The *Help* soundtrack contained nuances of introspection and vulnerability. The title cut, which Lennon later described as

a depressed cry for assistance, portrays a psychological awareness rare for that era. “Hide Your Love Away” even sounded like Dylan.

A metamorphosis was taking place, transforming the band of happy-go-lucky pop musicians into cultural pied pipers. Rock music, a genre that not even its most serious proponents could call philosophically important, was acquiring a “serious” dimension. And the Beatles were among the pioneers. The turning point came with their December 1965 release of *Rubber Soul*. Gone were the formula songs of simple boy-girl romance; they were replaced by abstract references (“Norwegian Wood”), social commentary (“Nowhere Man”), a Lennon favorite about friendship and love (“In My Life”), and the weighty “The Word,” intoning the message, LOVE.

This experimental edge to Beatles music was enhanced by an incident that took place in the spring of 1965. While attending a dinner at the house of George’s dentist, John, George, and their wives were dosed with another form of consciousness expansion; unbeknownst to them the sugar cubes that were ceremoniously placed in their coffee were laced with the drug LSD-25. The four spent an evening traipsing around the elite rock clubs of London, vacillating between revelation and insanity. In a later interview Lennon recounted, “God, it was just terrifying, but it was fantastic.” George commented, “It was like opening the door. . . . [I]t just opened up this whole other consciousness.”<sup>6</sup> Lennon became a frequent tripper; the rest of the band joined in, though to a far lesser degree.

*Revolver*, released in August 1966, confirmed the shift toward more meaningful material. Focusing both inwardly on travails of the psyche and outwardly on contemporary society, this was hailed as music of inner and outer vision. On the album, George Harrison emerged as a major contributor—offering more classical Indian coloring from his sitar (“Love to You”) and the political commentary on the British revenue system (“Taxman”). In “Eleanor Rigby,” a song often dissected by high school English classes, Paul sings a poetic vision of loneliness and alienation to the accompaniment of a string octet. By the time of *Revolver*, except for the occasional collaboration for a song for Ringo, the Lennon-McCartney songwriting team had essentially dissolved. From that point forward, the vocalist generally wrote the entire song.

From the oblique “And Your Bird Can Sing” (which contains pre-Allman Brothers twin-guitar harmony lines) to the acid tale “She Said She Said,” Lennon’s material continued to reflect his personal pilgrimage past the outer boundaries of rock music. “Tomorrow Never Knows” was the most eclectic, combining a collage of odd syncopation, backward and forward music, and a message inspired by the philosophies contained in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. To an anguished sixties Lennon urged, “Turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream / It is not dying.” To ensure that no one took themselves too seriously, the British *Revolver* also contained the universal sing-along “Yellow Submarine.”

With the release of *Revolver* and their decision to stop touring, the band was faced with a unique quandary. Having recorded, toured, and filmed constantly since 1963, they now had newfound leisure time. This would not be the first time they were called

upon to find answers to new situations. To some situations, like the role of popular musician as cultural guru, the Beatles adjusted creatively. Other band situations, like the struggle for individual interests within a group context, would remain unresolved for some time.

The band dispersed in many directions. Paul McCartney decided to continue his arts education. The Beatle who had worked so closely with producer George Martin to add a string section here, and brass there, studied music theory and composition, wrote a film score, produced other artists, and went on safari in Africa.

George Harrison returned to India for two months to study philosophy and sitar with guru Ravi Shankar. His use of the instrument would prompt similar sounds by the Rolling Stones (“Paint It Black”), Traffic (“Paper Sun”), and Donovan (“Sunshine Superman”). Of equal importance, George had finally developed a strong public persona and an identifiable territory within the band. He became the rock aesthete, adding a sprinkling of Eastern spiritual flavor to popular music.

John Lennon was struggling; he would go through periods of creativity and then sink into depression. John spent days at a time staring at the television, bored and not knowing why. In November 1966 John was invited to attend an exhibition at the Indica Gallery, *Unfinished Paintings and Objects*, by Japanese artist Yoko Ono. Yoko handed John a card that said simply, “breathe.” John returned home to wife Cynthia and son Julian. It took eighteen months for the seed planted at the Indica to germinate and bear fruit. Meanwhile, the band regrouped in November for a unified effort to produce an album of artistic and social consequence.

*Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, designated by many rock critics and radio programmers as the greatest rock and roll album in history, took an unheard-of four months to produce at a cost of \$100,000. Band members cited it as a peak group effort inspired, in part, by the experiences of Paul’s trip to the West Coast of the United States. Alluding to America’s alternative culture boom, John once stated, “People were no longer the Beatles or the Crickets—they were suddenly Fred and His Incredible Shriveling Grateful Airplane.” Paradoxically, this “decisive moment in the history of Western civilization,” as sage Kenneth Tynan dubs *Sgt. Pepper’s*, was produced not near San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury district, but at EMI’s Abbey Road studios in London.<sup>7</sup>

Aptly termed a hallucinatory cabaret revue by Beatleologist Nicholas Schaffner, the album is suggestive of a live concert—crowd noises and the introductory title cut are followed by a full complement of songs, a final Sgt. Pepper’s refrain, and the encore, or epilogue, “A Day in the Life.” The album is a collage, each song presenting, in form and content, innovative representations of some of the era’s social and artistic concerns. In “Strawberry Fields” and “Penny Lane,” originally intended as part of the album, John and Paul, respectively, return to childhood haunts and memories. McCartney explores the lack of generational communication in “She’s Leaving Home.” Drawing from the images of Lewis Carroll and the dreams of son Julian, John paints pictures of “plasticine porters . . . looking-glass ties . . . and the girl with kaleidoscope eyes” in “Lucy in the Sky with

Diamonds.” John’s clever acronym notwithstanding, he always denied the song was inspired by LSD.

The musical innovations were striking. The Beatles used the technology of the recording studio as if it were another instrument—another instance where the invaluable contributions of producer-arranger George Martin were evident. On “Strawberry Fields,” Lennon recorded two versions of the song, using different keys and tempos. Deciding that he wanted the beginning of one version and the end of the other, John asked Martin to meld them together. The ingenious use of a variable-speed tape recorder accomplished the task. Typically, numerous Beatles musical innovations relied upon the flexibility and inventiveness of producer Martin.

But Martin contributed even more to *Sgt. Pepper’s*. At John’s behest, the producer contracted with forty-two classical musicians to provide an orchestral transition between the two sections of “A Day in the Life.” Martin then wrote scores for each of the instruments, climbing chromatically from the lower reaches of each instrument’s range to a higher note in an E-major chord. The effect of this collaborative effort was a powerful tension-producing crescendo to the album.

Other Martin contributions included the Eastern-sounding score written to accompany Harrison’s Indian musicians on “Within You, Without You”; the Grammy Award-winning chicken cluck-to-guitar note transition at the end of Lennon’s ode to Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, “Good Morning”; and the backward-playing, spliced-together strips of organ music appearing on John’s “For the Benefit of Mr. Kite,” similar to the classical “music concrete” style. All of this was fashioned with the elementary technology of four-track recording. By dubbing from one machine to another Martin was able to utilize nine tracks. This manipulation of the studio technology transported the Beatles light-years ahead of contemporaries.

The innovative package was wrapped in a novel album cover, and the lyrics were printed on the back of the album sleeve. On the front cover art the band pictured a mixture of boyhood heroes, cult figures, and persons whose names had a creative ring to them. Comedians (W. C. Fields, Laurel and Hardy, and Lenny Bruce), gurus (Karl Marx, C. J. Jung, Einstein, and Huxley), artists (Stockhausen, Beardsley, William S. Burroughs, and G. B. Shaw), and buddies like Dylan, Stu Sutcliffe, and the Rolling Stones populated the picture collage just above the marijuana garden (missed by EMI executives). The Beatles’ creativity had spread even to the album art.

Having been showered with critical praise for *Sgt. Pepper’s*, the Beatles turned their attention in August 1967 to spiritual growth and the transcendental meditation (TM) of the maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The Indian guru promised that if one practiced TM for fifteen to twenty minutes twice per day one could escape from the stress of everyday life—a process that could lead to a state of pure consciousness. During one weekend in August the band traveled to Wales to attend a workshop with the maharishi.

While the Beatles sought spiritual regeneration, an event took place that foretold the band’s demise. On Saturday night, Brian Epstein took some Carbitrol, a sleeping

bromide, and never woke up. Those who interpreted his death as a suicide could point to many reasons for his anguish. Epstein's contract with the band would expire in a few months, and his leadership role, once the band stopped touring and needed no promotion, had diminished severely. He wondered whether his unswerving loyalty would be enough to ensure renewal of his contract. He had also previously attempted suicide. Finally, Epstein's homosexuality and his choice to lead a turbulent, physically damaging lifestyle had caused him grief and turmoil in an era that lacked understanding and acceptance in such matters.

The coroner's inquest handed down a finding of accidental death due to incautious self-overdoses; toxicity built up from three days of use caused a drowsy Epstein to take a little too much. There were also suggestions of a murder contract taken out on behalf of American businessmen slighted in negotiations for a licensing deal for Beatles paraphernalia. Whatever the cause, Epstein's absence became a formidable problem. Without an unswervingly loyal and competent business representative, the Beatles' business situation would destabilize, and the band would eventually become engulfed in controversy surrounding their business dealings. Brian Epstein's death was the first step in this deterioration.

The significance of this event was probably lost on the Beatles at the time. Told by the maharishi that this was simply a matter of the flesh, they continued to pursue their career, with Paul attempting to pick up the organizational slack. "Magical Mystery Tour" had been written for the *Sgt. Pepper's* sessions but had been rejected for the album. Paul suggested a tour of their own, patterned after the bus-tripping odyssey of San Francisco-based Ken Kesey and his band of Merry Pranksters (chronicled in Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*). The Beatles version was a modern touring coach adorned in Day-Glo paint.

In September and October the Beatles, accompanied by more than forty actors, midgets, and relatives and a film crew—collectively described in one publication as a bunch of weirdos—spontaneously arrived in southern England without script, director, or direction.<sup>8</sup> Although the score contained several well-received numbers (John's Lewis Carroll-inspired "I Am The Walrus," Paul's philosophical paradox "Fool on the Hill," and the hard-driving title cut), many reviewers considered the film to be a self-indulgent bomb. The scathing critical reaction to the December 26 showing appears to have been, in part, a zealous bombardment of a heretofore untouchable target. Neil Aspinall (their road manager) was later to comment that had Epstein been alive, the tour would not have been such a disorganized disaster, nor would he have allowed the release of such a poor-quality product.

In another flirtation with TM, the maharishi welcomed the Beatles to the mountains northwest of New Delhi, India, in mid-February 1968. At his Rishikesh Ashram (spiritual retreat), the entourage set about to meditate, sightsee, and write songs. Ringo and wife Maureen left after two weeks, citing missed children and spicy food. Paul and girlfriend Jane Asher had enough after two months. George and John returned to England disillu-



*The Beatles (Late)*

sioned by the maharishi's apparent interest in self-promotion and his alleged dalliance with a Swedish airline stewardess. Paul commented, "We thought there was more to him than there was. He's human." In an allusion to the maharishi, in "Sexie Sadie" John was to record, "Sexie Sadie, what have you done / You made a fool of everyone."

Upon their return to the United Kingdom the band turned to business. They had started an umbrella firm called Apple in April 1967, designed to handle the Beatles' marketing business. The band set about consolidating various business ideas under Apple Corps, Ltd., Apple Electronics (established to market state-of-the-art technology), Apple Retail (established as a boutique to sell designer goods), and Apple Publishing (which actually already existed). With a \$2 million budget earmarked for Apple, rather than the tax collector, Apple Records and Apple Films rounded out the roster. Apple headquarters moved to a white Georgian town house located on an exclusive block at 3 Saville Row, London.

In May 1968, while aboard a Chinese junk in New York Harbor, John and Paul held an Apple press conference. Included was an appeal to talented, unknown artists to cease prostrating themselves before the altars of record companies and to send a tape and picture to Apple. Apple headquarters, of course, received an avalanche of every sort of "art" imaginable. At a press party a few days later, rock and roll "girlfriend" and photographer

Linda Eastman managed to slip her phone number to Paul. He called her that night. The next day, Linda accompanied Paul and John to the airport.

Back in England, John packed wife Cynthia off to vacation in Greece and rang up his longtime friend Pete Shotten. He then rang up Yoko Ono. John had become increasingly tantalized by this kindred spirit; Yoko was blazing a similar trail at the outer fringes of her own field. That evening he shared his experimental tapes with her, music the Beatles would find hard to accept. At dawn, they made love. When Cynthia returned a few days later she was greeted in the kitchen by John and Yoko, who were wearing bathrobes. In November 1968 Cynthia was granted a divorce on the grounds of John's adultery.

John's traditional "chauvinist" Liverpoolian upbringing was sorely tested by his infatuation with Yoko. "I just realized that she knew everything I knew and more probably, and that it was coming out of a woman's head. . . . It was like . . . exactly the same relationship as any mate in Liverpool you'd ever had. But you could go to bed with it, and it could stroke your head when you felt tired or sick or depressed."<sup>9</sup> They became inseparable, moved into an apartment in London, and began to collaborate on musical and artistic projects. Those who later blamed Yoko for the breakup of the Beatles appear to have minimized John's avant-garde personal and artistic propensities, his marital boredom, and the experiences and education that Yoko had to offer.

The Beatles wrote thirty-four songs during their Indian pilgrimage, and these provided the basis for the band's next foray into the recording studio. The thirty songs that compose *The Beatles* were recorded between May and October 1968; the two-disc set is nicknamed the *White Album* because of its stark white exterior. Whereas *Sgt. Pepper's* had reflected a sense of teamwork—virtuosic performances by one Beatle on another's song and dialogue between members on song structure and arrangements—*The Beatles* reflected a growing gulf between John and Paul as personal and artistic interests headed in divergent directions. In an inflammatory *Rolling Stone* interview in 1971, Lennon commented, "It was just me and a backing group, Paul and a backing group, and I enjoyed it. We broke up then."

The individualized efforts produced an album that displayed a broad stylistic diversity. Numerous styles were represented: the simple beauty of John's folk memorial to his mother and Yoko, "Julia," and Paul's visionary ballad "Blackbird"; the raucousness of Paul's "Helter Skelter" and "Birthday" and John's "Yer Blues"; the Berry-style rock of McCartney's "Back in the USSR"; the Caribbean-flavored "Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da"; and songs reminiscent of vaudeville, country music, and doo-wop. George's songs finally began to receive critical acclaim, especially "Piggies," his swipe at the establishment, and "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," with a guitar solo by George's good friend Eric Clapton. Ringo, the drummer who had once almost emigrated to Texas to become a country musician, sang his first original composition, the down-home "Don't Pass Me By."

This album dispels the notion that Paul was simply a purveyor of unidimensional, formulaic pop love songs—most of the driving rock and roll numbers are his compositions. Ringo also had to contend with criticism. Rock drumming styles had changed

drastically in the past five years, departing from the metronomic, simple-fill classic rock approach toward the more complex and fill-dominated styles of Keith Moon (the Who), Ginger Baker (Cream), and Mitch Mitchell (the Jimi Hendrix Experience). In comparison to this hard-edged, technically demanding approach, Ringo's sparse, straightforward drumming was seen as simplistic, even bordering on incompetent.

The pressure became so great that during one of the sessions Ringo walked out on the band. One week later he was welcomed back to flowers strewn over his drums and a vote of confidence from the other band members. It is easy to see why Ringo and, at times, each of the other members weren't feeling needed. As John observed about "Why Don't We Do It in the Road," "[Paul] recorded it by himself in another room. That's how it was getting in those days. We came in and he'd made the whole record."<sup>10</sup> Even with this individualistic approach to recording—which was duplicated by other band members—*The Beatles* was released in November 1968 and became the fastest-selling album in history.

Dissonance was replacing harmony in the band's lives. It was not simply different interests, such as Paul's now flowering relationship with Linda or John's more flamboyant partnership with Yoko. It wasn't only the differing musical directions, which precluded a teamwork approach to their music. The bottom line was getting in the way; enormous business problems were beginning to surface and lead to conflict. They would eventually provide the most important tangible reason for the band's demise.

The Beatles controlled neither their management company, Nemporor Holdings (also known as NEMS) nor their publishing company, Northern Songs. In earlier years this wasn't considered problematic; the controlling interest in each company rested in sympathetic hands. In 1968 Clive Epstein, Brian's brother and successor at NEMS, was proposing its sale to an aggressive investment firm, Triumph Investment Trust. This sale would gain Triumph NEMS's 25 percent share of Beatles royalties. Paul, sensing the Beatles' lack of business acumen, called upon the well-respected New York copyright attorney (and future father-in-law) Lee Eastman to help the Beatles purchase NEMS themselves. In a move that proved disastrous, Eastman sent Linda's brother, John, to negotiate. Clive Epstein later commented, "[John Eastman] loaded the offer with so many conditions and warranties that he ended up talking himself out of the deal. In my opinion, he was a little too young to be negotiating at that level."<sup>11</sup>

In a drama worthy of a daytime TV soap opera, the negotiations were further complicated by the arrival of Allen Klein, former Rolling Stones manager. With a reputation as a vicious infighter during record contract negotiations, Klein approached John with an offer. Punctuating his detailed account of John's finances with John's own song lyrics, Klein guaranteed he would acquire NEMS for the Beatles without cost. Lennon felt a certain affinity toward this slightly pudgy accountant, who had lost his mother and spent part of his childhood in an orphanage. Whereas the Eastmans were high-society types, Klein was an epithet-flinging "street-fighting man." John, George, and Ringo lined up behind Klein; Paul stayed with Lee Eastman. NEMS was eventually lost, and the finger-pointing started.

The next round featured Northern Songs, the publishing firm originated for the purpose of collecting Beatles song royalties and finding other artists to record Beatles material. Former singer Dick James (who recorded the *Robin Hood* TV show theme) and Brian Epstein began Northern Songs in 1963. In early 1969, fearful of the Beatles' increasingly entangled business affairs, James secretly sold more than 31 percent to entertainment mogul Sir Lew Grade. John discovered this by reading about it in a newspaper; Paul learned about it during his honeymoon in the United States. Thus, for the second time in recent history, an important part of the Beatles' business empire had been sold to the business establishment. After months of internal wrangling and negotiations, the Beatles' 30 percent share of Northern Songs proved insufficient to stop Grade's company, ATV, from gaining decisive control of Northern Songs.

In the midst of this turmoil, Paul once more provided the impetus for a team effort. On January 2, 1969, at Paul's prodding, the band repaired to a soundstage at Twickenham Film Studios, where they were filmed recording an album. Dubbed the "Get Back" sessions, the Beatles played all or part of hundreds of songs, some even dating back to their Hamburg days. The eclectic mix included classic rockers like Domino's "Whole Lotta Loving," Holly's "It's So Easy," and Guy Mitchell's "Singin' the Blues"; music from the early 1960s such as Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," the Drifters' "Save the Last Dance for Me," and the Crystals' "Da Doo Ron Ron (When He Walked Me Home)"; and contemporary tunes like Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart" and Jimi Hendrix's "All Along the Watchtower."

Some sessions began at eight in the morning, definitely not a good time for nocturnal rock musicians, and McCartney's calls for discipline and organization were resented by other band members. The soundstage was cold and drafty, the emotional environment tense. George, after particularly strong prodding from Paul about a guitar solo, became the second Beatle to temporarily quit the band. He reappeared at the next regularly scheduled Beatles business meeting. Yoko's presence at the sessions was also an irritant. Never one to stifle artistic suggestions, Yoko's attempts to become a functioning member of the world's most exclusive boys' club—a pursuit that had dated back to the *White Album* sessions—only worsened the situation. The final product, *Let It Be* (the movie soundtrack album), included an old Quarrymen chestnut, "One after 909," a second version of John's "Across the Universe," the classic title cut, and Paul's intended follow-up to "Yesterday," the ballad "Long and Winding Road."

Then one day the band, along with keyboard player Billy Preston, took to the roof of their Apple headquarters, set up their equipment, and played five songs for the cameras. To the delight of the assembled Apple staff and a small crowd that listened from the street, the Beatles played what proved to be their last live performance together. Even though the band had recorded hundreds of numbers, neither the group, producer Martin, nor engineer Glyn Johns considered the tunes worthy of further consideration. They were stored away and forgotten as the band became engrossed in the aforementioned business squabbles.

The “Get Back” tapes followed their own odyssey. With the consent of the band, the recordings were offered to producer Phil Spector by Allen Klein in the hopes that he might salvage an album of songs for the movie soundtrack. Spector sequestered himself in California; added his usual wall-of-sound complement of strings, percussion, and background vocals to a number of tracks; and sent a test pressing to each band member. In a sequence of events still cloaked in controversy, Paul claims to have been stifled in his attempts to remove the grandiose orchestration from “Long and Winding Road.” In May 1970, one month after the Beatles breakup, *Let It Be* was released. It was even less of a group effort than the *White Album*, was not produced by George Martin, and was not polished by the band—questionably a Beatles album at all.

Soon after the “Get Back” sessions, two Beatles married their respective lovers. On March 12, 1969, Paul married Linda Eastman in London. Numerous female fans, including the group that camped each night outside his home, mourned the “passing” of the Beatles’ holdout bachelor. On March 20, 1969, John married Yoko in a quiet ceremony at Gibraltar, attended by Apple chief Peter Brown. Few people found this union acceptable; the era’s racism and the couple’s avant-garde antics did not endear them to many. For their honeymoon, John and Yoko arrived at the Amsterdam Hilton’s presidential suite to begin their “bed-in” for peace. A dialogue raged in the press as to whether these symbolic efforts were at all effective. No one accused the Lennons of having a realistic assessment of effective political organizing or of the efficient use of their power and money. To their credit, they did speak their minds.

In a strange turn of events given this tumultuous atmosphere, the Beatles returned to their recording home in Abbey Road’s newly refurbished sixteen-track Studio B to collaborate for the last time on record. Recorded in the spring and summer of 1969, *Abbey Road* proved to be one of the finest technological accomplishments of the decade. Although some of the instrumental timbres and equalization settings today sound archaic, the polish and crispness, forged by Martin and engineer Geoff Emerick, come close to contemporary standards. Although Lennon described the material, like that on *Sgt. Pepper’s*, as a group of unfinished songs, the variety and quality of tunes exhibited by the primary songwriters (John, Paul, George) were well received. Most important, the band played at their motivated, musically mature best. Paul’s bass playing exhibited a tasteful choice of melodic passages, adding yet another dimension to what had historically been a more rhythmically oriented style. In 1980 Lennon stated that “Paul was one of the most innovative bass players . . . and half the stuff that’s going on now is directly ripped off from his Beatles period.”<sup>12</sup>

George’s songs were singled out for praise. “Something,” which was called by none other than Frank Sinatra the best love song in the past fifty years, exhibited newly developing teamwork between Harrison and Martin. The tune’s guitar solo was, not surprisingly, quite similar in tone and melody to Clapton’s *White Album* cameo. It also was Harrison’s first A-side Beatles single release, a fact that only slightly mollified his long-simmering resentment on the subject. “Here Comes the Sun,” Harrison’s other contribution, has turned

into one of those shared-experience songs—on a hypothetical day, when the sun breaks through the cloud cover, one can imagine people the world over beginning to hum, “Here comes the sun, Da-da, Da-da.”

Along with Lennon’s stream-of-consciousness powerhouse “Come Together,” side one contained the two romantic screamers, Paul’s “Oh, Darling” and John’s weighty, repetitive “I Want You (She’s So Heavy).” On side two, John’s often-overlooked cosmic reminder “Because” was followed by eight song fragments linked by musical transitions. Here we are introduced to Lennon’s tongue-in-cheek characters “The Sun King,” “Mean Mr. Mustard,” and “Polythene Pam.”

The album concluded with four sections that, in the light of subsequent events, proved to be their recorded swan song. The musical interlude after “Carry That Weight” contains Ringo’s first and only drum solo. Considering the previous discussion of Ringo’s shaky reputation, this simplistic solo would appear to have been a courageous undertaking. Then, reverting to the Silver Beatles’ three-guitar lineup of the late fifties, George, Paul, and John alternate two-bar guitar solos for eighteen measures.

Like a musical prophet, Paul intones the band’s final message to the congregation: “And in the end / The love you take, is equal to the love you make.” It is unclear as to whether the Beatles realized this would be their final message to the world, but it certainly reads as such. And to remind listeners that the band should never be taken too seriously, Paul inserted an irreverent, folk-style fragment, “Her Majesty,” just as the vinyl grooves were about to end. Although the album would be released out of creative sequence, appearing before the compilation *Hey Jude* and *Let It Be*, this was their last collective effort.

*Abbey Road* was released in late September (in the United Kingdom) and sold phenomenally well, but the unity forged in the studio didn’t last. Returning from his appearance with the Plastic Ono Band (which included Lennon, Yoko, drummer Alan White, Hamburg pal Klaus Voorman on bass, and Eric Clapton) at September’s Toronto Rock and Roll Revival show, John communicated his desire to leave the Beatles. Having already experienced the exhilaration of recording three albums independent of the band and performing live with Yoko, Lennon no longer wanted to be saddled with the outdated Beatles format. Allen Klein and Paul pointed out the potentially disastrous economic ramifications this announcement would have on Klein’s ongoing royalty negotiations with Capitol. John kept quiet and Klein closed the deal, but the band was all but formally dead.

In the ensuing six months tension abounded. John and Paul barely talked. Phil Spector worked on the “Get Back” tapes. Ringo recorded his solo album of timeless pop favorites, *Sentimental Journey*. And Paul single-handedly recorded his first solo effort, *McCartney*. Paul’s requested April release date was vetoed by Klein and the rest of the band, fearing a conflict with *Let It Be*. Although he eventually won that argument, it was obvious to McCartney what others had felt for a long time: The Beatles were dead. On April 10, 1970, Paul’s departure from the band was made public.

In a strategy he was later to regret, Paul included in the British *McCartney* release an insert containing a hypothetical interview with the artist. When asked about the break, he cited “personal differences, musical differences, business differences, but most of all because I have a better time with my family.” Paul described the feel of the album as “Home. Family. Love.” And he included snide swipes at the rest of the band. The public blamed Paul for the breakup of the world’s most successful rock and roll band. John was furious at McCartney’s self-serving tactics, considering the pressure Paul had exerted on him to stay with the Beatles just six months earlier. It took John years to get over his anger.

For the next few years, John and Paul traded barbs in word and song. Yet each Beatle remained a prolific artist. John went through primal therapy, freeing his feelings of love, fear, and pain—all of which he revealed on record with a unique honesty and forthrightness. He continued to plumb the boundaries of his genre, creating both mainstream and avant-garde music. He later pointed to predecessors such as Vincent van Gogh, Lewis Carroll, and Dylan Thomas and stated, “Surrealism to me is reality. Psychedelic vision to me is reality and always was.” Yet his eclecticism was tempered with spiritualism. In reference to “Imagine,” he commented, “It is the concept of positive prayer. . . . If you can imagine a world at peace then it can be true.”<sup>13</sup>

Lennon’s odyssey took him through a burst of creativity in the early 1970s, a lost weekend that turned into a year (including a separation from Yoko), an attempt by the United States to deport him because of his political activity, the birth of son Sean, and five years as a househusband. In 1980 John and Yoko returned to music, releasing *Double Fantasy* and the single “(Just Like) Starting Over.” On December, 8, 1980, John Lennon was assassinated by a crazed fan at the doorway to his New York apartment building.

Paul, stung by the criticism surrounding the breakup as well as his first two albums, decided to return to the simple life of a rock and roller. Forming the band Wings with a guitarist, drummer, and neophyte Linda McCartney on keyboards, he set off to tour the English countryside in a van. McCartney and Wings achieved consistent popular success with three #1 Capitol albums from 1975 to 1976. In 1970 Paul instituted the lawsuit he would eventually win, an attempt to extricate himself from the Beatles partnership and the control of Allen Klein. As the suit dragged on, dirty laundry was aired and Paul was again painted as the Beatle killer. McCartney continues to create, and through purchases of the Holly song catalog and other significant publishing properties he has solidified his position as an astute businessman.

George continued on a roll following the band’s demise. His album *All Things Must Pass* went to #1 and was critically well received. On August 1, 1971, George produced the Concert for Bangladesh at New York’s Madison Square Garden. Dedicated to the relief effort for the victims of Pakistan’s civil war, the group of friends Harrison collected for the all-star show included Ravi Shankar, Ringo, Leon Russell, Eric Clapton, and Bob Dylan. George’s reputation for Beatlelike idealism remained intact, and he continued to release albums through the eighties. He died of cancer on November 30, 2004.

Ringo continued both his recording career and followed up on his interest in acting. Some albums were more popular than others; none approached the critical acclaim given to the Beatles.



The band that had come together in Hamburg in 1960 ended acrimoniously ten years later. During this period, rock music evolved from its roots in the classic rock era to the golden age of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Beatles explored the creative cutting edge, becoming major catalysts in rock music's maturation. They made important musical innovations and helped reshape the record industry. The themes and ideas contained in their songs reflected the consciousness not only of individual band members but also of the growing counterculture of the era. The Beatles' commercial success ensured the distribution of these ideas to the largest possible audience.

Whereas most bands strive for one unique musical idea, the Beatles developed many, consistently rewriting rock's musical boundaries. Their material contained increasing harmonic and rhythmic complexity, more and different instrumentation (sitar, orchestra, piccolo, trumpet, and so on), a highly advanced understanding and use of studio technology, and the ability to make their songs sound as varied as are the styles of Chuck Berry and Ravi Shankar. Other musicians listened to these innovations and tried for themselves.

The Beatles also helped transform the record industry. What had started in the teen idol era as pop music written in office buildings by Aldon songwriters ended with rock and roll stars as performers, songwriters, producers, and businessmen. The Beatles were dominant artistic forces in a record industry that almost tripled its gross sales between 1960 (\$600 million) and 1970 (\$1.66 billion). The rock album replaced the single as the medium of exchange as profits skyrocketed. Whereas albums had previously been compilations of a few hit singles and filler cuts, British Beatles albums contained fourteen cuts of similar quality. This encouraged other artists to do the same.

The group's phenomenal record sales were a catalyst for many other changes. Artists, the product's creators, gained power at the bargaining table. The Beatles' record royalty rates rose from 3 percent in 1962 to 17.5 percent by 1970. Record companies, envisioning enormous profits to be made by the sales of popular music, rushed to sign almost any band with a British accent. At era's end, record sales had surpassed all other areas of entertainment, including movies and sports.

The Beatles, like Elvis, were part of a moment. Their popularity coincided with the vast expansion of communications technology. The "All You Need Is Love" broadcast was seen by 200 million people worldwide. Beatlemania thrived on six continents. Due to the band's deification, as well as its momentous impact on British and American culture, the subsequent marketing and proliferation of Western popular culture throughout the world made the Beatles the most potent musical force in history.

The Beatles proved once again a fitting axiom: You can't remove rock music from its societal context. Young people in the sixties, building on rebellious behavior of the previous decade, created their own lifestyle, challenged the prevailing morality, and initiated an era of creativity and experimentation. The Beatles concurrently drew from a classic rock foundation and blazed a trail that continuously expanded the boundaries of rock music. Their creative integrity, idealism, and spontaneity posed the challenge to leading critics—to evaluate rock music's form and content seriously. The Beatles enabled the discussion of rock and roll as art. They also taught a lot of people to sing "yeah, yeah, yeah." In Western popular culture's journey through the sixties, the Beatles were in the crow's nest, calling "Land ho!"



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# THE ROLLING STONES

It's Only Rock and Roll but I Like It

Chapter

# 8



*The Rolling Stones*

“Are the Stones more satisfied today?”

“Sexually, do you mean, or philosophically?”

“Both.”

“Sexually—more satisfied, financially—dissatisfied, philosophically—still trying.”

—Mick Jagger, at a 1969 New York press conference

**You go out every time roaring drunk. After five years you’re a fucking wreck. . . . It used to be booze. It used to be . . .**

—Keith Richards, 1971, quoted in *Rolling Stone*

**The best rock and roll encapsulates a certain high energy—an angriness—whether on record or on stage. That is, rock and roll is only rock and roll if it’s not safe.**

—Mick Jagger, 1988, quoted in *Rolling Stone*

**A** LONG WITH THE BEATLES, there were a number of British bands poised on the cutting edge of midsixties rock and roll. These contemporaries were led by the Rolling Stones. In February 1963, as the Fab Four were making their way to the top of the British charts, the Rolling Stones were starting their first regular Sunday appearances in the back room of a London pub. The band, named after the Muddy Waters blues tune “Rollin’ Stone,” capitalized on aggressive, unpolished versions of predominantly black American music to propel it to the forefront of the fledgling British blues movement.

By the middle of the decade the Rolling Stones had achieved commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic. When the Beatles self-destructed, the Stones emerged from the shadows to create their own brief golden age. This is the story of four young London suburbanites (singer Mick Jagger, guitarist Keith Richards, bassist Bill Wyman [née Perks], and drummer Charlie Watts) and one well-off provincial (guitarist Brian Jones) who went beyond the classic rock music of their youth to discover and follow its blues and R&B antecedents.

Mick grew up in a household of moderate means in suburban London: “My mum is very working class, my father bourgeois, because he had a reasonable good education, so I came from somewhere in between that.” His father, Joe, was a physical education teacher, and Mick was both intellectually and athletically gifted. His mother was sure Mick would become a politician, especially after the young Jagger enrolled in the prestigious London School of Economics (LSE) to study accounting. Indicative of his cautious nature, Mick didn’t quit LSE until he was sure that the Rolling Stones had become a commercially viable group.

Jagger's musical history included the stereotypical introduction to American rock and roll via the classic rockers. Mick was crazy about Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bo Diddley, and to a lesser extent Buddy Holly, labeled "jungle music" by Mick's father. From there he followed a musical progression back in time, discovering bluesmen Big Bill Broonzy (who toured England before his death in 1958) and Muddy Waters. These roots took hold of young Jagger, who had already demonstrated a propensity toward show business pursuits, appearing as a model on his father's physical-fitness TV show. A boyhood friend described the strangely remote Mick as giving his friends "the idea he'd sooner be somewhere else than with us, doing far more glamorous things."<sup>1</sup>

Keith Richards played with Mick in the same Dartford primary school playground until the age of six or seven, when the Richards family moved to a housing development on the rougher side of the tracks. Keith was sufficiently talented as a boy soprano to appear at Westminster Abbey and Royal Albert Hall, but the onset of puberty lowered his vocal range, and he turned to rock and roll. Keith wore tight-fitting jeans, violet shirts, and pink socks; practiced air guitar; and listened to Chuck Berry and Little Richard records.

In 1958 Doris Richards purchased a guitar for her son. Soon thereafter, Keith was expelled from Dartford Technical School; as a last resort he enrolled at Sidcup Art School. The art school environment proved to be musically enlightening for Richards: "I learned from all these amateur art school people . . . Broonzy first. He and Josh White. . . . Then I started to discover Robert Johnson and those cats. . . . The other half of me was listening to all that rock and roll, Chuck Berry."<sup>2</sup>

Lewis Brian Hopkin Jones, who went by the name Brian, was raised in the elegant surroundings of Cheltenham, a spa-resort town in western England. Brian excelled in his grammar school studies and learned to play piano (from his mother), clarinet (which he played in an orchestra), and saxophone. Adolescence brought rebellion; rebellion brought him a child out of wedlock and a premature departure from school. Brian became enamored with jazz saxophone, working day jobs and playing with jazz and rock bands at night. He was graced with a good ear for music—the ability to hear and reproduce music easily—and his next infatuation was with blues-style guitar. After the birth of his second child (with a second girl), Brian left Cheltenham for London. Billing himself as Elmo Lewis, a takeoff on slide guitarist Elmore James, Brian joined Alexis Korner's seminal blues band, Blues Incorporated.

One day in 1960 Keith boarded a commuter train to London. "So I get on this train one morning and there's Jagger and under his arm he has four or five albums. . . . We haven't hung around since we were five or six. We recognized each other straight off . . . and under his arm he's got [albums by] Chuck Berry, and Little Walter, Muddy Waters."<sup>3</sup> Their common interest in music deepened and eventually developed into a symbiotic relationship similar to that of Lennon and McCartney (somewhat odd, given the natures of the rough, teddy-boy Richards and the cautious, middle-class Jagger). Along with Keith's school chum Dick Taylor, they formed a short-lived trio called Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys.

In March 1962 Blues Incorporated, including Charlie Watts on drums and Elmo Lewis on guitar, played its first night at the Ealing Club, a rented room behind the ABC Bakery. A few weeks later, Mick and Keith traveled to London to see them. They were astounded by Brian's playing. Richards says of that night: "Suddenly it's Elmore James, this cat man, and it's Brian . . . playin' bar slide guitar. . . . He's really fantastic and a gas. . . . He'd been doin' the same as we'd been doin' . . . thinkin' he was the only cat in the world doin' it."<sup>4</sup> Although Brian continued to play with Korner (Mick occasionally sitting in as vocalist), the nascent Stones now numbered three, as Brian started playing with Mick and Keith.

In July the three were joined by Dick Taylor, Ian Stewart (on piano), and a drummer to play a gig at London's new blues center, the Marquis Club. Billed as the Rolling Stones, they acquitted themselves well but found few other bookings. Brian, Keith, and Mick moved into a rundown flat in London's Chelsea district, living and jamming together and exhibiting the craziness of young musicians on the loose. Bill Wyman, who was about six years older than most of the band and had already served a stint in the Royal Air Force, answered their ad for a bass player. In addition to a love of classic rock and a feeling for the blues, Wyman arrived with a large amplifier and proffered extra equipment, cigarettes, and a round of drinks; he was welcomed into the band.

Their next task was to find a regular drummer. They tried to persuade Charlie Watts to join to no avail. Watts had little reason to join the Stones, a band without an ensured future. He already had security, having attended Harrow Art School and then being employed as a graphic artist with an ad agency. He also had a regular gig with a popular blues band at night. Charlie's first love was jazz, but his experience with Blues Incorporated acclimated him to the blues and started his friendship with the Stones. After many evenings at the Chelsea flat and encouragement from Korner, Charlie accepted their offer. In January 1963 all five members were in place, and the Rolling Stones were born.

In 1963 the first wave of popular music mania took hold in England, and the Stones were swept up in the tide. Within the year, they established a residency at the Crawdaddy Club and recorded and released their first single—Chuck Berry's "Come On" backed by Willie Dixon's "I Want to Be Loved." That same year they toured as a support act for American rockers Little Richard, the Everly Brothers, and Bo Diddley. One night the Beatles, Britain's most popular rock and roll band, came down to the club to listen. Both groups spent the rest of the night carousing at the Chelsea pad; a few days later the Stones returned the favor, catching the Beatles' show at Royal Albert Hall.

In the spring of 1963 Andrew Loog Oldham saw the Stones at the Crawdaddy. He was a public relations man already at the age of nineteen, having worked as a publicist for Brian Epstein during the release of "Please Please Me" and for Mary Quant and her line of hip designer clothing. What impressed Oldham about the Stones was "Music. Sex. The fact that in just a few months the country would need an opposite of what the Beatles were doing."<sup>5</sup> Oldham recognized the raw emotion and sexual rebelliousness generated by the band and its music, and so he set about to package and sell that image. Early

attempts to dress the Stones in matching outfits were sabotaged by band members, who left assorted uniform parts in dressing rooms and hotels across England.

One evening, George Harrison mentioned to Decca's Dick Rowe (the man who passed on the Beatles) that he ought to see about signing the Rolling Stones. Rowe wasted no time in catching them at the Crawdaddy and signing them to a contract. As a record producer, Oldham was strictly laissez-faire; he simply arranged for the recording sessions and turned the band loose in the studio. He couldn't do much more, as his knowledge of music and recording technology was less than elementary. Without much in the way of direction, the recordings reproduced an unpolished authenticity reminiscent of the American originals.

The Rolling Stones of early 1964 were still being led by their most talented musician, Brian Jones. Much like John Lennon, Brian experimented with and explored the frontiers of permissible behavior offstage. "He was the first one that had a car," describes Jones's former partner Anita Pallenberg. "He was the first into flash clothes and smoke, and acid. . . . It was back then when it seemed anything was possible." Once he tasted success (by hanging out with the Beatles), Brian wanted to be the one on top. Mick concurs: "The driving force [of the Stones] was to be famous, get lots of girls and earn a lot of money, that and the idea of just getting our music across as best we could."<sup>6</sup>

The Stones released their second single, the Lennon-McCartney composition "I Want to Be Your Man," in November 1963 and saw it climb into the top 20. Slowly, their music was changing; a few original tunes sneaked into their repertoire of covers. The first Stones album, *The Rolling Stones*, was released in April 1964; it paid homage to their roots while hinting at a new direction. Lead singer Jagger growled and slurred blues favorites like "I'm a King Bee" and "I Just Want to Make Love to You" in a style dripping with sexual innuendo. Up-tempo classic rock favorites like Holly's "Not Fade Away" (with the Hollies' Graham Nash and Alan Clarke singing backup and friend Phil Spector on maracas) and Chuck Berry's "Carol" were joined by Memphis soul man Rufus Thomas's "Walkin' the Dog."

But the Jagger-Richards original "Tell Me" had a distinctly different feeling. Jagger sang with crisper pronunciation, and the feel was dominated by a twelve-string acoustic rhythm guitar. Of their early writing experiences, Keith comments, "The first things, usually I wrote the melody and Mick wrote the words. . . . [E]very song we've got has pieces of each other in it." Both the covers and the original material presented a worldview consistent with its blues roots—men and women struggling for a few moments of satisfaction.

These were years of nonstop touring. Says Keith: "We worked our asses off from '63 to '66. Right through those years non-stop, I believe we had two weeks off." As with the Beatles' shows, playing onstage was not always a pleasant experience for the band. Crowds screamed and yelled and, at least in the case of the Stones, were moved by the scene to express themselves physically. "There was a period in England," Keith recalls, "when we couldn't play ballrooms anymore because we never got through more than

three or four songs every night, man, chaos, police, and too many people in these places fainting.”<sup>8</sup>

In June 1964 the Stones arrived in New York for their first U.S. tour. “Not Fade Away” had barely made the charts, so the band had to be content with the acclaim of musical friends and some popularity on each coast. Typical of their midwestern gigs, 600 fans squeezed into a 15,000-seat Omaha venue. The tour’s highlight proved to be a recording session at Chicago’s Chess Records. The engineer, Ron Malo, had recorded Chess greats Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, and Howlin’ Wolf; Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, and Berry stopped in to chat. Female fans caused a near riot, and the Chicago police told the Stones to get out of town, which they did. Though generally ignored by the mainstream press, a piece in the fashion magazine *Vogue* hinted at their future success: “The Stones have a perverse, unsettling sex appeal with Jagger out in front of his team-mates. . . . To women, he’s fascinating, to men a scare.”

To this Mick added his mimicry of moves by James Brown and other black artists. In October the Stones had the good fortune to appear as headliners at the TAMM show—a video of this show is available—along with Brown; Chuck Berry; Motown artists Marvin Gaye, the Supremes, and Smokey Robinson; and the Beach Boys. Jagger stepped off the return flight to London doing the James Brown shuffle and incorporated these and other moves into his performances.

As the Stones became more popular and accumulated a series of chart hits, their live shows, and the responses to those shows, became more raucous. A 1965 Dublin concert

was stopped when part of the second show Adelphi Theater audience leapt over the orchestra pit onto the stage. Mick was dragged to the floor; three boys were throwing punches at Brian while two others were trying to kiss him. Wyman was crushed against a piano at one side of the stage. . . . In Belfast, the audience tore up the seats and threw them at the stage. As the Stones tried to leave, fans covered the car, but they got away with another collapsed roof.<sup>9</sup>

Although most top groups now had difficulty moving about in public, the Stones had reached a point where they weren’t even safe while onstage.

Even though “Time Is on My Side” and “The Last Time” had reached the top 10 and the band was scheduled for an October appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the Stones had yet to conquer the United States. The May 1965 release of the Jagger-Richards composition “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” which mocked the superficiality of life on tour in America, changed all that. (The story goes that Keith woke in the middle of the night at a Florida motel to write the legendary guitar-riff introduction, immortalizing him in rock music annals.) To this Mick added a stream of themes chronicling men on TV, advertising detergent, and voices on car radios giving out useless information and the head-whirring emptiness of “drivin’, doin’ this, and signin’ that.” Although the song is generally misinterpreted as a diatribe on the inability to achieve sexual satisfaction, only

the next-to-last chorus and last verse allude to the frustration of not finding a willing sexual playmate. “Satisfaction” hit the charts in June and stayed at #1 for four weeks. In the next eighteen months the Stones would score six more top-10 hits, including three #1s, and each of their three studio albums would achieve top-5 status.

The band had finally achieved mass commercial success. They would boast to the Beatles that with the addition of Allen Klein in 1965 as their business manager and record contract negotiator, they would make more money from records in one year than the Beatles had made since the beginning of their career. This success was further enhanced by Oldham’s ability to sell the Stones as the bad boys of rock and roll, the antithesis of the Beatles’ positive pop-star image. The Stones’ body-based music also helped. The Wyman-Watts rhythm section accentuated the black-rooted two-and-four backbeat and sometimes even emphasized a 1-2-3-4 quarter-note snare and bass pulse. These driving pulses evoked a physical reaction that was perceived by some as a threat to the status quo, much in the same manner as during the classic rock era. When kids moved uncontrollably, parents got uncomfortable.

Jagger’s vocal style and onstage performance reinforced this visceral, sensual reaction to the band. Like his blues predecessors, Jagger slurred, growled, and screamed his delivery. Onstage, he sweated, pouted—with those luscious and world-famous lips—and undulated his way across the stage. As in previous eras, physicality could be interpreted as sex, and sex usually meant rebellion. To varying degrees, the audience was moved to react, to rebel. In addition, R&B and blues covers meant blackness, and in the midsixties identification with black forms still carried with it a dark or unwholesome connotation.

Writing about a 1965 Stones press conference, columnist Pete Hamill reflects some of these reactions: “There is something elegantly sinister about the Rolling Stones. They sit before you at a press conference like five unfolding switchblades, their faces set in rehearsed snarls, their hair studiously unkempt and matted . . . and the way they walk and the songs they sing all become part of some long mean reach for the jugular.”<sup>10</sup> Something was happening, but you didn’t know what it was, did you, Mr. Hamill?

The reaction to the Stones occurred predominantly on emotional and physical levels. Yet much of the activity in “swinging London” surrounding the Stones was located in the mind; many of popular music’s leading figures were preoccupied with consciousness expansion and its chemical catalysts. The Stones were slow to join this pilgrimage and never fully embraced its direction, but they dabbled sufficiently to allow their repertoire and worldview to grow.

Following the Beatles’ lead, the Stones experimented with exotic and orchestral instrumentation. Brian learned to play the sitar for “Paint It Black” and then discarded it. He also played dulcimer on “Lady Jane,” flute on “Ruby Tuesday,” marimba on “Under My Thumb,” and mellotron on “2000 Light Years from Home.” This new experimentation in musical coloration, which also included other players on brass, strings, and double bass, gave Rolling Stones songs a musical depth that their earlier material lacked. They were changing along with the times.

Lyrics occasionally strayed outside the usual romantic parameters. “Paint It Black” and “As Tears Go By” were pictures of sadness and depression. “Mother’s Little Helper” dug at the hypocrisy of antidrug sentiments while the societal mainstream abused tranquilizers in a struggle to cope with “meaningless,” pressure-filled lives. However, Jagger was later to remind us “that for every one song that took some serious social view, like say ‘Mother’s Little Helper’—there were lots of others that were just teenage bullshit.”<sup>11</sup>

There were relationship songs that, along with the romantic fare of “Ruby Tuesday” and “Lady Jane,” drew the ire of numerous parties. Ed Sullivan and the CBS censors required the band change the words “the night” to “some time” in “Let’s Spend the Night Together” for their TV appearance. And Jagger’s reputation as a male chauvinist was sealed with the release of “Under My Thumb” and “Stupid Girl.” Keith later rationalizes that “it was all a spin-off from our environment . . . hotels, and too many dumb chicks. Not all dumb, not by any means, but that’s how one got.”<sup>12</sup>

Concurrent with these artistic changes was a shift in the power relationships within the band. Brian, who in the early days had been the organizer, spokesman, and equal arbiter of artistic choice, was relegated to second-class status. Artistic direction and power gravitated to the songwriters, Jagger and Richards. Brian attempted to write and failed—he was once locked in a room with American rocker Gene Pitney and a piano—leaving him feeling paranoid that his usefulness to the band was over. Brian did continue his quest for different life experiences. His affinity for costumes, including dressing in silk and satin, gave him some notoriety. Brian and the stunning actress Anita Pallenberg descended into an intense and bizarre relationship. In a stormy partnership characterized by spontaneous acts, sexual experimentation, a profusion of drug use, and Brian’s jealous rages and physical abuse, they lived the lives of rock royalty.

Life on the edge eventually caught up with Brian, who from then on rode an emotional roller coaster dominated by downhill plunges. The Jagger-Richards friendship and writing alliance left him depressed and helpless. His close friend Guinness heir Tara Browne died in an auto accident, and his relationship with Anita became combative. Brian sought chemical refuge. His drug intake, as described by supplier and friend Tony Sanchez, was a regular morning assortment that might include amphetamines, cocaine, morphine, LSD, and mandrax (a heart stimulant). This left him “a scrambled wreck”—many times incapacitated for the rest of the day.<sup>13</sup> Lacking the constitution to withstand the pressures and rigors of the road, his refuge in drugs made things only worse.

If Brian’s personal problems were not enough, the February 12, 1967, police raid on Keith’s Redlands home also had serious ramifications for the Stones’ ascent to the top. The previous Sunday, sensationalist tabloid *News of the World* had printed an article incorrectly identifying Mick as the Stone who displayed hashish (an Eastern cannabis-based product that is usually smoked) in front of a reporter. Mick readied a libel suit and went to Redlands for a party with friends. That morning Mick took his first LSD trip, and the party, which for a time included George and Patti Harrison, traipsed around the Sussex countryside. Most participants returned to the house for an evening of records and television.

At eight o'clock, nineteen police, including three policewomen, pounded on the door. Mick was arrested for possession of four prescription amphetamine tablets long ago placed in his jacket pocket by his girlfriend, Marianne Faithfull; Keith was charged with allowing drug use on the property. Police conveniently overlooked a briefcase, filled with LSD and other exotic drugs lying out in full view. It belonged to a notorious American "acid king" who slipped out of the country that night. Keith would later claim that *News of the World* had hired the drug dealer to inform the paper of a party in progress so that it could tip off the police. The police didn't miss Marianne, who was wrapped only in a fur rug. During the trial, she was referred to as "Miss X," and accounts of her dropping the rug while standing before a female officer scandalized the nation.

In a remarkable coincidence, Brian was arrested in his London flat the same day that Mick and Keith were scheduled for a court hearing, having been found in possession of cocaine, methedrine, and cannabis. Drugs and the Rolling Stones remained on the front page. In July Mick and Keith were convicted and sentenced to serve time in jail. In response to the overly severe penalty, the editor of the prestigious *Times* wrote a scathing editorial taking the judge to task. On appeal, Keith's conviction was quashed, and Mick was given a lecture and an unconditional discharge. Brian eventually pleaded guilty to cannabis possession; the other charges were not pressed.

These episodes left a mark on the band. Brian would continue to be harassed, and he was arrested again by corrupt members of the vice squad. He would pay them off, but he became increasingly paranoid and insecure. Mick and Keith were truly frightened by the brutal reality of their nights in jail. At times, it seemed, even the Stones were at the mercy of the Fates. Brian's drug conviction made touring difficult, as many countries, including the United States, did not grant visas to persons with drug records. Thus, the Stones' touring train ground to a halt. Between October 1966 and July 1969, the band played only one three-week European concert tour (March–April 1967).

Aside from an expedient trip to Morocco to avoid further unpleasanties with the authorities, the Stones turned their efforts to defending themselves in court and recording their next album. Nobody was more surprised than I when, while sitting in the marketplace in Marrakesh one afternoon watching the Gnawa dancers, I looked up to see Mick, Keith, and Brian walk by. The Rolling Stones in Morocco? Oh, well, here's to good health! In the summer of 1967 the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's*. Mick, who had traveled with the Beatles to Wales in the search for transcendental enlightenment, suggested a similarly styled effort for the Stones. Brian argued against it, and his viewpoint proved to be correct. The Stones' predictable attempt at creating a psychedelic musical collage, *Their Satanic Majesty's Request*, was released in November 1967, but it was clearly not a natural outgrowth of the band's creative nature—in fact, it was out of character for the more sexually oriented band. Even if their ideas were creative and focused, the band lacked a producer like the Beatles' George Martin to translate their inspiration into reality.

However, their spring 1968 sessions at London's Olympic Studios produced a music that sent reverberations throughout the music world. It was innovative, the sound was

crisper, and the musical ideas more sophisticated. Their lyrical worldview had expanded its previous focus on romantic/sexual involvement to include topics of social and political concern. Yet the rhythm section still throbbed, Jagger still growled and howled, and danger and taboo still lurked among the lyrics. The maturing Rolling Stones were anything but tame. They produced a classic quartet of albums—*Beggars Banquet*, *Let It Bleed*, *Sticky Fingers*, and *Exile on Main Street*—that ensured the Rolling Stones would forever be considered one of rock and roll's greatest groups.

One can point to producer Jimmy Miller as a reason for the musical maturation and the new sophistication in arrangements and sound. An American percussionist, Miller had already produced albums by Spooky Tooth and Traffic when he was invited to these Stones sessions. A working relationship was established, and Miller went on to produce the next five albums, the first four of which are the artistic peak of the band. One of the trademarks of this period (thanks, perhaps, to Miller's studio savvy) is the layering of percussion instruments at the beginning of hits such as "Sympathy for the Devil" and "Gimme Shelter."

"Jumping Jack Flash," the song that alerted the public of things to come, was released as a single in May 1968. Keith's memorable guitar hook proclaims a remarkably strong presence, followed by Jagger's autobiographical maelstrom, which begins, "I was born in a crossfire hurricane / And I howled at my ma in the drivin' rain. But it's awww riiight noww—in fact it's a gas!" The song hailed a new Stones era—one that included deeper, more symbolic lyrics and sophisticated musical arrangements. It was also a time when the Stones' artistic and commercial focus shifted from singles to albums. Each of the next four studio albums placed in the top 5, including two #1s; from those albums only three top-10 singles emerged.

The first album in the golden quartet, *Beggars Banquet*, was originally scheduled for an August 1968 release. It was issued in time for Christmas, as the band wrangled with Decca over the album cover, which the label considered offensive. The original cover pictured a toilet surrounded by graffiti that offered album information and some choice phrases. The final cover is plain white with black lettering. Inside, however, the Stones reached for and achieved a new quality of artistic consistency.

"Sympathy for the Devil," the first track on side one, continues the trend of layered, percussion-oriented arrangements begun by the breakthrough single "Jumping Jack Flash." Introductory drum, conga, hi-hat, maracas, guero, and syncopated vocal sounds, in layered steps, precede Jagger's vocals. Lyrically, we are treated to an autobiographical stroll through some of the devil's more celebrated carnage. This song in particular reinforced the band's negative image, which was already peaking as a result of bad-boy antics, violence at concerts, and drug trials. They now paid homage to the devil, singing in the first person. Although there is little (if any) evidence that the band practiced the occult, regular critics painted them as Satanists.

The Stones were also not immune from the political turmoil existing in 1968. Antiwar demonstrations occurred in front of the American Embassy in Grosvenor

Square, and Mick attended one such event. Students took to the streets on the Continent, and Mick and Keith spent time in the United States, enveloped as it was by the political and cultural maelstrom. (It was also their favorite place to write songs due to the incredible infusion of stimuli.) These experiences seeped into their new material. Still, Mick's involvement in political causes was limited: "I was much more involved with politics before I got into music. At the London School of Economics, I was always in arguments." However, given songs like "Street Fighting Man," a rallying anthem for the day's youth, it was obvious the Stones didn't completely insulate themselves from the surroundings. Mick continues: "But you're always involved in what's going on around you. There is, I suppose, a certain political content to that song."<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Lennon's (and later Harrison's) penchant for activism, Jagger and Richards counseled resignation in "Street Fighting Man": "But what can a poor boy do / Except to sing for a rock and roll band." Keith states more explicitly: "We're not saying we want to be in the streets, but we're a rock and roll band, just the reverse. Those kids at the press conferences want us to do their thing, not ours. Politics is what we're trying to get away from in the first place."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, two other songs contained obvious political references: "Factory Girl," the folk-flavored tribute to a female working-class hero, and the proletarian anthem "Salt of the Earth," which concludes "Let's drink to the hard working people / Let's drink to the salt of the earth."

Mindful of a lack of visual footage capturing the energy of the band, the Stones decided to create their own magical event, the Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus, in December 1968. It was a forty-eight-hour happening featuring authentic circus acts (tigers, acrobats, fire-eaters), bikers, Merry Prankster Ken Kesey, schoolteachers, and a major musical agenda. The circus acts were scattered between performances by Jethro Tull, Taj Mahal, the Who, the Rolling Stones, and the so-called Supergroup (John Lennon on vocal and guitar, Eric Clapton on lead guitar, Keith Richards on bass, and Mitch Mitchell of the Jimi Hendrix Experience on drums). All the Stones were costumed, and Mick acted as ringmaster. The film, intended for a BBC special, was short-circuited by the band itself and never aired—the band was apparently displeased with their performance.

Brian and the band were more estranged than ever by this time; his tenuous grip on reality only worsened. He wasn't contributing to the band in the new studio sessions, and his drug conviction still impeded the band's touring plans. Brian finally agreed to leave the band in return for two years' compensation at 100,000 pounds per year. Frustrated by the Stones' new musical direction and encouraged by contemporaries like Creedence Clearwater Revival, Brian renewed contact with old pal Alexis Korner. He retreated to his new abode (Cotchford Farm, the former home of *Winnie the Pooh* author A. A. Milne) to cleanse himself and prepare a return to his roots.

By most accounts Brian was indeed on the mend. But on July 3, 1969, he drowned in his swimming pool. Although he had consumed alcohol and prescription sedatives, Brian was a strong swimmer and had been left alone for only a few moments by friends. The

coroner's inquest ruled "death by misadventure"; a number of unanswered questions remain about the circumstances of his death. Keith feels that "some very weird things happened that night, that's all I can say." Pete Townshend, once asked to comment on Brian's death, replied, "Oh, it's a normal day for Brian, like he died every day you know."

"Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep." Those were the words recited by Mick at the first live Stones performance in more than two years. Two stanzas of Shelley's "Adonais," recited in homage to Brian, greeted the 250,000 fans at London's Hyde Park on July 5, two days after his drowning. New to the Stones was twenty-one-year-old Mick Taylor, former lead guitarist for John Mayall's Blues Band. (Eric Clapton, the Stones' first choice, had reportedly declined an offer.) The set showcased current music, opening with "Honky Tonk Woman" and closing with "Sympathy for the Devil." Although timing was off, cues were muffled, and Mick Taylor appeared stiff and nervous, the Stones were back and looking forward to a new album and planned U.S. tour.

At the Stones' Olympic Studios base in London, with producer Jimmy Miller and engineer friend Glyn Johns teaming up in the control room, the band recorded *Let It Bleed*, which was greeted with effusive praise. Writer Greil Marcus intoned, "*Let It Bleed* is not only one of the most intelligent rock and roll albums made, but also one of the most visceral and exciting." The music continued the now familiar trends of layered introductions ("Gimme Shelter" and "Let It Bleed"), increased diversity (the London Bach Choir on "You Can't Always Get What You Want"), and throbbing rhythmic feel.

Jon Landau had written "the Rolling Stones are violence" in referring to *Beggars Banquet*. This effort was even more saturated with angry, violent, and sometimes bloody references. Typical of the lyrics were images of bleeding men ("You Can't Always Get What You Want"), rape and murder (being just a shot away, as in "Gimme Shelter"), and smashing windows and rape ("Midnight Rambler"). Jagger and Richards refused to ascribe any cause and effect between their music and the highly charged atmosphere of the era. Critic and musician Lenny Kaye chose to focus on the audience's use of the band: "Through a special community alchemy, we've chosen the Stones to bring our darkness into light, in each case via a construct that fits the time and prevailing mood perfectly. . . . If you can't bleed on the Stones, who can you bleed on?"

Amid the swirling controversies of violence, Satanism, and Mick's androgynous stage persona, the Stones excitedly prepared for their first American tour in three years. Jagger was not oblivious to societal changes taking place: "I see a great deal of danger in the air. . . . Teenagers are not screaming about pop music anymore, they're screaming for much deeper reasons . . . about the world and the way they live. I see a lot of trouble coming in the dawn." The tour's violent finale would prove him right. When the fifteen-city tour stopped at New York's Madison Square Garden, *New Yorker* magazine exalted, "The Stones present a theatrical musical performance that has no equal in our culture. . . . Listening to Mick Jagger is not like listening to Jasha Heifetz. Mick Jagger is coming in on more circuits than Jasha Heifetz. He is dealing in total undefined sensual experience of the most ecstatic sort."<sup>16</sup> However, the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia noted

at the time that there was danger in adding a little bit of sadism to their sexuality, and the Stones did add a combustible touch of leather.

Sensitive to charges of price gouging and befitting the Bay Area's concert-in-the-park tradition, the band had planned to stage a free concert in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park as their final gig. Turned down by the park commission, Stones tour management, with help from friends in the Grateful Dead organization, decided on nearby Sears Point Raceway as an alternative. A large stage and light towers were constructed, but just days before the concert a disagreement over exclusive film rights eliminated that site. Less than twenty-four hours before concert time, the crew dismantled the stage and equipment and moved it sixty-five miles south to a new site, Altamont Raceway.

On December 6, 1969, a warm, overcast day gave way to a cold evening. Facilities for performers and concertgoers were almost nonexistent; there were few restrooms and little food. The stage, a low temporary affair that would be used by the acts during the show, was surrounded by members of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club, who were hired to provide a secure buffer between the audience and performers. As the day progressed, chaos reigned. Santana opened, followed by Jefferson Airplane—lead singer Marty Balin was knocked unconscious by an Angel after trying to stop them from beating an audience member—the Flying Burrito Brothers, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Waves of violence, provoked mostly by the brutality of the Angels, rippled through the crowds—onstage and offstage.

The Stones, who had sauntered slowly through the camped masses late the previous night, were now being sequestered in a well-stocked, well-secured backstage trailer. In a sinister omen earlier in the day, a teenage boy punched Mick in the face as he stepped from the shuttle helicopter. The evening turned cold, and the Stones lounged in their trailer, delaying the show until darkness provided better lighting conditions. They struggled to reach the stage, which at the moment was a war zone nominally under the control of the Hell's Angels. Mick, after asking the bikers for more space to perform, launched into "Jumping Jack Flash." Drunk, LSD-sotted Angels set upon similarly drunk and drugged concertgoers who strayed across the imaginary boundary of the war zone. No one, not even performers, promoters, or photographers, was exempt from biker violence.

During the fourth song and in front of the cameras (the shot is included in the video titled *Gimme Shelter*), Meredith Hunter was stabbed to death by Hell's Angels. The Stones finished the set, afraid that stopping would trigger only more violence. They sprinted to their helicopter and took off. *Rolling Stone* magazine, in a major story, crucified the Stones as most responsible for the tragedy. Columnist-editor and rock elder Ralph J. Gleason called Altamont the end of rock innocence. Promoter Bill Graham, whose warnings of impending doom had been ignored, lashed out at Jagger: "What right do you have to leave the way you did, thanking everyone for having a good time and the Angels for helping out? . . . What did he leave behind throughout the country? Every gig he was late, every fucking gig he made the promoter bleed. . . . But you know what is a great tragedy to me? That cunt is a great entertainer."<sup>17</sup>

With the exceptions of a European tour in 1970 and an abbreviated English tour in 1971, the Stones stopped performing for a time. In a move that reflected their musical roots, they hired Marshall Chess, the son of Chess Records founder Leonard, as president of their new label, Rolling Stone Records. For their manufacturing and distribution deal they again made a choice with historical significance, signing with Atlantic, the R&B and soul major. In response to the British tax laws, which George Harrison assails in “Taxman” as 95 percent for the government and 5 percent for the rich musician, the entire band moved to southern France.

The classic *Sticky Fingers*, recorded in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, at Olympic Studios, and at Mick’s Stargroves mansion, is a musically tight and emotionally gritty journey through drug-plagued existence. The listener encounters needles and spoons, Sister Morphine and Cousin Cocaine, a demon life, a head full of snow, and Brown Sugar (in reference to either heroin or a female slave or both). Also included is “Wild Horses,” Mick’s haunting ballad to Marianne—first recorded by Gram Parsons’s band, the Flying Burrito Brothers. The “scandalous” Andy Warhol—designed front cover features men’s pants with a working zipper, and the disc label contains Warhol’s famous lips logo.

The fourth Miller-produced album, *Exile on Main Street*, closed out the first decade. The sessions, captured by the band’s mobile recording unit parked outside Keith’s French villa, eventually filled four sides. Of this record, Jagger comments: “It’s a wonderful record but I wouldn’t consider it the finest Rolling Stones work. I think that *Beggars Banquet* and *Let It Bleed* were better records.”<sup>18</sup> Like the Beatles’ *White Album*, *Exile* contains a variety of sounds, and some contemporary reviewers considered its length to be a drawback. However, the double album captures Keith’s creative genius. During the sessions, however, Richards was continuing to struggle with his heroin addiction. He later quipped: “While I was a junkie, I still learned to ski and I made *Exile on Main Street*.”

During the seventies the Stones toured the United States about every three years (’72, ’75, ’78). The self-contained Stones tour party was an all-consuming juggernaut, becoming more extravagant with each successive tour. Reflecting in part a societal shift toward individual gratification, the newer Stones music ran back to the familiar hedonistic themes of sex, drugs, and rock and roll music. Mick Taylor, perhaps the most technically gifted guitarist in the band’s lineup, left in 1974, depressed at the music’s narrow focus and his own involvement with heroin. Ron Wood, Faces guitarist and lighthearted Richards crony, filled in for the 1975 tour; he never really left. In the late 1970s some band members continued to struggle with the debilitating effects of drug addiction.

As of this writing, the Rolling Stones have survived the rock and roll fast lane for more than four decades. Their music over the past forty years has been flavored by contemporary popular styles like disco and new wave. Their records continue to sell, although they do not receive the artistic acclaim of earlier efforts. Their current portraits show some graying hair and lined faces, but these rock and roll dinosaurs still crank out that gritty, emotional, arrogant, black-rooted music that brought them to the dance in the first place.



Whereas the early Beatles attracted a spectrum of fans entranced by their safely rebellious mixture of classic rock elements, the Stones initially appealed to black music fans and those who were titillated by aggressive, crude, and sexual behavior. The music throbbed, pushed by the emphasized quarter-note pulse of Watts and Wyman. Mick replicated many stylistic attributes of contemporary black music, illustrated by his choice of blues and R&B material; the slurred pronunciation and emotive, sliding growl of his vocals; and his onstage sexuality and physicality. And Keith kept up a barrage of sparse, bent-note licks and classic rock and blues-derived phrases.

In the midsixties the Stones, like many contemporaries, tempered these early stylistic elements with musical experimentation and an expanded worldview. Brian Jones added the coloration of nontraditional rock instruments, and songwriters Jagger-Richards composed airy ballads filled with orchestration to complement their sensual, driving rockers. As the band matured, their adolescent sexual orientation broadened to include introspection and societal examination. These trends of musical expansion and intellectual growth burst forth in the late 1960s and early 1970s—the “golden era” of the Stones.

As the sexual revolution of the sixties spread, and talking about and participating casually in sex became more acceptable, the Stones were able to move closer to the cultural mainstream. An undulating Jagger, now stripped to the waist, was no longer a pariah, but an androgynous visage tempting the masses with tangible delights. Satisfaction was now in, as Madison Avenue reinforced the notion of immediate sexual gratification. The addition of an intellectual level to the band’s lyrics also moved the band nearer to the center. Even the Stones were listening to the words, attempting to communicate stories (“Jumping Jack Flash”), ideas (“Gimme Shelter”), or personal feelings (“Wild Horses”).

During this golden era, the Stones matured as musicians, arrangers, and lyricists, creating multilevel works that rank as some of the period’s best. Even with the critical raves over the more fully developed material, they were unwilling to abandon the sexuality, raw creativity, and aura of danger that had carried them this far. For each new accessible “Honky Tonk Woman” (#1, June 1969), there was a sinister and controversial “Sympathy for the Devil.” They sold themselves as the bad boys of rock. Long after they ceased to evolve in any significant musical or lyrical fashion, or to create a meaningful amount of quality material, younger generations treat the Stones as pretenders to the title. The Rolling Stones—who created the most artistically ingenious and commercially successful white fusion of blues and R&B-rooted rock and roll in pop history—continue into the twenty-first century, assured that, although it’s only rock and roll, we’ll like it.



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# THE WHO

People Try to Put Us Down

Chapter

# 9



*The Who*

Basically . . . [guitar smashing is] a gesture which happens at the spur of the moment. I think with guitar smashing, just like performance itself, it's a performance, it's an act, it's an instant. And it really is meaningless.

—Pete Townshend, 1968, quoted in *Rolling Stone*

What was important at the time [*Tommy*], and continues to be important, is that the human individual accepts the fact that he or she is capable of being spiritually swayed. And in order to make the best of that, they really have to listen to what's being said.

—Pete Townshend, in a 1987 interview

Adolescent Townshend smashed his guitar and his teenage fans cheered. Young adult Townshend dabbled in drugs and Eastern religion and his college age fans grooved along. But as he approached his thirties, Townshend publicly became torn between writing to create songs about the difficulties of adulthood—marriage, being a parent, shaky health, fear of growing old, and the silence of God—and the demands of a youthful rock audience for loud, raunchy celebration.

—Rock journalist Bill Flanagan, 1986

**P**ICTURE LEAD SINGER ROGER DALTREY, resembling a perpetual-motion machine, commandeering the stage for a two-hour athletic romp. Guitarist Pete Townshend swings his right arm in a gigantic windmill motion, striking his guitar to produce loud, crashing, ringing power chords that saturate the hall. Sometimes these blasts are accompanied by agile leaps as Townshend vaults across the stage. Drummer Keith Moon frantically thrashes at his drum kit, occasionally launching one of his drumsticks off a drumhead and toward the audience. This whirlwind surrounds bassist John Entwistle, who stands as if anchored to the stage, motionless except for the blur of finger attack on the bass fret board.

This hypothetical set climaxes with the song “My Generation.” After an extended solo, Townshend raises his guitar above his head and smashes it to pieces against the stage, jamming the remaining skeleton through the protective grill cloth and into his speaker cabinet. Squealing, tortured feedback wails from the speakers, sounding the instrument’s death rattle. Daltrey swings his microphone by its cord in an ever increasing arc until it too smashes into the stage. Moon’s bass drum has been set with a small charge of smoke-producing explosive, and it erupts as he kicks it off the raised drum podium onto the stage. Standing behind his kit, Moon laughs maniacally at the smoldering pyre.

Finally, Entwistle's throbbing bass ceases, and the Who straggle offstage, just another day in the life.

The Who have always been considered one of the most energetic and entertaining live bands in rock music history. Even when compared to 1970s hard rock performances, with their displays of athletic prowess, explosive charges, and frantic energy, the Who hold their own. At the same time, the Beatles bobbed their heads and the Rolling Stones sold sex and spectacle. But the incredible power of the Who's live performances has overshadowed the extraordinarily thoughtful and musically interesting material that songwriter-guitarist Pete Townshend composed during the Who's twenty-five-year existence. Of the three major British invasion groups—the Beatles and Stones being the other two—the Who most directly and thoughtfully confronted the philosophical and political issues of the day. To Townshend, good rock music reflected important societal concerns and was a powerful vehicle for ideas.

Of the major British invasion groups, the Who were initially the most musically competent. They developed and used the power-trio format (using only one guitar, drums, and bass) long before Cream, the Jimi Hendrix Experience, and Led Zeppelin made it popular. Their definitions of the instruments' respective functions were different from traditional classic rock definitions—typified by the rhythm guitar, lead guitar, bass, and drums used by the Beatles and Stones. The Who's relatively complex harmonic structure, regular use of three-part vocal harmonies, and development of the “rock opera” format were innovative and sometimes overlooked.

In addition to the quality of the contributions, they also had a significant impact on subsequent rock generations. The rebellious fury of their 1965 teen anthem “My Generation” sowed the seeds of two major musical forms that sprouted later in the seventies, hard rock and punk. Townshend's power chording, Moon's active drumming style, Daltrey's aggressive lead vocalist image, and the band's volume and overall stage show were all precursors to hard rock; punk roots are visible in the music's frantic, driving pulse and its reactive get-out-of-my-face sentiment. Thus, the Who, known primarily for energy and opera, made many important contributions.

The Who's story is not unlike our previous tales. Roger, Pete, and John grew up in the Shepherd's Bush district of London and went to the same grammar school. Roger was, in many ways, similar to John Lennon. He was rebellious, dressed as a teddy boy, formed a musical group with friends, and had a reputation in school. For the aggressive five-foot-five Daltrey, prone to settling disputes with his fists, his band, the Detours, was seen as a way out of Shepherd's Bush. Pete and John were best mates. They went through school together, one grade behind Roger, and started their own first band, the Confederates. After playing in a series of rock and trad-jazz bands, both eventually joined forces with Roger in the Detours.

Initially, Pete's mom, Betty, acted as their booking agent and van driver. Rounding out the band were drummer Doug Sandom (ten years older than the rest) and a series of

lead singers (as Roger then played lead, with Pete on rhythm, guitar). During these years their repertoire included classic rock, country and western, traditional jazz, and current English pop by bands such as the Shadows and the Beatles.

The Detours, like the early Stones, was a group comprising well-trained as well as untrained musicians. John's parents were musicians, and as a youth he learned piano and trumpet, played in an orchestra, and studied jazz. His initial interest in rock and roll was as a lead guitarist, but John's primal urges led him to bass (bass being a fundamental part of the rhythm in rock). In addition to lead guitar, Roger played some trombone before switching to vocals. Pete's dad played the clarinet, and Pete learned the banjo, playing in jazz bands. Townshend's shift to guitar was motivated by the instrument's growing popularity and by his insecurity about his appearance. In Pete's mind, his large nose dominated his features, and attention focused on power chords and leaps shifted the spotlight away from the guitarist's facial features. Much like McCartney and Hendrix, both of whom compensated for the loss of their respective mothers with a single-minded pursuit of music, Townshend used music as a retreat from his self-perceived physical handicap.

Keith Moon was another who possessed innate musical talent; he learned trumpet and started drums by age fourteen. His idols were big-band drummers Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich and Hollywood session player Hal Blaine, the man who played on many of the early surf music hits. Dave Marsh, in his creditable Who biography, *Before I Get Old*, notes that Moon not only tried to emulate their technique, power, and flamboyance—Krupa's twirling drumsticks, for example—but also copied their large drum sets, which at times included double kick drums.

But musical training wasn't the only formal education that helped the Detours. In 1961 Pete started studies at Ealing Art College; this turned out to have a major impact on the Who. Many rockers found in art school a stimulating refuge from the sometimes dead-end English educational system. Challenged by a new generation of art educators, Pete was impelled to think about how and why people create and about what forms creations might take. When Pete began to smash his guitar, Gustav Metzger's lectures on "auto-destructive" art offered a fitting rationale.

While attending Ealing Pete entered a social circle that introduced him to the blues, rhythm and blues, modern jazz, and marijuana. (Also attending Ealing were future band biographer Richard Barnes, future Small Faces and Stones guitarist Ron Wood, and budding Queen vocalist Freddie Mercury.) Soon the Detours were incorporating black American roots music into their show and by 1963 were popular enough to play on the same bill with the Rolling Stones, Manchester's Hollies, and Liverpool's Searchers. One day, however, they spotted a band on national TV that was also calling itself the Detours. The final choice for the band's new name was between the Hair and the Who; they chose the latter.

Pete Meaden, an intense, fast-talking, pill-popping publicist who had just left Oldham's Stones organization, sought a band that he thought could represent the growing mod subculture. He changed the band's hair, clothing, demeanor, and name.

Meaden preferred the High Numbers, a term combining allusions to the “high” induced by the mod penchant for amphetamines with a popular mod T-shirt that was emblazoned with numerals.

With the addition of drummer Moon to the lineup in the summer of 1964, the intensity of the band’s music soared. In an incident resembling Pete Best’s departure from the Beatles, the Who (not yet the High Numbers) auditioned for Fontana Records. The A&R man suggested the band might benefit from a different drummer. Doug Sandom, who was not enjoying the new focus on blues, opted to leave the band. According to rock mythology, a slightly drunk Keith Moon auditioned for the band by performing a bashing rendition of “Road Runner” and then breaking the temporary drummer’s kick-drum pedal and hi-hat.

This story omits the fact that Moon had been following the Detours, knew their music well, and had come to the pub for the sole purpose of making the lineup. After the audition Moon returned to his drink, steeling himself for anticipated retribution over the damage to the drum set. Instead, the band offered to pick him up on Monday for a gig. Years later, Keith would contend that he was never formally asked to join the Who but was only asked, “What are you doing on Monday?”<sup>1</sup>

Moon joined a band in transition. The High Numbers bought vented jackets and button-down shirts on Carnaby Street, played at the hip Mod Scene Club, and recorded the Meaden blues clone “I’m the Face/Zoot Suit” on Fontana Records (released in July 1964). Pete and Keith followed Meaden into the speed-laced mod world of amphetamine abuse, becoming more combative in a band that already had its share of verbal and physical conflict. Roger and Pete vied for supremacy; Roger could win with his fists, but Pete had a sharp and brutal tongue. John had seen his straightforward drummer traded in and was not sure he relished the idea of playing with a maniac. “The wiry, high strung and anxious nature induced by taking pills made them touchy,” states biographer Barnes. “Anything could spark them off and usually did.” Pete would later comment, “We were four ‘orrible unpleasant little bastards.”<sup>2</sup>

In late 1964 the High Numbers were working steadily, touring and playing clubs six and seven nights per week. Still, their record wasn’t being promoted by the label and wasn’t selling. One evening movie producer Kit Lambert caught their act. Lambert and partner Chris Stamp were searching for a rock and roll band for a movie; after catching the act live they were convinced to forget the movie and manage the act. Meaden had no legal hold, so the band, attracted by Lambert’s upper-class demeanor and industry connections, jumped ship. The High Numbers toured that summer with such notables as Tom Jones, the Kinks, and the Beatles and then dropped the name, reverting back to the Who.

Different managers offer different areas of expertise to their bands. Brian Epstein contributed style and organization to the Beatles, and Andrew Loog Oldham was an image maker for the Stones. Lambert, whose father was well known in British music circles, became a mentor and confidant to Pete. Although not a trained musician, Lambert

provided encouragement and critical thinking when Pete was just beginning his song-writing career. It was Lambert who would later suggest that Townshend string works together into lengthier pieces (he even helped with the libretto for *Tommy*). In late 1964, however, management's job was to keep the Who working and secure another recording contract. Chris Stamp went back to work on the set of the film *Heroes of Tellemark* in Norway just to pay the bills. The band survived on gigs such as their weekly dates at the Railway Tavern. One night, during the set, Pete accidentally bumped the neck of his guitar on the ceiling. He recalls that

it broke and it kinda shocked me cause I wasn't ready for it to go. . . . I was expecting everybody to go "Wow, he's broken his guitar," but nobody did anything which made me kind of angry in a way and determined to get this precious event noticed by the audience. I proceeded to make a big thing out of breaking the guitar. I pounded all over the stage with it and I threw the bits on the stage.<sup>3</sup>

The next week fans arrived expecting another guitar-smashing spectacle. Pete declined, but "Moonie" obliged, capping off the evening by beating up his drums.

Smashing instruments produced consequences. For one, it was costly; Lambert urged Pete to do it only on special occasions. (In fact, the penchant for trashing equipment kept the band in the red for a number of years.) It also created audience expectations as well as a stir in the entertainment community. To some, the Who's destructive finale became the hit song the band was expected to play every show. Some fans experienced a vicarious thrill, the symbolic act of rage and rebellion carried out by their surrogates onstage. According to Moon, they destroyed things because they were just "pissed off."<sup>4</sup>

The next logical step for the Who was to seal a recording contract. EMI passed, citing the lack of original material. So Townshend, with Lambert's encouragement, pursued this challenge with a vengeance; songwriting became his passion. It turned out that Kinks producer Shel Talmy was so entranced by a demo of Townshend original "I Can't Explain" that he signed the Who to a contract and scheduled a recording session. When Talmy insisted on using his trusted studio guitarist, future Led Zeppelin legend Jimmy Page, Townshend balked and played the lead solo. Page churned out the choppy Kinks-style rhythm-guitar chords. "I Can't Explain" sold more than 100,000 copies, peaked at #8 (U.K.), and earned the band nationwide TV appearances. Guitar feedback characterized their follow-up, "Anyway, Anywhere, Anyhow," in an attempt to simulate and capture the live Who on record. It was adopted as a theme song for the pop-music TV show *Ready, Steady, Go* but reached only #10 (U.K.) on the charts.

Despite its mounting success, the band was embroiled in turmoil. They were torn apart by conflicts over lifestyle, leadership, and creative differences. Pete, Keith, and even John were dedicated to life in the fast lane, fueled by amphetamines and alcohol and, in Pete's case, marijuana and hashish. Each night, when the supercharged band hit the

stage, sparks flew and anything could happen, and it often did. Thus, it is not surprising that the Who's live show was described as pure energy and that the mixture of drugs, adrenaline, loud music, and a rebellious psyche produced a climax of destruction.

Roger and Pete were also locked in battle over band leadership, a task for which neither was naturally suited. Both were argumentative, especially toward one another, and neither Roger's fists nor Pete's tongue helped in leading the band or mediating disputes. Finally, in Denmark, Roger, who was furious at Keith's constant partying and inconsistent playing, dumped out a box of pills. When Keith protested, Roger knocked him out. Ejected from the band, Daltrey—who wasn't considered to be a very good lead vocalist at the time—found himself staring at a future as a sheet-metal worker. Making an about-face, Roger promised to exchange his combative personality for that of a peaceful team player. This solution gave Pete creative carte blanche and challenged Roger with the role of interpreting Townshend's material.

His first chance came with "My Generation." In retrospect, this song is a successor to Chuck Berry's "School Days"—a musical and lyrical adolescent anthem. In the fifties Berry criticized his era's mores by favoring romance and rock; Townshend's sixties were a time of more forthright rebellion. So to his older generation, Pete cries "People try to put us down / Just because we get around." And also, "Why don't you all f-f-f-fade away / Don't try and dig what we all say." Townshend would later comment that "'My Generation' was very much about trying to find a place in society. I was very, very lost."<sup>5</sup>

Musically, the Who attack the song—guitar and bass pound out a quarter-note pulse, Roger shouts the lyrics, and Keith rides a percussive roller coaster of fills and cymbal crashes. Halfway through the song, the listener is treated to a unique guitar-bass call-and-response solo. The finale degenerates into drummed frenzy and feedback-filled guitar barrages. Thus, "My Generation" is hard rock before its time. But Townshend's 1970 description of the song's effect also anticipated punk rock: "It repulsed those it was supposed to repulse, and it drew a very thick line between the people that dug it and the people that wouldn't dig it."<sup>6</sup> Some certainly didn't dig the song's retort, "Hope I die before I get old."

Released in late 1965, "My Generation" quickly rose to #3 on the British charts but barely even placed in the United States (#74). Yet it was a definitive moment for rock and roll. The Who were laying the groundwork for the two important musical streams of the 1970s, hard rock and punk, in a single, driving, chaotic song—through the power trio, screaming singer, and distorted, pounding guitar on the one hand, and in-your-face lyrics and brash, thrashing music on the other. It was no wonder that Moon and Entwistle nearly quit and formed a band with Jimmy Page in 1966 or that, in 1977, Paul Cook and Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols were to praise the Who as one of their favorite bands.

During the years 1966 and 1967 the band consolidated its popularity in England with its auto-destruct live shows and a series of top-10 British singles: "Substitute" (#5), "I'm a Boy" (#2), "Happy Jack" (#3), "Pictures of Lilly" (#4), and "I Can See for Miles" (#10).

During this time there was a distinct stylistic shift in Townshend's writing. Whereas "I Can't Explain" and other early tunes had musical and lyrical similarities to the early Beatles and other period hits, Pete was now electing to craft compositions in accordance with the emerging trend toward musical complexity and deeper lyrical meanings.

"I Can See for Miles," the Who's only American top-10 hit (#9, September 1967), lyrically addresses romance (in this case, retribution), but musically it functions on a different level. The song offers a brilliant example of the power trio cruising on all cylinders. Moon is in delightful synchronization with Townshend's power chording during the verse as he provides the section with brash but tasteful dynamic coloration on his cymbals and tom-toms. A sustained E note by the guitar—the song is in E-major—rides on top of the chorus as the voices and chords change underneath from the tonic I to bVII, IV, VI, IV, and back to the I.

Certainly powerful but also musically interesting, "Miles" was part of a conceptual expansion that included the EP *A Quick One While He's Away* and the pop-art album *The Who Sell Out*. With songs tied together by original commercial jingles and on-air material from pirate radio station Radio London, *Sell Out* featured "I Can See for Miles" and an inside jacket adorned by advertising photos of each band member. (In fact, Roger contracted pneumonia from the shoot, having been submerged in a tub of baked beans.)

In 1967 the Who, frustrated by their inability to crack the American market, finally made a number of major concert appearances in the United States. They were on the bill at Murray the K's Easter Show in New York City along with Cream, the Blues Project, Wilson Pickett, and Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels. During eleven destructive Easter shows the band totaled twenty-two microphones, five guitars, four speaker cabinets, and one sixteen-piece drum kit.

In June the Who appeared at the Monterey International Pop Festival, rock's first megaconcert (see Chapter 14 for a more detailed account). The group opened a monumental closing-night set, followed by the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and the Mamas and the Papas. The Who completed their show with their usual demolition; Hendrix, who had resided in England for a year and felt quite competitive, not only smashed his guitar but burned it as well. As relative unknowns in the United States, the Who gained notoriety with this appearance and toured with countrymen Herman's Hermits—a classic mismatch, but not as bad as the one pairing Jimi Hendrix with top-40 idols the Monkees.

Later in the year the Who toured America once again and also appeared on CBS on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. Richard Barnes describes the havoc caused by what Pete terms "the destruction bit": Moon, who was drunk on brandy, "secretly added extra flash powder to the special effects. The explosion at the end of 'My Generation' was enormous. Pete temporarily lost his hearing and singed his hair, a fragment of flying cymbal embedded itself in Keith's leg, and show guest [movie star] Bette Davis fainted into Mickey Rooney's arms." In Michigan Moon celebrated his alleged twenty-first birthday (really only his twentieth) by trashing rooms in the local Holiday Inn. While being chased by the

authorities he filled all available cars with fire-extinguisher foam and then leaped into an empty swimming pool.

Experimentation with legal, recreational, and psychoactive drugs fueled the frantic nature that characterized the band's work. Use of alcohol and speed kept some members intemperate and overly aggressive. Townshend and Moon also ingested LSD and other psychedelics. Like the Beatles, Pete was also entranced by the teachings of an Eastern mystic, in this case Meher Baba—a man who wrote prolifically but who had not spoken in forty years. In 1968 Townshend reduced his drug intake and began to follow Baba's life philosophy. He would later say, "I think at the end of the day all religions are based on finding a reason why people should act in a caring, compassionate and humanitarian way. But, most of all, that they should act."

Reflective of this message of individual moral responsibility, Townshend set about writing rock and roll that was in some way illuminating to audiences. With the assistance and encouragement of manager Kit Lambert, he sketched out a story line that worked in both the symbolic and the real worlds. Townshend explained: "The thing is, we wanted it to work on lots of levels. . . . We want to turn on the spiritually hip, we want to turn on the fuckers and the street fighters. . . . We want to turn on the opera lovers and we succeeded in turning on a lot of people that weren't reached before."<sup>7</sup>

Early titles for this project included *Amazing Journey* and *Brain Opera* before settling on *Tommy*, after the central character. The fact that an actual story was being told through song, without accompanying narrative, was then unique in rock music and most closely resembled the opera form. This story, or libretto, begins with young Tommy witnessing his father's death at the hands of his mother's lover—the father, having been thought dead, returns years after the war. Tommy is traumatized and becomes deaf, mute, and blind. Tommy's mother attempts to find a cure for her son, after which he is administered LSD by the Acid Queen; eventually he is miraculously cured after smashing the mirror into which he has been looking.

While in his sense-deprived state Tommy becomes famous for excelling on pinball machines. And even though Tommy is finally cured, his uncle Ernie still tries to merchandise the boy's achievements, at summer camps. Once Tommy's normalcy and the fraud of his returned senses are revealed, the campers (representing the public) revolt, and Tommy is left alone, pleading for compassion.

On a symbolic level Tommy represented a person who through suffering achieved a God-realized state, without senses yet in tune with the cosmic pulse of all life that surrounds us—in this case represented by the electromagnetic impulses of the pinball machine. When the commercialized Tommy and his gifts—rock and roll, spiritual enlightenment, furtherance of humanity—are revealed to have been sold on a fraudulent basis, humanity revolts. Don't sell us false prophets! they cry. "We're not gonna take it!" A rejected Tommy cries, "See me, hear me," still capable of offering spiritual enlightenment.

In his masterwork Pete, following the tenets of Meher Baba, attempts to engage important issues surrounding the search for morality: "It [that era of pop music] was its

strong connection with the roots of spiritual theosophy and the language that rang with it—the idea that pop music was about spiritual uplift, human potential, solidarity, unification.”<sup>8</sup> The response to *Tommy* was near-universal acclaim. Mainstream British magazine *Melody Maker* named it LP of the Year; Albert Goldman in the *New York Times* called it a “work of innovative power and philosophical profundity.” It rose to #7 in the United States after its summer release in 1969 and reascended to #4 one year later.

The Who finally made it, achieving the kind of critical and commercial success that eluded them for so long. No longer relegated to the role of auto-destruct kings, the band took their place at the head of the creative/artistic class. Townshend received accolades as a composer and songwriter, Daltrey’s stature as a rock vocalist and song interpreter was at its zenith, and the rest of rock and roll finally caught up with rhythm-section pioneers Entwistle and Moon. Hard rockers looked to the Who as a prototype. And, as if to thumb their noses at the music aristocracy, the Who arranged for a *Tommy* tour of opera houses in Europe, ending with two shows at New York’s prestigious Lincoln Center.

The Who’s appearance at Woodstock in August 1969 was filled with brilliant images, but it was in fact a personal nightmare for the band. The golden-maned Daltrey wowed ’em, resplendent in his white-fringed leather and bathed in blue-white light; Townshend windmilled his guitar; Moon and Entwistle drove the runaway train. However, they waited all night and had been dosed with LSD and had to follow an explosive set by Sly and the Family Stone at 3:30 AM. Said Pete of the experience: “Woodstock wasn’t what rock was all about. . . . *Tommy* wasn’t getting to anyone. Sly and the Family Stone had just whipped everyone into a frenzy and then kind of walked off.”<sup>9</sup> After a long medley of *Tommy* songs, the exhausted bandmates performed a lengthy regular set that included the “My Generation” climax. During this set, an irritated and disoriented Pete swatted Yippie activist Abbie Hoffman into photographers’ row, the penalty for hijacking one of the Who’s microphones—during the set—to harangue the crowd with a political speech.

Many artists, having paid their dues and subsequently achieved high critical acclaim and commercial success, would dance the so-called dinosaur dance, content to rest on aging laurels. Pete Townshend paused for a moment and then began work on another major undertaking, a science-fiction film project titled *Lifehouse*. The major character, Bobby, another God-realized guru, leads a small band of freethinkers against the totalitarian rulers of the land. Bobby’s faith consists of a kind of biorhythmic, transcendental mythology. Each follower, in touch with individual biorhythms and concomitant notes or sounds, would, at nirvana’s gate, dance themselves into a whirling-dervish state—to the strains of the guru’s band.

However, the forces of control find the location of worship and break down the energy barriers protecting the church. They shoot Bobby, but before he dies the congregation achieves an ecstatic state, the mythological lost chord is sounded, and they are all transformed into the innocence as if in a Garden of Eden. Pete wrote the songs for this project and set about writing a screen treatment to sell to film studios anxious to capitalize on the

Who's previous success. In the end none was willing to risk the investment necessary for a contract, and Pete eventually found himself in a state of nervous exhaustion.

With their record company clamoring for a follow-up to *Tommy* and a release of live material, the Who recorded 240 hours of shows on their American tour. Nobody had the patience to cull the acceptable cuts, so the band booked a university concert in Leeds, England. Pete recalls, "We got a Pye 8-track and we said take it to Leeds, and we went to Leeds and it just happened to be like one of the greatest audiences we ever played to in our whole career."<sup>10</sup> Released in May 1970, *Live at Leeds* includes cover favorites "Summertime Blues" by Eddie Cochran and Mose Allison's "Young Man Blues"; it also contains extended renditions of "My Generation" and "Magic Bus." Not only did it showcase the vibrancy and vitality of their live act, but it also showcased Pete's talents as both a rhythm and a lead guitarist functioning within the structure of a power trio.

*Lifefhouse* was simply not to be, and the task of compiling the band's next studio album fell to acclaimed producer and engineer Glyn Johns. He assembled four *Lifefhouse* songs along with three other Townshend cuts and Entwistle's "My Wife." The resulting album, the critically acclaimed *Who's Next*, was released in the summer of 1971. The *Lifefhouse* cuts exhibit compositional brilliance, pioneering use of the synthesizer in rock music, and further synchronicity in play among the band members.

The first song, "Baba O'Reilly," named for Meher Baba and electronic music composer Terry Reilly, would have opened *Lifefhouse*. The ARP-2600 synthesizer was programmed with approximations of the physiological attributes of Meher Baba, and thus the repetitive phrases at the beginning reflect the story's interest with an individual's sonic representation. At one point in the song, Townshend describes the future (and perhaps current) environment as a "teenage wasteland." The acoustic opening of "Behind Blue Eyes" is a form that parallels the Led Zeppelin megahit, "Stairway to Heaven," released the same year. Daltrey's plaintive opening is followed by Moon's explosive entrance at mid-song in a number that attempts to engender sympathy for the leader of the oppressive forces.

"Won't Get Fooled Again" uses another repetitive underlay from the synthesizer to set off the explosive ensemble. As they are in "I Can See for Miles," Townshend and Moon are marvelous at creating a broad and rhythmic dynamic range by their synchronized playing. Entwistle adds bass slides to the mix during the chorus. The lyrics leave plenty of room for interpretation. If one neglects the verses, the song can easily be seen as "We're not gonna take it" redux. Paradoxically, the verses actually discourage political interest or activism by suggesting that any change in leadership will produce new leaders just as bad as the old.

Townshend recanted in 1987, telling an interviewer, "It was dumb to deny the political role of the individual. The political responsibility of the individual. . . . It was an irresponsible song. It was quite clear that during that period that rock musicians had the ear of the people."<sup>11</sup> "The Song Is Over" rounded out the four *Lifefhouse* cuts. The *Who's Next*

cover was graced by their own science-fiction obelisk, in the process of being adorned by band members, who appear to be peeing on it.

The band's early greatest-hits package, *Meaty, Beaty, Big and Bouncy*, kept fans busy while Pete worked on his third parable, *Quadrophenia*. Centered around Jimmy, another hero, it chronicles the mod experience in midsixties England and features a frustrated, inarticulate, confused, and violent young man who feels betrayed by all elements in his life. Townshend had always felt that rock, at its essence, was "the music of the frustrated and dissatisfied" and that the mod subculture represented its purest working-class audience.

The mod was represented by four distinct personality characteristics, each with a theme song that also represented characteristics of a member of the band. Roger was the tough guy/"Helpless Dancer," John the romantic/"Doctor Jimmy," Keith the lunatic/"Bell Boy," and Pete the philosopher/"Love Reign O'er Me." Feeling discouraged and disillusioned, our hero, Jimmy, returns to the Brighton coast, the scene of past glories from the gang fights between mods and rockers. During this return he spies the Ace Face, the former general of the mod troops, working as a hotel bellboy. In the final scene Jimmy clings to a rock in the coastal surf in a final reevaluation of life's meaning.

Townshend called *Quadrophenia* "a study in spiritual desperation. The fact that all desperation and frustration leads somebody to the point where the first time in their life they realize that the only important thing is to open their heart. It wasn't about blood and guts the way that the film turned out to be." The album represented the highest chart success for the band, peaking at #2 in November 1973. The film version, released six years later, didn't garner the same acclaim, in part due to the distinctly British experience of the mod subculture.

In 1978 the Who released *Who Are You*, which questioned the relevance of rock dinosaurs in the era of punk and metal creativity and the seemingly simultaneous death of Keith Moon, who died from an overdose of pills. Into the twenty-first century Townshend continues to write and release solo projects, and the Who continue to tour. Bassist John Entwistle died in Las Vegas on June 27, 2002, on the eve of the band's North American tour.

As one of rock's most accomplished and dedicated composers, Townshend continues to address issues he considers important: "[What] continues to be important is that the human individual accepts the fact that he or she is capable of being spiritually swayed. And in order to make the best of that, they really have to listen to what's being said." Although he considers the music business to be "financially, spiritually and morally corrupt," Pete believes that rock still is a "key" to freeing the person to be themselves.<sup>12</sup>



Having played in the shadows of other British invasion groups during the midsixties, the Who began to receive the recognition they deserved at the time of Woodstock. Musically, and in their live-performance style, they pioneered the hard rock form. Because of their

musical aptitude, talent, and social proclivities, they redefined instrumentalist roles and functions, creating a daring and more sophisticated rock. Drums became more than timekeeper, the bass more than harmonic and rhythmic foundation, and guitar became both lead and rhythm.

As a rock composer, Townshend is one of the best. He wrote alone, not as a part of a team like Lennon-McCartney or Jagger-Richards. And he wrote about the broadest scope of topics, whether it be through in-your-face rock and roll or thoughtful, philosophical, and sophisticated commentary on the human condition. What's more, this was accomplished as audiences and critics focused on the high-volume, high-energy, destructive bombast of their live shows. Rarely does one band successfully combine such essential rock elements with such complex and sophisticated musical and lyrical components.

In Chapter 10 we will return to the United States to chronicle the folk revival of the early 1960s, the emergence of Bob Dylan as a singer-songwriter, and the genre's response to the rock and roll success of the British invasion.



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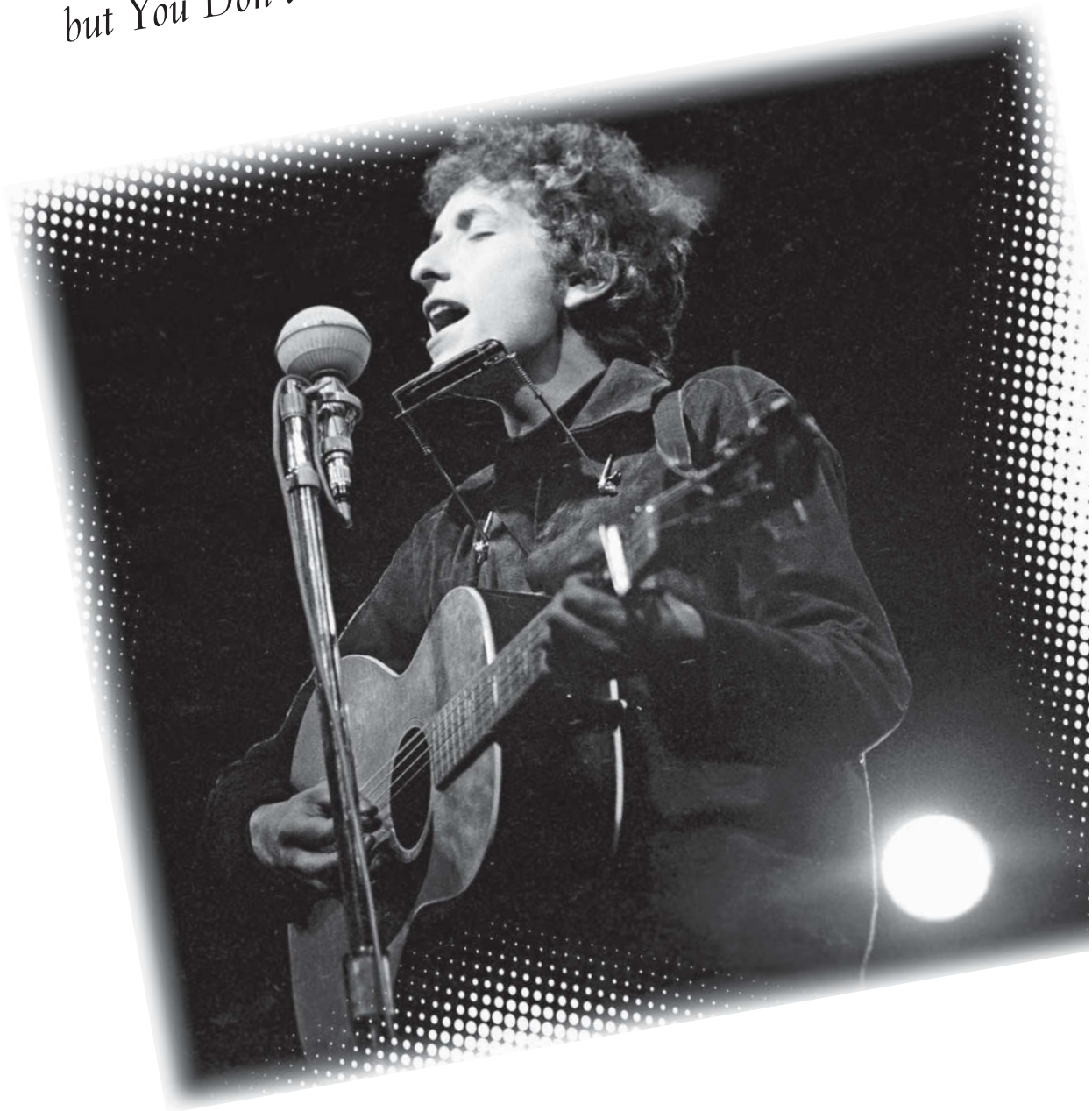
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# BOB DYLAN

*Somethin' Is Happening,  
but You Don't Know What It Is*

## Chapter 10



*Bob Dylan*

The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, rational disordering of the senses.

—Arthur Rimbaud

I'm just one person, doing what I do. Trying to get along . . . staying out of people's hair.

—Bob Dylan, 1969, in a *Rolling Stone* interview

The point is that Dylan's songs can serve as metaphors, enriching our lives, giving us random insight into the myths we carry and the present we live in, intensifying what we've known and leading us towards what we never looked for, while at the same time enforcing an emotional strength upon those perceptions by the power of the music that moves with his words.

—*Rolling Stone* magazine, 1970

**B**OB DYLAN, AN ITINERANT nineteen-year-old folksinger, wandered through the streets of New York's Greenwich Village one cold day in December 1960. Recently arrived from Minnesota, he was on a pilgrimage to the bedside of his idol, American folk hero Woody Guthrie. Within a few years this scruffy, curly-haired midwesterner would turn the folk community, and later the rock and roll world, upside down. For now, he was just another kid come to see Woody Guthrie.

### Digression: The American Protest Song Tradition

Folk music has always been an important part of the American music tradition, and topical songs—personal stories linked to current political and cultural events—are an essential part of that heritage. Supporters of the American Revolution sang songs in praise of their heroes, Jeffersonian Democrats issued a scathing attack on the Federalist Party with the tune “Jefferson and Liberty,” abolitionists railed against slavery, and both sides—Union and Confederate—created sad songs of a country ravaged by the Civil War.

The twentieth century, with the growth of the trade-union movement, saw a shift in the nature of topical songs. Many songs focused on events rather than the more personalized stories of earlier eras. International Workers of the World union organizer Joe Hill took a song about train engineer Casey Jones and made it into a prounion protest song about Casey Jones the strikebreaker.

The Great Depression and the concurrent expansion of union organizing efforts became topics for songs dealing with injustice and inequality in American society. Woody Guthrie, a boy from Oklahoma whose family was decimated by tragedy, saw dust storms destroy the land and banks evict his neighbors. Guthrie became convinced that only if the common people banded together, via unions and other associations, could they successfully fight for their rights.

Woody had a talent for attaching topical lyrics to traditional folk and religious melodies. In a country where most resources were in the hands of a rich few, Guthrie pointed out that “this land is your land,” or that it could be, should you choose to struggle for it. His “Pastures of Plenty” and “Deportees” painted poignant portraits of migrant farm laborers. Among his 1,400 songs were the Dust Bowl Ballads, as well as songs about the Northwest’s Bonneville Power Authority (including “Roll On, Columbia”), humorous children’s songs, “hard-travelin’” ballads, and numerous union songs (including “Union Maid”).

Although Guthrie would point out that he was just one guy singing about life as he saw it, others found him a figure of heroic stature. Woody crisscrossed America, a hobo riding the rails or thumbing a ride on the nation’s highways. He turned his back on fame and commercial success, opting instead to perform in union halls and on strike picket lines. Acting on these beliefs earned him more than a few bruises. But Guthrie’s persistent idealism, coupled with a talent for reflecting the attitudes and hopes of working-class America with simple, direct songs, established him as a poet-prophet of the era.

After World War II Guthrie began to experience the first symptoms of Huntington’s chorea, the degenerative nerve disease to which he would ultimately succumb in 1967. Groups like the Almanac Singers (of which Guthrie was a member) and the Weavers carried on the topical song tradition. Pete Seeger, the son of musicologist Charles Seeger, left Harvard, collected folk songs in the South, learned to play the banjo, and traveled with Woody before the war. With Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert, and Fred Hellerman, Seeger formed the Weavers, a folk group dedicated to preserving the political-activist protest song tradition. The Weavers also added a spectrum of international folk songs to their repertoire.

Discovered by Decca arranger and bandleader Gordon Jenkins, the Weavers reached #1 on the pop charts with their version of blues singer Leadbelly’s “Goodnight Irene.” The Hebrew folk song on the flip side, “Tzena, Tzena, Tzena,” reached #2. They appeared on television, had further hits, and toured clubs and concert halls nationwide. As the cold war and the McCarthy era’s Red Scare hysteria reached its peak, an important and meaningful pop music career was destroyed by accusations of left-wing leanings. Apparently, a repertoire containing international folk songs, Negro spirituals, and prounion broadsides was considered too subversive for the guardians of American morality. The Weavers were relegated to playing union halls, civil rights and peace benefits, and college concerts.

By the late 1950s the popularity of the Weavers was again on the rise, and a new era in folk music was beginning. Seeger left the group, hounded by right-wing patriots such as the House Un-American Activities Committee, and pursued a successful solo career. He achieved commercial success in spite of his politics, recording for Columbia Records and releasing albums that included the songs “We Shall Overcome,” “Turn, Turn, Turn,” and the Cuban patriotic anthem “Guantanamera.”

Smooth-sounding button-down folk groups, inspired by the Weavers’ legacy and Seeger’s banjo playing, performed on college campuses and had popular chart successes. The Kingston Trio reached #1 with the folk ballad “Tom Dooley” and had a hit with Seeger’s “Where Have All the Flowers Gone.” The Highwaymen, with a lineup of Connecticut college students, had a #1 with Weavers original “Michael (Row Your Boat Ashore).” Even the Beach Boys recorded the Bahamian folk song “Sloop John B,” introduced on record in the United States by the Weavers.

### Back to Greenwich Village



This topical folk song tradition of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and the Weavers influenced the new generation of folksingers, including Bob Dylan, who were drawn to Greenwich Village in the early sixties. Blues-based singers like Dave Van Ronk mingled with Guthrie cohorts Cisco Houston and Ramblin’ Jack Elliot; traditionalists such as Joan Baez; emerging topical balladeers such as Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, and Bob Gibson and groups like Peter, Paul, and Mary; and bluegrassers the Greenbriar Boys. During that chilly winter day Bob Dylan came to New York to find Woody and stayed, one day to change the face of American popular music.

This story begins in America’s heartland, the open-pit iron-ore mining town of Hibbing, in northern Minnesota. Bob’s father, Abe Zimmerman, was a partner at Zimmerman Furniture and Electric, on Hibbing’s Fifth Avenue. His uncle owned the local movie theater, where Bob swept up popcorn to images of the American Dream. Young Robert Zimmerman grew up in the Jewish mercantile middle class of America’s Midwest.

Bob was something of a loner, a condition enhanced by the prevailing local attitude toward Jews. He had a few close friends but also spent increasing amounts of time in his room reading, writing poetry, and later composing lyrics to songs. Bob had an early interest in the piano, rejecting lessons and opting instead for the I’ll-do-it-myself school of learning. He also picked up the guitar. In 1955 Haley’s “Rock Around the Clock” and the music of Little Richard reached northern Minnesota—not, of course, on Hibbing’s WMFG, but at night, from stations in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Shreveport, Louisiana.

At the age of fifteen and with images of Brando and Dean in mind, Zimmerman purchased a leather jacket and a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. He formed a rock band, the Teen Chords, with friends, emulating the brash aggressive style of Little Richard on the

piano. Like high school bands everywhere, Bob and friends were plagued by the authority's attitude toward rock and roll. At one performance, the vice principal simply pulled the plug, literally. The ensuing loss of face impelled Bob to move away from rock and the piano toward the guitar and folk music.

Bob listened to bluesmen Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed and classic rockers Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly. Three days before Holly died, Bob was in the front row at Buddy's Duluth, Minnesota, concert. But it was folk music that grabbed his attention most. Zimmerman enrolled in the University of Minnesota, having graduated from high school in 1959 and spent the summer playing music. Bob began to haunt the folk clubs of Minneapolis's bohemian section, Dinkytown, anxious to perform. Here, "Zimmerman" was exchanged for "Dillon." Some cite *Gunsmoke* TV hero Matt Dillon, or even the Hibbing family of the same name, as influences in the name change. Others note his later appetite for the works of Dylan Thomas in explaining Bob's last legal name change, to Dylan in 1962.

In Minneapolis Dylan developed that single-minded pursuit of success that one sees in many of the artists discussed in this work. This zeal was matched by the recently acquired enthusiasm for Woody Guthrie. Introduced to the Guthrie myth through the autobiography *Bound for Glory*, Dylan learned his songs, phrasing, vocal inflections, and guitar style. He telephoned Guthrie in the hospital, telling him that he would be East soon to visit. After a year's apprenticeship in Minneapolis, Dylan began his own guru quest. His subsequent success surprised many of those he left behind—some embittered by the feeling that they had given much more to Dylan than they had received in return.

The Bob Dylan who reached New York was very different from the Robert Zimmerman who had left Hibbing. Dylan had built a fantasy life history to replace discarded pieces of the real one. Zimmerman transformed himself into Dylan. In one version Dylan had no living parents. In another young Bob had run away from home on numerous occasions, hitchhiking or riding the rails to South Dakota, California, New Mexico . . . wherever. Dylan claimed to have met Woody as early as 1954 while on the run from home.

Bob dove into the burgeoning Village folk life, visiting Woody in the hospital and arriving on the Guthrie family's Queens doorstep, to the delight of young Arlo and dismay of the babysitter. Invited to the weekly get-together at an apartment near the hospital, Dylan initially sat quietly at Guthrie's feet as the era's folk cognoscenti swapped tales and tunes. Eventually, Bob got up the nerve to sing his "Tribute to Woody," a song that moved the master to comment, "That boy's got a voice. Maybe he won't make it by his writing, but he sure can sing it."<sup>1</sup>

Dylan was by no means a polished performer at the time. But what he lacked in experience he made up for in enthusiasm, a confidence bordering on arrogance, and a nervous energy that proved contagious to an audience. Oscar Brand, a well-known folksinger, reflects, "I thought Bob was pretty crummy. He was a pale version of Woody. . . . He was like Woody in that he wrote bad and he wrote good. When he wrote

good, he was a genius.” Noting that success took a year and a half to happen, folksinger Bob Gibson’s initial impression was that by contemporary standards Dylan had nothing going. “He couldn’t play real good. He couldn’t sing real good. . . . But you were drawn back.”<sup>2</sup>

Much of the commentary about Dylan the person was also ambivalent. He appeared so vulnerable at times that many performers and supporters took it upon themselves to take care of him. He arrived in the Village unkempt, a folk urchin—reportedly wearing the same hat and jacket for years (they appear on the cover of his first album). In short the folk community put him up, fed him, and took care of him. Some would later feel discarded, no longer needed, no longer cultivated as friends. As Dylan became more popular, he became more aloof and sometimes cruel. During legendary drinking sessions, Dylan would unleash brutal sarcastic attacks, putting down friends and other performers. Some left; others returned for more.

Success comes to different performers in different ways. For Dylan, it began with a laudatory column, about his September 1961 Gerde’s Folk City performance, by *New York Times* reviewer Robert Shelton. In it Dylan was touted as a “bright new face in folk music” whose career was going “straight up.” The day the Shelton review appeared, Columbia Records A&R genius John Hammond Sr.—the man who had signed Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, and Aretha Franklin and would later sign Bruce Springsteen—signed Dylan to a record contract. Hammond had seen Dylan in concert months before, pegged him as a rebel, and decided that he wanted to record the spirit of protest. Dylan embodied that spirit.

The initial album, the self-titled *Bob Dylan*, hints at flashes of future brilliance. Dylan, with guitar and harmonica, sped through traditional blues and folk tunes, offering only two originals. His voice, phrasing, and harmonica style were called unique by some, just plain bad by others. Record sales were minimal, and in the halls of Columbia Records Dylan was being referred to as “Hammond’s Folly.” But, in the absence of artistically viable rock music, the commercial importance of folk music was growing. Dylan was learning quickly, soon to outdistance the pack.

In the early 1960s Greenwich Village continued as the center of bohemian culture in New York—folk music and jazz were the music of choice, art and literature the common pursuits. Dylan inhaled the atmosphere: Rimbaud and the beat poets, a wide variety of musical and performance innovations by fellow artists, and the nascent political and social upheaval of the sixties. Dylan fell in love with Suze Rotolo, a budding sculptor and artist, and her activities with the civil rights and peace movements exposed him to a variety of new political and literary experiences. She also became everybody’s folk sweetheart as she appeared arm in arm with Dylan on the cover of his next album, *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*. To Suze, Bob’s genius was the depth and detail of his vision and his ability to synthesize the information and express it in words.

The May 1963 release of *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* unveiled Bob Dylan, poet-prophet, to the world. A new era in politics was reflected in “Masters of War” and “Hard Rain’s

a-Gonna Fall.” Warm reminiscences of “Girl from the North Country” clashed with the first of his acerbic tirades against the real and imagined transgressions of Dylan’s lost lovers, “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright.” Suze’s unwillingness to act as a Dylan appendage, and her subsequent flight from the relationship, would provide the wounded Dylan with an easy target for his bittersweet sarcasm.

The album’s first cut, “Blowin’ in the Wind,” is the rough jewel that reveals Dylan’s potential songwriting genius. Dylan uses the poetic devices of allusion, symbol, metaphor, and imagery within an abstract framework of questions about issues of war and peace, justice and injustice. The answers to these questions are “blowin’ in the wind.” Does that mean they are tangible, surrounding us like the wind? Or that they are amorphous and indistinct like the wind? Dylan frames the questions, challenging listeners to draw their own conclusions. This ability to confront issues of both political and personal consequence in an artistically creative and abstract manner proved to be one of Dylan’s major contributions to folk music and, later, rock music.

Dylan’s version of the support-system “team” came together at this time. This brilliant and unique performer and songwriter now commanded the services of Albert Grossman, a dedicated, business-minded, and powerful folk music manager. With the addition of the clout offered by Columbia Records and the production talents of Hammond and, later, Tom Wilson, Dylan was poised to rise as high as his artistic growth would merit.

One of Grossman’s clients was the folk trio Peter, Paul, and Mary. Already nationally known entertainers with hit records of the Seeger-Hays anthem “If I Had a Hammer” and “Puff the Magic Dragon,” their popular version of “Blowin’ in the Wind” gave Dylan some overdue national recognition. At the August 1963 civil rights march on Washington, D.C., Dylan sang “Only a Pawn in the Game” and Peter, Paul, and Mary sang “Blowin’ in the Wind.” Dylan’s career also received a significant boost from the queen of traditional folk music, Joan Baez. Mesmerized by Dylan’s performances and struck by the understated brilliance and timeliness of his songs, Baez took Dylan on tour, exposing him to her adoring college audiences. He opened her shows, they sang duets, and they eventually became lovers. At the 1963 Newport Folk Festival, the queen introduced the new crown prince to the elite folk audience. When asked in a *New York Daily News* interview in October 1963 about the subject of folk music, Dylan replied, “The times cry for the truth . . . and people want to hear the truth and that’s just what they’re hearing in good folk music today.”

Dylan, who experienced the artistic creativity and political activity of the New York Greenwich Village folk scene firsthand, crafted that vision of the truth throughout his next album, *The Times They Are a-Changin’*. In it Dylan’s notion of the inevitability of change proved illuminating for his growing audience, causing converts to hail Dylan as a prophet. Dylan’s late 1963 America, as represented in this historic recording, was full of people struggling against the tide of injustice. There are poignant reproductions of true stories: a disconsolate farmer choosing the murder of his family and suicide over the loss

of his farm and slow starvation (“The Ballad of Hollis Brown”), the beating death of a black servant woman by a rich young tobacco baron (“The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”), “One Too Many Mornings” and “Boots of Spanish Leather” find the weary lover at the end of a relationship, and civil rights leader Medgar Evers’s assassin appeared as “Only a Pawn in the Game,” the larger game being racism and oppression. The title cut ties these vignettes together in a prophetic vision regarding the inevitability of change and the resultant turmoil should the powerful of the United States continue to resist democratic change. He calls upon politicians, journalists, and critics to become part of, instead of obstruction to, this new wave of human rights activism. Finally, Dylan calls on parents to refrain from criticizing their children and to get out of the way if they can’t lend a hand.

The civil rights movement rejoiced at this poetic expression of imminent change. Young people discovered a spokesperson for their generation. The twenty-two-year-old Dylan found himself in the role of seer, a position in which he was not altogether comfortable. Then, just as people were beginning to discover the prophetic Dylan and as the country was getting caught up in political activism, Dylan began one of his many creative course corrections. Having started his career singing traditional folk and blues, Dylan had evolved into a topical singer. Now, having briefly experienced the dangers of civil rights activism during a trip to the South, Bob turned his focus away from the sociopolitical landscape. Fear was one motivation. Struck by the sudden death of President Kennedy and cognizant of possible involvement of the radical Right, Dylan feared he was next on the assassins’ list of liberal ideologues. Beyond this paranoia, Dylan was reacting to new vistas opened by his use of mind-expanding drugs. They helped create a more personal, metaphysical orientation. After all, nobody has ever accused psychoactive drugs of enhancing political activism. Time slowed to a microscopic crawl as the poet examined his relationship to the forces of the cosmos.

In March 1965 Columbia released the album *Bringing It All Back Home*. The distorted cover contains a dressed-up, no-nonsense Dylan, a sultry woman in red (manager Grossman’s wife, Sally), and a gray cat named Rolling Stone. One can imagine the surprise when a listener placed the record on the turntable and “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” the record’s first cut, exploded from the speakers. Accompanying the now famous stream-of-consciousness lyrics, which warn listeners to beware of those in authority, pulses an electric rock and roll band with a new musical energy. Many fans enamored with Dylan the folksinger, those who venerated him as a political visionary and learned to accept the personal focus of his transition period, were stunned by the first side’s electric instrumentation. To most followers of serious protest or traditional folk music, rock and roll was still considered a simplistic, romance-dominated, adolescent-oriented pop music.

However, Dylan’s turn toward and eventual embrace of the rock and roll idiom was not such a radical departure but instead a return to his musical roots. Dylan came from a generation that worshiped the classic rockers. He had recorded the single “Mixed-Up

Confusion” with an electric band back in 1962. What’s more, his friendship with the Beatles pushed him toward rock. Aware of both the limited commercial potential of acoustic folk music and the astounding success of the British invasion bands, “going electric” proved a natural progression for an artist who was not restrained by convention. The Beatles and Dylan participated in a process of cross-pollination: Dylan suggested that the Fab Four pursue poetic lyrics of social and political consequence; the Beatles countered with the power of rock and roll.

It is interesting to note that throughout the 1960s Dylan made a series of artistic course corrections. The journey that started in traditional folk music followed a path through protest, psychosocial folk, folk-rock, and country-flavored folk-rock. Dylan seemed aware of the commercial potential of each shift in direction, as each brought increased record sales. Dylan seemed able to sense the shifting commercial pulse of the nation.

Though abandoning societal polemics in *Bringing It All Back Home*, Dylan nevertheless maintained his individual rebellion. He wasn’t “gonna work on Maggie’s farm no more” and he led an estranged life in “Outlaw Blues.” This rebel was also a wanderer, and the trip taken by “Mr. Tambourine Man” that opens side two is one of his most famous songs. In it Dylan is at his abstract best, telling a tale of a weary, disillusioned, and smoke-blurred existence, pleading for escape and a new morning. Listening to this surreal plea at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, I was not the only one to experience both confusion and enlightenment. The song contained something indefinably marvelous. What was it?

On “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream,” the listener is treated to a glimpse at Dylan’s famous spontaneous recording process. Whereas most artists took great pains to create exacting versions of their songs in the studio, Dylan was notorious for his casual approach—“Here’s the song, let’s wing it.” Gathering musicians whom he considered artistically trustworthy, Dylan describes the process: “I play it, and everyone just sort of fills in behind it.”<sup>3</sup> On “115th Dream” we hear the band forgetting its cue to start the tune, laughter, and then the successful second try.

In April 1965 Joan Baez accompanied Dylan on his return to England. The seven dates sold out within an hour. Whereas Baez had introduced Bob to her folk audiences, immediately garnering him the status of folk music’s crown prince, she hoped for some reciprocity as to Dylan’s English fans. The call to join him onstage never came. Hurt and miserable, Baez left for the Continent. It was only after many years, and then through a cathartic song of retribution called “Diamonds and Rust,” that she communicated with him again. They eventually performed together on the Rolling Thunder Review of 1975 (discussed later).

The 1965 English tour’s essence was captured in a cinema vérité documentary by D. A. Pennebaker entitled *Don’t Look Back*, now available on video. It chronicles not only Dylan’s stage performances, but his jousting with the press, his verbal demolition of a student reporter, Grossman in no-holds-barred negotiation mode, and informal song sessions. We are treated to Dylan the hero and Dylan the boor. By tour’s end Dylan had become the

object of affection of former model Sara Lowndes, a Pennebaker assistant and Sally Grossman's friend. Bob and Sara were secretly married in November 1965.

The live debut of the electric Dylan was scheduled for the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. *Bringing It All Back Home* had reached the top 10 and his new single, "Like a Rolling Stone," was headed up the charts to #2. (It was blocked from the top spot by Sonny and Cher's "I Got You, Babe.") In anticipation of the show, Dylan corralled members of Chicago's Paul Butterfield Blues Band, including guitarist Mike Bloomfield, plus Al Kooper on organ and Barry Kornfeld on piano, for an all-night jam and practice. Dylan hit the stage in an orange shirt, and the band started into "Maggie's Farm." The audience's hostile reaction was divided between folk purists who felt betrayed by electrification and less purist concertgoers who couldn't distinguish Dylan from the surrounding noise due to the terrible sound balance.

The furor over Dylan's new direction continued into the following autumn. Some contended that he had given up his search for a "universal sound" and thrown in his lot with the forces of top-40 radio. In short Dylan had gone commercial. Other critics were quick to point out that this fusion of poetry and consequential lyrics with the guitar-based rock and roll band produced a hybrid of monumental artistic and commercial potential. By June 1965, before Dylan's ascendance to the top 10 with "Like a Rolling Stone," a California-based group named the Byrds electrified "Mr. Tambourine Man" and scored a #1 hit—and the folk-rock genre was now off and running.

The demanding and debilitating 1965–1966 schedule continued with the release of *Highway 61 Revisited*, the second in Dylan's folk-rock trilogy. The opening cut was "Like a Rolling Stone," which was listed as the best rock and roll song of all time by the British magazine *New Musical Express*; the song became his most popular work. Like much of Dylan's best, the lyrics can be interpreted in various ways. It can be interpreted as the latest diatribe against the lost lover. Dylan might also be empathizing with young people leaving home—either to escape or to search for a better life—by asking, "How does it feel, to be on your own?" Even the basic "How does it feel?" brought a new feelings-oriented perspective to a tightly controlled emotional environment.

Dylan also reached a musical peak with "Like a Rolling Stone"—the opening drum shots signal its power while the large ensemble climbs harmonic steps to the chorus, crowned by Bloomfield's slashing guitar fills. The refrain rides on top of Al Kooper's broad organ chords (see Kooper's autobiographical *Backstage Passes* for a hilarious account) while Dylan shouts "How does it feel?" The song was Dylan's first to receive significant radio airplay and remained in the top 40 for nine weeks. For the first time, Dylan had achieved mass commercial success and mass popular penetration. He had achieved Roseburg status.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of this album, which is considered his best by some critics, continues the themes of anger and rebellion. Musically, it contains his hardest-driving rock and roll yet, played by a variety of New York and Nashville session musicians. Lyrically, Dylan introduces us to the stereotypical "Nowhere Man"—Mr. Jones in "Ballad of a Thin Man." Reflecting the feelings of a younger, more active generation, Dylan confronts this repre-

sentative of straight society: “Because something is happening here / But you don’t know what it is / Do you, Mister Jones?” Dylan’s other topics (or targets) include a selection of real or imagined female companions, materialism, and a variety of places visited aboard his magic swirling ship.

Having now entered the world of popular music, Dylan occupied a peculiar and exalted position. Although he had not achieved the mass commercial success of the British invasion rockers, he was viewed, even by some of them, as a man whose songs contained magic and wisdom. This perception made contact with the press problematic. Press conferences were bound to include questions about the meanings of his songs, to which he would inevitably reply, “What do they mean to you? I don’t know, I just write them.” Thus, there existed the paradox of a man perceived to know “the truth” acting like a hostile boor when asked for the one thousandth time what it all meant. Dylan simply didn’t want the responsibility.

Dylan’s increased popularity also meant an exhausting international tour, which included periodic stops for recording sessions in Nashville. His backup band consisted of the Hawks, four Canadians and an Arkansas-born drummer (that was Levon Helm, who missed most of the ensuing tour when he returned to his native Arkansas). With roots in country music, blues, and classic rock and roll, and exhibiting both musical mastery and great instrumental versatility, the band (later to become known simply as the Band) proved to be a perfect complement to the bard. Guitarist-songwriter Robbie Robertson roamed the stage, punctuating Dylan’s jabbing lyrics with simple melodic riffs.

The tour encompassed dates in the United States, Europe, and Australia, sometimes three to four nights per week. Although Dylan denied that his songs were drug oriented, he candidly admitted that drugs (speed, marijuana, and others) kept him up there to pump ‘em out. While the band slept, Dylan wrote. Friends felt Dylan was not well, exhausted, even close to death. Response to the electric sets ranged from acceptance, mostly in the United States, to massive walkouts, booing, and even violence. This lack of audience acceptance, the constant bickering with the press, and pressures for a new product exacted a telling emotional toll on the artist.

In May 1966 Columbia released an album with no identification on the front jacket, the two-record set *Blonde on Blonde*. From the cover gazed a deliberately out-of-focus Dylan with disheveled hair and a perplexed look. (A 1977 poll of critics rated the album #2 on the all-time rock list.)<sup>5</sup> Some reviewers felt it would have been a brilliant one-disc album and that the two-disc format stretched the quality of the material. This was the first double album by a major artist, predating Frank Zappa’s *Freak Out* by several months. The album’s first cut, “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35,” sounds as though it were recorded at a party. The lyrical hook, “Everybody must get stoned,” does nothing to dispel the druggie image. A barrage of disclaimers about the lyrics was ineffective as radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic banned the tune from the airwaves.

*Blonde on Blonde* showcases the fine musical tastes of Dylan’s studio players interpreting his broadest range of music. Lyrically, the songs generally fall along a continuum of love

relationships—from the negative, nasty, sarcastic portraits of women loved and lost (“Just Like a Woman” and “Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat”) to the glowing portrait of his new love, Sara (“Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands”). Sandwiched between are a variety of visions, some unobtainable, some in the blues mode of loved and lost, and some, of course, incomprehensible.

That summer, with the album and single “Rainy Day Women #12 & 35” having reached the top 10, Dylan’s Columbia Record contract expired, and he faced a new series of concert dates. The exhausted Dylan retired to the upstate New York countryside to rest with his family, near the artist colony of Woodstock. There, on July 29, 1966, Dylan crashed his Triumph motorcycle. Whether Dylan broke his neck, as was reported in the press, or sustained less serious injuries, he remained out of the public eye until the January 1968 release of his next album. Everybody worried and wondered whether his head injury would prevent him from writing his next chapter of existential angst. In hindsight Dylan was probably due for another course correction, and the injury and subsequent period of slowing down and recuperation possibly saved him from becoming another casualty of life in the fast lane.

Throughout the summer of 1967 Dylan turned on the tape recorder while he and the Band jammed in the basement of their pink tract house in nearby West Saugerties, New York. The songs, released as *The Basement Tapes* in July 1975, show a man midtack in yet another artistic course correction. He continues the quest for answers yet at the same time seems more satisfied, surrounded by friends—cocomposers (the Band), a growing family, and a nurturing physical environment. During this hiatus, Dylan-penned compositions were recorded by other artists (“The Mighty Quinn” by Manfred Mann and “Wheels of Fire” by Brian Auger).

At a time when many artists were creating more musically complex, studio-oriented music, Dylan surfaced in January 1968 with the sparse, simple sounds of *John Wesley Harding*. Recorded in Nashville with top studio session men Charlie McCoy on bass, Kenny Buttrey on drums, and Pete Drake on pedal-steel guitar, this album showcases a Dylan come full circle—to strummed acoustic guitar, harmonica, and vocal. With one exception the songs are short, and generally the tone is less ominous than his most recent efforts. Biblical allusion of repentance and salvation creep into the mix in his relentless pursuit of solutions to life’s dilemmas.

The devoted family man and Woodstock country gentleman returned again to Nashville in February 1969 to solidify this latest musical change of course. With an expanded cast that included Charlie Daniels, Norman Blake, and Johnny Cash, Dylan recorded *Nashville Skyline*, released in April 1969. It was an immediate commercial success (the album hit #3), and the single “Lay Lady Lay” went to #7. Dylan’s newest incarnation featured a relatively smooth vocalist (in part, as a result of his quitting smoking) who is crooning positive, and even sometimes playful, tunes about love gained and sometimes lost.

Dylan garnered an even larger audience with this album. His metamorphosis into a country-flavored folk-rock artist won him increased sales and added country music listeners to his stable of fans. Dylan even appeared as a special guest star on Johnny Cash's network TV show, where the duo played the record's dissonant duet "Girl from the North Country." However, the appeal to a wider audience—fashioned by creating less abstract and symbolic lyrics, more songs featuring just plain romance, and identifiable country music instrumentation (use of pedal-steel guitar, fiddle, and dobro)—gave reviewers ample ammunition to label Dylan a sellout pandering to Nixon's "silent majority."

To many antiwar protesters, Dylan's timing for his journey into country music appeared inopportune. While protest music—and even Dylanesque folk-rock—could be interpreted as philosophically and politically progressive, country music, including its "redneck" proponents, conservative orientation, and lack of social conscience, were red flags to former supporters. Many wrote off their prophet as no longer relevant, a Judas.

In his defense, Alan Rinzler points out that Dylan was only doing what he had always done—writing from experience reflecting a happy relationship and home life and a long-standing love of country music. Here we have an ordinary man, without the crown of thorns. Dylan's next release, *Self Portrait* (June 1970), garnered such negative criticism that *Rolling Stone*'s Greil Marcus was driven to comment, "What is this shit?"<sup>6</sup> Although many felt he had returned to form with his October 1970 release *New Morning*, Dylan had finally fallen from the ranks of rock's vanguard—that special group at the apex of their artistic and commercial careers whose every release is scoured for its musical essence and lyrical truths.

As with many rock dinosaurs, Dylan's future releases would, for the most part, be compared to the faded image of the demigod. Still, some efforts of the next fifteen years ranked among his creative best. Dylan concert appearances were especially legendary. In August 1971 he performed a series of oldies while accompanied by Leon Russell, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr (at Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh benefit). A dynamic 1974 tour with the Band was chronicled in *Before the Flood*. In the fall of 1975 Dylan set out with an assortment of singers (Joan Baez, Jack Elliot, Roger McGuinn, and others), acoustic and electric musicians, poet Allen Ginsberg, and more than seventy others on an odyssey called the Rolling Thunder Review. Playing in venues ranging from New England college campuses to Madison Square Garden, this "floating musical crap game" of folk pranksters reminded the world that one of music's major puppeteers was back, pulling the audience's strings.

From time to time, Dylan releases alerted critics that he was still a contemporary songwriter worthy of note. *Blood on the Tracks* (January 1975), a document of romantic dissolution, contains gems like "Tangled Up in Blue" and "A Simple Twist of Fate." A year later, *Desire* presented a musically entrancing collage of lost romance ("Sara," the song to his former wife), mythic fantasy ("Isis" and "Mozambique"), and a return to the political

broad­sides of an earlier age (“Hurricane,” an appeal for justice on behalf of former mid­dleweight boxing champion Reuben “Hurricane” Carter).

In a startling 1979 course correction, Dylan converted to born-again fundamentalist Christianity, recording *Slow Train Coming* (which contained the Grammy-winning “Gotta Serve Somebody”); he also refused to perform any classic material while touring with his new band and gospel-flavored vocal backup group. This brief incarnation stirred further controversy, as Dylan gained a new group of fans and renewed popularity. Dylan would assert that biblical allusion was not new to his work, that he was simply more fully exploring a different direction.

Dylan has since released numerous albums, has nearly succumbed to a heart infection, and has consistently toured. The Grammy-winning *Time Out of Mind* (1997) and *Love and Theft* (2001) have garnered critical acclaim.

Who knows how many more directions we can reasonably expect from this troubadour, this self-described song and dance man? Dylan has contributed so much already. His fusion of the folk/protest heritage with abstract lyrical style had an extraordinary impact on the form and content of 1960s folk and rock music. His political and personal visions contained within that often-copied artistic form compelled artists and audiences to ask, What does it all mean? Never complacent, the bard would then slip off in new directions, chronicling his experiences in ways that, although seeming to make sense, no one claimed to understand.

# FOLK-ROCK

So You Want to Be  
a Rock and Roll Star

## Chapter 11



*The Byrds*

You had to be a little nuts to want to take folk music changes and put 'em to rhythm and blues beats and sing Dylan Thomas sort of words to 'em.

—David Crosby of the Byrds

We sang our asses off. Our sound could have filled a cathedral. It is the first time we had ever achieved what Denny [a bandmate] and I called the Fifth Voice: the ringing, resonant overtones that vibrate throughout the harmonies and into your limbs and chest when they are perfectly tuned. . . . We were flying.

—John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas

Tin soldiers and Nixon coming, we're finally on our own  
This summer I hear their drumming, four dead in Ohio.

—"Ohio," Neil Young (1970)

**I**N THE EARLY 1960S sales of acoustic guitars skyrocketed as young men and women strummed along to the era's latest folk melodies. Those that were good enough found their way to New York's Greenwich Village and other urban folk music centers, performing in the streets for tips or, if they were lucky, in clubs and coffee-houses. Stephen Stills came to the Village from Florida, Richie Furay from Ohio, Jim McGuinn from Chicago, John Phillips from Virginia, John Sebastian just stayed close to home, and on and on.

Some were attracted to folk by its accessibility; all one had to master was a simple melody and some lyrics, plus a few chords on the guitar. Others were drawn to its sociopolitical heritage and the timeliness of its meaningful outlook, as society surged into the socially relevant sixties. Folk music during the early 1960s achieved some commercial success. Young, white, predominantly male groups recorded smooth versions of generally nonpolitical songs for popular consumption. This music reached the radio airwaves, filling in for classic rock while the nascent British invasion waited in the wings.

When the Beatles hit big, pre-folk-rock artists felt torn between the two genres. Purist folk wisdom regaled rock as simplistic pop pap. However, most of these players grew up listening to and loving classic rock and roll. Those that remained acoustic, Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton for example, stayed in New York. Many others, citing the sun-and-fun promise of California dreamin', headed to Los Angeles. There they found a relatively affluent, white youth culture that venerated individual freedom, cars, beaches,

and the opposite sex. Homeboy David Crosby described it as “blasting down the road with the wind in your hair, listening to the radio turned up.”

Los Angeles became the mecca for early electric folk. Although Dylan is generally acknowledged as folk-rock’s foremost pioneer—fusing acoustic guitar and topical lyrics from folk with the electric guitar-based rock and roll band—members of the L.A. scene also deserve similar credit. In the summer of 1964, while Dylan played an acoustic “Mr. Tambourine Man” at the Newport Folk Festival, Jim McGuinn, a former accompanist with the Limelites and the Chad Mitchell Trio, was strumming his twelve-string guitar singing Beatles songs at the Troubadour folk club. Gene Clark (recently of the New Christy Minstrels) made it a duo, and David Crosby (formerly with Les Baxter’s Balladeers) joined them to form Jet Set. This group became the Beefeaters, an Anglicized name inspired by the Beatles movie *A Hard Day’s Night*. In October 1964, with the addition of bassist Chris Hillman and drummer Michael Clarke, they became the Byrds.

This two-guitar, bass, drums, and tambourine lineup had already recorded an album, titled *Preflyte*, before their manager received a copy of “Mr. Tambourine Man” featuring Dylan, with an attempted harmony by Ramblin’ Jack Elliot. With Dylan’s permission, the Byrds recorded the song in the spring of 1965. That June, at the same time Dylan released “Like a Rolling Stone,” the Byrds’ version of “Mr. Tambourine Man” had reached #1. They followed with Dylan’s “All I Really Want to Do” and the Pete Seeger composition “Turn, Turn, Turn,” which also hit #1. McGuinn’s vision of finding the gap between Dylan and the Beatles had paid off. The Byrds’ particular folk-rock formula of droning electric twelve-string guitar—McGuinn’s use of the Rickenbacker electric twelve-string was inspired by George Harrison’s sound from *A Hard Day’s Night*—three-part harmonies, a driving rhythm section, and meaningful lyrics set the tone and geographic location for the new genre.

The success of the Byrds, coupled with Dylan’s 1965 Newport electric conversion and release of “Like a Rolling Stone,” unleashed the dormant rock and roll spirit in many folk musicians. In early 1966 a legendary encounter took place that led to the formation of a band called Buffalo Springfield. Folkie Stephen Stills left the Village for L.A. to form a rock and roll band. Stills telephoned singer-guitarist Richie Furay, inviting him to L.A. to join the as yet unformed group. Fate placed them in a traffic jam on Sunset Strip, behind a 1953 Pontiac hearse with Ontario license plates; they had been on the lookout for Canadian friend Neil Young. Believing that they recognized the vehicle, they discovered Young and bassist Bruce Palmer inside. With the addition of drummer Dewey Martin, Buffalo Springfield (named after a steamroller) was formed.

Stills once described the band’s inspiration, saying, “He [Young] wanted to be Bob Dylan and I wanted to be the Beatles.” The band contained three prolific songwriters in Stills, Furay, and Young, whose early compositions clearly show flashes of later greatness. Stills wrote the group’s only top-40 hit, “For What It’s Worth” (#7, February 1967), inspired by a Sunset Strip police riot against teenagers protesting a ten o’clock curfew. The

sparse, airy feeling (especially the chimed harmonics) is typical of his later work in Crosby, Stills, and Nash (CSN). Neil Young's compositions tended to be more driving and hard-edged. "Mr. Soul" even contains the signature riff from "Satisfaction," perhaps a reflection of the band's earlier experience as an opening act for the Rolling Stones.

Buffalo Springfield lasted only two years. They performed sporadically, due to an absence of hit records and the turbulent personal and musical relationships within the band. Although their live performances were legendarily energetic, they were not enough to keep the band together. In 1968 Neil Young left for the last time, replacement bassist-producer Jim Messina compiled the final album, and the band dissolved.

In typical L.A. musical-chairs fashion, as soon as the music stopped for Buffalo Springfield, three different bands emerged. Furay and Messina went on to form Poco, the seminal, country-flavored folk-rock band. Stills busied himself with numerous projects until he and Crosby visited John Sebastian, former leader of the Lovin' Spoonful. The Hollies were in town, and member Graham Nash came over to Sebastian's pad to sing. Within months Crosby, Stills, and Nash began rehearsals and recorded the self-titled, critically acclaimed album that shook the music world to its foundation. Meanwhile, Neil Young settled down in Topanga Canyon to write and record his first solo effort. He employed the band Crazy Horse (formerly the Rockets), who became Young's regular backup band.

The progeny spawned by Buffalo Springfield added important elements to the growing genre now known as folk-rock. Poco was a trendsetter, fusing country and folk-rock stylings. Instrumentalist Rusty Young added a country-flavored texture to the band through his pedal-steel guitar, banjo, mandolin, dobro, and Fender Telecaster electric guitar. Poco's high, close harmonies and generally romance-oriented lyrics were also reminiscent of country and bluegrass roots. Jim Messina left Poco after two years, intending to become a CBS staff producer. Label chief Clive Davis prevailed upon Messina to produce songwriter Kenny Loggins's first solo album, then asked him to appear on the album and finally to play with Loggins on the road. Messina found himself a creative partner for the next four years in the widely heralded Loggins and Messina. The addition of four excellent session players ensured that this group's live shows cooked.

Although there have been numerous incarnations of CSN and, later, CSN and Young (CSNY), their first album firmly established the group and their unique sound in the rock and roll pantheon. CSN proved that essentially acoustic folk-rock could be effective, moving music, and their mellifluous, celestial harmonies became a stylistic trademark. Stills's paean to Judy Collins and their lost relationship, "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," exemplifies both these qualities, with his bass and occasional electric-guitar fills being the only electrified sounds.

In the summer of 1969 Ahmet Ertegun, president of Atlantic Records, facilitated Neil Young's entry into CSN. Unwilling to give up his solo career, yet interested in attaining the superstar status and monetary rewards that had eluded Buffalo Springfield, Young decided to pursue both careers. He recorded CSNY's only studio album, *Deja Vu* (#1,



*Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young*

April 1970), and went on tour with them (including the historic appearance at Woodstock) while writing and rehearsing with Crazy Horse. Young's second solo album, *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* (#34, August 1970), is his favorite album and contains early versions of "Cowgirl in the Sand," "Cinnamon Girl," and "Down by the River." It is one of the era's gems that rarely gets the mention it deserves.

In subsequent years the loosely knit fabric that held together the careers of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young frayed, and Neil Young emerged as the most critically acclaimed and commercially successful of the four. His next two albums, *After the Gold Rush* and *Harvest* (#1 with the #1 single "Heart of Gold"), cemented his place in rock music history. Although Young is perceived as a brooding loner, and his songs of the period chronicled desperate times, he has proven to be a creative and durable artist. As many of his friends succumbed to life in L.A.'s fast lane (including Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten), Young somehow survived—epilepsy, bad back, and all.

After the closure of CSNY, Stephen Stills went to England. In early 1970 he purchased Ringo Starr's mansion and recorded his first solo album with a host of friends, including Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, and "Mama" Cass Elliot. Having always wanted to play bass for Hendrix, Stills hung out with the guitar master in an attempt to learn the secrets of

Jimi's artistry. Although Stills never achieved that level of virtuosity, his solo and group permutations (the solo Stills, Manassas, and CSN) have produced some well-received material. At the same time, Stills wove in and out of the inebriated high life, which he termed the "rock and roll circus."

Working as a duo, Crosby and Nash continued to tour and release albums throughout the seventies. Nash appeared physically and spiritually healthy, assuming leadership roles among the music industry on social and environmental issues; Crosby fought legendary bouts with substance abuse, eventually served time in jail, and rose again to sing, record, and tour while battling serious health problems. This genre of folk-based rock, as practiced by Byrds—Buffalo Springfield alumni, retains its importance today among musicians and fans. Its legacy of recorded material and its stylistic effect (strummed guitar style, harmonies, consequential lyrics, and its counterculture image and dress) had an impact.

The Flying Burrito Brothers, led by the talented and mysterious Gram Parsons, were another influential L.A. band with a cult following similar to Springfield's. Parsons joined the Byrds in early 1968 and, befitting his Deep South roots, infused them with his vision of the country-flavored rock and roll that appeared on *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*. This seminal country-rock album features banjo, fiddle, and pedal-steel guitar and a lyrical motif of liquor, love, and loves lost. Parsons refused to join the Byrds on their South African tour and spent the summer of 1968 in London with the Rolling Stones before returning to L.A. to form the Burritos.

The Burrito Brothers, with Byrds compadre Chris Hillman and pedal-steel player Sneaky Pete Kleinow, became L.A.'s resident musical cowboys. The band graced the cover of their first effort, *Gilded Palace of Sin*, in flowery rhinestone cowboy suits from Nudies of North Hollywood. Although they never achieved much commercial success, elements of their country chic—folk-rock fusion paved the way for later L.A. cowboys. One first-album highlight, "Sin City," aptly describes the debauchery rampant in the L.A. music scene. Parsons, ever the wanderer, left the Burritos and struck out on his own with a band that included the young Emmylou Harris as backup vocalist. He died of a drug overdose in 1973, another rock casualty. Gram had asked to be cremated out in the desert. His manager, Phil Kaufman, hijacked the body from an airport terminal, drove to the desert, and burned the casket.

The Burritos, Byrds, and Poco carried on. Meanwhile, four members of Linda Ronstadt's backup band formed a group that parlayed the various stylistic elements of their L.A. predecessors into major artistic and commercial success. The summer of 1971 proved to be the right time for the L.A. sound to mature. At the suggestion of Ronstadt producer John Boylan, former Burrito guitarist Bernie Leadon, Motown émigré Glenn Frey, former Poco bassist Randy Meisner, and Texas-born drummer Don Henley sequestered themselves in a room and just played music together. Thus the Eagles were born.

This was a two-guitar band containing country instrumental inflections (with Leadon adding pedal-steel and banjo), a driving rhythm section, and high, tight harmonies. Their songs contained personal stories of what Henley has called "looking for it . . . what-



*The Eagles*

ever it is.” The time was right, as were the combinations of talent. The “team” the Eagles put together included prolific songwriters within the group plus outsiders like Jackson Browne and J. D. Souther. Management was handled by feisty Irv Azoff, they recorded on a potent new label, the David Geffen-run Asylum, with stablemates Browne and Joni Mitchell, and utilized the production skills of veterans Glyn Johns and Bill Szymczyk.

Paradoxically, the first two albums of this new-era American folk-country-rock prototype were recorded not in America, but in London with English producer Glyn Johns. The first album, *The Eagles*, had three top-40 hits (“Peaceful Easy Feeling,” “Witchy Woman,” and “Take It Easy”), and included a logo and album art that reflected the contemporary fascination with Native American religion and the teachings of the Indian *brujo* Don Juan. The day the Eagles photographed the cover, the band drove into the desert, built a fire, ingested peyote tea, and then faced the camera. Their second release, *Desperado*, was thematic, a symbolic representation of the rock and roll band as a band of outlaws in society.

Subsequent albums were characterized by two trends, a movement away from acoustic-oriented music and toward more driving rock, hastened by the addition of guitarists Don Felder in 1974 and Joe Walsh, who replaced Leadon in 1975. This incorporated a harder-edged, distorted-guitar sound (featuring Les Paul guitars rather than Leadon’s

Telecaster) that reached its peak with the album *Hotel California* and the harmony guitar solo contained in the title cut. At the same time, Eagles lyrics reflected the hedonistic lifestyle of a large segment of the Los Angeles rock community—some of whom dwelled in the not-so-mythical, snow-filled Hotel California. Having achieved megastardom, sell-out concerts, and gold and platinum records, the band expired in 1982 as individuals went on to pursue solo careers.

There are numerous singer-songwriter members of the L.A. music community during these years that deserve more than the simple mention they have received to this point in our story. Jackson Browne was a local songwriter who started writing at age seventeen, moved to New York at nineteen, and returned for a successful performing career during the midseventies. He has created a broad range of material, including poignant, introspective ballads, such as “These Days,” and stinging social and political commentaries. Browne is one of the few committed activist-musicians in the Guthrie tradition who actively supported social justice and antinuclear movements well before they became fashionable.

Canadian Joni Mitchell, another extraordinary songwriter, began writing in a folk vein in the midsixties, moved to L.A., and became one of the “Ladies of the Canyon.” She first received notoriety when artists like Judy Collins (“Both Sides Now”) and CSNY (“Woodstock”) recorded her songs. In addition to the obvious quality, personal awareness, and sociopolitical relevance of her songs, Mitchell’s distinctive lilting soprano voice and unusual open guitar tunings further prompted her own success. An extraordinary breadth of vision allowed Mitchell to later combine folk and rock with jazz players and compositions.

Not all music from the folk-rock genre originated in Los Angeles. Since New York retained its folk prominence, some electro-acoustic artists originated there. The Mamas and the Papas straddled both coasts. Founder John Phillips, who had migrated to the Village in 1957, married his California dream girl, Michelle Gilliam, in 1962. They were joined by former Mugwumps Cass Elliot and Denny Doherty, retired to a campsite in the Virgin Islands, and created the Mamas and the Papas. Instead of returning to the inclement environment of New York, the band headed for Hollywood, where they signed to Dunhill Records and recorded “California Dreamin’” (#4, February 1966). The song set the tone for the rest of their hits, with strummed acoustic guitars, rich harmonies (featuring the unusual two men—two women alignment), and strong songwriting. Studio session musicians filled in the rest.

Phillips and Dunhill label head Lou Adler were the prime movers for the June 1967 Monterey Pop Festival (see detailed description in Chapter 14). They arranged for artist participation (the board of directors included Smokey Robinson, Paul Simon, Paul McCartney, Brian Wilson, Roger McGuinn, and others) and sparked record industry interest. Scheduled to close the show on Sunday, the Mamas and the Papas found themselves in the unfortunate position of following torrid performances by the Who, the Grateful Dead, and Jimi Hendrix. That same year they also had hits with a superior version of the Shirelles’ “Dedicated to the One I Love” (#2, March 1967) and the autobio-

graphical “Creeque Alley” (#5, May 1967). Within a year of the Monterey festival the band disintegrated, having fallen victim to interpersonal friction and life in the fast lane. John and Michelle (divorced in 1970) and Denny and Cass attempted solo careers; none were able to achieve much commercial success.

The other two members of the fabled Mugwumps, John Sebastian and Zal Yanovsky, remained in New York City to pursue folk-rock careers. Sebastian came from a musical household—his father was a classical harmonica player, his mother the administrator for Carnegie Hall. With Steve Boone (bass) and Joe Butler (drums), Sebastian and Yanovsky organized the Lovin’ Spoonful, a name taken from Mississippi John Hurt’s “Coffee Blues.” Their debut album, *Do You Believe in Magic*, and the title cut (#9, September 1965), were typical of the bouncy style that they dubbed “good-time music.” On the single, Sebastian, the group’s major creative force, strummed the electric autoharp while waxing ebulliently over love and rock and roll.

For the next two years, these striped-shirted Manhattan mop-tops released a series of smile-inducing songs, including “Daydream,” “You Didn’t Have to Be So Nice,” and “Nashville Cats.” Atypical of this fare was their only #1 hit, “Summer in the City” (July 1966). Catchy lyrics describe the Big Apple, brought to a standstill by the stifling summer heat; the singer dreams of the cool nights dancing on the rooftop with his girl. The music is dominated by driving rhythms and city sound effects. After “two glorious years and a tedious one,” Sebastian left and the band disintegrated. Sebastian’s solo career was sporadically successful, including an appearance at Woodstock and a #1 single, “Welcome Back” (April 1976), the theme for the hit TV series *Welcome Back Kotter*.

The Band was the most musically interesting and varied folk-rock group based in the New York area. They originated in the late 1950s in Canada as a backup band for Arkansas-cum-Canadian rocker Ronnie Hawkins. Arkansan Levon Helm (drums, mandolin) and Canadians Jaime “Robbie” Robertson (guitar), Rick Danko (bass), Richard Manuel (keyboards, drums), and Garth Hudson (keyboards, sax) left Hawkins after a number of years and moved to New York. They interrupted their career quest to tour as Dylan’s band in 1965 and 1966 (Helm chose not to go). The Band moved to Woodstock in upstate New York near Dylan, recorded hours of material with him after his motorcycle accident (released as *The Basement Tapes* in 1975), and released their first album, *Music from Big Pink* (#30, October 1968). The album was named for their large pink residence and contained a Dylan painting as the front cover. The sound was distinctive and included Dylan tunes like “I Shall Be Released” and Robertson originals like “The Weight.”

Their second album, *The Band* (#9, October 1969), became an era classic. Pictured on the cover in sepia tones, the group looked more like rural laborers than rock musicians. Inside were sketches (mostly Robertson’s) of Americana: the decimation wrought by the Civil War on a family in the poor rural South (“The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down”), the paean to a country lass (“Up on Cripple Creek”), and hard times as a sharecropper (“King Harvest”). The rural nature of this music was further accentuated by the drawl of lead vocalists Levon Helm and Canadians Manuel and Danko.

These vignettes were transported by inventive and multilayered rock music. The ensemble included the normal drums, bass, acoustic guitar, and electric guitar, plus concertina, fiddle, mandolin, and a full complement of keyboards (organ, piano, and electric piano). The music contained more syncopation than most folk-rock; bassist Danko played a fretless bass, allowing him to slide, and he emulated the playing of his heroes, Motown's James Jamerson and session player Chuck Rainey. The few instrumental solos were generally taken by Robertson in a minimalist blues and rockabilly-derived style. Three-part harmonies predominated, but they were rough and wailing compared to the celestial and crisp harmonies of CSN.

The Band never again achieved the critical acclaim given their second album. Among others, they released a live album with a horn section (*Rock of Ages*) and an album of classic rock-era material (*Moondog Matinee*). They went out in style, at San Francisco's Winterland on Thanksgiving Day 1976. Among the guest performers were Dylan, Clapton, Muddy Waters, Neil Young, Ronnie Hawkins, and Van Morrison. Martin Scorsese captured the event, released on film as *The Last Waltz*. One of the era's best bands was gone and one of the era's best folktale tellers, songwriter Robbie Robertson, continued to go unnoticed.

I would like to mention two marvelous but unheralded bands, Seatrain and Pure Prairie League. Seatrain—composed of Blues Project alumnus Andy Kulburg, Syracuse vocalist-extraordinaire and keyboard player Lloyd Baskin, songwriter Peter Rowan (“Panama Red,” “Midnight Moonlight,” and many others), electric fiddle whiz Richard Green, and others—was one of the first bands to record with producer George Martin after the Beatles breakup. Their second Capitol release, *Marblehead Messenger* (1972), is one of my all-time favorites.

The same goes for Pure Prairie League's self-titled first RCA release (1972). For the first two albums, the driving force in this Cincinnati band was singer-songwriter-guitarist Craig Fuller. His songs, including the follow-up album hit “Amie” (#27, April 1975), were delightful examples of the folk/country/rock fusion so popular at the time. “Harmony Song” still touches me deeply. After the second album, *Bustin' Out*, Fuller resisted the draft, went to jail, did alternative service, and was barred from returning to the group by his former bandmates—their loss.

Folk-rock is very accessible music—then and now. All one needs is an acoustic guitar and an idea. The British invasion tantalized folk artists with the power of rock music, and some jumped ship immediately; many others later climbed aboard. This course inevitably steered away from the protest song, so easily sung to folk audiences, to something less controversial. There is the occasional “Ohio” (where Neil Young strongly criticizes Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War); however, most stories and commentaries were more personal and less zealous. The folk-rock genre continues to thrive; dinosaurs like Dylan, Paul Simon, Young, and others now coexist with younger strummers like Bruce Springsteen, R.E.M., Tracy Chapman, Indigo Girls, Dave Matthews, Ani DiFranco, and Phish, asking questions and giving answers, while the band plays on.

# SOUL MUSIC

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Chapter

# 12



*Aretha Franklin*

[Soul music is] all about feelings. You can't get away from that fact, no matter what you do.

—Aretha Franklin

We're people, we're like the birds and the bees. But we'd rather die on our feet than keep living on our knees.

—James Brown, "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968)

Reflecting and encouraging black pride, soul is an important psychological component of the black struggle. It is a diffuse almost mystical concept and its emphasis on subjective qualities—you have to feel it—encourages emotional commitment to it. . . . Its diffuseness allows all black Americans to identify and associate with it and so with each other.

—Soul music historian Michael Haralambos

**B**LACK POPULAR MUSIC OF THE SIXTIES was divided into two very different and distinct kinds of music: soul, a sweaty, raw, and relevant Memphis sound, and Motown, an elegant, danceable, more mainstream Detroit sound. Both drew heavily on gospel, doo-wop, and rhythm and blues, but each reflected different ways to build on that musical foundation. This chapter will chronicle the path taken by soul music—one that began in the era of rhythm and blues and eventually grew to include the sixties musical style as well as the feeling of African American ethnic pride.

To understand the musical essence of soul, start with late 1950s rhythm and blues—resplendent in its gospel-generated vocal emotion and four-piece driving rhythm sections. Syncopate the bass lines, make the horns more prominent, and turn up the volume. Chronicle the life experience of 1960s African Americans and you have the story of soul: romance and disillusionment, love and lust, pride, pain, and struggle. Like R&B's prodigal child, soul music emerged early in the sixties, precariously climbed the popular music charts, left an enduring catalog, and began the 1970s by evolving into the funk of the next generation.

Like classic rock and doo-wop, soul was a regional sound. It was born and nurtured in the South. Most of its artists were raised in the South; others migrated north during their childhood, only to return southward later as musicians. A significant proportion of soul hits were recorded in southern locations: the Stax/Volt studios of Memphis, Tennessee, or the Fame or Quinn Ivy studios around Muscle Shoals, Alabama. No wonder that the spark that ignited the genre—fanning the flames of intensity and emotionality—came from the South's revivalist religious tradition.

Eventually, soul transcended its original musical meaning and came to describe essential, authentic blackness (as in, “that cat’s got soul”). *Webster’s New World Dictionary* defines it as “a sense of racial pride and social and cultural solidarity, often with opposition to white, middle-class practices and values.” Few songs from the soul repertoire actually addressed the ongoing civil rights movement; nevertheless, the music was adopted by the black community as a representation of its struggle for black pride and racial consciousness. Eventually, whites, in a manner consistent with previous co-optations of black musical and cultural forms, adopted some cultural trappings of the soul concept for use in mainstream America. Soul handshakes and slang terms like *get down* were in.

This story begins with two artists, Ray Charles and James Brown, whose initial successes came during the R&B era. Although both had numerous hits during the fifties, they continued to evolve musically and claimed even more popular success as soul artists. Along with Sam Cooke, they stood as musical and commercial role models to the younger African American generation of performers who emerged in the late 1950s and formed the backbone of the soul sound.

Georgia-born Ray Charles Robinson, blinded by glaucoma at age seven, was considered something of a child prodigy while studying music at a Florida school for the blind. Having mastered keyboards, sax, clarinet, and trumpet at fifteen, he struck out on his own to become a professional musician. At seventeen he asked a friend to locate a large city as far away as possible from his Tampa, Florida, base. Charles moved to Seattle, Washington, where he occasionally worked with bandleader Bumps Blackwell and the fifteen-year-old Quincy Jones.

In 1954 Charles—who had dropped his last name so as not to be confused with middleweight boxing champion Sugar Ray Robinson—recorded a major R&B hit, “I Got a Woman,” for Atlantic Records. In it he directed his soul big band (piano, bass, drums, two trumpets, and two saxes) and sang in the new gritty vocal style that became a Charles signature. After a string of R&B classics and his big 1959 crossover hit “What’d I Say” (which contains the bridge that taught many white listeners the meaning of call and response), Ray Charles was enticed away from Atlantic by ABC-Paramount for a more lucrative contract, then returned to Atlantic and had a long and illustrious career. His 2004 album of duets with a notable lineup of artists including Van Morrison, Willie Nelson, and Norah Jones won Grammy awards for Album of the Year and Record of the Year. He died on June 10, 2004.

On his new label he recorded numerous pop hits (including #1s “Georgia on My Mind” and “Hit the Road, Jack”) and experimented with a broad range of musical styles. His country albums were critically acclaimed and included the hit song “I Can’t Stop Loving You.” Working again with Quincy Jones, Charles recorded the album *Genius Plus Soul Equals Jazz*. By the mid-1960s Charles—an educated musician, songwriter, singer, and arranger—had achieved popular success. He was hailed as “the genius of soul.”

Whereas Ray Charles found popular commercial acceptance, James Brown, “the godfather of soul,” had to settle for preeminence in the African American community.

Brown's voice, band, and performances were legendary. He would exhort the audience with a voice so raw that it seemed his vocal chords would shred on the very next note—at the same time thrilling the crowd with his flamboyant and acrobatic physical moves.

Brown's famous concert closer was built around his early R&B hit, "Please, Please, Please." With the band relentlessly pounding the closing musical figures, and the Famous Flames vocal backup group repeating the phrase "Baby, please don't go," Brown would fall to his knees, pleading into the microphone for his baby to stay. From the wings a man would appear with a plush cape; draping it around Brown's shoulders, he would attempt to lead the sobbing singer offstage. Just as it seemed James was ready to retire from the stage, he would toss aside the cape and with renewed vigor return to the microphone for one last pleading chance.

Repeatedly crying "I, I, I," and other words, Brown wailed as the audience became almost mesmerized by the hypnotic chanting. The man and cape would again appear, and Brown would again be led toward the wings, where at the last moment he would toss off

the cape and resume his plight. Finally, the exhortations would end, with Brown, the band, and the audience emotionally spent. "The Hardest Working Man in Show Business," as Brown billed himself, had led everyone through a nonstop parade of his million-selling R&B and soul hits and ended with "the cape."

During his shows the former boxer moved constantly, sliding across the stage on one foot, twirling 360 degrees, then dropping into a split. His moves were observed and copied by many, including a young Michael Jackson and an awestruck Mick Jagger. Of course, this phenomenal movement would come as no surprise to a black community raised on the physical dexterity of dancing sensations Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, the Step Brothers, and the Nicholas Brothers. Nor would the raw emotionality of his vocal style, focus on rhythm, and physi-



*James Brown*

cality in performing surprise those who had been raised in the Pentecostal Baptist Church, where unbridled emotion in the service of the Lord was typical of worship.

These musical and performance characteristics, so deeply ingrained in African American tradition, were part of what endeared Brown to the black community. However, the same elements, despite their authentic presentation, probably prevented Brown from having the crossover success that he hoped and worked for. Although soul was “in,” some related aspects were just too alien for white culture to assimilate. So Brown had to be content with spectacular R&B and soul chart success, some pop chart action, and a reputation as “Soul Brother #1.”

Like most soul artists, Brown was raised in the South, in his case Augusta, Georgia. Also typically, he immersed himself in music early, was recognized as being extremely talented, sang both gospel and R&B, and was doggedly determined to succeed. Brown overcame impoverished beginnings and a stint in reform school, finally choosing music over possible careers in baseball and boxing. By 1955 his group, the Famous Flames, with James on drums and vocals, crashed a Little Richard gig and impressed Richard’s road manager. They were brought to Macon, Georgia, and eventually signed to King/Federal Records of Cincinnati.

A string of R&B hits followed as Brown expanded and fine-tuned the band—he sometimes carried two drummers because one lacked the stamina to play the entire show. In October 1962 Brown recorded a midnight show at New York’s legendary black theater, the Apollo. The album, *Live at the Apollo*, reached #2 on the pop charts and stayed in the top 40 for thirty-three weeks, alerting pop music circles to a fresh, unique sound. This proved to be his greatest chart success.

Between 1960 and 1970 Brown had thirty songs on the top-40 charts, including his biggest, 1965’s “I Got You (I Feel Good)” (which climbed to #3). This celebratory smash opens with the patented James howl, a drum beat, and the exclamation “I feel good!” Brown’s musical recipe calls for the obligatory syncopated bass line, straightforward drum pattern, and sparse, choppy rhythm guitar part. This rhythm section is spiced by punctuating blasts from the horn section and topped by a generous serving of the raw, gritty (though somewhat restrained) Brown touting his good feelings.

Although “I Got You” and other singles had some chart success, the popular music scene, flooded by the British invasion and charmed by Motown, was ultimately unwilling to share the mainstream with James Brown. This former shoeshine boy owned a private jet, two hundred suits, a Victorian-style castle, and three radio stations, and could always be counted on to sell a million copies of any record to an adoring black public. In Europe and even Africa James played to tens of thousands. When black communities erupted after the assassination of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., the mayors of Boston and Washington, D.C., asked the godfather of soul to help settle things down.

In the late sixties Brown’s releases reflected the growing movement of black pride and consciousness. Journalist Thulani Davis, reflecting on her youth, writes, “JB was proof that Black people were different. Rhythmically and tonally Blacks had to be from

somewhere else.”<sup>1</sup> Brown later alienated fans by supporting Republicans Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, lost substantial sums as his businesses failed, ran into big trouble with the IRS, and finally went to jail. He remained an enigma to most whites, but to many in the black community he is still Soul Brother #1.

Whereas Brown captivated his audience with raw power, Sam Cooke, another significant role model for aspiring soul musicians, forged his career on the smooth, cool end of the spectrum. He had an extraordinary voice and legendary vocal control. Cooke’s choice to leave gospel music and a successful gospel group, the Soul Stirrers, to pursue a popular music career inspired many young singers, including Aretha Franklin and Jackie Wilson, to leave religious music and strike out on their own.

Born in Mississippi, Cook (the *e* was added later) was raised in Chicago, where his father was a minister. By the age of nine he was singing professionally; at thirteen he was already singing in gospel’s minor leagues. Cooke was invited to join the Soul Stirrers in 1951 at the age of twenty. Even the early gospel recording of “Jesus Gave Me Water” shows the powerful but lilting tenor voice soaring over multiple notes in his delivery of the first syllable of “Je-sus.” By 1956 Sam was recognized not only for his voice and control but also for the good looks and charisma that attracted a substantial number of young people to the group’s concerts. Although gospel was now big business, the financial and pop chart successes of black rock and roll artists like Little Richard and Fats Domino were a lure to Cooke. His gospel label, Specialty Records, was reluctant to record the secular Cooke and discarded him along with producer Bumps Blackwell after one pop record.

The tiny Keen Records signed them both and released “You Send Me” in 1957. It climbed to the top of both the R&B and pop charts. The secular Cooke was still cool and smooth but with an added sensuality. Notes still cascaded, as they had during his gospel years, with that familiar “woo-oh-oo-oo,” all on the same syllable—a multinote, one-syllable technique termed *melisma*. The public was now able to hear what soul producer and Atlantic Records vice president Jerry Wexler called “the best singer who ever lived.”

After more hits for Keen, including “Wonderful World,” Sam signed with major label RCA. Within months “Chain Gang,” containing rhythmic grunts and hammering designed to replicate road gang life, hit #2 (August 1960). Although Cooke’s RCA sound contained lush orchestration representative of the era’s pop genre, it was the voice that sold. His hits ranged from the traditional “Frankie and Johnny” to the blues of “Little Red Rooster” and the soulful “Bring It on Home to Me,” with backup vocals by Lou Rawls. After hearing Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” for the first time, Cooke was inspired to write “A Change Is Gonna Come,” an attempt to sort out the ongoing civil rights movement. In a situation similar to the release of Otis Redding’s “(Sittin’ on) The Dock of the Bay,” Cooke’s foreboding tale of “Change” was released as a single soon after his death.

Under the tutelage of musical and business mentor J. W. Alexander, Cooke also learned the importance of self-sufficiency. Rather than sign away the publishing rights to Sam’s extensive catalog of songs, they established Kags Music and created SAR Records to

produce other artists. Such financial independence and control were atypical of the era's black artists and were used as a model by Redding and others who followed.

Cooke's power and financial independence may have led to his untimely death in December 1964. The common story has Cooke driving his Ferrari to a seedy motel and, once inside the room, attempting to rip the dress off his beautiful companion. According to the story, she then absconded with his pants; clothed only in an overcoat, he broke into the night manager's office in search of his companion. The manager, a middle-aged woman, shot him three times. To his friends, this story—with Cooke driving a very expensive car to a three-dollar motel and losing control over a woman he had just picked up in a restaurant—was implausible. Instead, industrywide rumor had him being set up and killed by the Mob, incensed at his refusals to their overtures.

By the time of his death, Sam Cooke was a creative artist with unlimited potential as well as a role model for a generation of new artists. He was already a vocal inspiration to singers as disparate as Otis Redding and Smokey Robinson, and his success in popular music inspired the eighteen-year-old Aretha Franklin to seek fame and fortune in secular rather than gospel music. Cooke was a prolific songwriter and was on his way to creating a self-sufficient music business network. He was also interested in producing other artists. Like his friend Malcolm X, who was assassinated three months after Cooke's death, Cooke left just as great fame and accomplishment appeared within grasp.

The person who scaled the artistic heights as the king of soul music was Otis Redding. Raised in Macon, Georgia, Otis sang gospel in his father's church and left school in the tenth grade to help support the family as a singer. In a city that had already spawned Little Richard and James Brown, Redding first built his reputation as an amateur, winning talent contests and sometimes fronting Richard's former band, the Upsetters, with a vocal style reminiscent of the classic rocker.

Otis had already recorded for two small labels when his friend and manager Phil Walden—who booked many of the soul era's artists and went on to form Capricorn Records for the Allman Brothers—persuaded Atlantic Records executive Joe Galkin to take Redding to a recording session in Memphis. At the time, Otis was the vocalist for bandleader-guitarist Jimmy Jenkins and his group, the Pinetoppers. Stax Records president Jim Stewart, unimpressed with Jenkins, was convinced to record Redding in the last half hour of the session. Haltingly, Otis sang the title words, "These . . . arms . . . of . . . mine"; not everyone present saw the potential, and it took six months for the record to climb the soul charts, but Redding's career, and the Stax studio sound, began to take off.

Stax Records had been around since the late fifties. In 1960 they had moved their studio into the old Capitol Theater and started to record early soul artists like Rufus Thomas and William Bell. In the summer of 1961 the Mar-Keys, a local white band composed mostly of recent high school graduates, recorded the instrumental "Last Night," which astoundingly climbed to #3 on the pop charts. Mar-Keys guitarist Steve Cropper and bass player Donald "Duck" Dunn joined studio keyboardist Booker T. Jones and drummer Al Jackson Jr. to form Booker T. and the M.G.s. This Stax studio unit (with



*Otis Redding*

Lewis Steinberg, Dunn's predecessor) recorded "Green Onions" in 1962, and by September it had also reached #3.

Over the ensuing five years, Booker T. and the M.G.s helped to define the musical essence of soul. Jackson's straightforward, simple drumming provided the solid foundation for the syncopated bass patterns created by Dunn, Cropper's distinctive elemental rhythmic chops and fills, and Booker T.'s prolonged organ chords. The popularity of "Green Onions" in particular, and the Memphis soul sound in general, probably accounted for the resurgence of the organ in popular music during the sixties.

Booker T. and the M.G.s, who became the studio musical foundation for Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, and many other Stax/Volt hit makers, present an interesting paradox. Soul music became identified with essential blackness, yet the group at its musi-

cal core was integrated, evenly divided between black members Booker T. and Al Jackson and white members Cropper and Dunn (the original bassist, Lewis Steinberg, who left in 1964, was also black). Soul's white players (Cropper and Dunn, as well as Chips Moman, Dan Penn, Jimmy Johnson, and others in Muscle Shoals) experienced similar roots to soul's black artists—raised in the South; immersed in R&B, blues, classic rock, and country music; and itching to play modern, syncopated, emotional music. These whites evidenced an innate feel for the genre.

An even greater paradox lies in the fact that Motown—a music we discuss in Chapter 13—was produced for an essentially white market but was devised, written, directed, and performed exclusively by African Americans. Soul music, identified as inherently black and quite popular in the black community, was controlled by white-run record companies like Atlantic and Stax and produced and recorded by an integrated crew. As a rule, only the individual soul vocalists were black.

The fortunes of Otis Redding rose in tandem with those of Stax/Volt Records. Stax had signed a licensing and distribution agreement with independent-label Atlantic Records, guaranteeing nationwide clout and sales without the potential business risks and headaches. Otis continued to record in Memphis with the M.G.s and finally penetrated the pop charts in 1965 with the classic “I’ve Been Loving You Too Long.” Thirty years later, the purity and depth of his emotion still pierce the cultural clutter of our lives. Here is Redding at his best, the balladeer with his halting, urgent pleas capped by exploding exhortations—an agonizingly authentic emotional roller coaster.

From the critically acclaimed album *Otis Blue* came his classic “Respect,” a song that earned Redding some radio airplay at the time but is best known through Aretha Franklin’s 1967 chart-topping rendition. Whether Otis intended it or not, “Respect” became an anthem of black consciousness, with the demand for racial recognition being substituted for the song’s masculine plea for equality in a relationship. The Redding version features the Memphis Horns, an integrated studio group composed of former Mar-Keys members plus some of the area’s best black players—another signature of the Stax sound. They launch the song with horn bursts of pure driving energy, keeping it up with dynamic blasts throughout.

Redding cut a version of the Rolling Stones hit “Satisfaction” (#31, April 1966), and in the spring of 1967 he headlined the Stax/Volt Revue tour of Europe. For five weeks, Sam and Dave, Eddie Floyd, Arthur Conley, the Mar-Keys, Booker T. and the M.G.s, and Otis crisscrossed the Continent, conquering overflow crowds and being astounded themselves at the adulation they received. Upon his return to the United States, Redding appeared at the June 1967 Monterey Pop Festival—like other artists, he played for free. Following hometown darlings Jefferson Airplane at approximately one o’clock Sunday morning, Redding, backed by Booker T. and the M.G.s, brought down the house.

Like many other critically acclaimed but relatively unknown performers at the festival—the Who, Hendrix, and Janis—Otis scored big with both the predominantly white audience and the industry representatives in attendance. Redding played San Francisco’s Fillmore, wore out the grooves of the Beatles’ new *Sgt. Pepper’s* album, and, while staying on a houseboat docked at Sausalito, California, wrote “(Sittin’ on) The Dock of the Bay.” On December 7, 1967, Otis, Steve Cropper, and other friends laid down the basic tracks to this classic. Many who heard it questioned its lightness, its lack of grit; Otis said it would be his first #1. On December 10, 1967, Redding and members of his band, the Bar-Keys, flying in his new twin-engine Beechcraft, crashed in a storm near Madison, Wisconsin. Although most commercial flights had been grounded, Otis, driven by his zeal for success, had vowed not to cancel the band’s next concert date. Steve Cropper put the finishing touches on “Dock of the Bay”; three months later it was #1.

Otis was twenty-six years old when he died. Like Sam Cooke, he was a man with musical and commercial vision, an artist with an abundance of talent as well as the motivation and brains to forge his way to the top. Also like Sam Cooke, he never had the

chance to get there. Stax survived the accident, although in 1968 the label was sold to conglomerate-bound Paramount Pictures. Some artists began to leave, and Stax later lost its Atlantic connection.

Still, Cropper and other producers continued to turn out hits from the Memphis studio. Between 1966 and 1968, Stax's roster included soul's top duo of Sam (Moore) and Dave (Prater). Both had deep gospel roots—Sam was actually invited to try out for the Soul Stirrers—and they immediately found themselves in a symbiotic relationship when they met in Miami in 1958. Their apprenticeship with Roulette Records proved inconclusive, but early Atlantic sessions at Stax produced the national soul and pop hit “Hold On, I’m Comin’” (#21, June 1966). This song, which is typical of their sound, has Sam’s soaring but gritty tenor providing the counterpoint response to Dave’s lower emotive growl as both cruise atop the typical drums/bass/guitar-driven groove.

On the road, the Sam and Dave Revue, part of the Stax/Volt European tour, was hard to top for sheer energy; the men usually finished their shows drenched in sweat. More than once Otis Redding was reported to have scolded his managers for placing him as the headliner, closing the show after Sam and Dave. At their peak they recorded two top-10 hits, “Soul Man” (#2, September 1967)—in which Sam rewards Cropper’s guitar fill during the second chorus with “Play it, Steve”—and “I Thank You” (#9, February 1968), written and produced (like most of their hits) by the team of Isaac Hayes and David Porter.

In the late 1960s these prolific songwriters (Hayes and Porter) became part of the core Stax staff group along with the M.G.s. Hayes eventually became a highly touted solo artist, writing the music for black exploitation films (including a #1 hit with “Theme from Shaft” in October 1971) and receiving critical acclaim for his seminal, soul-rap, extended-jam tour-de-force album, *Hot Buttered Soul* (#8, August 1969). Meanwhile, Sam and Dave’s personal relationship deteriorated to the point where the team didn’t talk to each other except onstage.

Numerous other artists made the pilgrimage to Memphis to record for Stax or for Atlantic at the Stax studio. Alabama-born Wilson Pickett sang lead for the Detroit vocal group the Falcons before signing with Atlantic in 1964. In 1965 Atlantic V.P.-producer Jerry Wexler brought Pickett to Stax and, with the M.G.s rhythm section and Cropper cowriting, started his string of pop chart hits by recording “Midnight Hour” (#21, August 1965). Pickett’s aggressive personality radiates from the record. Over the bass-pattern foundation, with horn blasts and guitar strums emphasizing the backbeat, Pickett, in his raw, scratchy voice, belts out his missive of macho promises.

“The Wicked” Pickett scored a series of top-40 hits in the next three years, including “Land of a Thousand Dances,” “Mustang Sally,” “Funky Broadway,” and a version of “Hey Jude” that included studio musician Duane Allman on guitar. By 1966 Stax had closed the door on all visiting Atlantic artists—including Pickett and his volatile personality—citing lack of open studio time. Stax executives also apparently resented the minimal

compensation and pittance of publicity that the studio gleaned from allowing Atlantic artists to use the Stax sound.

Wexler, aware of the impending lockout, had already scouted the South for another studio with the “soul” sound. In the northeastern Alabama town of Muscle Shoals he found Fame Studios, which was operated by Rick Hall. Wexler also found an experienced soul-oriented house band with proven recording success, including Joe Tex’s “Hold on to What You’ve Got” and soul music’s first pop chart #1, Percy Sledge’s “When a Man Loves a Woman.” The relationship proved fruitful as Atlantic found another studio with the players and the sound, Fame gained national notoriety, and Pickett recorded more hits.

The next Atlantic artist to arrive in Muscle Shoals was Memphis-born Aretha Franklin, a twenty-five-year-old singer steeped in gospel tradition. Her father, the Reverend C. L. Franklin, migrated from the South and became minister at Detroit’s large New Bethel Baptist Church, single father to his five children. Reverend Franklin was known as “the man with the million-dollar voice”; he recorded more than seventy albums of the spoken word. Aretha grew up in a household where close family friends like gospel greats Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward, James Cleveland, and Sam Cooke, and jazz legends Art Tatum and Dinah Washington, visited regularly.

By age six Aretha was being billed by her father as the world’s youngest gospel singer; at fourteen she had quit school and was on the road with her father as a gospel soloist. At the urging of Sam Cooke, Aretha moved to New York and signed with John Hammond Sr. at Columbia Records in 1960; he declared hers “the best voice I’ve heard since Billie Holiday.” Over the next six years she labored at Columbia, unable to find a consistently suitable style of music to record. She covered show tunes, ballads, gospel, blues, and pop material, earning her only top-40 success with the Al Jolson classic “Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody.”

In 1966 Atlantic signed Aretha, and another one of those historical “moments” had arrived. The artist was ready, the studio and musicians had the sound, Atlantic producer Wexler and engineer Tom Dowd provided savvy direction, and the soul genre was firmly established. Soul was ready to crown its queen. On her first song, over the rolling electric piano of Spooner Oldham, Aretha spat out the epithet “You’re no good, heartbreaker!” at an imaginary lover—Ted White, her husband and manager at the time, was notoriously abusive. The record, “I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Loved You)” backed by “Do Right Woman,” served notice to soul fans and the world that Aretha had arrived. Her next record, cut at Atlantic’s New York studios, was one of the finest tunes of the decade—Otis Redding’s “Respect” (#1, May 1967).

In the ensuing years Aretha continued her success on both the soul and the pop charts. Her gospel heritage—evidenced by explosive, soaring, passionate vocals combined with a forceful piano accompaniment—provided the foundation for her entrancing style. Fans were treated to a string of gold singles (including Don Covay’s “Chain of Fools,” “Think,” “Bridge over Troubled Water,” and “Spanish Harlem”) and albums *Lady*

*Soul, Live at the Fillmore West* (containing a duet with Ray Charles), and *Young, Gifted, and Black*. In 1972 she recorded the live gospel album *Amazing Grace* in Los Angeles with choir director James Cleveland. Even into the 1990s, Aretha conducted periodic forays into the world of popular music, earning additional artistic and popular chart successes.

Numerous soul artists worthy of mention barely brushed the pop charts or remained exclusively on the soul side. Some of the genre's greatest singers were virtually unknown to most white pop music fans. Bobby "Blue" Bland was a pioneer, starting as B. B. King's valet before recording a string of sixties soul hits. Solomon Burke, dubbed "the king of rock and soul" by the Atlantic publicity machine and cited by some as soul's best singer, began his career at age nine as "the wonder boy preacher." Joe Tex actually scored three top-10 pop hits but remained essentially out of the music mainstream. Arthur Alexander, Don Covay, and William Bell released soul classics as well.

When once asked about his successful daughter Aretha, the Reverend C. L. Franklin commented that she never really left the church—a statement that is also appropriate for soul as an entire genre. Soul artists apprenticed in the church, receiving invaluable vocal and instrumental training and a relatively optimistic outlook; little changed in their musical transition to the secular arena. The major musical vehicle shifted from the choir to a rhythm and blues band with a punchy horn section. Songs about the Lord and the hereafter became the here and now of everyday life in black America—sung with the same vocal intensity.

Although the "core band" rhythm-section instrumentation remained constant during the evolution from R&B to soul (drums, bass, guitar, and keyboard), some interesting musical changes were taking place. Whereas R&B bass parts usually consisted of a "walking," steady quarter-note or eighth-note pulse (reminiscent of the blues), soul bass lines were more melodically and rhythmically complex—highly syncopated parts providing a bouncy alternative to the straight-ahead groove laid down by Al Jackson Jr. and others drumming in a similar style. Aretha's "Respect," Sam and Dave's "Soul Man," and Eddie Floyd's "Knock on Wood" are outstanding examples of this bass-line syncopation. In addition, the soul horn section increased in prominence since the days of R&B, adding emphasis to syncopated beats and providing much of the gospel-generated call and response with the vocalist.



Soul, the music and the concept, affected white and black America in different ways. Most white Americans heard only the hits and saw only the most commercially successful crossover artists—Aretha, Otis, and a few others. Some white Americans adopted the cultural trappings of soul, including language ("Right on!") and gestures (the raised fist). As a genre, however, soul music could not compete on the popular charts with Motown and the British invasion groups and commercially remained a second-class citizen.

For many people in the African American community, soul was a unifying force. A large percentage of black radio listeners in urban centers were reached by black stations emphasizing soul music. Black DJs talked about soul and soul music as something that represented the black experience that no one could take away. Eventually, both the music and the concept came to symbolize black pride. Whereas few of the hits that whites heard contained direct or symbolic messages of black pride, the soul charts—especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s—contained numerous songs with references to a heightened positive black self-image. Many blacks, including James Brown, adopted the Afro, an unprocessed African American hairstyle reflecting this attitude of personal acceptance.

Soul music helped to create the atmosphere in which black pride grew. Along with the civil rights movement, rising economic expectations, and the era's growing idealism, soul music reflected and spurred further black advances. Both white and black audiences experienced the music as an expression of that subjective quality called emotional authenticity, terming that feeling *soul*. Paradoxically, this music was produced by an integrated studio band and by white-owned labels, yet the music was interpreted by listeners in the idealistic sixties as an honest and artistically authentic expression of a black musical and cultural aesthetic.

In Chapter 13 we turn our attention to Motown, the other black-generated style of 1960s popular music. Motown's reputation as an assembly-line musical commodity is in direct contrast to the notion of spontaneously generated authentic soul music. However, as the story of Motown unfolds, we shall discover numerous similarities to soul—gospel and R&B roots, vocal virtuosity, innovative song production, a top-notch studio band, and a brilliant “sound”—reframed in a way that made a lot of sense to white record buyers.



# Taylor & Francis

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**MOTOWN**

Hitsville, U.S.A.

**13**

*Chapter*



*The Supremes*

Berry [Gordy] wanted to make crossover music. Crossover at that time meant the white people would buy your records. Berry's concept in starting Motown was to make music with a funky beat and great stories that would be crossover, that would not be blues. And that's what we did.

—Motown legend Smokey Robinson

Baby love, my baby love  
I need you, oh, how I need you  
But all you do is treat me bad  
Break my heart and leave me sad.

—The Supremes, "Baby Love" (Holland/Dozier/Holland, 1964)

**M**OTOWN IS THE FLIP SIDE OF SOUL. It is the North (Detroit) to soul's South. It's the rich doo-wop harmonies to soul's searing lead vocals. It's the suave, bouncy rhythmic feeling to soul's torrid, sweaty beat. Yet the two musics were molded from the same raw materials of gospel and rhythm and blues—R&B's core rhythm section, gospel's vocal dexterity, and the beat-laden music of both.

Motown, unlike soul, was the product of a single record company and guided by a strong, visionary leader, Berry Gordy Jr. Gordy's songwriting and production skills, his organizational and business sense, and his zeal to be a part of the American Dream provided the impetus for the formation and growth of the company known as Motown and the Motown sound. Of course, Gordy was only one part of this success story. Since Motown's early years occurred during the lull between classic rock and the British invasion, the time was ripe. And the Motown label tapped the enormous talent of Detroit's black musical community, helping to polish the rough edges and presenting it in a way that excited white America. The success was so monumental that by 1969 Motown was one of America's top-five record companies.

The preamble to the Motown story is mostly a personal history of the Gordy family's migration to the North, their establishment in Detroit as well-respected small-business owners, and Berry Gordy Jr.'s individual growth. Gordy Sr. (known as "Pops") came to Detroit in the early 1920s and by the end of World War II had fathered seven children, built a construction company and a printing business, and had opened the Booker T. Washington grocery store. The grocery's namesake provided the Gordy family with a guiding philosophy: Blacks could get ahead only through hard work and education. Mrs. Bertha Gordy took college business classes, was secretary-treasurer of an insurance company serving a black clientele, and was active in the Michigan Democratic Party.

In this atmosphere of self-reliance, Berry Jr. searched for his own calling. He boxed professionally—a five-foot-six bantamweight—did a stint in the army, and, with funds borrowed from the family, opened a jazz record store, 3-D Record Mart, in 1953. After the store folded in 1955, Gordy succumbed to the lucrative lure of the auto industry, fastening upholstery at a Lincoln-Mercury plant. His entry into the music business came as a songwriter, coauthoring “Reet Petite,” “Lonely Teardrops” (#7), and “That Is Why” (#13) for former sparring partner Jackie Wilson.

Next, Gordy produced an R&B hit for Marv Johnson (“Come to Me”) and wrote and produced the often copied “Money” for Barrett Strong. The song was leased to Gordy’s sister, Gwen, for her Anna label and contained Berry and second wife Raynoma singing the echoing “That’s what I want” on the chorus. By 1959 Gordy had solidified his friendship with Miracles songwriter and lead singer William “Smokey” Robinson and had begun to set the pieces of the Motown empire. Two labels—Tamla and later Motown—were created, headquarters and studios were established in the house at 2648 West Grand Boulevard, and the Jobete Music Publishing house was formed. In late 1960 the combination of Smokey and Gordy produced the Miracles hit “Shop Around” (#2), the company’s first major popular hit.

The first few years (1960–1963) were a time for building—each piece of the foundation for Motown’s success had to be crafted and set in place. The talent had to be discovered and acquired, the creative process (in this case, a musical assembly line) organized, and sound business practices established. The Gordy family played an important role in Motown’s development, serving the organization in key positions and providing a model of dedication, experience, as well as nepotism. Sisters Esther and Louyce played key fiscal and organizational roles in the company. Pops and a crew of teenage aspirants, including future Temptation David Ruffin, rebuilt much of the interior of the building. In-law Harvey Fuqua (married to Gwen Gordy), former Moonglow lead singer and indie president, polished acts and worked in record promotion. Marvin Gaye (married to Anna Gordy) worked as a session drummer and piano player before turning to a solo career.

The Motown house band—its version of Stax’s Booker T. and the M.G.s—was nicknamed the Funk Brothers. Led by pianist Earl Van Dyke (who succeeded Choker Campbell in 1964), the band included James Jamerson on bass, Benny “Papa Zita” Benjamin on drums, and numerous guitarists, including Robert White. Most had formal musical training, and many played in the burgeoning Detroit jazz scene. Van Dyke paid his dues playing with future jazz luminaries Yusef Latteef and Kenny Burrell, national artists like Dizzy Gillespie, and popular performers Lloyd Price and Aretha Franklin.

The Funk Brothers became the core of the Motown sound. Like soul’s Al Jackson Jr., Benjamin established a relatively simple rhythmic foundation on drums and was heralded for his ability to establish a song’s “groove” (the rhythmic feeling and pulse). For example, the verse section of “Heatwave,” a hit for Martha and the Vandellas, is carried along on the crest of Benjamin’s forceful drumming; even with the addition of more

syncopated snare beats during the chorus, Benjamin is able to keep the forceful groove intact. This ability to propel a song forward without calling undue attention to the drums was one of Papa Zita's many talents.

James Jamerson was one of the era's most creative bassists, credited by many for extending the boundaries of popular-music bass playing toward a more complex and syncopated direction. His early material (for example, the 1965 Temptations hit "My Girl") evidences that active sound and Jamerson's patented unobtrusive fluidity. Material from 1967, like "I Second That Emotion" (the Miracles) and "I Heard It through the Grapevine" (Gladys Knight and the Pips), shows Jamerson at his syncopated best.<sup>1</sup> As label musical director Maurice King once pointed out, "I attribute the Motown sound to Jamie Jamerson's busy bass."

While industry regulars scoffed at the notion that a roster of mostly Detroit-bred artists could rise to national prominence, Gordy, who regularly prowled the city's black musical showcases, began to collect the early members of the Motown family. Joining Marv Johnson and the Miracles was Motown's first successful girl group, the Marvelettes, who scored Motown's first #1 in 1961 with "Please Mr. Postman." They continued their pop success throughout 1962 but lost momentum as the company's attention turned to other artists. This inattention was to haunt many of Motown's early top artists. Some, like Mary Wells, left the label, while others (the Marvelettes and the Contours) stayed and languished at the bottom of the roster.

Mary Wells, Motown's first important female vocalist, was guided by Smokey Robinson—who wrote and produced most of her eight pop hits. Singing in traditional Robinsonian dulcet tones, Wells reached her commercial pinnacle with the 1964 hit "My Guy." However, having just scored Motown's third #1, and two top-40 duets with Marvin Gaye, Wells left the label. In a scenario that was often repeated at Motown, the artist (or songwriter) became disillusioned with their share of "the family's" growing wealth and left the fold. In Wells's case she, like most other Motown artists of the time, was on salary and received none of the production, songwriting, or label profits that made only a select few wealthy.

Thus, at her zenith—which also included Motown's first British #1, an English tour, and the royal treatment by the Beatles—Wells could show little substantial monetary remuneration. Offered a reported \$500,000 two-year contract by Twentieth Century-Fox Records, she left Motown. After one further hit, she fell from the charts. Perhaps, as Motown would later assert, it was the label assembly line and its quality team players that were important, not the individual stars. Others, like Temptation lead singers David Ruffin and Eddie Kendricks, artist and repertoire stalwarts Mickey Stevenson and Harvey Fuqua, and musical director Maurice King, left for similar reasons. Eventually, a mass exodus would signal Motown's demise.

The one consistent artistic and commercial success throughout this developmental period turned out to be the Miracles and their leader, Smokey Robinson. Starting out as the Matadors in 1954, they added Smokey's high school sweetheart and future wife,

Claudette, in 1957; they scored with a Gordy-written and -produced hit, “Got a Job,” in 1958. During the sixties the Miracles scored multiple top-40 hits every year, in large measure due to their marvelous built-in songwriter-producer-lead singer, Smokey Robinson.

The group’s 1965 hit, “The Tracks of My Tears” (#16), is an example of Robinson’s prodigious combined talents and his ability to collaborate with others. Written by Robinson and Miracles Warren Moore and longtime guitarist Marv Tarplin, the introduction has Tarplin chiming out a lilting melody on guitar. Instruments are introduced in layers, first in the loping groove established by the drums, two guitars, bass, and congas, and then by the addition of multiple keyboards, a horn section that includes baritone sax, celeste, strings, and the ever present tambourine accenting the backbeat. Gliding over this musical mixture is Robinson’s airy, urgent lead vocal and choral and unison background counterparts from the Miracles.

The ability to tastefully blend musical ingredients into a coherent, pleasing, and commercially successful sound was a most important talent craft of the Motown family. In early years Robinson and Motown stuck close to the R&B band-and-horns format (heard on the 1963 hit “You Really Got a Hold on Me”), but by 1965 they were opting for a fuller range of instrumentation, including strings. By this time they also had an eight-track recording machine, more flexible than the old three-track model used in the early years. Part of Motown’s true genius was the manner in which it arranged instruments into a distinct “sound.” Gordy had long ago recognized that most of his listeners were young and that they heard popular music either in their cars or on transistor radios. He also realized the limitations of these units; car and transistor radios produced lousy, thin sound. Thus, Motown tailored its music to overcome these limitations; certain elements in the music were emphasized while others were pushed to the background.

The three major musical elements Motown brought to the forefront were vocals, drums—usually emphasizing the backbeat on the snare drum—and a syncopated bass line. The vocals showcased the attractive singing voices, harmonies, and lyrics; the drums kept time and provided a forceful backbeat; and the bouncy bass impelled the listener to physical excitement (like dancing). The rest of the instruments were moved to the background, providing more of a cumulative musical effect. Two other contemporary producer-writers were famous for this type of instrumental balance and distribution: Phil Spector (noted for his “wall of sound”) and Beach Boy Brian Wilson.

The Motown musical formula is in evidence on “The Tracks of My Tears.” During the first verse, Robinson’s lead vocal, the backbeat (played on the snare, tambourine, and rhythm guitar), and the bass take their places in the forefront of the mix. The effect of this type of arrangement, heard through tinny three-inch speakers, was to emphasize the vocals and various rhythms and de-emphasize everything else. For sixties youth, this musical formula worked.

The Motown lyrical style was similarly outstanding. Writers excelled at creating a romantic scenario that listeners could identify with, and Robinson was one of the best at this tactic. His talent as a wordsmith prompted Bob Dylan to characterize him as “one of

America's greatest living poets." Robinson's specialty was what writer Nelson George describes as "the understanding and dissection of love's paradoxes."<sup>2</sup> In "The Tracks of My Tears" these paradoxes are delivered in the form of a confession. While the singer appears to be the gregarious life of the party, telling jokes and putting on the face of a clown, he confesses to the listener that it is all a masquerade, hiding his devastation at the loss of a true love. To confirm this disclosure, the listener is told to look beyond the smile to the nearly invisible tracks of the tears the clown has shed—a delightfully inventive and sophisticated lyrical construct.

Throughout the midsixties, Robinson had numerous successes, including "The Way You Do the Things You Do," "My Girl," and "Get Ready," all by the Temptations; Marvin Gaye's "Ain't That Peculiar" and "I'll Be Doggone"; "Don't Mess with Bill" and "The Hunter Gets Captured by the Game" by the Marvelettes; and almost all of the hits scored by the Miracles. Substantial monetary rewards from a variety of roles at Motown, plus his long-standing friendship with and loyalty to Gordy—aided by his 1962 promotion to label vice president—kept Robinson at Motown in the wake of the late-1960s defections. After his 1972 final appearance with the Miracles, Robinson embarked on a solo career and earned his first Grammy Award in 1988.

The title of most successful writer-producers during Motown's golden years of the mid-1960s goes to brothers Brian and Eddie Holland and partner Lamont Dozier. Known as Holland/Dozier/Holland (or HDH), they created most of the major hits for the Supremes, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, and the Four Tops plus numerous others for Marvin Gaye, the Miracles, and Junior Walker. Between 1963 and 1967, HDH wrote and produced forty-six top-40 hits including a dozen #1s. When the team formed in 1962, each member had talent and experience as a solo vocalist, writer, and outside producer. Eddie Holland specialized in words and working with lead singers, Brian focused mostly on the melodies, and Lamont Dozier covered both in addition to directing the backup vocalists. Brian Holland and Lamont Dozier are generally credited with in-studio production work.

Because of this division of labor, the team fitted well with Motown's assembly-line approach to song construction and production. This step-by-step approach—similar to pop music's Tin Pan Alley/Brill Building methods—resembled the auto industry's assembly line. First, the need for a song was established. (For example, a particular group might need a follow-up to their recent hit.) In the case of the Supremes or the Four Tops, HDH would be assigned to write and produce the next song. In the case of a new artist or one without specific writers, Gordy or A&R chief Mickey Stevenson might assign the task to a writer or to two competing writers. Once the song was finished, or an already completed song assigned to a group or individual performer, the recording process would begin. The studio band, generally the Funk Brothers, would be called in to record the rhythm tracks; the singer(s) was then brought in to record vocals, followed by the extra instruments such as strings, horns, and percussion. Finally, the song was mixed down into a final product, and an acetate or test pressing was ready for label scrutiny.

The Motown process contained an innovative step that the label called “quality control.” A staffer would listen to the finished product in an attempt to determine whether the person on the street would like the record. One early quality-control staffer was future songwriting-production great Norman Whitfield; at the time, he was a quiet, talented teenager hanging around the studio. The acetate would finally reach a weekly meeting where Gordy, label sales and A&R executives, quality-control personnel, and others would vote on all potential releases. The record went to the manufacturing plant only after a positive vote. Although the creative forces, writers, and producers were given substantial artistic freedom, the decision to release a record was concentrated in the hands of a few. Thus, the public heard only what people at the top felt were the best results of Motown’s assembly line. This entire process accounted for Motown’s incredible release-to-hit ratio. Approximately 65 percent of all label releases reached the Hot 100 charts; no other major label touched even 15 percent.

Holland/Dozier/Holland’s Motown successes started with Martha and the Vandellas. Leader Martha Reeves, who was laboring as a Motown secretary while awaiting her chance to record, started singing in a Detroit church and later with her vocal group, the Delphis. After singing backup on some early Marvin Gaye hits, the group changed its name to Martha and the Vandellas, and HDH wrote them a hit for the summer of 1964 called “Heatwave” (#4). Although still early in their creative career, HDH exhibited a keen understanding of the pop formula. The musical elements were arranged to emphasize the backbeat (on snare and “clap”) and Reeves’s emotive vocals. The song also contains a “hook”—a catchy, repeated lyrical and/or musical element designed to remain with the listener.

In “Heatwave” the musical hook, played by baritone sax and kick drum, was on the first and anticipated third beats of the four-beat measure. A lyrical hook was also in evidence, the title word being repeated over and over. HDH and Gordy knew the value of repetition and familiarity. Assisting people to enjoy and remember their songs by the use of hooks was a vital ingredient in the Motown formula. As if to prove this point, the Vandellas’ follow-up to “Heatwave” a few months later had the same rhythmic musical hook (this time emphasized by the piano, guitar, and kick drum), and a lyrical hook also consisting of two syllables and describing a natural phenomena (in this case “Quicksand,” #8).

The biggest hit by Martha and the Vandellas was “Dancing in the Street” (#2), written by A&R director Mickey Stevenson and Marvin Gaye for release in the summer of 1964. The group disbanded in 1971, not having had a hit since 1967, and Martha Reeves left the label the next year. Like other early Motown performers, the Vandellas took a seat near the back of the bus around 1964, as Gordy and HDH geared up to promote their newest female group, the Supremes.

Florence Ballard, Mary Wilson, Barbara Martin (who would soon leave the group), and Diane Ross (later known as Diana) were teenagers from Detroit’s Brewster-Douglass housing projects when they formed a group called the Primettes—the Temptations were

billing themselves as the Primes at the time—and hung out at the Grand Boulevard headquarters hoping for their big break. Although Gordy had told them to come back after they had finished high school, the Primettes were signed to Motown in early 1961. Initially, the group split lead vocal chores, and though both Ballard and Wilson had stronger voices, Ross's unique, nasal sensuality attracted key Motown personnel, including Berry Gordy, Dozier, and Brian Holland. Ross's aggressive personality—some would later characterize her as manipulative and pushy—and penchant for hard work earned her the position of lead vocalist.

After numerous earlier releases and a minor hit in late 1963, HDH handed the Supremes “Where Did Our Love Go,” the first of five straight #1s. The July 1964 hit cemented a group-writer relationship that would produce sixteen hits, including ten #1s, before 1968. In “Where Did Our Love Go” HDH established a forceful quarter-note “clap” pulse reinforced by the bass to carry Ross's delicate voice. During the first two verses, between Ross and the backup singers, the word *baby* is repeated nineteen times. No doubt, many a commuter left their cars that summer humming “baby, baby.” It is no coincidence that the first actual word sung three months later in their follow-up #1 hit was the *baby* in “Baby Love.” The follow-up, as well as many future hits, including “Stop in the Name of Love” and “Reflections,” also contained the emphasized quarter-note pulse, which was probably used to compensate for the lack of lead-vocal forcefulness.

There was a multitude of reasons for the success of the Supremes. The ladies had talent, and Ross's unique voice and doe-eyed charisma were infectious. HDH wrote and produced catchy, danceable songs admirably interpreted by the studio musicians. However, a transformation had to take place in order to make this all work; three black women from the projects had to appear as princesses, acceptable to white American sensibilities. This is where the Motown finishing school, singing lessons, and dance sessions came in. All the major acts, especially the women, were schooled in how to talk, eat, walk, use correct deportment, dress, and carry on charming but uninformative relations with the press. The matron of one of Detroit's better-known finishing schools was persuaded to close her doors and come to work for Motown. Dancemaster Cholly Atkins was persuaded to relocate and choreograph label acts. It was said that Motown acts were being groomed to appear in two places: Buckingham Palace and the White House.

The combination of Diana Ross's coquettish demeanor, bright smile, and airy voice, the midtempo soap-opera dramas crafted by HDH, and the best promotional campaign Motown could mount (including Berry Gordy's personal efforts) helped to create the label's most successful group. Their string of HDH #1s included “You Can't Hurry Love,” “You Keep Me Hanging On,” and “The Happening.” The group traveled with the Motortown Revues, a label package show in the early 1960s that toured the States and Europe but became too big and moved on to the country's most prestigious venues such as New York's Copacabana and some of the Las Vegas showcase palaces.

Events during 1967 eventually proved to be disastrous for the group. That July, Gordy dismissed Flo Ballard from the group. The original leader and the group's most powerful

singer, Ballard had been pushed into the background to allow for the emergence of Ross. Whereas Mary Wilson could rationalize Ross's aggressiveness and ego-driven zeal as her being "just Diane," Florence became increasingly frustrated and depressed at her secondary status. Without warning, Ballard was out and Cindy Birdsong, who had already been thoroughly rehearsed, became a Supreme.

Next, Holland/Dozier/Holland sued Motown for back royalties and left the label. Even Hitsville's top team came to view Gordy's accumulation of wealth with resentment; they felt they deserved a more representative share. HDH later collected a substantial sum, and their absence was felt immediately. Morale dropped as the Supremes and the Four Tops searched for another winning writing/production team. The Tops never found one, and the Supremes, after 1968's "Love Child," had to wait until Ross announced her departure for their final #1, the absurdly titled "Someday We'll Be Together." The group carried on into the late 1970s with Mary Wilson as the only original member. In 1977 she sued Motown, citing the \$200–300 weekly salary she had been receiving during the glory years and asking for an equitable settlement. Diana Ross was successful as a pop music personality and received wide acclaim as Billie Holiday in the Gordy-directed movie *Lady Sings the Blues*.

The Four Tops lacked the momentum to maintain their success after HDH's departure. These Detroit natives had been singing together since 1954 (originally as the Four Aims) and had recorded with a variety of labels, including Chess and Columbia, before signing with Motown in 1964. Paired with HDH, they hit big with "Baby, I Need Your Lovin'" (#11) in 1964 before their first #1, "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch)" (spring of 1965). On "Sugar Pie" the HDH formula worked well. The rhythmic accents abound as tambourine and guitar cover the backbeat, the snare pulses on quarter notes, and the bass and another guitar press forward on a circular syncopated pattern. Levi Stubbs's dynamic, slightly gritty lead vocal rides over the groove, echoed by a typical HDH unison response by the rest of the group.<sup>3</sup>

In an anecdote illustrative of Gordy's business acumen, Motown received word that Columbia Records, in an attempt to capitalize on the first #1 by the Four Tops, would flood the market with previous Four Tops products. The legend has HDH summoned to headquarters, ordered to beat the other label to the punch. Ostensibly, they wrote the follow-up on Monday, recorded the rhythm section Tuesday morning and vocalists that night, put sweeteners (strings, horns, and so on) in on Wednesday, and mixed it that same day. The disc was in the stores the following Monday. Recorded in the same key, using a similar circular bass pattern and quarter-note snare, and featuring unison background vocals, the follow-up was aptly named "It's the Same Old Song" and rose to #5 on the charts. The Four Tops were moderately successful, scoring four more top-10 hits (including the highly dramatic "Reach Out I'll Be There" and "Standing in the Shadows of Love") before leaving Motown for ABC/Dunhill in 1972.

With a career dating back to 1960, the Temptations, Motown's most critically acclaimed and commercially successful male group, stayed on with the label. Not only did

they achieve outstanding chart success (twenty-eight top-40 hits between 1964 and 1972, including four #1s), but their live performances were legendary—composed of equal amounts of high energy and beautifully choreographed, synchronized fancy steppin'. Whereas the Supremes and the Four Tops relied on HDH, the Temps' early mentor was Smokey Robinson, who wrote and produced most of their pre-1967 hits. Like the Four Tops, the Temps came to the label via the Detroit doo-wop circuit, singing in groups with names like the Distant, Elegants, Questions, and Primes. The Primes changed their name to the Temptations at Gordy's suggestion. By 1962 the lineup had solidified to include tenors Eddie Kendricks and David Ruffin, baritones Otis Williams and Paul Williams (no relation), and bass Melvin Franklin.

Their first pop hit, the Robinson-penned "The Way You Do the Things You Do," featured the Smokey-like high tenor vocals of Eddie Kendricks, cleverly listing the romantic attributes of his lover. It is interesting to note that the hand claps reinforcing the backbeat on record were actually Motown's legendary studio two-by-fours being hit together. By 1965 David Ruffin—with his gritty, intense vocal style—had emerged as the lead singer, fronting Robinson's follow-up to Wells's hit "My Guy" with the group's first #1, "My Girl." This classic contains one of Motown's most memorable musical moments



*The Temptations*

as Ruffin's "my girl" is echoed by Paul Williams on the three of the scale, followed by a harmonized "my girl" by the rest of the group.

Starting in 1966, one of Motown's most important but least-known writer-producers, Norman Whitfield, replaced Robinson as the Temptations' mentor. Over the next six years, he wrote, mostly with Barrett Strong, numerous top-10 hits for the Temptations, including "Beauty Is Only Skin Deep," "I Wish It Would Rain," "Cloud Nine," "I Can't Get Next to You," "Ball of Confusion," and "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone." In 1968 Ruffin left for a solo career, replaced by another fine vocalist, former Contour Dennis Edwards, and in 1971 Kendricks departed.

The change in personnel was paralleled by a shift in Whitfield and Strong's song-writing vision. Beginning with "Cloud Nine," the songs turned from a focus on romance toward first-person accounts of the physical and emotional struggles of black urban existence. In both lyrical content and musical production, these were seminal works. When "Cloud Nine" was released in late 1968, Motown music had yet to reflect the profound political and social changes being experienced by the black community. "Cloud Nine"—through its lyrics and music—recounts the experience of smoking "consciousness-altering drugs," much in the same way that Jefferson Airplane did one year before with "White Rabbit."

"Cloud Nine" broke Motown's lyrical formula taboos, at the same time loosening musical boundaries. No longer restricted to a romance-oriented permutation, the song describes the hardships of living in lower-class black America, accompanied by the strains of wah-wah guitar, strong quarter-note snare-driven pulse, and funklike syncopated bass. Using influences from Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone, Whitfield shaped a sound that would have an impact on many early 1970s black musicians—including Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, and the Philadelphia team of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. In a move that paralleled popular music trends, Whitfield extended playing length; the short version of "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone" was six minutes, the album cut nearly twelve.

Of Whitfield's many commercial successes during that era, two are worthy of special note: "I Heard It through the Grapevine" (1967) and "War" (1970). Whitfield cowrote (with Strong) and produced both hit versions of "Grapevine," the original for Gladys Knight and the Pips (#2, 1967) and Marvin Gaye's follow-up (#1, 1968). Knight and the Pips had come to Motown in 1965 with the reputation as an extraordinarily dynamic and polished stage act—they had been singing together since 1956, and their steps were choreographed by dancer Cholly Atkins. Knight had been considered something of a child prodigy since her appearance at age seven on TV's *Ted Mack Amateur Hour*. "Grapevine" was their first major hit, and Knight's explosive, gospel-style lead vocals served notice that Motown had a new outstanding vocalist on its roster. Unfortunately, with Motown's attention turned toward Diana Ross's pending solo career, insufficient attention was lavished on the group, and they left the label in 1973. "War," with a prefunk rhythmic groove and Edwin Starr's raw-voiced Pentecostal pleadings, expressed exasperation at the

senselessness of the current armed conflict in both the ghetto and Vietnam—"War . . . what is it good for . . . absolutely nothing."

Unlike the Pips, Marvin Gaye had been at Motown since the early days. Having grown up in Washington, D.C., as the son of an authoritarian Pentecostal minister, Gaye—born Gay, he added the *e* for homophobic reasons—was raised singing in the church. He turned to secular doo-wop vocalizing as a rebellious response to a physically and psychologically abusive home environment. His group, the Marquis, cut an unsuccessful Bo Diddley-produced record before doo-wop star Harvey Fuqua tapped them to become the new Moonglows. Fuqua became Gaye's mentor and benevolent father figure, and when he moved to Detroit to form his own label, Marvin came with him. By 1962 Gaye had worked as a backup drummer and piano player; recorded his first album, *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*; scored his first R&B hit with "Stubborn Kinda Fellow"; and married Berry's sister Anna Gordy.

In the sixties Gaye recorded seventeen hits for a variety of producers. These included "Ain't That Peculiar" (#8, 1965) with Smokey, "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You" (#6, 1965), written and produced by HDH, "Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing" (#8, 1968), written and produced by Valerie Simpson and Nicholas Ashford, and Whitfield and Strong's "Grapevine." One major reason for this success was Gaye's vocal dexterity, ranging from a Nat Cole-like smoothness to a Ray Charles-inspired raw forcefulness. Gaye also exhibited a suave demeanor, sensuality, and charisma onstage that attracted more than his share of female admirers.

Female fans were especially thrilled when, beginning in 1964, Gaye released a series of duets with some of Motown's leading ladies. Gaye had top-20 hits with Mary Wells and Kim Weston, but his most praised work was with Tammi Terrell, a former feature soloist with James Brown's Mr. Dynamite Review. Gaye's apparently platonic adoration for Terrell translated into ultimate romance on vinyl; the duo released three albums and had seven pop hits between 1967 and 1969. Tragically, Tammi collapsed in Marvin's arms onstage in the summer of 1967. She never fully recovered, and after numerous operations she died from the effects of a brain tumor.<sup>4</sup>

It was nearly two years before Gaye sufficiently recovered his composure to perform at Marvin Gaye Day in Washington, D.C., in May 1972. However, in the studio, the ever reluctant Gaye was recording his magnum opus, the label's best-selling album of the era, *What's Goin' On*. The sensitive, troubled Gaye found what he called "a path of the heart." Like Whitfield and other African American writers of the time, Gaye chose to explore the black urban experience. Gaye weaves tales about personal and political war and peace ("What's Goin' On" and "What's Happenin' Brother"), the environment ("Mercy Mercy Me"), drugs ("Flyin' High"), and life in the ghetto ("Inner City Blues").

Historically, Motown rarely gave an artist control over a major project, so this album represented a 180-degree shift in production—no artist, other than Smokey, wrote, produced, and arranged so much original material. Motown was reluctant to release *What's Goin' On*; Gaye threatened to stop recording altogether if they didn't. It went to #1. This



*Stevie Wonder*

artist-control precedent was later demanded and won by Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson.

Gaye's ambivalent feelings about life complicated what was largely a successful musical career at Motown. He was tormented by his relationship with his father, by the legacy of a strict religious upbringing conflicting with the real life that contained sins of music and the flesh, and his ability to meet the day-to-day demands of music and the road. His escape led him to psychoactive drugs—Gaye claimed to have smoked marijuana for twenty-five years and snorted cocaine since the early sixties—relocation in Europe, and frequent contemplation of suicide. On the day before his forty-fifth birthday, Marvin Gaye was shot to death in his bedroom by his father.

Another artist who worked within the Motown system only to struggle free in the early seventies was Stevie Wonder. Signed to a contract at age eleven, Little Stevie Wonder (changed by Gordy from Steveland Morris) was all of thirteen when he released Motown's second #1 hit, "Fingertips Part II" (1963). Although blind from birth, Wonder had, by his teen years, become an accomplished harmonica, piano, bongo, and trap-drum player. In addition, he wrote or cowrote most of his sixteen hits of the 1960s. During Wonder's teen years, a time that is not always kind to a boy's voice as he reaches

puberty, his church-trained, high-tenor voice mellowed gradually—lowering slightly for the 1965 hit “Uptight” and even further for the critically acclaimed, bass-driven “I Was Made to Love Her” (#2, 1967).

Throughout the sixties Wonder labored in the Motown factory, where the company maintained control over all aspects of production. Wonder cowrote the material, and Clarence Paul or Hank Crosby produced most of the hits. In the late 1960s the two albums, *My Cherie Amour* and *Signed, Sealed, and Delivered*, produced four top-10 singles, including both title tracks. Then, in 1971, Stevie Wonder—the *Little* had long since been dropped—turned twenty-one and became an instant millionaire from royalties Motown held in trust. Wonder decided to leave the factory. He moved to New York, formed a production company (Taurus, like its owner) and a publishing company (Black Bull), hired attorney Jonathan Vigoda to field the substantial record company contract offers, and set out in search of his liberated musical self.

The quest led him to the keyboard synthesizer. Inspired by the work of the two-musician group the Expanding Headband (Malcolm Cecil and Robert Margouloff), Wonder sequestered the three of them in the late Jimi Hendrix’s Electric Ladyland Studio for a year’s worth of experimentation. A quarter of a million dollars later, more than three hundred songs had germinated; some of them appeared on his next four pioneering albums, *Music of My Mind* (1972), *Talking Book* (1972), *Innervisions* (1973), and *Fulfillingness First Finale* (1974).

These four albums, plus the 1976 classic *Songs in the Key of Life*, established Wonder as the most important black popular musician of the era. Not only did he have chart success (*Songs in the Key of Life* was the #1 album for fourteen weeks), but his overall compositional brilliance, musical talent and craftsmanship, and inspirational lyrics were critically acclaimed during this period. In addition, Wonder’s vision of spiritual enlightenment and peaceful coexistence shone as a popular music beacon during and after the dark days of the prolonged Vietnam War and Watergate.

The late 1960s and early 1970s also gave rise to Motown’s first family from Gary, Indiana: the Jackson 5. The group was initially brought to Motown’s attention by Gladys Knight, whose recommendations were ignored. The Jackson kids were already a polished group, guided by the aggressive and experienced “Papa” Joe Jackson—a former guitarist for a Detroit group called the Falcons—when they signed to the label and left for Los Angeles to record and undergo more Motown fine-tuning.

The racial unrest in Detroit and concentration of music industry power in L.A. had convinced Gordy that a move to the West Coast was necessary. Beginning to move in 1969 (final consolidation came in 1972), Gordy spent increasing amounts of time and recording-budget money on the West Coast. During this period many Funk Brothers, songwriters, and administrators left the label and/or stayed in Detroit. With the key writers gone or busy, Gordy took a more active role in launching the Jackson 5’s career, joining with three staff writers (designated “the Corporation”) to write and produce many of

their early hits. To promote the band, Motown had their diva, Diana Ross, give them a jump start—she claimed to have discovered them, their first album was titled *Diana Ross Presents the Jackson 5*, and they were featured on her 1970 network-TV special.

Their early success rate was phenomenal; their first four hits, including “I Want You Back” and “ABC,” were all #1s. All eyes were focused on eleven-year-old lead singer Michael, a prodigious child performer in the tradition of Frankie Lymon and Little Stevie Wonder. His choreographed steps—Michael spent hours studying the moves of James Brown—vocal fluidity, and stage presence evidenced a talent and self-assurance far beyond his years. Their recording successes were enhanced by a second-generation Motown house band punching out the well-crafted, driving musical sound. In 1971 Michael initiated a parallel solo career, scoring four top-20 hits in 1972.

Jackson’s solo career languished in the mid-1970s until the release in 1979 of *Off the Wall* (#3), which was followed in 1982 by the blockbuster *Thriller*. Jackson had obviously found a musical and lyrical formula that appealed to a broader-than-normal pop-audience age group. *Thriller* stayed at #1 for thirty-seven weeks, sold more than 40 million copies—making it the best-selling album in history—and produced six top-20 singles. The former child prodigy, Michael Jackson, who had been in the music business for more than fifteen years, reached the top at age twenty-four. However, Motown couldn’t afford his success. Epic Records (a Columbia Records subsidiary) won the bidding war for Michael and the Jacksons back in 1976, and the company reaped the rewards.

By the early 1970s the Motown roster had lost an appreciable number of its former stars—the glitter and camaraderie of its golden days were fading fast. There are numerous reasons for this decline. Beginning with his announced intention to move in 1969, Gordy spent more of his time and focused much of his attention on the West Coast. The bipolar ship began to drift under its absentee captain. Numerous personnel had chosen, because of family or monetary reasons, to leave the label or not to relocate to Los Angeles with the final contingent in 1972.

The great accumulation of wealth by the chosen few and the relative pittance gathered by the many led to the defection of key players. Already, Holland/Dozier/Holland, songwriter-producer Harvey Fuqua, and the team of Ashford and Simpson had left. By the early seventies the Four Tops, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Temptation lead vocalist David Ruffin, the Isley Brothers, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, Mary Wells, and others departed. In the early days artists had signed contracts for small salaries and royalties, reflecting the reality of a small company working together as a family to get to the top. When Motown’s success exceeded even their wildest expectations and money came pouring into the label’s coffers, the artists were still on salary, Motown songwriters were still signed to Gordy’s Jobete Publishing Company, and artist performances were booked through Gordy’s ITM Agency. In the end the factory owner got rich and the workers got steady employment.

Nevertheless, for that golden era between 1964 and 1971, Motown's version of bouncy black romance took on all comers and beat them on the charts. They became America's teenage soundtrack and everybody's dance track. With Gordy's musical and entrepreneurial genius as the basis for the sound, a successful formula was developed to best represent black musical roots and to best utilize the technology of the era. The lyrics were crafted to appeal to a broad cross section of young white America. And, for a time, Motown was on top. But popular tastes changed, key personnel left, and the label was forced to relinquish its popular music crown.

# THE SAN FRANCISCO SOUND

People in Motion

Chapter 14



*Janis Joplin*

More important than just the music is the whole attitude, the dance thing, the whole fact that there are lots of people getting together. . . . We never grew up where there were things like that. It was pretty isolated. And now suddenly there are large groups of people getting together.

—Jerry Garcia, of the Grateful Dead

One particular element I enjoyed was the breaking of shackles—the intellectual shackles represented by the mentality of the 50s, sexual shackles that had been in place forever . . . anything proscribed by the establishment—everything from Chairman Mao to drugs to acupuncture to Eldridge Cleaver—was looked into with relish.

—Paul Kantner, of Jefferson Airplane

It used to be that when people came out to hear music it was like they were going to the temple.

—Rock impresario Bill Graham

Sometimes the lights all shining on me, other times I can barely see  
Lately it occurs to me, what a long strange trip it's been.

—“Truckin’” by the Grateful Dead (1970)

**T**HE YEAR WAS 1965. The British invasion was under way. Bob Dylan was rising to national prominence with his first popular hit, “Like a Rolling Stone,” and his disciples were spreading folk-oriented rock with a message throughout the land. Soul artists had begun to hit their stride, and Motown’s golden era was in full flower. Out in San Francisco, a group of musicians, supported and inspired by a growing counterculture community, was giving birth to a musical style destined to become one of American rock’s most creative and culturally exotic.

Between 1965 and 1970, waves of Bay Area bands were formed, brewed their eclectic blend of folk-rock and revivalist blues, and achieved some level of national prominence. This chapter will focus upon six of the era’s most popular bands—Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company (featuring Janis Joplin), Country Joe and the Fish, the Grateful Dead, and two later arrivals, Creedence Clearwater Revival and Santana—and the cultural milieu in which their music was created. The region’s vibrant music scene produced many more groups than space permits us to chronicle; some are even worthy of mention if only for strikingly unique names like A Cid Symphony, Frumious

Bandersnatch, the Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band, and one of my favorites, Black Shit Puppy Farm.

San Francisco—area rock was composed of a variety of musical and lyrical ingredients. Some of it reflected the current musical trends, such as the two-guitar ensemble and two-plus-four rhythmic emphasis of classic rock and early Beatles music; lyrics critical of traditional societal values and behavior; and an emotive, earnest vocal style reflective of the ongoing folk-rock boom. However, there were also significant musical and cultural departures from contemporary popular styles, seen in the distorted, extended guitar improvisations, which paralleled those of the emerging sixties blues revival and took on more major-scale melodic character than their blues counterparts; the lyrics emanating from Bay Area groups, which were more likely to contain references to altered consciousness and counterculture concerns; and Bay Area musicians themselves, who challenged the commonly held music-industry notion of elite star—versus-commoner relationship with the audience.

One reason this challenge took place was that Bay Area artists closely identified with the San Francisco and Berkeley counterculture communities. Even though the Beatles and Stones lived in London, they did so in mansions, isolated from the hoi polloi; many American rock artists did the same. However, a large number of San Francisco's musicians resided in communal living situations in the city's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, drawing their support and cultural and political attitudes from their immediate environment. Members of the Dead lived at 710 Ashbury, Big Brother resided and practiced at 1090 Page, and Airplane established their headquarters at the 2400 Fulton mansion. Immersing themselves in the counterculture, they grew their hair long, adopted appropriate modes of dress, played music, and took psychoactive drugs.

During this era the ingestion of psychoactive drugs by the counterculture community, including its musicians, was the rule rather than the exception. Smoking marijuana and taking other drugs was as common as drinking coffee, considered both a search for enlightenment and an escape from oppressive elements of "straight" society. Community members believed that recreational drug use enhanced both the individual's quality of life and his artistic creativity. Users made a strong distinction between psychoactive drugs (marijuana, hashish, LSD, mescaline, mushrooms, and the like), which they believed would produce this positive result, and alcohol, methamphetamines or "speed," barbiturates, and heroin, which produced aggressive hostility or numbness.

Due to the close proximity to San Francisco and Berkeley's alternative culture community, the musicians' artistic output strongly reflected the community's escape from the straight world and its idealistic search for a different set of values and existence. This quest manifested itself in many ways, including music that tested existing boundaries and lyrics that were highly critical of mainstream society. Artists produced an inordinately large proportion of what James Carey would term "newer-value" songs.<sup>1</sup> These critical songs covered a spectrum of topics. Some, such as Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody to Love," dealt with the common topic of romance, adding a touch of societal focus and

alienation. Others, such as the Grateful Dead's "Dark Star," explored more metaphysical or esoteric topics, whereas Country Joe and the Fish's "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" and Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" proffered political commentary on contemporary subjects such as the Vietnam War.

Just as the objective conditions in Liverpool spawned the Beatles and the *Mersey Beat*, San Francisco's history as a pioneer boomtown contributed to the new sound's development. Ever since the 1849 gold rush, the "City" had earned a reputation for "anything goes." The Barbary Coast neighborhood of the late nineteenth century was notorious; gambling, prostitution, and gangsterism flourished. Under the philosophy that each neighborhood should be left to its own devices, San Francisco would later allow the topless bars of North Beach and the culturally radical Haight-Ashbury of the sixties to exist. San Francisco became a last frontier for eccentrics.

In the fifties some viewed San Francisco as a haven for creative intellectuals, with the beatniks, or "beats," as the most recent wave. These artistic counterculture bohemians sought to create an alternative to the rigid, conservative, cold war-dominated lifestyle of the fifties. They challenged the old order, seeking answers by studying existentialist and Eastern philosophies, writing poetry, listening to jazz and folk music, adopting a try-anything sexual philosophy, and expanding consciousness through the use of psychoactive drugs (in this case, mostly marijuana). From the cultural heights of their Columbus Avenue coffeehouses, it was the beats who identified their sixties counterculture counterparts as only a little "hip," thus a "hippie."

San Francisco also had a tradition of political activism, which added a spark to the alternative community and its music. Elements of the Bay Area's trade-union movement, led by the Longshoreman's Union and its head, Harry Bridges, involved themselves in political and social issues. (They would later take a stand against the Vietnam War by refusing to load ships bound for the conflict.) In 1960 a broad political coalition mounted a campaign to bar the House Un-American Activities Committee from holding its McCarthy-style hearings in San Francisco. When demonstrators were brutalized in front of the nation's TV cameras on the city hall steps, the public outcry contributed to the committee's final demise.

In 1964 the University of California at Berkeley (across San Francisco Bay) closed the campus to controversial leftist, student-invited speakers. Students reacted to this abrogation of their academic liberties by forming the free-speech movement and by holding massive demonstrations and sit-ins on campus. This confrontational student activism set the tone for midsixties Bay Area political and cultural activities and was a bellwether for student movements nationwide.

The existence of numerous older ballrooms, able to be rented for reasonable sums, made San Francisco unique. The process of urban renewal—an architectural genocide against American inner cities—that took place across the country missed many of the area's old dance palaces. The midsixties San Francisco music scene adopted these dance halls for their performances. Rather than an audience viewing the musician-elite from

distant fixed seating, it became an active participant, a swarm of throbbing, psychedelic, whirling dervishes. Band members expressed the feeling that the audience and artists were part of one large organism, one in which the musician head wagged the dancing tail.

Thus, the conditions under which this San Francisco-based music emerged and flourished included the legacy of a free-spirited, anything-goes attitude; previous successful counterculture communities; a history where political activism played an integral role; and a number of ballroom venues where the symbiotic musician-audience relationship could be born and nurtured. It was within this historical context that a young San Francisco native named Marty Balin (having changed his name from Martyn Buchwald) opened a club called the Matrix in the spring of 1965. He then set about forming a “great” folk-rock group to become the house band.

For his first recruit, Balin tabbed local folkie-cum-rocker Paul Kantner, who had gone to school in nearby San Jose, managed a club, and happened to be carrying a banjo and guitar when they met. Lead guitarist Jorma Kaukonen, a widely traveled Washington, D.C.-based son of a diplomat, had been an acoustic blues aficionado in the Bay Area for a few years before being asked to join. Kaukonen enticed his D.C. buddy, bassist Jack Casady, to the coast, and Balin rounded out the rhythm section when he spied Skip Spence and said, “There’s our drummer.” When Spence replied that he was a guitarist, Balin sent him home to practice drums. Folk vocalist Signe Anderson completed the lineup that adopted its name from a friend’s dog, Blind Thomas Jefferson Airplane.

Jefferson Airplane (or “Airplane” for short)—a group of mostly middle-class, ex-folknik, rock and roll converts—debuted at the Matrix in August 1965. Meanwhile, the ballroom scene was being born. A group of friends called the Family Dog rented the Longshoreman’s Hall near Fisherman’s Wharf, contracted with the region’s budding talent, and dubbed the October 16, 1965, event “A Tribute to Dr. Strange.” Posters were colored in with magic marker, advertising Jefferson Airplane, the Marbles, the Great Society (featuring vocalist Grace Slick), and area music pioneers the Charlatans. *San Francisco Chronicle* jazz and popular music journalist Ralph J. Gleason, an early scene supporter, described the night: “Long lines of dancers snaked through the crowd holding hands. Free form improvisation (‘self expression’) was everywhere. The clothes were a blast. Like a giant costume party. . . . It was a gorgeous sight.”

Within the next three weeks, the Family Dog threw two more parties: “A Tribute to Sparkle Plenty,” with the Lovin’ Spoonful and the Charlatans, and “A Tribute to Ming the Merciless” (an evil character from the 1930s sci-fi serial *Flash Gordon*) featuring Frank Zappa’s Mothers of Invention, the Charlatans, and emcee Howard Hesseman. In December a guerrilla theater group known as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and its business manager, Bill Graham, rented an old second-story ballroom called the Fillmore (in a black neighborhood of the same name) for a benefit dance/concert. They booked six bands, including Airplane, the Great Society, and a new group on the scene known as the Warlocks (soon to change their name to the Grateful Dead). Signs inside the hall proclaimed “LOVE” and “NO BOOZE,” and the packed house got “high with a little help from their friends.”



*Jefferson Airplane*

In December 1965 Airplane became the first of the new groups to land a major-label contract, signing with RCA Records. Their first album, *Jefferson Airplane Takes Off*, was released the next August and featured Balin's yearning tenor vocals and folk-style guitar strumming. Its generally vague musicianship and looseness were typical of the era's early sound but belied some band members' classical training (Kaukonen, Casady, and future drummer Spencer Dryden). The band was going through other changes as well. Anderson, with a newborn baby, returned to her native Oregon, and drummer Spence left the band, strapped on his guitar, and helped to form the group Moby Grape. Their replacements were experienced jazz and rock drummer Dryden and vocalist Grace Slick, lured away from Great Society.

By the first weekend of January 1966 the ballroom dance/concert had achieved institutional status. At the Longshoreman's Hall, top-40 radio station KYA presented a dance with the Vejtables; at the California Hall, the Family Dog hosted Airplane and the Charlatans; and at the Fillmore, author and LSD advocate Ken Kesey held his "Acid Test with the Warlocks." The ballrooms—the Fillmore, Avalon (used mostly by the Family Dog), Winterland (a converted ice rink), Carousel (renamed the Fillmore West by Graham), the California Hall, and others—became the musical meeting places.

A few weeks after the “Acid Test,” Kesey and his psychedelic sidekicks put on a three-day event at the Longshoreman’s Hall called the Trips Festival. A multimedia circus featuring strobe lights, slides, bands, theater, and Native American tipis, it was billed as an LSD simulation without the drug. (Out in the crowd, someone distributed free samples of acid-domo Augustus Owsley Stanley III’s latest batch of still-legal LSD.) Referring to the developing avant-garde culture, Kesey proclaimed, “It’s a need to find a new way to look at the world, an attempt to locate a better reality, now that the old reality is riddled with radioactive poison.”<sup>2</sup>

The Trips Festival was part of the ongoing odyssey so magnificently captured in Tom Wolfe’s book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Kesey, a prizewinning author—and participant in early Stanford University LSD research—had assembled a crew of creative, eccentric, LSD-addled Merry Pranksters, and they were all involved in a life-cum-bus ride, with the destination being only “further.” To them, you were either on the bus or off the bus. Soon after the Trips Festival, Kesey the guru became Kesey the outlaw, retiring to a Mexican beach to avoid serving time for numerous marijuana-related offenses. Although Kesey was out of circulation for a while, the beat went on.

A small group of community graphic artists (Wes Wilson, Alton Kelly, Stanley “Mouse” Miller, Victor Morocco, Rick Griffin, and others) were hired to create posters to advertise the ballroom shows. The concert posters were brightly colored (to be spotted from a distance and attract attention), extraordinarily detailed, highly stylized, and, at times, difficult to read. Potential music patrons, many of whom were in chemically altered states, were known to have stared for hours at a poster in an attempt to decipher its layered meaning. In the early 1970s, as Bay Area ballrooms closed and the demand for posters fell off, the use of posters had spread to other parts of the country. Contemporary critics now view San Francisco’s sixties-era poster art as some of America’s finest.

Another nonmusical innovation adopted by the San Francisco scene was the psychedelic light show. Using a constantly changing mixture of slides, film (anything from cartoons to film of last week’s show), flashing strobe lights, and colored pigments floating on oil (transmitted by overhead projectors), the light shows filled ballroom walls, stage screens, audiences, and other surfaces with an intense, shifting, pulsating spectrum of images and color. Like the posters, light shows also illuminated music in other areas.

Throughout 1966 numerous counterculture businesses grew alongside the music scene. Much of this activity took place in and around the Haight-Ashbury community, named for the intersection of two central streets. “Hip” merchants opened stores to service the community’s physical and spiritual needs. The Psychedelic Shop carried occult books, incense, Indian paisley fabrics, smoking paraphernalia, dance/concert tickets, and myriad other items. Clothing stores and boutiques like Mnadsidika, In Gear, and the Blushing Peony flourished along with the I/Thou coffee shop. Newly arrived residents and tourists could also find nearly any commodity they desired on sidewalks clogged with vendors hawking their wares. Locals could also be heard offering acid, speed, and lids (bags of marijuana).

Support systems were organized to assist the burgeoning population. Settled residents, who had found ways to make ends meet, were now being joined by many younger transients and runaways who were more apt to hit up passersby for spare change in order to exist. A local newspaper, the *Oracle*, offered philosophical discourse, debates on community issues, and event information. The Diggers, a group named for seventeenth-century English radical altruists, were performance artists whose political involvement in the community included collecting food from a variety of sources, cooking it, and offering it free every day on a park strip running through the neighborhood called the Panhandle. In 1967 a free medical clinic opened its doors.

In response to LSD's criminalization in October 1966, writers from the *Oracle* printed a manifesto called *A Prophecy of a Declaration of Independence*. In it the authors declared:

When in the flow of human events it becomes necessary for people to cease to recognize the obsolete social patterns which had isolated man from his consciousness. . . . We hold these experiences to be self-evident, that all is equal, that the creation endows us with certain inalienable rights, that among these are: the freedom of the body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness, and that to secure these rights, we the citizens of the earth declare our love and compassion for all conflicting hate-carrying men and women of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Local bands attracted large followings as the vibrant ballroom scene produced at least two major dances/concerts per weekend. The Warlocks, on a name-change mission, found themselves staring into a dictionary at the words "*grateful dead*." The phrase, from old Irish and Scottish folk ballads, described those deceased who were required to return to earth and perform a good deed before being allowed to rest in peace—and thus, become the eternally grateful dead. The name change, stimulating live performances, constant work, and a big record contract in late 1966 elevated them to second in popularity behind only Airplane.

Of the popular groups, the Grateful Dead were the most visible in their search for enlightenment and democracy (both within the band and the greater community). Band members believed that LSD enhanced their creativity. Lead guitarist Jerry Garcia (nicknamed Captain Trips) once described LSD's effect: "It was like another release, yet another opening. The first one was a hip teacher when I was in the third grade; and the next one was marijuana; and the next one was music; and the next one was LSD. It was like a series of continually opening doors." In order to be consistent with the counterculture philosophy of egalitarianism, the band refused to designate or publicly promote one member over another, even though it was obvious to their fans that Garcia, who wrote and sang a majority of their early originals, was an intelligent and astute spokesman.

This notion of equality also translated into the way they treated their audiences. Since everyone was family, the audience deserved the best; for the Dead, the best translated into a lengthy show full of improvisational inspiration. Three-hour concerts were not

unusual, and the list of songs changed nightly. With each gig the band delved into uncharted territory, forging musical transitions between songs and long improvisational jams in search of the undefinable. That elusive spontaneity, or “magic,” traditionally was an objective of jazz players, and it defined the Dead’s final destination. On many good nights and the occasional great one, the group and the audience celebrated a musical and spiritual communion. Because positive results depended on the ability of each band member to listen carefully and communicate with others, sometimes personal overload or technical problems produced erratic, uneven performances. However, unlike most bands, the Dead went for “it” every night.

Their unusually broad range of musical interests and backgrounds endowed the band with a certain creative flexibility. Garcia began by playing Chuck Berry songs on electric guitar, shifted to the banjo and bluegrass music, then to acoustic guitar and folk and jug-band music. Drummer Bill Kreutzmann and rhythm guitarist Bob Weir cut their teeth mostly on rock and roll. Harmonica and keyboard player Ron “Pigpen” McKernan came from a blues and R&B background; his father was a well-known Bay Area blues disc jockey. Phil Lesh had studied avant-garde classical composition and played trumpet in the Oakland Symphony before accepting Garcia’s offer to join the fledgling crew and take up the bass. In January 1967 the Dead traveled to a three-track L.A. studio to record



*The Grateful Dead*

their first album. The result, although it contains some interesting versions of their cover repertoire, only reinforced the notion that they were best experienced live.

Another of the ballroom bands, Big Brother and the Holding Company, had also been around since the Trips Festival. They practiced in the basement at 1090 Page and performed an eclectic array of music, ranging from Stones covers to jazz-inspired avant-garde noodling. Family Dog head Chet Helms suggested they get a female singer and recommended his old friend Janis Joplin. She had visited San Francisco once before in the early sixties. She had strummed folk and the blues with area notables, lost herself in drugs and the frantic pace, and fled back to Texas in one last attempt at a life of conformity.

Joplin grew up in the refinery city of Port Arthur, Texas, and had enrolled as a part-time student at the University of Texas at Austin. Janis was a rebel and an outspoken hard drinker with a colorful vocabulary, and her brazen style belied a substantial insecurity and need for love and acceptance. Joplin returned to San Francisco in June 1966, full of songs but apprehensive about her ability to stay healthy. Within a week Big Brother and the Holding Company were performing with the gutsy new lead singer.

People weren't indifferent about Joplin's singing; they either loved her voice or couldn't stand it. "Coarse sandpaper" is how one might describe it. Joplin's fans, concerned that she was destroying her vocal chords with that raw, screaming delivery—she eventually did develop nodes—urged the singer to save her voice. However, Janis continued and she became one of the era's best white blues singers. Onstage she raged, cried, and cajoled, often with her trademark bottle of Southern Comfort dangling from one hand. After hearing her, B. B. King was driven to comment, "Janis sings the blues as hard as any black person. It's about the war between the sexes." Big Brother hit the local ballroom circuit, found themselves broke in Chicago, and signed with tiny Mainstream Records. Their loose and amateurish first album, recorded in Chicago and Los Angeles, wasn't released for almost a year, after their successful appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival.

Throughout 1967 the national media flooded the country with stories about the Haight-Ashbury community and the upcoming Summer of Love. This notoriety proved fatal to an already burdened neighborhood. However, the same media attention also thrust San Francisco rock groups into the national spotlight. Over the course of the year, record companies converged on the area, signing nearly every band that could tune their instruments (and some that couldn't). Just as Haight-Ashbury's streets became inundated with new immigrants, Bay Area musicians set out on a mission to spread the tie-dyed gospel.

Nineteen sixty-seven began with one of the counterculture community's fondest moments, the Gathering of Tribes. On January 14, an unseasonably warm Saturday afternoon, 20,000 people gathered at Golden Gate Park's polo grounds to celebrate the ongoing union of love and activism in their community. It was called a Human Be-In, and the grounds were consecrated in an early-morning Hindu religious ceremony by poets Allen

Ginsberg and Gary Snyder. Onstage, a parade of speakers, a meditating Buddhist priest, the Dead, Big Brother, Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, and others entertained an audience that writer Gleason described as being costumed in a “wild polyglot mixture of Mod, Paladin, Ringling Brothers, Cochise, and Hell’s Angels’ formal. . . . And so it ended, the first of the great gatherings. No fights. No drunks, no troubles. Two policemen on horseback and 20,000 people. The perfect sunshine, the beautiful birds in the air, the parachutist descending as the Grateful Dead ended a song.”<sup>4</sup>

Bay Area residents were becoming increasingly frustrated at their inability to hear the new underground music on the radio. The only rock radio in the nation was top-40 AM stations, featuring a format of hit singles spun over and over and introduced by fast-talking disc jockeys. No album cuts or songs from lesser-known groups like the Who penetrated tightly controlled top-40 playlists. Since most early San Francisco music from 1965 to 1967 didn’t even dent the singles charts, it was absent from the airwaves. FM radio programming included classical music or a simulcast of a sister station’s AM signal and had little commercial importance.

The situation took an important turn in February 1967 when guitarist Larry Miller was hired for the all-night midnight-to-six shift on the predominantly foreign-language FM station KMPX. Miller programmed an eclectic mix of music, ranging from local artists to album cuts, from acoustic folk to Dylan, the Beatles, the Stones, and the Byrds. In April former KYA favorite “Big Daddy” Tom Donahue—a 300-pound top-40 dropout who sometimes dressed in overalls and sported a long beard—started programming the eight-to-midnight slot on KMPX, playing a more rock-oriented array of music. Donahue was a major music-business figure in the area who had promoted concerts by the Rolling Stones and Beach Boys, owned a record company, and managed numerous bands. With the addition of Donahue’s former top-40 cohort Bobby Mitchell, KMPX proved to be a flagship station for the progressive rock radio format that would become so popular in the early 1970s and lead the FM band to dominance over AM.

The one vehicle that brought the San Francisco music scene to national attention via AM radio airplay was Jefferson Airplane’s second album, *Surrealistic Pillow* (#3), released in February 1967. Recorded in thirteen days in Los Angeles, the record included two songs that Grace Slick had brought with her from the Great Society, “Somebody to Love” (#5) and “White Rabbit” (#8). The tunes reached the hit charts and top-40 radio in midyear; both featured Slick’s potent, tremulous, yearning vocal style and lyrics that were critical of society. Over a musical bed of quarter-note snare, a bounding Casady bass line, and Kantner’s folklike strums, “Somebody to Love” asked the listener, When “truth” was found to be unbelievable, wasn’t it time to find somebody to love?

Slick described “White Rabbit” as her combination of Ravel’s “Bolero” and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* story “Through the Looking Glass.” The band’s counterculture appearance obscures a well-constructed arrangement of a complex group of musical and lyrical ingredients. The band creates the Spanish dance setting (the bolero) with syncopated bass and drums and Middle Eastern-sounding guitar. Slick begins her

allegorical tale singing softly, “One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small. And the ones that mother gives you, don’t do anything at all.”

The song works on many levels. One can interpret it as a children’s parable; radio stations used this rationale in giving it airplay. On another level, it is highly critical of authority figures, including mother and “men on the chessboard” who direct society without “logic” or vision. Slick’s answer to this misguided authority is to “feed your head,” a reference to drug-induced enlightenment and/or counterculture pursuits. On the musical level, the listener is taken along on an acid trip as the song’s volume and intensity, quite low at aural ingestion, rush toward a crescendo finish.

The region’s cultural activities finally spilled over into the national media. *Life* magazine ran a story in 1966 on the horrors of LSD; later that year *Newsweek* trumpeted: “The San Francisco Sound is the newest adventure in rock ’n’ roll. It’s a raw, unpolished, free-wheeling, vital and compelling sound.” In June 1967 *Time* magazine added, “The San Francisco Sound encompasses everything from bluegrass to Indian ragas, from Bach to jug band music—often within the framework of a single song. . . . The sound is also the scene. With its roots in the LSDisneyland of the Haight-Ashbury district, the music is a reflection of the defiant new bohemians.” By April 1967 the Haight had become a tourist attraction and Gray Line bus tours added a “Hippie Hop Tour,” billing it as “the only foreign tour within the continental limits of the United States.”<sup>5</sup>

Haight merchants proclaimed the coming months the Summer of Love, a phrase that spread like wildfire throughout the press. In June the strains of “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair),” written by John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas and sung by pal Scott McKenzie, drifted dreamily from the nation’s radios. Some of the “people in motion” who were described in the song were Jefferson Airplane, who had recorded two “psychedelic” radio commercials advertising Levi’s-brand jeans. All of this national publicity intensified the already existing problem of community overload, exacerbated by the generally young and indigent nature of recent arrivals.

As the Haight braced for the flood and local merchants oiled up cash registers, musicians planned the nation’s first rock festival, the Monterey International Pop Festival. Organized by a combination of artists and industry executives—Papa John Phillips and Ode Records president Lou Adler were the major players—the three-day event presented an intelligently chosen roster of high-quality acts ranging from stars to relative unknowns. The crowd far exceeded original estimates of 50,000 and numbered nearly 200,000 concertgoers resplendent in flower-power finery.

Although held at the Monterey County fairgrounds, located between San Francisco and Los Angeles, the concert was weighted heavily in favor of the Bay Area. The Friday evening show (June 16) featured the Animals with Eric Burdon (who would have a hit the next month with “[Warm] San Francisco Nights”), Simon and Garfunkel, and Johnny Rivers. Saturday afternoon offered an acid-tinged blues lineup, including Canned Heat, Paul Butterfield, and San Franciscans Big Brother (with Janis), Country Joe, Steve Miller, and Quicksilver Messenger Service. That night soulsters Booker T. and the M.G.s and

Otis Redding shared the bill with Moby Grape and Jefferson Airplane. Sunday afternoon's spiritual brunch offered Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar.

Sunday evening's finale was extraordinary: New York's Blues Project, a Big Brother repeat (D. A. Pennebaker's film crew had ignored the first set of this virtual unknown, who had to be rescheduled for filming), the Byrds, the Who, the Dead, and Jimi Hendrix. Of these performers only the Byrds were commercially sellable, the rest being relatively unknown in the United States. The industry executives in attendance pounced. Big Brother eventually signed with Columbia Records and Bob Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman. Otis Redding's career moved into the fast lane, and the Who, whose explosive set stunned the laid-back Sunday audience, went on a seven-week tour with Herman's Hermits. Hendrix, who burned his guitar in an attempt to top the Who, earned the touring plum. In a monumental mismatch Jimi was booked as the opening act for top-40 giants the Monkees.

Sunday June 18—just a little more than two weeks after the release of *Sgt. Pepper's*—was Monterey board member Paul McCartney's twenty-fifth birthday; he admitted to the press that he had taken LSD four times in the past year. McCartney explained that it had made him “a better, more honest, more tolerant member of society, brought closer to God.” World leaders who tried LSD would be ready to “banish war, poverty and famine.”<sup>6</sup> These sentiments were quite similar to those expressed regularly by the local music community.

Haight-Ashbury and the musical community were headed in two different directions. The Summer of Love had overloaded the institutional resources of the community, and longtime residents began leaving for other cities or for a few acres of Mother Earth. Many band members moved to Marin County, north of the City. Recent immigrants appeared to favor escape rather than the creative enlightenment of the old-timers. Heroin and methamphetamines began to replace psychedelics as drugs of choice for some newcomers.

The Haight's crime rate soared, in part because of this taste for heroin and speed and in part because the indigent high school dropouts who had replaced the more upwardly mobile college dropouts of recent years found it increasingly difficult to survive. On October 6, 1967, people carrying a coffin paraded down Haight Street in a ceremony symbolizing the death of the hippie. However, the community didn't vanish overnight, and Haight-style counterculture enclaves continued to spring up in cities all over the United States. Not far behind was Madison Avenue, which used counterculture symbols and artifacts in its advertisements.

San Francisco music continued its expansion beyond regional boundaries. FM radio was catching on in other cities, and San Francisco artists were getting radio airplay. Many Bay Area groups had albums on the top-100 album charts. In November 1967 Ralph J. Gleason and Jann Wenner, a former Cal Berkeley entertainment writer, published a magazine based in San Francisco designed to appeal to the rock music fan. *Rolling Stone* carried a blend of artist and industry news, concert and record reviews, and

in-depth articles and interviews. Rock was becoming institutionalized, and in recognizing that fact *Rolling Stone* reached the top and began a publishing empire.

Bay Area groups continued the process of musical maturation, creative innovation, and increased commercial success. During this period the local environment became even more politically charged than before. By 1969 more than 500,000 American troops were fighting in Vietnam, and Country Joe's lyrics about war casualties returning home in boxes were reality. Soldiers left and returned to the Bay Area. Gun-toting self-defense forces were organizing in Oakland's black communities to defend themselves from police brutality. And Berkeley officials ordered a teargassing of citizens who demonstrated on a small plot of land (People's Park) the city planned to pave for a parking lot.

Many of the local groups reflected this additional turmoil in their music. Jefferson Airplane released the long-awaited *After Bathing at Baxter's* (#17) in December 1967; the record was delayed, in part because the group felt the need to return to the studio after hearing the studio magic on *Sgt. Pepper's*. Airplane soared in 1969 with their *Volunteers* release, which contains some of the most forthright and aggressive antiestablishment lyrics in mainstream rock history. On the cut "We Should Be Together," Airplane calls on society to unite in overturning the "dangerous, dirty, and dumb" policies of the establishment. Calling themselves outlaws in the eyes of the enemy (state), the singers resolve to replace America's private property priority with one that favors people. They yell at the establishment, "Up against the wall, motherfucker," calling to the unified audience to tear down the wall.

From this creative peak, the band began to slowly disintegrate in the early seventies. Dryden quit. Balin faded out as fewer of his compositions ended up on vinyl. Kaukonen and Casady, who had formed an eclectic blues duo called Hot Tuna on the side, quit to pursue the endeavor full-time. Slick and Kantner manufactured a baby and a solo project titled *Blows against the Empire* (which followed a science-fiction theme) using the name Jefferson Starship. The band was forced to use "Jefferson Starship" on their mid-1970s tour behind Balin's #3 composition "Miracles"—a manager owned the name Airplane—and changed simply to "the Starship" in the eighties as Kantner left with the "Jefferson."

Like Airplane, Berkeley-based Country Joe and the Fish also combined political commentary and counterculture lifestyle. Joe McDonald, who came from a leftist southern California family, migrated to the Bay Area in search of the beat lifestyle. Although he had plenty of creativity, cultural activism, political dedication, and the appropriate quantity of drug-related reckless abandon, major commercial success eluded Country Joe. He is noted for two long-lasting artistic contributions. In 1965 he recorded a jug band-style tune called "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," a satirical blast at the carnage of the Vietnam War—"one, two, three, what are you fightin' for"—that became an antiwar anthem.

McDonald also composed the famous *F-I-S-H* cheer, the best-known version of which can be seen on the Woodstock film. He calls to the audience—"Gimme an F!" "Fffffff!"—

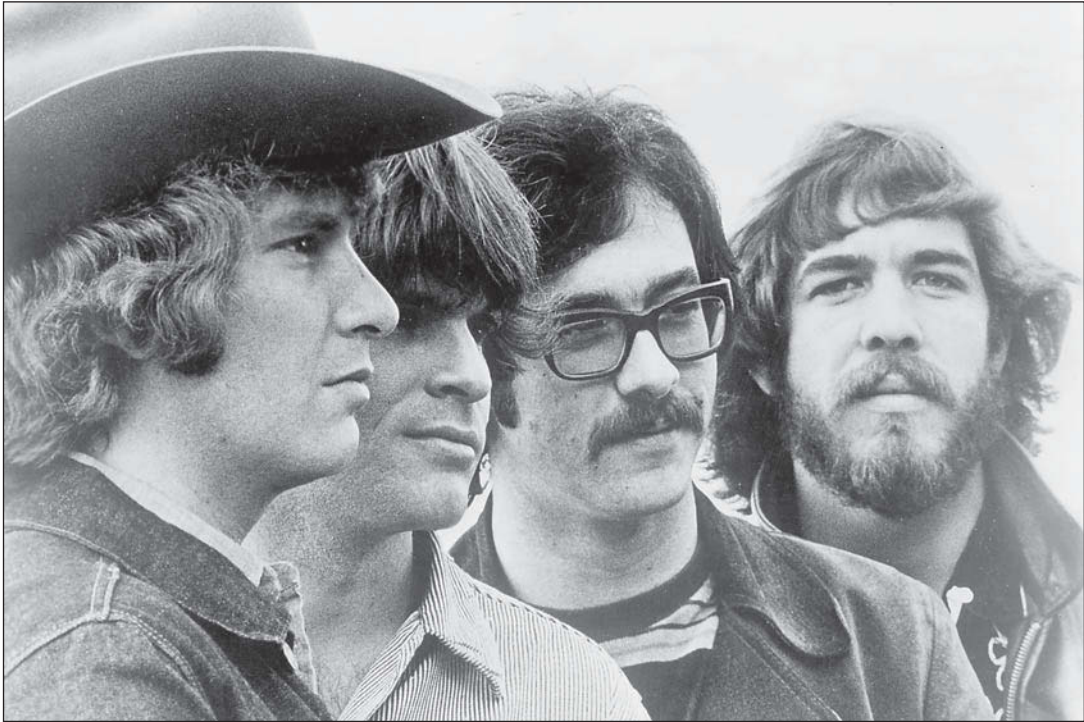
following with *U*, *C*, and *K*—not exactly spelling at its best, but a joy for antiestablishment audiences nonetheless. Early in his career, Country Joe had signed to folk-oriented Vanguard Records (whose roster featured Joan Baez and the Weavers) and released five albums, including *Electric Music for the Mind and Body* (#39, September 1967) and *Together* (#23, July 1968). Country Joe and the Fish were a good draw at major venues, had records that sold moderately well, and were participants in the era's cultural and political events.

Their lack of monetary success, which frustrated an artist who felt the equal of the area's big guns, can be ascribed to a number of reasons. Country Joe's breadth—the ability to be both politically active and acid focused—proved confusing to one-issue audiences. In spending more time pursuing political causes, donating time and money, the band had less time to devote to promoting its career. By living their ideals they partly sacrificed their careers. The Fish also found that Vanguard Records was unable to compete in promotion and sales with majors like RCA and Warner Bros. Nevertheless, Country Joe, with and without the Fish, continued his creative pursuits into the eighties.

Creedence Clearwater Revival was another band from the wrong side of the bay and was criticized for a proclivity to produce three-minute AM hits. To many Bay Area critics, Creedence was an East Bay top-40 band who wrote AM-oriented ditties that contained none of the counterculture experimentation that characterized the “authentic” San Francisco sound. They were late (their first hit came in 1968) and straight. In hindsight, however, this criticism is somewhat shortsighted; CCR was, of course, affected by the surrounding societal turbulence, and their songs do reflect, at least lyrically, some of the same issues as those of their psychedelic neighbors.

John Fogerty was the dominant creative force in CCR. John was playing with junior high school buddies Stu Cook (bass) and Doug Clifford (drums) in 1959 when they were joined by John's older brother Tom. Known then as the Blue Velvets, the group signed to Berkeley-based Fantasy Records, released numerous teen-oriented singles, and had the name the Golliwogs foisted upon them by a label executive. In 1968, having reverted to a name of their choice, CCR released their self-titled first album, which included covers of Dale Hawkins's “Suzie Q” (Parts I [#11] and II), and Screamin' Jay Hawkins's “I Put a Spell on You.” Throughout the rest of its relatively short career, the band scored multiple top-40 hits from each successive album. In 1969 CCR released six million-selling singles and two million-selling albums.

CCR's most famous release, “Proud Mary” (#2, February 1969), is one of the era's most played and also most derided songs. Its charm lies in the basic Creedence formula. Over a simple, steady rhythmic groove, characterized by a strong two-plus-four snare, John draws a folk parable about leaving the city for the simple welcoming life among America's common folk. Here was classic rock rhythm and instrumentation, gritty soul-tinged vocals, folk-rock strums and lead solo, and slightly antiestablishment tales about ordinary citizens. For critics steeped in counterculture music, this tight, three-minute AM hit that lacked any real experimental or improvisational musical qualities



*Creedence Clearwater Revival*

represented straight society. Thus, CCR took most of the United States by storm while being castigated by its local music community.

Between 1969 and 1971 CCR scored a dozen top-40 singles; all five albums were in the top 10 (including two #1s, *Green River* and *Cosmo's Factory*). Most originals such as "Green River," "Lodi," and "Down on the Corner" followed the classic rock-folk story formula. However, Fogerty also expressed strong antiestablishment sentiments with songs like "Fortunate Son," in which he derides the privileged (politically, monetarily, and militarily) who grow rich and powerful at the expense of the common person. CCR was also known to improvise occasionally, releasing an eleven-minute version of "I Heard It through the Grapevine" and an extended "Suzie Q."

In 1971 Tom Fogerty left the band, happy to be out of John's shadow. One year later the band disintegrated as Cook and Clifford demanded equal space on the albums, and John (who had written, sung, played lead guitar on, and directed nearly all the efforts) wondered, Why fix something that wasn't broken? The members, some of whom released solo efforts, were devastated to learn that millions of dollars in royalties had been invested by Fantasy Records in the Castle Bank of the Bahamas, a front for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. When the bank folded, the money disappeared. After many troubled years, John returned to the limelight in 1985 with his #1 album, *Centerfield*.

History treats CCR with more kindness than did their contemporary critics. The idealistic, change-oriented Bay Area music community equated the band's commercial success with lack of artistic integrity. Given some historical perspective, it is easier to judge CCR's formula and appeal on its own merits. There is a certain charm in the band's ability to combine beat-driven, classic rock-rooted music, a soul-styled vocal authenticity, and stories with which working-class America can identify. This recipe was liberally spiced with musically rebellious elements (beat and vocal style) and occasional antiestablishment lyrics. It has aged well as one form of original, stylistically integrated music.

Another San Francisco band that combined an unusual sound with a late arrival on the scene was Santana. Named for Mexican-born leader Carlos Santana, this band featured his guitar virtuosity and multirhythmic percussion stylings drawn from his Latin American heritage. In 1966, at age nineteen, he formed the Santana Blues Band, shortened a few years later to simply Santana. A revolving lineup, which originally included keyboardist Gregg Rolie, later was joined by drummer Mike Shrieve, percussionists Mike Carabello and Costa Rican star Jose Chepito Areas, and, in 1971, guitarist Neal Schon. In 1973 Rolie and Schon formed their own group, Journey.

Whereas most Bay Area audiences focused on a band and/or its material, Santana listeners were drawn to Carlos's guitar playing. Key to Santana's playing was the blues philosophy that "it can all be said in one note." His guitar style emphasized a crisp, edgy, sustained note as the basic medium of exchange. Like the best urban blues guitarists, Santana made his guitar cry in a series of fluid but not crowded passages. His cover of "Black Magic Woman" (#4, November 1970, written by Peter Green of early Fleetwood Mac) provides an excellent example of this type of playing. The band's version of "Oye Como Va" (#13, March 1971) evidences this guitar work combined with the exciting Latin percussion feeling of Tito Puente's salsa original.

Within a short time frame, Santana signed with Columbia Records, appeared at Woodstock—his torrid "Soul Sacrifice" is one of the film's highlights—and released a self-titled album that went to #4 (September 1969). His next two albums, *Abraxis* and *Santana III*, topped the charts. Santana soon became a disciple of the guru Sri Chinmoy, took the name Devadip, and moved in more eclectic and jazz fusion directions. His artistry, commercial success, and longtime management by Bill Graham allowed Santana to become a global ambassador of American rock.

At the same time that these new groups were emerging, old bands were learning new tricks. Although the Grateful Dead had gained a legendarily devoted following and had numerous releases on a major label, they lacked substantial record sales. The Dead found it difficult to capture that live magic on the studio albums, had no hit (or even underground singles), and consequently were absent from the nation's airwaves. They moved a step closer in 1969 with *Live Dead*, a two-record set that featured lengthy compositions, esoteric lyrics, long improvisational jams, and musical segues between numbers. A high level of musicianship is exhibited in the difficult song "The Eleven" in eleven/eight time; the song segues into the four/four time R&B-style classic "Turn on Your Love Light."

Under pressure from sagging record sales and strongly influenced by Crosby, Stills, and Nash and the Band, who were friends, the Dead turned to writing shorter songs consisting of parables and historical vignettes. The new music emphasized acoustic folk and country-rooted instrumentation (Garcia also played the banjo and pedal-steel guitar), more focus and precision on lead and harmonies vocals, and Lesh-led, creatively accented rhythms. From their 1970 sessions came the band's two most critically acclaimed albums, *Workingman's Dead* (#27, July 1970) and *American Beauty* (#30, December 1970).

These efforts brought the Dead more in line with mainstream rock music—spotlighting the lyrics of silent partner Robert Hunter without losing the band's uniqueness. Classics like "Casey Jones" (with the chorus line, "Drivin' that train, high on cocaine"), "Truckin'" (the on-the-road anthem that went to the top of the charts in Turlock, California), and "Ripple" (the Zen-like ballad with a perfect seventeen-syllable haiku chorus) became FM favorites. This new music was the key to expanding the Dead's extended audience-family. Both records went gold (with sales of more than 500,000 units), cuts received radio airplay, and the band appeared at major music festivals, spreading the San Francisco gospel.

As one of the few groups to enter the seventies intact, the Grateful Dead continued their role as innovators. Known primarily as musical, psychedelic, and audience-relationship pioneers, their visionary work in sound-amplification technology has often been overlooked. Whereas most groups were abysmally ignorant of sound-reproduction technology and how crude they could sound in concert, the Dead concluded that a sound system was analogous to a foreign language translator—and that their concert sound was only as good as their translator. This led them to form their own research-and-development firm called Alembic and to construct "the System," a three-story, twenty-five-ton sound system placed on scaffolding behind the band onstage. Generally acclaimed as the world's best, this system delivered virtually distortion-free sound to the audience.

In the ensuing years the Grateful Dead found a median point between the raw, energetic, improvisationally oriented early material and the more structured, vocally oriented folktales of the early 1970s. Their live three-record *Europe '72* (with surreptitiously dubbed studio vocals) and two releases on Grateful Dead Records, *Wake of the Flood* (#18, November 1973) and *Mars Hotel* (#16, July 1974), are marvelous examples of this fusion. After twenty years of album releases they scored their first platinum effort in 1987 with *In the Dark* (#6) and their first top-10 single, the aptly titled "Touch of Gray" (#9). Midway through the 1990s the band's concerts were still more than three hours long, featuring different songs from their vast repertoire each night. They still reached for the magic that kept their audiences, which ranged in age from fifteen to fifty, filling the halls every night. To many the Dead were the only contemporary musical performers who symbolized the idealism, purity, and integrity of the sixties. On August 9, 1995, Jerry Garcia died of cardiac arrest, and the congregation—Garcia once likened the Dead's concerts to a spiritual and religious communion—lost a guru and music master.

Like the Dead, Janis Joplin's career underwent massive changes in the late 1960s. Following the Monterey Pop Festival, Big Brother, now advertised as Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company, saw their fortunes soar. From March through June 1968 they were in Hollywood, recording their Columbia Records debut, *Cheap Thrills* (the record company had vetoed the original album cover, which showed the band naked in bed, and the original title, *Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Thrills*). That fall the album raced to #1 as the country adopted a new rock queen. On *Cheap Thrills* Joplin sings concert mainstays like Big Mama Thornton's R&B classic "Ball and Chain" and Gershwin's "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*. The concert stopper, "Piece of My Heart," is a good example of how Joplin, the blues screamer, melds with the powerful, unpolished band; Peter Albin's throbbing bass and Sam Andrews's edgy, distorted lead guitar complement Joplin's raw dynamism.

At the time, however, Janis was the target of a campaign of whisper and innuendo: "They [Big Brother] aren't any good, you're the star, Janis." Big Brother received some limp reviews, and even manager Albert Grossman favored a change. In December Janis played her last concert with Big Brother and her first with the Kosmic Blues Band, a unit that retained Andrews on guitar, adding new bass, drums, keyboard, guitar, and a full horn section. This group appeared at Woodstock and disbanded in January 1970, to be replaced in April with Joplin's last band, the Full Tilt Boogie Band. Kosmic Blues had power and improved musicianship but lacked interpersonal harmony; Full Tilt, retaining some players, worked as a unit and exhibited both power and finesse. Finally, Janis had a band she could call her own.

One time Joplin had bragged that despite her huge thirst for alcohol she had never missed a concert; the same could be said of her heroin habit, though she couldn't brag about that. Nineteen seventy was a perilous year: there were the highs of an impending marriage, the Festival Express concert tour by train across Canada with the Grateful Dead, Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett and friends, and the recording of a new album. There were also emotional lows, renewed heroin use (after months of being clean), and a growing reputation for inciting audiences. To this last accusation Joplin countered, "My music ain't supposed to make you want to riot! My music is supposed to make you want to fuck!"<sup>77</sup>

Joplin took some heat for acting like a rock and roll star instead of a woman. Her bravado, crass language, and ability to match the band in sexual promiscuity were seen by many as coarse and unladylike. Women weren't supposed to drink and screw like men. In the end Janis couldn't maintain her challenge to the male-dominated industry. On the night of October 3, 1970, Janis returned to her hotel after an album session and a few drinks. Once upstairs she injected herself with heroin, returned to the lobby for a pack of cigarettes, went back to her room, and then died. The coroner's verdict was a mixture of heroin and alcohol—another case of self-annihilation in rock and roll's fast lane.

The sound of most San Francisco bands had faded by the early seventies. Of the early groups we have chronicled in these pages, only the Grateful Dead survived and flourished. Other Bay Area favorites such as Quicksilver Messenger Service, Moby Grape, and

the Sons of Champlin also stumbled turning the decade. The vibrant, visionary counter-culture community was also dissolving—and along with it the major local support system and impetus for musical growth and change. Commercially successful bands moved to the outlying areas, bought fancy cars, and focused their concerns on fighting for a larger piece of the recording-industry pie. Those who could compete in the marketplace, like promoter and manager Bill Graham, did quite well. Even though he closed both Fillmores (East and West) in 1971, he continued his reputation as the nation's best concert promoter. Bill Graham died in a helicopter crash on October 25, 1991.



It is difficult to separate the impact of San Francisco music from the impacts of the counter-culture values it transmitted. Few bands of the seventies chose to adopt the sound of Airplane, the Dead, Big Brother, or the Fish; interestingly, some elements were revived in the eighties. Culturally transmitted values of integrity and humanitarian idealism were subsequently overcome by other goals, the selfishness and greed of ensuing decades. The seventies began the Me Generation, and song lyrics soon turned away from societal criticism toward the less politically threatening: sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Meanwhile, the San Francisco sound faded in volume as the seventies began.

Chapter 15 will focus on rock's major electric guitar soloists. They emerged during the blues revival of the midsixties when, for the first time, the improvised guitar solo took center stage. The cast of players includes Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, and many others: the Guitar Kings.

# THE GUITAR KINGS

And I Gave Her the Gun

Chapter

# 15



*Jimi Hendrix*

I copied most of my runs from B. B. [King] or Albert King or Freddie King. There's no reason why they [other guitarists] should listen to me when they can listen to the masters, you know, the source.

—Eric Clapton, in an interview with journalist Fred Stucky

Lots of young people now feel they're not getting a fair deal, so they revert to something loud or harsh, almost verging on violence. . . . It's more than music. It's like a church, like a foundation for the lost or potentially lost.

—Jimi Hendrix, as quoted in *Hit and Run: The Jimi Hendrix Story*,  
by Jerry Hopkins

**S**WINGING LONDON IN THE MIDSIXTIES was a creative epicenter for the rock music explosion. Future legends like the Beatles, the Stones, and the Who patronized the many local clubs in a never-ending party and musical quest. In 1966 two London-based guitarists and their newly formed trios emerged from the scene with an innovative musical blend—a guitar-centered style that fused elements of the blues with the culturally acquired conceptual distortion of the experimental sixties. Eric Clapton, a blues aficionado and former guitarist with the British R&B band the Yardbirds, formed the group Cream; Jimi Hendrix, an American without substantial success as a soul guitarist, was enticed to England to form the Jimi Hendrix Experience.

For the first time in rock music's evolution, audiences were attracted primarily by an instrumentalist playing a series of improvised solos rather than by a group, singer, or repertoire of songs. The previous generations of classic rock and the early 1960s had their guitarists—Chuck Berry, Scotty Moore, Buddy Holly, Duane Eddy, and others—but at no time did the instrument or the instrumentalist achieve such monumental status as it did during the Guitar King era.

### A Short Digression

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The guitar has existed since 1200 BC. The first mass-produced, unamplified, steel-stringed models, the direct predecessor of today's electric guitar, were made by a Kalamazoo, Michigan, shoe clerk by the name of Orville Gibson in the 1870s. They had an arched top, patterned after the violin; by 1894 Gibson had sufficient interest in his products to form the Gibson Company. German immigrant C. F. Martin opened his guitar factory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and started to build steel-stringed guitars in the early 1900s. By

the 1920s steel-stringed acoustic guitars were used in blues, folk, country, and popular music.

The first artists to envision the guitar as a lead instrument were early jazz musicians. During the 1920s jazz rhythm sections underwent a process of evolution; the guitar replaced the banjo as the strummed rhythm keeper. Within ten years guitarists—emulating the brass and reeds—began to play single-string improvisational solos. Eddie Lang, who made numerous recordings with jazz violinist Joe Venuti and other era greats between 1923 and his death in 1933, is considered the first major jazz guitarist. Another pioneer, Belgian gypsy Django Reinhardt, moved to Paris and formed the Quintet of the Hot Club of Paris. Reinhardt, in spite of two paralyzed digits on his left hand, traded brilliant solos with classically trained jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli.

The increased popularity of the guitar, as well as the need to be heard over the expanding big-band ensembles, necessitated its amplification. In 1924 instrument engineer Lloyd Loar designed the first known guitar pickups; when mounted on top of the guitar's body, just underneath the strings, pickups translate sound frequencies created by vibrating strings into electronic impulses. These impulses moved through a connecting cable to an external amplifier, where the impulses were enhanced and transmitted to a speaker. Loar's devices went unheralded, but ten years later, guitar manufacturers like Gibson, Rickenbacker, and National began to serve the jazz market with guitars fitted with pickups. These were the first electric guitars.

Eddie Durham, a jazz guitarist and trombonist, debuted the electric guitar solo on record with his Kansas City Five in 1938. But two other early guitarists, Charlie Christian and Aaron "T-Bone" Walker, played even more prominent roles in the development of electric guitar as a solo instrument. Both men came from the Southwest and actually played together in 1934 in Fort Worth, Texas. Christian ascended from playing the streets of Oklahoma City to recording as a member of Benny Goodman's famous small ensembles between 1939 and 1941. He was considered a brilliant and tactile melodic innovator and riff maker, approaching the guitar solo in a manner stylistically similar to the era's horn players. His playing evidenced a mellifluous fluidity, rich tone with a touch of distortion, and the ability to either solo or play rhythm. Christian left the Goodman lineup due to poor health. He died of tuberculosis in 1942 at the age of twenty-six.

T-Bone Walker began his career in the same geographic region—he was six years older than Christian—but he remained more firmly rooted in the blues. Walker accompanied blues vocalist Ma Rainey and was a "lead boy" for the famous blues guitarist and singer Blind Lemon Jefferson. Walker moved to Los Angeles in 1935 and played electric on disc for the first time with Les Hite's band in 1939. In 1947 T-Bone recorded his blues classic "Stormy Monday," with its atypical harmonic complexity and a single-string solo that prompted B. B. King to once comment, "It drove me crazy. I could never believe a sound could be that pretty on an instrument." Numerous blues artists have credited Walker as a primary model, and even Chuck Berry's pioneering rock style is more than vaguely

reminiscent of Walker's (listen to T-Bone's 1950 version of "Strollin' with the Blues" to hear the bent notes, repetition, and choke so prominent in Berry's playing). Walker was also a master showman and played the guitar behind his back and suggestively between his legs decades before Jimi Hendrix.

Concurrent with the development and evolution of electric-guitar playing styles were changes in the instrument itself. Early jazz players favored a hollow-bodied arch-top guitar with one pickup that delivered a rich bell-like tone—the result of pickup placement and of the design's large resonating body and air cavity inside. Both Christian and Walker played the popular hollow-body Gibson model ES-150, although Walker switched to other guitars in later years. In post–World War II America, urban blues players used not only a variety of hollow-body guitars but also the thinner, multipickup models called semi-solid-body guitars. Because they contained less interior air space and resonating wood surface, these guitars provided a crisper, punchier sound. B. B. King's famous guitar, which he affectionately named "Lucille," is a semi-solid-body Gibson ES-335.

Wisconsin-born Les Paul (originally Leslie Polfuss) is credited with designing the third body style, the solid-body guitar. Paul sought to solve the problem of feedback (instantaneous buildup of specific frequencies) and the short sustain (prolonged single notes) that plagued players using a hollow-body guitar. He determined that due to the high density, a solid piece of wood could solve both problems. Paul experimented with a railroad tie, finding that "you could go out and eat and come back and the note would still be sounding." In 1941 he built his "Log" at Epiphone's New York guitar factory from a four-by-four length of wood, two wings fastened on to make it feel like a guitar, and two pickups. This was the prototype solid-body guitar, a design that has come to dominate rock music for the past four decades.

Paul was not only an innovative craftsman but also an electronics wizard and a talented player. In 1929 at age thirteen he designed some guitar-pickup prototypes. In the late 1930s he pioneered a method of multiple-input recording, which allowed him to dub numerous vocal and instrumental parts separately onto tape and mix them together into one final product. This process, later termed multitrack recording, defied the contemporary logic, which stated that all material had to be recorded in one place and at one time. In 1951 he and his wife, Mary Ford, started their series of million-selling records with songs such as #1 hits "How High the Moon" and "Vaya con Dios" featuring multitracked instruments and vocals and expert guitar work.

The solid-body guitar was finally mass-produced in the late 1940s. Early in the decade Les Paul had moved to California, continuing to work on the solid body and eventually attempting to interest the Gibson Company. Meanwhile, his two neighbors, Paul Bigsby (inventor of the Bigsby tailpiece) and Leo Fender (who founded Fender Electrical Instrument Company in 1947), were also working on the same concept. Bigsby built a custom solid body for country star Merle Travis in 1947; Fender manufactured their Broadcaster model a year later (renamed the Telecaster in 1950).

In the early 1950s and within the space of one year, the world's two most prestigious electric guitar manufacturers issued what would become rock music's two most popular guitar models. In 1952 Gibson's new top management relented and issued the first Gibson Les Paul—model solid-body guitar, featuring numerous Paul-designed innovations. In the ensuing years a variety of Les Paul models have been issued, including the Custom, Junior, and Standard (or SG). In 1953 Leo Fender responded with his triple-pickup solid-body Fender Stratocaster, a model widely used today and one that has remained essentially unchanged since its arrival on the music scene.

Classic rock guitarists, who were strongly rooted in the blues and country traditions, gave solid-body guitars mixed reviews. Elvis's guitarist, Scotty Moore, and Carl Perkins continued to use hollow bodies; Eddie Cochran and Chuck Berry played semi-solid-bodies. Buddy Holly became the first major rock artist to favor the thin, twangy sound of the Stratocaster. James Burton—who played the solo on the Dale Hawkins 1957 hit “Susie Q” at age fifteen and joined Ricky Nelson's band a few years later—used a Telecaster. Frankie Beecher—a former jazz guitarist with Benny Goodman—switched to a Gibson Les Paul while in Bill Haley's band.

As the electric guitar physically evolved, so did the nature of the instrumental solo. Jazz guitarists tended to fully explore the melody and harmonic structure of a song using a multitude of notes and arpeggiated and strummed chords. Blues players, on the other hand, generally followed the axiom that it could all be said in one note. Thus, urban blues guitarists concentrated on the feeling and emotion generated by bent notes, choking, slides, and repetition rather than the speed and harmonic exploration of jazz. Country pickers relied on crisp, quick runs (or phrases) derived from bluegrass and groups like the Delmore Brothers, combined with the innovative fingerpicking styles of Merle Travis and Chet Atkins, with a dash of blues thrown in for flavor.

Each of the major fifties guitarists mixed styles in order to create their individual sound. Berry took repetition and bend from blues to go along with speed and slides from country. Scotty Moore adapted bend from blues plus slides and fingerpicking from country; all three are evident in his solo on Elvis's first record, “That's All Right (Mama)” (1954), from the Sun Sessions. Beecher borrowed heavily from jazz while also leaning on the blues. And Holly displayed his country roots with slides and strummed solos, using limited blues-derived single-string work.

## Back to the Future

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It is from this historical context that Clapton and Hendrix emerged in the early 1960s. Each drew from a variety of sources to find early artistic and commercial success—Clapton initially as a blues revivalist and Hendrix as a soul and R&B session man—and each finally played solid-body guitars, the Gibson Les Paul (Clapton) and Fender Stratocaster (Hendrix) during their peak years. Eric Clapton was the first of the two to

achieve commercial notoriety. Born out of wedlock and raised by his grandparents in suburban London, Clapton, like many other British rock musicians, gravitated toward art school. At thirteen he was given his first guitar—an acoustic—and immersed himself in the music of blues masters like Robert Johnson and Big Bill Broonzy. Also introduced to players like B. B. King, Freddie King, Albert King (no relation), and Chuck Berry, Clapton spent much of his spare time practicing in his room. He would later claim that the pain derived from his childhood was transformed into creative energy and applied to music—a dynamic that is common to the careers of Lennon, McCartney, Hendrix, and many others.

Clapton, apparently more interested in his music than in a career in commercial art and stained glass, was dismissed from Kingston College of Art. He soon joined the Roosters, one of the minor acts on the budding English R&B scene. Rooster bassist Tom McGuinness, reflecting on their naïveté and idealism, comments on those days: “The idea of there being a real commercial market for what we were doing just didn’t strike us. . . . We were doing it because we loved playing rhythm and blues.” “It used to be,” states longtime Clapton associate and Rooster pianist Ben Palmer, “We would get enough money for a brown ale and a packet of crisps and we’d walk home.”<sup>1</sup>

Nine months later, in October 1963, Clapton took a step up. He joined the Yardbirds, a band with a regular gig at the Crawdaddy Club (replacing the fast-rising Rolling Stones) and a real manager named Georgio Gomelsky. Although still considered an R&B band, there were strong feelings within the band, supported by Gomelsky, to climb aboard the pop-oriented British-invasion gravy train. This led to the wide disparity in Yardbird sounds, ranging from the gritty, bluesish Howlin’ Wolf cover “Smokestack Lightning” to a bouncy “Good Morning Little School Girl” (featuring a Clapton slide-guitar solo) and the 1966 prepsychedelic hit “Shapes of Things.”

This stylistic schizophrenia is most obvious on their biggest hit, “For Your Love” (#6, June 1965). The verse section quickly introduces the listener to a harpsichord, bongo drums, Ringo-signature two-plus-and-four snare hits, and a bouncy paean to love. The chorus feels like an up-tempo Chuck Berry tune due to the eighth-note rhythm-guitar pulse. Clapton, who was still immersed in the black music aesthetic, found the pop direction repulsive, and his relationship with leader Paul Samwell-Smith untenable; he quit just before “For Your Love” became the band’s first major hit. Studio guitarist Jimmy Page was offered the job and declined but recommended Jeff Beck. One year later Page joined the Yardbirds on bass, switching to guitar three months later to join Beck in a two-guitar lineup.

Meanwhile, Clapton pursued his blues dream, accepting John Mayall’s invitation to join the Bluesbreakers. Clapton had honed his already considerable skills as a blues-rooted guitarist during a nearly yearlong string of one-nighters. As a Yardbird Clapton had been nicknamed Slowhand, a tongue-in-cheek accolade by manager Gomelsky to Clapton’s picking dexterity. During his term with Mayall, Clapton’s reputation as a guitarist reached new heights. Graffiti appeared in London Underground stations proclaim-

ing “Clapton Is God”; at performances, audience members were known to shout “Give God a solo!”

This adulation, and its concurrent media hype, were heady stuff for a twenty-one-year-old guitarist with all of three years’ experience. In a mixture of vanity and wisdom, Clapton proclaimed, “I’m not interested in guitar sound technique, but in people and what you can do to them via music. I’m very conceited and I think I have a power—and my guitar is the medium for expressing that power. I don’t need people to tell me how good I am, I’ve worked that out by myself. . . . My guitar is the medium to make contact with myself. It’s very, very lonely. That is blues.”<sup>2</sup> Clapton felt he was the best white blues guitarist around.

Like Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated, the Bluesbreakers lineup was a continuously shifting *mélange* of high-quality players. During Clapton’s tenure the rhythm section consisted of drummer Hughie Flint and bassist John McVie (who later cofounded Fleetwood Mac). On occasion, when McVie’s intemperance flared, bassist Jack Bruce (from the Graham Bond Organization and Manfred Mann) was invited to fill in. The Clapton-era Bluesbreakers released a self-titled album (their cover of Freddie King’s “Hideaway” shows Clapton at his bluesy best) just in time for Eric to leave the band in a renewed quest for blues nirvana.

England’s blues and R&B community included the perpetual all-star jams inherent to vibrant music scenes. Thus, Clapton jammed with Graham Bond drummer Ginger Baker. Baker suggested they form a band. Clapton insisted they include bassist Bruce, and Cream was born in July 1966. Interestingly, Baker—once leader of the Graham Bond Organization—had fired Jack Bruce, citing musical and personal differences. Bruce had refused to be fired, and an onstage brawl ensued, ending as both crashed into Baker’s drum kit. In forming Cream Clapton had chosen to sandwich himself between two people who loathed one another but who were making an effort to overlook differences. Bruce claims, “Because of the very pain of our relationship, we were the hottest rhythm section I’ve ever played in.”

On the surface Cream—a name chosen because they intended to rise to the top—had ample talent and a simple goal: they would become a blues trio. Baker, a Londoner of Irish decent, was schooled on trumpet as well as drums and played with a number of England’s top jazz bands before joining the rock scene. Bruce, from Glasgow, Scotland, studied cello and attended the Royal Scottish Academy of Music, in addition taking up the acoustic and electric basses. Clapton, who Stevie Winwood claims wasn’t a particularly good technician and was limited by his lack of technique from performing jazz, was nevertheless in peak form as a blues-derived guitarist.

But the trio hadn’t factored in the “moment.” Because Clapton initially viewed Cream as a blues band, he felt their future would be in the home of the blues, the United States. When they reached America they found audiences filled with counterculture fans favoring long improvisational jams. “I think it was pure accident,” reflects Clapton. “It stunned us and we leaped in and took advantage of it. When we saw that in America they



*Cream*

actually wanted us to play a number for a whole hour—one number—we just stretched it.” The audience was ready for a change, and this trio of instrumental rock virtuosos took up the challenge. To Bruce, “It was like jazz playing in a rock setting.”<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of Bruce’s original material all but sealed the fate of Cream being a blues trio. Bruce became the lead vocalist and front man; Clapton’s guitar playing attracted most audience attention. Although initially consumed by the hype surrounding this superstar unit, the band settled down and let their music speak for itself. Clapton was being pushed by the musicianship of Bruce and Baker to extend himself beyond his blues-derived boundaries, and it was working. At the time, he commented, “I don’t really think I represent the blues anymore. I have more of that in me and my music than anything else, but I don’t really play the blues anymore.”<sup>4</sup> Clapton’s fusion of blues and his musical representation of the era’s cultural climate thrilled audiences.

Cream released four albums during their two-year existence. Given the climate and the improvisational nature of their live performances, it is not surprising that the albums fared much better in the United States than did their single releases. However, rather than albums of loosely organized lengthy compositions—one live *Wheels of Fire* version of “Spoonful” does run 16:44—each release contains a mixture of material, including rambling jams and concise but driving love songs.

*Fresh Cream*, the group's first LP release, scored well on the English charts (#6, December 1966) but not in the United States (#39). The single "I Feel Free" was similarly successful in England and featured Bruce's Winwoodian, raw, emotive vocals; atypical harmonies; and Clapton's Les Paul guitar, driven to a distortion that would soon come to dominate the era. In April 1967 Cream traveled to the United States for the first time, playing in New York with the Who and others on the annual series of concerts called Murray the K's Easter Show. They received attention from the underground press, who were especially impressed with Clapton's guitar playing.

Their performance format solidified during two weeks of gigs at the Fillmore in San Francisco, where promoter Bill Graham gave them the green light to play their improvised material until the sun rose. This spontaneity created a love affair between the psychoactively oriented Bay Area audience and the band. Clapton felt that San Francisco audiences "were the best anywhere. They're so obviously critical. Every move you make. Every note you play is being noticed, devoured, accepted or rejected."<sup>5</sup> The dawning of the Summer of Love found Cream confident that at least a certain segment of American music fans would rally to their sound.

The release of *Disraeli Gears* (#4, November 1967) flooded the American market with quality Cream material, including their most popular song, "Sunshine of Your Love" (#5, July 1968). Most of Cream's essential ingredients are present on this classic: the forceful riff, in this case the famous ten-note phrase, played by both bass and guitar; Bruce's powerful vocals expounding protestations of love; and Clapton's distorted, edgy, improvised guitar solo. In this case Clapton adds a bit of humor to his solo, beginning with the first two musical lines of the 1930s pop hit "Blue Moon." The solo evidences the pioneering fusion of bends, note sustain, and finger vibrato from the blues with a distorted tone setting and infusion of speed and extra notes that would characterize the guitar playing of the late 1960s. As a bonus, Clapton, the ever shy vocalist, alternates every two verse lines with Bruce.

Other outstanding cuts on *Disraeli Gears* include the bouncy "Strange Brew," with atypically airy, doubled, almost falsetto voices and overdubbed guitar; "Tales of Brave Ulysses," a Clapton-conceived flower-power tribute to Homer's *Odyssey*, containing a wah-wah guitar solo reminiscent of Hendrix (but without the speedy brilliance); and "SWLABR," a pop tune with a blues riff and doubled guitar solo. The album cemented Cream's place in the American rock scene and garnered mainstream press accolades.

The follow-up, *Wheels of Fire* (#1, July 1968), contains one studio record and one recorded live at the Fillmore and reflects the group's improvisation-versus-studio dichotomy. Cream creates a masterpiece with their version of the Robert Johnson classic, "Crossroads," in which the group shines as a blues-inspired, improvisational unit. Clapton generates heat with his fast, biting, staccato runs and dexterous work up the neck; Bruce instrumentally spans the other two, playing in rhythmic concert with Baker and his driving, beat-filled style while providing a tight, syncopated harmonic foundation for Clapton's guitar work. A formidable example of their in-studio mastery is "White

Room” (#6, October 1968), a song about a lover’s disenchantment that features an inventive arrangement and wah-wah guitar fills.

Cream had established their position as the first rock band to succeed as a result primarily of their instrumental abilities. However, the fabric of the group, never very strong to begin with, was chronically torn by the enmity between Bruce and Baker. After two years Clapton had neither the emotional constitution nor stamina to mediate any longer. Clapton was also exhausted by the pressure of living up to his deified status each time he appeared—especially with Hendrix on the scene—and was distraught by a *Rolling Stone* review that called him “the master of the cliché.” Clapton abdicated and Cream held their farewell concerts at London’s Royal Albert Hall in November 1968.

Cream left a substantial legacy for seventies rockers. Although Cream was not the first popular power trio—the Who, with the powerhouse rhythm section of Moon and Entwistle and “no-lead” guitarist Townshend, created the formula—they refined the format and designed its most popular application. Their recipe called for a blues-rooted guitarist with sufficient talent and charisma to thrill an audience; a powerful, emotive vocalist; and a bass player and drummer capable of creating both a strong rhythmic and harmonic foundation while adding exciting dynamic accents. The Cream legacy is seen in Led Zeppelin and that band’s many progeny.

Before Cream’s birth Clapton and Stevie Winwood had discussed playing together; after its demise Eric sought out the veteran from the Spencer Davis Group and Traffic. Clapton, who wanted to include a keyboard in his next group, felt inclined toward more melodic music and still didn’t want to be the front man. The multitalented Winwood fit the bill. Bass player and violinist Rick Gretsch was seduced away from the group known as the Family, and, at the strong urging of Winwood and against Clapton’s better judgment, Baker was invited to play drums. The group’s name, Blind Faith, reflected the reality of the situation. Clapton, after the pressure of Cream, wanted out of the hype and to be accepted as just a guitar player appreciated for his art. He envisioned the band traveling around England, arriving unannounced at small pubs and halls, blowing audiences out of their seats.

The band lasted less than a year, the dream much less. They recorded one self-titled album, debuted in front of 150,000 fans at London’s Hyde Park in June 1969, and booked a six-week American tour for arena-size venues. The album reached #1, and the band earned lots of money. However, the specter of Cream, in the person of Baker and persistent audience demands for Cream material and long jams, depressed Clapton. Lacking the fortitude to mold the situation, he sat back and let it happen: “It’s easier to be led than to lead. . . . I felt very insecure sometimes inside Blind Faith, and that was my own hang-up that had to be cured in its own time.”<sup>6</sup> Despite a delightful album, an all-star lineup, and competent representation by longtime manager Robert Stigwood, Clapton left the band in January 1970.

What followed was a solo career—and a struggle within the young man’s soul. The insecure, pained, faceless guitarist who wanted to hide nameless in a rock and roll band

was pitted against the once confident master instrumentalist, loved by his fans and deserving of solo success. There followed a self-titled album, recorded with the help of vocalists Delaney and Bonnie Bramlett, Leon Russell, Stephen Stills, and friends. There was a second solo effort recorded at Miami's Criteria Studios with Bobby Whitlock (keyboards), Carl Radle (bass), and Jim Gordon (drums), and a special friend. In an attempt to even further distance himself from his own legacy, Clapton called the group Derek and the Dominos.

The classic album that emerged from those sessions, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* (#16, November 1970), is one of those underground gems that people were bound to include in their record collections. (*Cheap Thrills* by Big Brother and Janis, *Crosby, Stills, and Nash*, and *The Band* are three others that come to mind.) The title cut, "Layla" (#10), was an aching, up-tempo blues song about Clapton's unrequited love for Patti Harrison (good friend George's wife), who eventually left Harrison and moved in with Clapton, marrying him in 1979. The song features the inspired slide-guitar work of then studio musician Duane Allman (the original Allman Brothers had formed in 1968). The guitar midsection contains overdubbed, swirling Clapton guitar figures and Allman's slide soaring through the upper reaches. Drummer Jim Gordon's epilogue on piano adds a fitting, melancholy close to the song.

The *Layla* album was Clapton blues circa 1970—full of anguish and some tenderness. "Bell Bottom Blues," "Why Does Love Have to Be So Sad," traditional blues number "Keys to the Highway," and Hendrix cover "Little Wing" are but a few of the quality numbers. Clapton already had one foot out of the band by the time it toured late in the year. Within the space of a few months, Hendrix died, as did Clapton's step-grandfather (the man who had raised him), and the pain of Patti's absence became unbearable. Clapton fell into a heroin-fueled numbness that lasted nearly three years. With his patrician girlfriend, Alice Ormsby-Gore, Clapton sat in his mansion snorting heroin and diddling on his guitar. He emerged to play in public on two occasions—the first being at Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh, on August 1, 1971. Although not a particularly close friend, Pete Townshend, in an attempt to arouse Clapton from his stupor, organized a premature welcome-back concert at London's Rainbow Theatre in January 1973. The all-star band included Townshend, Faces veteran Ron Wood, Clapton on guitar, Gretch on bass, Winwood on keyboards, Jim Capaldi on drums, and Ree Bop on percussion. Clapton arrived backstage one minute before showtime, and although the concert was an artistic success and Clapton played well, it would be another year before he sought treatment. Acupuncture eased the addictive cravings, and work as a day laborer helped heal the body. Clapton traded in his heroin addiction for alcoholism.

In the spring of 1974 Eric returned to Criteria Studios with bassist Carl Radle, Radle's Oklahoma pals Jamie Oldaker (drums) and Dick Sims (keyboards), guitarist George Terry, and vocalist Yvonne Elliman. They recorded *461 Ocean Boulevard*, which was named for the Florida residence where the musicians stayed, in two and a half weeks. This was Clapton's third solo album, and he had at last become comfortable

with his role as group leader and lead guitarist. No longer would he have to shoot it out for the title of top guitar gunslinger (no doubt Clapton still lived with the image of Hendrix, who once came to a Cream gig, asked to sit in, and blew everybody off the stage). Faster, more technically proficient players were on the scene; all Eric Clapton had to do was play like himself.

On *461 Ocean Boulevard* Clapton also found a formula for commercial success and made his peace. The songs range in length from 2:51 to 4:57 and cover a spectrum of styles, including adaptations of Robert Johnson's blues ("Steady Rollin' Man"), Johnny Otis's R&B ("Willie and the Hand Jive"), and Clapton originals. The album also contained a cover of a 1973 Bob Marley reggae tune "I Shot the Sheriff," which climbed to #1 (along with the album) in the summer of 1974. The formula developed on this album has continued to provide Clapton with a string of hit singles and discs. Clapton still does well that which he did best: play blues-based guitar with feeling.



Jimi Hendrix also began his career listening to blues records in his room, and he never forgot those roots. Although his quasi-blues music differs a great deal from Clapton's, in one way they are the same. Both loved the blues and never lost the ability to transmit the depth and emotionality of the blues to the audience. But unlike Clapton, Hendrix expanded guitar playing beyond a fusion of stylistic elements, past the borders of notated music, into the realm of sounds. In creating this sound spectrum he was also forced to master the evolving "effects" technology of the time. In creating sound by controlling the guitar and its effects technology, Hendrix had no peer. In some ways—more than three decades after his untimely death—he has yet to be equaled.

As with Clapton, Hendrix's blues were an expression of personal pain. He was born Johnny Allen Hendrix in Seattle, Washington, on November 27, 1942, while his father was in the army; he was shuffled from relatives to friends of relatives to foster homes. His mother was wild and consumptive, leaving the family for the final time when Jimi was ten. His father, Al, returned from the war, but it was many years before he could earn enough as a gardener to establish a home for Jimi and younger brother Leon. Jimi found solace in music, his father's jazz and R&B record collection, and his first guitar, an acoustic that he acquired when he was fourteen.

Al Hendrix had been a dedicated tap dancer before the war; his son became a rock music fanatic. At fifteen he joined the Rocking Kings, playing hits of the day, including Richie Valens's "La Bamba," the Everly Brothers tune "Cathy's Clown," Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues," and the Coasters hit "Yakety Yak." For more than two years Jimi played contemporary popular music up and down Washington's Interstate-5 corridor, going as far north as Vancouver, Canada. His musical interests were varied and included classic rockers Berry, Presley, and Holly and modern blues players Muddy Waters, Elmore James, and B. B. King.

Hendrix also became involved in petty crimes in the Seattle ghetto (midnight clothing sales, for instance). In all probability he entered the army to avoid a jail sentence for his second joyriding offense. By January 1962 he was training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as a Screaming Eagle, a 101st Airborne paratrooper, and eventually completed twenty-five jumps before breaking an ankle and mustering out on a medical discharge. The paratrooper who had taken his electric guitar to bed decided to become a professional musician. Along with his army buddy, classically trained bass player Billy Cox, Hendrix and friends got work in nearby Nashville, Tennessee, clubs. There he met a young white guitarist from Memphis, Steve Cropper. Their plans to record an album together were scrapped when Cropper's group, Booker T. and the M.G.s, scored a national hit with "Green Onions."

For the next four years Jimi Hendrix paid his dues. He worked as a rhythm guitarist with many of the era's great soul artists, then as a hired lead player, and finally as leader of his own small unsuccessful ensemble. During this period Hendrix marshaled his considerable repertoire of songs, created his phenomenal catalog of guitar riffs and solo styles, and developed his own version of the black performance dynamic called "the show." Living mostly out of a suitcase, Jimi worked behind and recorded with Little Richard intermittently from the spring of 1963 into 1965. He also played with the Isley Brothers, Solomon Burke, Wilson Pickett, Jackie Wilson, and others. There was no better school for an aspiring musician-showman.

By 1965 Hendrix had settled in New York City, straddling the black music scene of Harlem and the counterculture folk and rock worlds of Greenwich Village. He caught on with the band led by tenor sax great King Curtis, sharing guitar chores with another young black guitarist named Cornell Dupree. Soul artist Curtis Knight also provided some regular local club work. However, enamored of Dylan's lyricism and antiauthoritarian sentiments and the downtown community's acceptance of eccentric artists, Hendrix gravitated toward the Village. Jimi also found the counterculture's psychoactive drug scene attractive, smoking marijuana regularly and experimenting with LSD.

Many times the door to success is found in strange places. For Jimi, it materialized during his appearance as Jimmy James and the Blue Flames at one of the Village's marginal clubs, the Cafe Wha? In walked white acoustic blues artist John Hammond Jr.—the son of Dylan mentor John Hammond—who, upon hearing Hendrix play the blues, recruited him for future Village dates. As Hammond's lead guitarist, Hendrix soon impressed British rock royalty, as members of the Rolling Stones and the Animals came to view the new guitar wonder.

Mike Bloomfield, Butterfield Blues Band guitarist and Dylan studio pal, also stopped in to catch one of his gigs. He recalls:

[At the time] I was the hot shot guitarist on the block. . . . Hendrix knew who I was and that day, in front of my eyes, he burned me to death. I didn't even get my guitar out. H-bombs were going off, guided missiles were flying—the surf—waves. . . . He

was getting every sound I was ever to hear him get right there in the room with a Stratocaster, a Twin [Fender Twin guitar amplifier], a Maestro Fuzztone [fuzz-producing special effects foot pedal] and that was all—he was doing it mainly through extreme volume. He just got right up in my face with that axe, and I didn't even want to pick up a guitar for the next year.

Obviously, this unknown had something extraordinary to offer.<sup>7</sup>

Animals manager and former bassist Chas Chandler came to see Hendrix back at the Cafe Wha? stating categorically that Jimi was wasting his time in the United States. Come to England, he said, and we'll make you a star. After assuring Hendrix that he could introduce him to Eric Clapton and attempting to disentangle him from the myriad contracts he had signed over the years, Chandler and Hendrix stepped through the door to success in September 1966. Hendrix entered the tumultuous swinging London of the midsixties, with its vibrant, ever-changing music scene. He was introduced to Paul and Ringo, Pete Townshend, Clapton, and John Mayall. He asked to sit in with Cream and, as Clapton describes it, "He did his whole routine. . . . It was incredible."

Chandler and Hendrix envisioned a power-trio lineup, figuring no one could keep up with Jimi on guitar. Enlisted on bass was twenty-one-year-old former art student Noel Redding, who had auditioned for the lead guitarist slot with the Animals. Drummer John "Mitch" Mitchell had been performing professionally since his stint on BBC radio at thirteen; a TV series at sixteen followed, as did the role of the Artful Dodger in the original London stage production of *Oliver*. The roster was finalized on October 12, 1966; the Jimi Hendrix Experience played its first gig three days later, opening for France's own Elvis, Johnny Hallyday, at the prestigious Olympia Theatre in Paris.

For the initial release Hendrix and Chandler chose "Hey Joe," a minor top-40 tune (#31, June 1966) by a one-hit American group called the Leaves. The Experience version was a modified blues containing an emotive, talking vocal style by Hendrix (complete with vocal fills such as "dig," "yeah," and the famous "I gave her the gun!"); falsetto; droning background vocals; a short, rather simple guitar solo (containing a profusion of bent notes and vibrato but lacking the dissonant noise qualities of later works); Hendrix's typical chorded guitar fills; and the second guitar found on most studio cuts. The biggest and most pleasant surprise was the quality and dominance of the drums in the mix. Mitchell, rather than Hendrix, embroidered the song with creative and dynamically effective one- and two-measure fills.

"Hey Joe" reached #6 on the English charts in January 1967, and the Experience's appearance on TV's *Top of the Pops*—where Hendrix exposed England to the "show"—generated media descriptions such as the "Wild Man of Pop" and the even more racist "Wild Man from Borneo." Indeed, Hendrix's live performances were wild, as one account describes it:

Falling suddenly to his knees like James Brown during "Please, Please" and lip-synching a scream as his Stratocaster emits an orgasmic howl. Then moving the guitar

across his body, standing straight up from his haunches panning the instrument before him like a machine gun cock emitting staccato bursts; humping his ax as it rumbles into low-pitched feedback, and then letting it all out as he falls back to his knees and then over backward.<sup>8</sup>

The first album, *Are You Experienced?* (#2 U.K.), released in May 1967, was kept from the top of the charts only by the extraordinary *Sgt. Pepper's*. It exhibits Hendrix's full range of talent and accomplishment; the years of paying dues and establishing an instrumental foundation were paying off. Numerous outstanding cuts fill the album, each one revealing a different facet of Hendrix's volatile musical and psychological personalities.

"Purple Haze" (#3 U.K.), a musical reference to psychoactive drugs that was written in his dressing room, featured Hendrix both as hard-driving riff maker and as celestial traveler. Mitchell's introductory snare-driven quarter-note pulse explodes as Hendrix bangs out two highly distorted introductory riffs—these initial measures have become a signature for hard rock and roll music. For three verses Jimi sing-speaks about being transported into a higher but disorienting state of consciousness, punctuating the intervening instrumental passages with licentious oohs and aahs. The song fades, as a seemingly endless sustained note rings, an inventive mechanical technique that Hendrix was able to duplicate live by repeated picking.

"The Wind Cries Mary" (#6 U.K.), the third single released from the album, presents the gentle Hendrix, the Dylanesque balladeer. To a melodically pleasing soundtrack featuring hammer-on chorded fills, abstract and obscure lyrics tumble forth, framed by the titular reference "And the wind cries Mary." Some fans cite "The Wind Cries Mary," "Little Wing," and other ballads as their consistently favorite Hendrix material. "Third Stone from the Sun" is a surreal romp introduced by a delightful melody played on the guitar in octaves reminiscent of jazz guitarist Wes Montgomery. This song (the title is a reference to the solar system's third planet) introduces the listener to a broad collage of the master's guitar-generated sounds—swirling winds, atmospheric static, screams, roars, and much more—that astounded his audiences and was one factor that distinguished him from other players.

On "Foxy Lady" the erotic Hendrix emerges—just one more of his many personalities. Jimi's performance style lacked sexual subtlety. His guitar, played between his legs T-Bone Walker-style, symbolized a phallus, and he'd often simulate sex with his guitar against the stack of amplifiers during live performances. The title cut opens with musical references to the Beatles hit "Strawberry Fields," with the sustained note, military-snare cadence, backward tapes, and musical reprise.

The Hendrix revealed on *Are You Experienced?* was brash and innovative. Certainly no one approached his mastery of the guitar and its sounds, nor had anyone displayed such a variety of intense and forceful musical personalities, from the pounding hard rocker to the ethereal space pilot to the erotic lover. For those who listened (as Reprise Records executive Stan Cornyn commented, "Hendrix was an acquired taste"), new musical and

emotional directions were being revealed. The junior high and high school generation, buffeted by the turbulent sixties, were crying for more, and as their older siblings continued to embrace the Beatles and friends, many younger fans were attracted by Hendrix's forceful, explosive sound.

America's first exposure to Jimi Hendrix as guitar king came at the Monterey Pop Festival. Festival board member Paul McCartney had strongly recommended Jimi, releasing him from a previous commitment to travel with the Beatles on the filming of *Magical Mystery Tour*. Cognizant of Hendrix's power, festival planners scheduled him to perform next to last on Sunday night, after the Who and the Dead and before the closing act, the Mamas and the Papas. Dressed in his colorful Carnaby Street finery (Jimi normally wore boldly colored and frilly shirts, embroidered jackets and vests, scarves, headbands, and jewelry as his costume), Hendrix jammed a six-song set.<sup>9</sup>

On Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" Hendrix once again demonstrated his unique ability to sound like a lead and rhythm guitarist, proffering strums and tasty hammer-on fills seemingly simultaneously. His set closer, a cover of the Troggs hit "Wild Thing," began with a rambling "stoned" rap about his previous night's lovemaking and a cryptic reference to sacrifice. Launching into his combined British and American national anthems, Hendrix blasted feedback bursts of fireworks along with speedy, indistinguishable melodic passages. The finale sounded much the same, but suddenly Hendrix placed his guitar on the ground, soaked the body with lighter fluid, and while he knelt onstage set his ax on fire. Finished with this ritual sacrifice, the guitar moaning from feedback, Jimi finished the job by smashing it on the stage (echoes of Townshend) and exited to tumultuous applause.

Critical response to this performance was mixed. The *Los Angeles Times* observed, "When Jimi left the stage, he had graduated from rumor to legend." But Robert Christgau in New York's *Village Voice* called Hendrix "an Uncle Tom, a caricature, a modern incarnation of long-dead Negro minstrelry."<sup>10</sup> Promoters, however, were not ambivalent and hustled to offer concert dates. Jimi appeared with Airplane at the Fillmore. Clubs in New York and Los Angeles scrambled for bookings. Peter Tork of the Monkees and Dick Clark wanted the Experience to open for top-40 idols the Monkees. They actually started a tour, but it proved to be a mismatch—the Monkees' teenybopper audience couldn't handle Hendrix's raunchy, hard-driven rock. *Are You Experienced?* was released in the United States—rising to #5—but received mixed critical reviews. Jon Landau in *Rolling Stone* noted the poor quality of songs and their inherent violence, yet he cited Jimi as a great guitarist and arranger.

The next eighteen months found Hendrix in perpetual motion. He released two albums, *Axis: Bold as Love* (#3, February 1968) and *Electric Ladyland* (#1, November 1968), and toured constantly in England, Europe, and the United States. When Jimi wasn't recording or performing he was out on the town or sequestered in one of the many apartments or hotel rooms he had set up with special girlfriends around New York. Hendrix spent up

to \$5,000 per week recording at the Record Plant in midtown Manhattan. Jimi also frequented the Scene, a trendy nightspot a few blocks away from the studio. On any given evening Hendrix might sit in with club headliners or jam after hours till dawn. His musical cohorts at the Scene included an amazing assortment of players: bluesmen Johnny Winter, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, and James Cotton and Led Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, and Rick Derringer.

Hendrix's later studio output was prolific and generally well received. *Axis: Bold as Love* opened with a simulated radio interview between imaginary station ESP disc jockey (manager Chas Chandler) and a man from outer space (Hendrix). Feedback effects simulating spaceships lifting off and other intergalactic sounds punctuate the first two minutes. The album's panoply of songs include "Spanish Castle Magic," a riff-driven tune with a blues-rooted harmonic structure and minimalistic bluesy solo, and "Little Wing," the winsome ballad to sometimes-companion Devon Wilson, featuring crystalline percussion and other ethereal effects, along with a demonstration of controlled whammy-bar detuning, evidencing Hendrix's great control of the instrument. "If 6 Was 9" features a broad range of feedback effects sprinkled around a laissez-faire, let-me-live-my-life-the-way-I-want-to political rap—Hendrix's political outlook didn't include the notion of collective action found in the era's counterculture movements. For the cut's final passages Hendrix replicates a crazed pan blaring his wooden pipes.

*Electric Ladyland* garnered even more acclaim at the time. It was Hendrix's only #1 yet still proved too hard and raunchy for a major segment of the rock audience. Like *Axis: Bold as Love*, it was uneven, containing brilliant and innovative guitar music and compositions of multilevel meaning alongside seemingly directionless, improvised fuzz. *New York Times* reviewer Robert Palmer saw it as one of those albums that contained messages "to be savored and probed for hidden meanings and listened to again and again." To Richard Goldstein of the *Village Voice*, you came away "feeling that it's overlong, indiscriminate, and needlessly jammed." Beyond that, however, "for sheer texture, this [was] an uncanny piece of sound collage."<sup>11</sup> Hendrix brought in big guns Stevie Winwood, Al Kooper, Buddy Miles, and Airplane bassist Jack Casady to spice up the work. Excellent cuts included "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)," exhibiting a mature guitarist going through his blues-rooted paces, and "All Along the Watchtower," a Dylan cover as forceful and brilliant as the original.

By the end of 1968 Jimi was at his peak. *Rolling Stone* critic Jon Landau called *Electric Ladyland* "the only two-record set of the year that made it in my book. [Hendrix] is the authoritative lead guitarist, the coolest showman, an excellent songwriter, and a constantly improving vocalist. Of touring performers on the scene today, Hendrix is tops and 1968 was his year." *Rolling Stone* declared, "For creativity, electricity and balls above and beyond the call of duty, he has won for himself the *Rolling Stone* Performer of the Year award."<sup>12</sup>

There were, however, stormier days on the horizon. Disputes continued among critics and fans over Hendrix's alleged abandonment of his black roots in favor of a white

counterculture musical aesthetic. Cuts on both *Axis: Bold as Love* and *Electric Ladyland* fueled the arguments. Some pointed to blues-rooted chord structure and stylistic elements, call and response, and emotive vocals as an example of attention to tradition. Others pointed to his distorted guitar feedback explosions and obscure stream-of-consciousness lyrics as evidence of drug-induced, bohemian-oriented content with a white pop audience focus.

Blues guitarist Bloomfield would come to Hendrix's defense, calling him "the Blackest guitarist I ever heard. His music was deeply rooted in pre-blues, the oldest musical forms like field hollers and gospel melodies. From what I can garner, there was no form of Black music that he hadn't listened to or studied . . . and they poured out in his playing." Yet when he sat in with Chicago blues great Howlin' Wolf at the Scene, Wolf "put him down" bad. Blues guitarist Johnny Winter was struck by the paradox and commented, "Jimi really loved the blues, the real thing though isn't what he wanted to play. . . . The Wolf couldn't understand that Jimi's style of blues was legitimate too. He just felt like his own blues were the blues, and didn't accept anybody else's with feedback and fuzz and everything."<sup>13</sup> When Hendrix jammed with Muddy Waters, they were both thrilled.

Nineteen sixty-nine was a year of turmoil for Hendrix. Former army buddy and bassist Billy Cox joined the Experience that summer, replacing Redding on bass. Tired of being away from England and exasperated with Hendrix's leadership and the necessity of subjugating his ego to the guitar master, Redding left the group. Mitchell parted at the same time but returned within the month and remained with Jimi throughout most of his career. Jimi was spending quite a bit of money, and although the success of his records and concert appearances earned him top dollar, unfavorable contracts with management and some shady dealings by another manager, Mike Jeffries, left Hendrix barely solvent. He poured a quarter of a million dollars of advance royalties into his dream studio, *Electric Ladyland*, but construction delays and poor planning postponed its completion until March 1970.

Yet there were some artistic successes in this year's roller-coaster ride. Jimi's management negotiated top dollar and closing-act status for Hendrix at Woodstock. Unfortunately, his legendary version of "Star Spangled Banner," captured so beautifully in the Woodstock film, was played before only 40,000 tired, mud-caked survivors of the festival on Monday morning. The closing-act demand had inadvertently caused Hendrix to miss the opportunity to play to the 500,000-person audience that attended during the previous three days of the lovefest. That May Hendrix had been arrested at Toronto's airport and charged with possession of heroin; customs officials had found a glass jar containing four glassine packets of heroin on top of Jimi's clean underwear. In December Hendrix was found not guilty—the jury believed the string of witnesses testifying that fans and bed partners sometimes slipped presents into the star's luggage. Anyone familiar with Hendrix would have known about his loathing for that particular drug.

New Year's Eve 1969 brought the reunion of Jimi and old friend Buddy Miles. Since meeting on the soul circuit when Miles was a sixteen-year-old drummer for Wilson Pickett, the two had jammed together often. Miles had joined guitarist Mike Bloomfield in soul powerhouse Electric Flag and then formed the Buddy Miles Express. Partially in response to calls from black activists for Hendrix to play with black artists, for two nights—December 31, 1969, and January 1, 1970—Hendrix, Cox, and Miles were the Band of Gypsys.

The concerts produced a self-titled live album, including the 12:38 gem “Machine Gun.” In a contemporary gesture Hendrix dedicated the song to all the troops fighting in Harlem, Chicago, and Vietnam. “Machine Gun” is the best single exhibition available on a major-label release of Jimi’s multifaceted approach to guitar. Present are the repetition, the tearing bends, and the gritty sustain of the blues along with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of feedback-driven riffs and sounds. The lyrics of “Machine Gun” tackle a war he describes as being conducted against blacks and Vietnamese by the “evil man.” To Hendrix, “They force us [black soldiers] to kill you and you to kill me even though we’re only families apart.”

In addition to the superlative playing on some of the Band of Gypsys cuts, 1970 found Jimi planning efforts with numerous jazz artists, including an album with jazz luminary Gil Evans. His life, however, was still plagued by business and personal problems. Management fired Cox and Miles and manipulated an Experience reunion for early 1970. Jimi needed the money and hadn’t the stamina or temperament to resist. He sought refuge in alcohol and drugs. Cox returned for a series of shows in Europe but was slipped a dose of LSD and unwittingly reduced to a zombie state. Hendrix canceled two Dutch shows and slumped back to London.

Jimi was staying with a British girlfriend, Monica Danemann. One night the couple ate a late dinner, drank some wine, and retired at dawn. Later that morning, September 18, 1970, Monica went out for some cigarettes. She returned to find Hendrix unconscious and in respiratory distress. An ambulance arrived and the attendants, assuring Danemann that Jimi would be all right, took him away. He was dead on arrival at the hospital. The coroner’s inquest ascertained that Hendrix had died “as a result of an inhalation of vomit due to barbiturate poisoning.” Hendrix had taken nine of Danemann’s Vesperax sleeping tablets, probably unaware that the European dosage was considerably more potent than the American equivalent. When his stomach rejected the drug, his numbed gag reflex could not prevent fluids from entering the lungs.<sup>14</sup>

Hendrix biographer David Henderson contends that the ambulance attendants mistakenly secured Hendrix seated rather than in the normal position (lying on his side). Thus, when Hendrix aspirated, his head thrust back, his windpipe was closed and the fluids filled his lungs. The body was flown to Seattle, where family and musical friends, including Redding, Mitchell, Buddy Miles, and John Hammond Jr., attended the funeral.

Some writers focused on Jimi's drug-plagued life and early demise. Others called Hendrix "a genius Black musician . . . and composer of brilliantly dramatic power."<sup>15</sup>

His greatness and legacy are not easy to characterize. He was closer to the cutting edge than the mainstream. In comparison to most music of the time, his sound was hard-edged, brash, and abrasive. But these qualities were a conscious effort on Hendrix's part: "We try to make our music so loose and hard-hitting, so that it hits your soul hard enough to make it open. It's like shock therapy."<sup>16</sup> The hard-driving rock music of Led Zeppelin and its seventies progeny is, in part, a reflection of this Hendrix shock-therapy aesthetic. Other elements—like Hendrix's sloppy speak-sing vocal style or his obscure, stream-of-consciousness lyricism—appealed to few musicians and thus had little or no impact.

Hendrix's most important contribution to rock music was in his willingness and ability to redefine the boundaries of rock and roll guitar. He did this as a technician (his ability to master the instrument) and as an artist. As an artist Hendrix conceptualized the musical expansion, and as a technician he replicated the vision. One of Hendrix's most important innovations was the notion that guitar music should not necessarily be limited to transcribable pitch; notated music is only one kind of sound. Other sounds can and should be reproduced on the guitar. As he set about creating this kaleidoscope of sound, Jimi drew from many sources. Some ideas, like the machine gun and the rushing wind, even came from his experiences in the army.

Hendrix the technician determined that these sounds could be best achieved through the manipulation of feedback—the overload of a sound reproduction system by the instantaneous surge of produced amplified frequencies. Hendrix found that by playing on the edge of feedback, and controlling how and when specific frequencies would feed back, he could reproduce his collage of sounds. This took constant practice and a thorough understanding of the primitive technology of the time. Contrary to popular belief, Hendrix did not play without effects devices but rather used a number of enhancements to bring his sound to the edge.

Hendrix was a regular customer at Manny's, the famous New York musical instrument superstore. "Any kind of new toy or sound effect he bought immediately. Whenever he walked in, he was good for \$1,500–2,000," claims Manny's son, Henry Goldrich. "Jimi used to buy three or four guitars every other week."<sup>17</sup> His guitar of choice was the Fender Stratocaster (known as "the Strat"). However, he played numerous others over the course of his career. Although Hendrix was left-handed, he preferred a right-handed Strat turned around and restrung. This enabled him easy access to the volume and tone controls—now situated above instead of below the strings—important components of his feedback-generation system.

Hendrix usually used a Vox wah-wah foot pedal (which produced a narrowing "wah" sound when depressed), a Fuzz Face (which distorted the sound), and a Univox Univibe (which simulated the phasing produced by a rotating Leslie organ speaker). In addition to this arsenal of effects technology, Hendrix manipulated the guitar with what observers

have called enormous hands. This enabled him to span large portions of the neck while utilizing the guitar controls. In fact, Hendrix could produce feedback on two or three strings while playing lead on others. Constantly playing close to feedback, he would tap the back of the neck with his hands, bump it with his hip, or fiddle with the pickup toggle switch, pushing the guitar over the screaming edge.

His enormous hands, the Stratocaster guitar, various sound-manipulation devices, a stack of high-powered Marshall amplifiers, an innate talent to reproduce anything he heard, and his own brilliant imagination helped Hendrix become, as Bloomfield once put it, “the man that took electric music and defined it. He turned sounds from devices like wah-wahs into music. They weren’t gimmicks when he used them. In fact, they were beyond music, they were in the realm of pure sound and music combined.”<sup>18</sup> His guitar legacy is not that so many others copied his style—even thirty-five years later there are still things contemporary guitarists cannot reproduce—but that they, too, liberated themselves from the boundaries of pitch in an attempt to take advantage of the possibilities opened by use of feedback. Unfortunately, subsequent guitarists also aped his speed and voluminous use of notes without understanding that these elements were anchored by Hendrix’s innate feeling for the blues.

Hendrix epitomized the quiet man who, as a performer, explodes onstage. In front of an audience, it was all show—an erotic, high-energy, colorfully costumed jester parading his bag of tricks before an adoring white audience. Behind the musical mask, however, he was a closely guarded and private man who had few, if any, confidants. Survivors find ways of eluding or outgrowing their haunting pain; those, like Hendrix, who try to numb or escape it rarely make it. Although Jimi’s death was most likely a tragic accident, his inability to deal with the lifelong pressures and pain left him only one step from the edge.



Other lead guitarists emerged in the late sixties, though none approach the status or influence of Clapton, Hendrix, and Led Zeppelin’s Jimmy Page (whose work will be explored in the next chapter). The closest in talent and compositional skill was Jeff Beck, who unfortunately had difficulty in maintaining the social relationships and making the compromises necessary to function in the commercial marketplace. Nevertheless, Beck released two solo albums after leaving the Yardbirds, *Beck-Ola* (#15, September 1968) and *Truth* (#15, August 1969), which showcased his imaginative use of controlled feedback and various modal feelings and featured cuts with vocalist Rod Stewart and bassist Ron Wood. Other players who garnered further acclaim in the seventies included Steve Howe (of Yes), Leslie West (Mountain), Robin Trower (Procol Harum), Alvin Lee (Ten Years After), and Joe Walsh (James Gang).

Between 1966 and 1970 Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix played their finest, most imaginative, and most important music. They helped to focus some popular-music attention on the exploits of electric guitarists. Their beat-driven, blues-derived music of the sixties

became the foundation for the sex, drugs, and hard rock of the seventies—a time when social commentary was out and the pursuit of pleasure was in. Youth, trained by Madison Avenue to strive for instant gratification, demanded more input. They turned the volume up a few decibels in an attempt to anesthetize themselves against the increasingly problematic aspects of society. Chapter 16 thus focuses on rock of the seventies and the band that led this parade: Led Zeppelin.

# THE SEVENTIES

*Dazed and Confused*

*Chapter*

# 16



*Led Zeppelin*

The essential ingredient for any successful rock group is energy—the ability to give out energy, to receive energy from the audience, and to give it back to the audience. A rock concert is in fact a rite involving the evocation and transmission of energy.

—Author William S. Burroughs

[Led Zeppelin's] success may be attributable at least in part to the accelerating popularity among the teenage rock and roll audience of barbiturates and amphetamines, drugs that render their users most responsive to crushing volume and ferocious histrionics of the sort that Zeppelin has dealt exclusively.

—From a review in the *Los Angeles Times*

The way I see it, rock and roll is folk music. Street music. It isn't taught in school. It has to be picked up.

—Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page, from a 1975 interview in *Rolling Stone*

We just get out there and rock. If your amp blows or your guitar packs it in, smash it up and pick up another one. And that's how it always was with us. We can't even stop and tune up. Those kids are all wound up. A second or two is too much for them. They've gotta have it.

—AC/DC guitarist Angus Young

**B**Y THE END OF 1971 most of the melodious creativity that characterized the golden era of rock music had dissipated. Regional styles such as soul, Motown, and the San Francisco Sound were in decline as artists succumbed to the fast lane, groups disbanded, and stylistic changes took hold. The first British invasion had run its course—the Beatles had disbanded, the Stones had scaled the heights and were resting up for the moment, and the Who were between projects. Pioneering guitar kings Clapton and Hendrix had relinquished their thrones, Clapton to heroin and Hendrix to the grim reaper. Yet the music of the late 1960s didn't disappear like its classic rock counterparts. Rock veterans like Paul McCartney and John Lennon; Motown's Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and Michael Jackson; the Rolling Stones; and Paul Simon continued to score commercial successes.

## Digression: The Changing Landscape



Rock's musical evolution during the late 1960s and 1970s occurred at a time when the music industry expanded rapidly in size and power. Record sales, which had topped \$1 billion for the first time in 1967, reached \$2 billion in 1973 and \$4 billion in 1978. Record and tape sales revenues also surpassed other types of entertainment earnings, including sports and movies. Pop music had finally entered the realm of Big Business, and the consequences were formidable. With profits soaring and growth levels approaching 25 percent annually, record-label subsidiaries came under closer scrutiny by corporate bosses. Lawyers and accountants replaced old-time music aficionados like Atlantic's Ahmet Ertegun and Elektra's Jac Holzman as the final arbiters of major-label decisionmaking.

In addition, because of the monstrous profits to be earned, music-industry giants began to swallow smaller companies as the trend toward corporate consolidation increased. By 1973 Warner Bros./Reprise, Elektra/Asylum, Atlantic/Atco (combined, given the acronym WEA) and other related subsidiaries were united under the corporate umbrella of the Kinney Corporation, a company that began in funeral homes and parking lots. Industry giant Columbia Records was only one cog in the CBS conglomerate that owned the CBS TV network, Hertz Rent-a-Car, Banquet Foods, and much more. By 1973 the top six record corporations were selling approximately 66 percent of all the Hot-100 singles and albums. By 1980 this figure, in part because of further consolidation by the record industry, had reached 82 percent.

The audience, seen merely as a segment of product consumers to be wooed by this increasingly powerful industry, was also changing. The second wave of the baby boom was about to hit puberty, ready for the latest teen-focused top-of-the-pops. What had essentially been a single teenaged rock audience of the fifties, and then a larger-yet-diverse audience brought together by the Fab Four in the sixties, was beginning the process of fragmentation. Age, class, race, education, and gender became natural dividing lines; these began determining the kids' interest in and identification with the many different evolving rock styles.

The rock audience of the late 1960s was now encompassing much of the American under-thirty population. It was no longer the exclusive province of the very young or the disenfranchised; rock was part of mainstream culture. In the seventies the older and middle-class audience segments continued to purchase music by artists that wrote meaningful lyrics and accentuated melody and harmony—characteristics they enjoyed during the sixties. Their younger brothers and sisters and working-class cousins were usually more attracted to the evolving music, which contained a stronger beat, loud distorted guitars, and simple, sexually oriented, escapist sentiments.

All this—industry consolidation and audience expansion—occurred in the context of a society exhausted by past and ongoing struggles over human rights issues (at home and abroad). In 1970 the U.S. government and military still had nearly 500,000 troops committed in Vietnam. Yet a majority of Americans opposed the war, with many taking their cause to the streets in the form of protests and marches in acts of civil disobedience. Minorities were also engaged in an ongoing struggle to obtain economic, social, and political equality. The counterculture movement had also spread beyond regional centers to the country’s high schools.

By mid-decade the war had been lost and Republican president Richard Nixon—who was elected in 1972 by dint of criminal activity and a reign of terror against legal dissent—had resigned his office in disgrace in the wake of the Watergate break-in scandal.

**And Now Back to Our Story**



The early 1970s became a time of contradiction. On the one hand there was the institutionalization of the counterculture’s dress, appearance, drug experimentation, and language. On the other there were efforts by government and big business to reverse the recent era’s political and cultural openness and expressiveness. Into this confusing milieu burst the bombastic, hard rock–rooted stream of popular music. Led Zeppelin was at the front of the charge, followed by a roster of attentive disciples. Together they constituted the third rock music explosion, which caught the attention of the era’s adolescents—solidifying a trend begun by the Who, Cream, and Hendrix. “Sex, drugs, and rock and roll!” became the rallying cry, and the pursuit of pleasure and money became the ultimate goal. Now art rock (rock with artistic pretense) and singer-songwriter rock joined heavy metal (as the hardest rock has come to be called) and dinosaur rock as the seventies lumbered on.

In its early days Led Zeppelin was unsure of its direction, much like the era in which it was born (the late 1960s). Personnel had been hired by guitarist Jimmy Page and manager Peter Grant originally as roster replacements for the Yardbirds. A lengthy process of attrition, including the departure of guitarist Jeff Beck in November 1966, left Page in control. Brought on board in order to honor Scandinavian concert commitments as the New Yardbirds, the replacement players—bassist John Paul Jones, vocalist Robert Plant, and drummer John Bonham—were astounded by the magic they experienced during their first rehearsal. They decided to continue, although as Page describes, “When Robert and I first got together we realized we could go in two possible directions—heavy blues, or an Incredible String Band trip.”

The players represented two levels of experience: the older, studio-wise Londoners (Page and Jones) and the teenage provincial greenhorns (Plant and Bonham). Jimmy Page (born January 9, 1944) was an only child, a self-described loner whose outlet and first love

was the guitar. His first, an acoustic that he acquired at age fourteen, was replaced by an electric so that he could more easily reproduce the bent-note solos of classic rockers James Burton and Scotty Moore. Page also delved into the works of blues artists B. B. King and Elmore James, and at seventeen he landed his first important gig with Neil Christian and the Crusaders—a lineup that also included superlative guitarist Albert Lee and, later, future Deep Purple wizard Richie Blackmore.

Physical frailty, a condition that would continue to plague Page throughout his career, forced him off the road. Like many of his contemporaries he enrolled in art school, but two years later he was lured into the recording scene by engineer and friend Glyn Johns. Between 1963 and 1966 Page was in constant demand as a studio guitarist, a favorite of top producers Shel Talmy, Mickie Most, and Andrew Oldham. He played on numerous hit records, including the Who's "I Can't Explain," the Kinks hit "You Really Got Me," Them's "Gloria," and even Tom Jones's pop classic, "It's Not Unusual." Page, content with the abundance of studio work, turned down an offer to replace Eric Clapton in the Yardbirds in 1965, recommending instead childhood buddy Jeff Beck.

By June 1966 Page succumbed to the temptations of the road, first joining the Yardbirds on bass and then, months later, sharing lead-guitar duties with Beck. The band was a strange amalgam of brilliance and contradiction. Page, with his wealth of studio experience, new musical ideas, and fresh enthusiasm, buoyed up the rest, who were becoming tired of the rock and roll treadmill. Although initially enthused at the prospect of playing harmony lead solos with Beck, Page found the other guitarist "an inconsistent player, in that when he's on, he's probably the best there is, but at the time, and for a period afterwards, he had no respect whatsoever for audiences."<sup>1</sup> Beck, pleading illness, failed to show for yet another concert and was sacked.

The last original Yardbirds (Keith Relf and Jim McCarty) left in July 1968. Page, who had previously been close to forming a band with session keyboard player Nicky Hopkins, drummer Keith Moon, and bassist John Paul Jones, now invited Jones to join the Yardbirds. Born John Baldwin on January 3, 1946, Jones entered the group with musical training, session work on bass and keyboard—he and Page had worked together on numerous records, including Donovan's "Hurdy Gurdy Man"—and experience in arranging numbers. Page initially wanted singer Terry Reid and drummer B. J. Wilson (who later played with Procol Harum), but neither was available. Instead he went to Birmingham to scope out nineteen-year-old Hobbstweedle vocalist Robert Plant. Plant, criticized by some local musicians for his stage posturing and lack of singing ability, apparently impressed Page, who later recalled, "It unnerved me just to listen. It still does, like a primeval wail."<sup>2</sup>

Plant was invited to London, developed an immediate rapport with Page, and eventually convinced his old Band of Joy crony, drummer John "Bonzo" Bonham, to join them. In describing their initial session together, Plant recounts, "I've never been so turned on in my life. Although we were all steeped in blues and R&B, we found out in the first hour

and a half that we had our own identity.”<sup>3</sup> The new identity required a new name. After rejecting the Whoopie Cushion and the Mad Dogs, the group settled on Led Zeppelin—derived from a pronouncement by the Who’s John Entwistle and Keith Moon that the projected band would go over like a lead balloon.

Led Zeppelin’s future commercial success was based, in part, on their version of the “team.” This included the musicians, the studio-production skills of Page, the songwriting consistency of Page and Plant, and aggressive, competent management. Their business leadership came in the form of a 250-pound former professional wrestler, former Yardbirds manager Peter Grant. An astute businessman and promoter, Grant also successfully employed verbal and physical intimidation to get what he wanted. The band was shepherded on the tour by road manager Richie Cole, whose job has been described as mother hen, field pimp, and hit man.

Grant, Page, and the three relative unknowns secured an astronomical \$200,000 advance and a commensurate royalty rate from Atlantic Records. Company executives correctly surmised that audience interest in hard rock label mates Cream, Iron Butterfly, and Vanilla Fudge would translate into even stronger support for Zeppelin. By 1973 Zeppelin accounted for 10 percent of Atlantic’s record sales.

Led Zeppelin’s self-titled first album was recorded straightaway, during a three-week period just after their return from the final Yardbirds tour. The album, with favorites like “Dazed and Confused” (an uncredited rewrite of the Jake Holmes original) and the guitar vehicle “Communication Breakdown,” is mostly an unrefined catalog of the band’s basic elements and a preview of things to come. Guitarist Page, an acknowledged studio master and stylistic innovator, lays the foundation for metal guitar with speeded-up riffs based on repetition and pull-offs (listen to “Communication Breakdown” and “Good Times Bad Times”). He also exhibits competence as a blues player—mimicking B. B. King’s style on “I Can’t Quit You, Baby” and screams and bent notes on “You Shook Me”—but lacks the emotional veracity of era counterparts Clapton (“Crossroads”) and Hendrix (“Red House”). Page’s interest in acoustic players such as Bert Jansch and John Renbourn translates into a unique versatility for the hard rock–heavy metal genre. Thus, listeners could relax to cuts like “Black Mountain Side,” which featured fingerpicking on the acoustic guitar. This ability to produce material with a wide dynamic range—from soft to stentorian—was also telescoped into one song, “Babe, I’m Gonna Leave You” and was later used most successfully on their all-time classic, “Stairway to Heaven.”

The surprise to most listeners was Robert Plant’s unique voice and singing style. Here was a man who sounded as though he was singing one octave above his natural range in a way that would shred his vocal chords at any moment—a Janis Joplin in drag, so to speak. However, this seemingly unnatural act worked in the context of the newborn lineup. Plant’s repertoire of screams, moans, wails, and lascivious groans generated the excitement mandated by the material itself. It was also a perfect call-and-response foil for Page’s catalog of guitar sounds (listen to “Dazed and Confused” for the wah-wah, bowed guitar, octaves, and other improvised sounds matched by Plant’s variety of moans).

Bassist Jones provided a literate harmonic foundation to the music, and Bonham just plodded along, pounding out the basics with his enormous drumsticks. His elementary style reversed the trend toward flashy, technique-oriented drumming, popularized by hard rock predecessors Mitchell, Baker, and Moon.

The band left England around Christmas 1968 for the first of six U.S. tours over the next year and a half. Work at home was scarce, but in America they were enthusiastically received by young fans while opening for Detroit's MC5 and Vanilla Fudge; they positively tore down both Fillmores, a supporting act first at the West, then blowing Iron Butterfly off the stage at the East. That first album, released in January 1969, went to #10, and "Dazed and Confused" and "Communication Breakdown" received FM airplay.

This popularity—on the radio and live—flew in the face of scathing reviews by the rock press, a paradox that would continue to haunt them into the midseventies. *Rolling Stone's* John Mendelsohn called the album self-indulgent and restricted. Calling Page an "extraordinarily proficient blues guitarist and explorer of his instrument's electronic capabilities," Mendelsohn also described him as "a very limited producer and a writer of weak, unimaginative songs." Plant wasn't spared either: "He may be as foppish as Rod Stewart [at the time, lead singer for Beck's solo efforts], but he's nowhere near so exciting, especially in the higher registers."

It was easy to forget the bad reviews with legendary alcohol- and drug-fueled sexual escapades that took place on the American tours. Mainly through the efforts of road manager Cole, women and drugs were made available for the band, anytime, anywhere. On the second U.S. tour *Life* magazine assigned reporter Ellen Sander to cover the band-on-the-road angle, providing the group an opportunity to score positive national press. Sander called Zeppelin one of the finest British bands on tour, adding that "no matter how miserably the group failed to keep their behavior up to a basic human level, they played well almost every night of the tour." In what would prove over time to become typical Zeppelin conduct, some band and crew members took a liking to animalistic behavior. Entering the Fillmore East dressing room to congratulate the band on its final tour date, Sander was physically assaulted:

Two members of the group attacked me, shrieking and grabbing at my clothes, totally over the edge. . . . Bonzo came at me first, and then there were a couple more. After that I didn't see much. All of a sudden there were all these hands on me, and all these big guys. My clothes were half torn off; they were in a frenzy. I was absolutely terrified that I was going to be raped and [I was] really angry.

Sander refused to complete an article, concluding in a later account, "If you walk inside the cages of the zoo, you get to see the animals close-up, stroke the captive pelts, and mingle with the energy behind the mystique. You also get to smell the shit firsthand."<sup>4</sup>

Their next album, *Led Zeppelin II* (#1, November 1969), hit the charts in 1969, the same year as its predecessor. Written and rehearsed on the road, it was recorded in studios in

England and across the United States. The album's centerpiece, and the group's most successful single release of all time, "Whole Lotta Love" (#4, December 1969), was recorded in L.A., and the mixing process for the album took two days in London. It epitomizes the Zeppelin formula: a driving, sexually oriented rocker featuring the carnal-screamer Plant and guitar-innovator Page. In this tune Page's guitar ranges from edgy, Clapton-like blues—Page had switched to a Gibson Les Paul from the 1958 Telecaster given to him by Jeff Beck—to the swirling sound pastiche reminiscent of Hendrix. The song is also full of not-so-subtle sexual double entendres, no doubt a delight to Zeppelin's largely adolescent male audience. During the chaotic guitar midsection, for example, Plant improvises concurrent orgasmic wails. A bit later he boasts, "Gonna give you every inch of my love."

Other material on the album is inconsistent. On "The Lemon Song" and "Heartbreaker" Page the studio-wise perfectionist surprisingly stumbles during the solos, reaching for riffs and speed beyond his grasp. "Moby Dick," a concert favorite, features the mandatory hard rock drum solo, characterized by Bonham's bare-handed improvisation and Baker-like double-kick drum rolls. Bonzo made no pretense about being a flashy or expert technician, stating, "I'm a simple, straight-ahead drummer and I don't try to be anything better than I am."<sup>5</sup>

The disturbing audience/critic paradox continued. The group increased in popularity, playing high-energy sets to sold-out houses while being panned as primordial head-bangers by most critics. Reviewers accused the band of taking credit for old blues songs, noting, for example, the similarity between "Whole Lotta Love" and Willie Dixon's "You Need Love." Writing a piece in the dialect of the proverbial raving and wasted teenage Zeppelin fan, *Rolling Stone* reviewer Mendelsohn implied that their music was best listened to in a narcotic trance induced by Romilar cough syrup, Novocain, strong Vietnamese marijuana, and mescaline. Zeppelin, who initially had respect for *Rolling Stone*, were now distraught and hostile—all the way to the bank.

Meanwhile, on tour the band foisted gratuitous violence on people and objects around them. At a Danish art gallery reception, Page goaded Bonham into destroying some paintings, which Grant was then forced to purchase. A free-for-all between Bonzo, Cole, and reporters then erupted. In Vancouver the road crew spotted a microphone pointing from the audience toward the band. The band was tired of competing with bootlegs (unauthorized recordings of live performances); its roadies dragged the offender backstage, where Cole smashed his equipment. The man turned out to be a Canadian government official recording concert volume levels. A frustrated Bonzo destroyed the dressing room to the tune of \$1,500.

At times Zeppelin management and band members acted like infantile gangsters, taking whatever they wanted. At the 1970 Bath Festival a band called the Flock ran later than scheduled, so Grant and the road crew commandeered the stage and halted the show by shutting off the electricity. Grant and Cole backed up these antics with their fists. When concert officials in the French city of Nantes were slow opening a backstage gate, Grant crashed it with a Mercedes-Benz. Bonham's distaste for the culinary offerings

then turned into a rampage that destroyed the three dressing-room trailers. Back at the hotel, Plant couldn't find milk for his tea so he unleashed the road crew; the toll included destroyed furniture, flooded floors, and ruined plumbing.

Off the road Page pursued his avid interest in magic and the occult. In 1970 he purchased Boleskine House, the former residence of mystic Aleister Crowley located on the shores of Loch Ness in Scotland. Crowley, an occultist and philosopher who believed that real magic was hidden in a person's will, spent his life writing poetry, climbing mountains, living openly with multiple women, and reveling in opium, cocaine, and heroin. Besides acquiring Boleskine House—its history included a beheading and a church congregation once trapped by a fire—Page collected Crowley manuscripts, books, and memorabilia.

Page's eccentricities weren't limited to his leisure time. As Stephen Davis describes in his Zeppelin biography, *Hammer of the Gods*, Page also exhibited some bizarre behavior on the road: "Jimmy spent days in his suite with the shades drawn and the candles lit. He gave several interviews sitting before a coffee table covered with numerous switchblades and ratchet knives. . . . With an armed guard sitting outside his door, Jimmy had the isolation of a monk. He spent days and nights wide awake, holding his guitar and, as he told a reporter, 'Waiting for something to come through.'" This behavior appears to reflect Page's mystical leanings, although when queried in 1975 he refused to discuss his beliefs or involvement in the occult. In fact, Page refused to align the music with any of the artistic or sociopolitical movements of the times. "I feel that some so-called progressive groups have gone too far with their personalized intellectualism of beat music. Our music is essentially emotional like the old rock stars of the past. . . . We are not going to make any political or moral statements. Our music is simply us."<sup>6</sup>

Page's simplistic interpretation of rock music history does not account for the variety of meanings intended by songwriters or interpretations by audiences of previous rock generations. Many of the classic rock masters of the fifties, and early members of the British invasion, intended to write and/or record antiauthoritarian, rebellious music. Songs like Berry's "Almost Grown" and "Roll Over Beethoven," Haley's "Rock Around the Clock," and many of the sexually daring numbers by Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard are inherently provocative, impelling some of the era's teens to exhibit prohibited behavior. In his inability to see the consequences of this early "simply emotional" music, Page cannot accept that Zeppelin's audiences may have also ascribed political or moral meaning to the band's music. Simply because they did not make explicit political statements does not mean that certain values and meaning aren't given the music by their listeners.

The rapid rise, enormous success, and increasingly bizarre behavior caused Led Zeppelin to pause in the spring of 1970. "It was a time to step back," Plant once revealed, "take stock and not get lost in it all. Zeppelin was starting to get very big and we wanted the rest of our journey to take a very level course."<sup>7</sup> Plant took Page to a childhood haunt, Bron-Y-Aur (the Golden Beast), a cottage without electricity in the remote

Welsh countryside. Enamored with the Crosby, Stills, and Nash sound and the work of California folkie Joni Mitchell, they spent evenings strumming acoustic guitars and sipping hot cider. Days found the duo wandering through the hills composing a very different Zeppelin sound.

*Led Zeppelin III*, released in fall 1970, reflected their Welsh sojourn; in addition to the normal rock fare it contained an album side dominated by acoustic instruments. The band was proud of this musical diversity, although critics and the record-buying public were not as convinced. The critics decried blues rip-offs, weak rock material, and pale imitations of California folk-rock. Although it reached #1 (October 1970), sales fell off rapidly. The band was again stung by the criticism and became even further alienated from the press.

The electric side of *Led Zeppelin III* begins with the hit single “Immigrant Song,” a tale of Viking invaders filled with the mythic lore that would become an integral part of Zeppelin’s lyrical landscape—proving that they were not simply debauched headbangers after all. “Since I’ve Been Loving You” was the finest blues-flavored cut to date. Page opens with a simple but elegant guitar introduction and later a convincing blues-early metal solo that showcases biting blues notes and fluid repetitive riffs. Riding above a relatively complex blues-rooted harmonic structure and rich texture added by Jones’s organ, Plant wails the blues with phrasing and tone similar to Janis Joplin at her best.

Although they obviously shared an affinity for folk music that came through on the acoustic-flavored side, they dabbled with only limited vision and competence. Page’s long-held interest in acoustic-guitar fingerpicking gave him a basic proficiency in the form, but not the inflated level of accomplishment cited by supporters in their praise of the band’s alleged versatility. One need only listen to British pickers like Jansch and Renbourn and Americans Leo Kottke, John Fahey, and Merle Travis for an inspiring level of accomplishment. In contrast, Zeppelin mostly mangles the folk form. On “Gallows Pole” Page tastefully adds mandolin, but his banjo playing is so poor as to be distracting—Page generously describes his banjo picking as a “cross between Pete Seeger, Earl Scruggs, and total incompetence.” The song breaks down completely as Bonham’s thudding drums lead the chase to its conclusion. “Bron-Y-Aur Stomp” fares somewhat better, a knee-stomping romp combining the stylistic attributes of Kottke and country music outlaw Waylon Jennings.

British rock fans offset the hostile media reviews by crowning Led Zeppelin England’s most popular group in the September 1970 *Melody Maker* public opinion poll—the first time in eight years the Beatles hadn’t won. The band was also able to take solace in their extraordinary commercial success; on tour they played to sell-out crowds in increasingly larger venues, and their record sales were reportedly three times that of the Rolling Stones. The writers soon returned to Bron-Y-Aur, hoping to compose a song to replace “Dazed and Confused” as a showstopper.

Page and Plant succeeded far beyond their expectations with “Stairway to Heaven.” Artistically, Page thought “Stairway to Heaven” crystallized the essence of the band. “It

had everything there and showed the band at its best . . . as a band, as a unit. . . . It was a milestone for us. Every musician wants to do something of lasting quality, something which will hold up for a long time, and I guess we did it with ‘Stairway.’”<sup>8</sup> Although the band refused to release it as a single, “Stairway to Heaven” became one of the most requested songs on FM album-oriented rock (AOR) radio. Radio programmers called it the most popular song of the decade.

Page and Plant divided the song into two dynamic levels (much like the Who’s “Behind Blue Eyes”). It began softly with Page’s acoustic guitar introduction and a long section of verses building in intensity until it erupted, three-quarters of the way through, into a full rocker. After the guitar solo, which is filled with Page’s repertoire of edgy blues riffs and premetal pull-off figures—he used the Telecaster for the first time in years—the song returned to a tasteful a cappella refrain. The obscure lyrics, sung with the voice of a yearning balladeer, reflected Plant’s interest in British and Celtic folklore and followed the quest of a mythical golden lady for her “stairway to heaven” or spiritual nirvana.

Although constantly touring, the band was nevertheless able to write and record the rest of an album’s worth of material by the spring of 1971, mixing by fall. The quality of this effort (which is untitled) reflects more time taken for studio assembly; the riff masters are also hard at work crafting recognizable hooks and phrases for rockers such as “Black Dog” and guitar and synthesizer orchestration for “Four Sticks.” The fast-paced “Rock and Roll” is pure Berry, plus some, with an eighth-note rhythmic pulse on keyboard and an assortment of guitar licks. “Going to California” is Page and Plant’s idealized longing for the southern California Topanga Canyon dream life and pays homage to one of Page’s idols, singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell. With this album the acoustic material, particularly “Stairway to Heaven” and “Going to California,” begins to make sense—the songs are more carefully crafted, offering a better integration of music, subject matter, and voice than on previous material.

Serious controversy developed between the band and Atlantic Records over the album cover. Zeppelin insisted that there be no identifying marks on the outside cover or inside the jacket. At the top of the liner sleeve appeared four symbols, each band member choosing one. To find the band name or songs listed one had to look on the label itself. Tired of media condemnation, Page decided to symbolically let the music speak for itself and won the dispute with Atlantic. (In fact, the label had little leverage, as Page refused to turn over the master tapes.) The album became known by many names: *Untitled*, *The Runes*, *Led Zeppelin IV*, and *Zoso* (for Page’s symbol).

During the years 1972 to 1975 Led Zeppelin owned the road. Their tours continued to set attendance and dollar records, due in part to the visionary tactics of Peter Grant. For the 1972 tour Zeppelin decided to offer local promoters 10 percent of the gross instead of the more typical 40 or 50 percent. The band rented the stadium venues, created the promotional plan, and hired local promoters to carry it out. The risk paid off. Touring at the same time as the Rolling Stones, Zeppelin played to larger crowds; still, the Stones garnered all the positive press. For the 1973 American tour, when *Houses of the*

*Holy* was released, Zeppelin hired a new publicist and a sound and light company called Showco; the light show, which utilized balls, revolving reflectors, smoke bombs, and cannons, was considered top-notch. They closed their American concerts with classic rock and rockabilly tunes such as Holly's "Peggy Sue," Ricky Nelson's "Hello Mary Lou," and Elvis gems "That's All Right (Mama)" and "Heartbreak Hotel."

On the 1973 tour in Tampa, Florida, Zeppelin broke the Beatles' eight-year-old attendance record for a single headliner, drawing 56,000 fans (a thousand more than the Beatles drew to Shea Stadium in 1965). They also outgrossed the Fab Four by \$8,000, taking in \$309,000 for the one show. Although Zeppelin had the comfort of touring the country in their luxurious charter "funjet," named the *Starship*, by the time they reached New York and the last three shows at Madison Square Garden they were totally exhausted. These are the concerts captured on the film *The Song Remains the Same* and the original soundtrack album released in 1976.

The 1975 tour was even larger. Touring behind the double-album *Physical Graffiti*, the band crisscrossed the United States to even more gigantic crowds. In New York they attracted writer William S. Burroughs, a kindred spirit and occultist who once likened Zeppelin's music to Moroccan trance music of the Jajaika tribe. But music was not the only source of trances on the 1975 tour, as Page and certain other bandmates reportedly added heroin to their lifestyles, a habit that would increase and eventually cause real problems on subsequent tours.

In August 1975 Plant and his family suffered an automobile accident in Greece; his wife, Maureen, almost died. Bonham's periods of violent insanity, brought on by heavy drinking and drug abuse, caused publicist Danny Goldberg to comment, "Bonzo was a large adult with the emotions of a six-year-old child, and an artistic license to indulge in any sort of infantile or destructive behavior that amused him."<sup>9</sup> On September 24, 1980, Bonham consumed forty measures of vodka over a seventeen-hour period to celebrate Zeppelin's pending American tour. His death the next morning was similar to Hendrix's; Bonham vomited, aspirated, and never woke up. Zeppelin, unlike the Who without Keith Moon, did not survive Bonham's death.

However, their fusion of hard rock, mutated blues, and the hedonistic-sexist bent of the seventies created the musical foundation for subsequent hard rock and heavy metal stylings. "Led Zeppelin was widely perceived as a group of bombastic showboaters with a heavy beat and pseudo-profound lyrics," wrote critic Ken Tucker in 1986, "but, it is now clear that the band changed the landscape against which rock is played. And so the basic formula for heavy metal was codified . . . high-pitched male tenor vocals singing lyrics that ideally combined mysticism, sexism, and hostility" and blues chords.<sup>10</sup>

Page's solo-guitar style, use of effects, and studio layering also frame the genre. Hard rock of the sixties (Cream, Hendrix, Iron Butterfly, Vanilla Fudge, and others) provided Page with the impetus to create a guitar-based Zeppelin and mold an instrumental solo style fusing blues ideas with Hendrix's sonic orientation. Page created an inventive mixture of these elements and speedy repetitive pull-off-based riffs. Page generally aban-

doned the long improvisational guitar solos in favor of more concentrated, efficient efforts—possibly a result of Page’s studio-based early years—and favored speed and repeated riffs over the emotionality of the blues. Unfortunately, the application of this trend has led to two decades of guitarists who generally lack an education in, and emotional understanding of, the blues and who substitute speed and technique for taste and simplicity.

Another shift from previous hard rock styles was Bonham’s drumming. Though he adapted some elements from Moon, Baker, and Mitchell—such as the drum solo and double-kick fills—Bonham veered away from their flashy, technique-oriented style and toward a more simplistic, pounding timekeeping. Most metal drummers followed suit. Contrary to Page’s protestations, the group did maintain some affinity for, and take elements from, relevant sixties styles. The pretentious lyrics swathed in Celtic lore and mysticism reflected the previous decade’s folksy ramblings of groups like Pentangle and Fairport Convention. The healthy dose of anger and hostility is in part attributable to the onstage ravings of the Who, MC5, the Stooges, and others.

Zeppelin contemporaries added weight to the heavy metal formula. Americans Blue Cheer (San Francisco), Blue Öyster Cult (New York), and British bands like Black Sabbath (with lead singer Ozzy Osbourne) and Deep Purple were in the game early and covered the volume spectrum, from loud to thunderous. They proffered macho rock for male teens and garnered negative critical reviews similar to Zeppelin’s—and also laughed all the way to the bank. By the midseventies the Zeppelin formula dominated the hard end of the rock spectrum.

Some critics incorrectly accused hard rock—heavy metal bands of sounding the same; however, the stylistic differences were mostly in how much as opposed to what. The formula called for at least one lead-guitar wizard, a lead singer able to emote in the higher registers (and look good in tight pants), a forceful but not too flashy drummer, and a bassist who was often the best musician in the group and a decent harmony vocalist. Lyrics usually expressed adolescent anguish about situations involving the unholy trinity—sex, drugs, and rock and roll—plus a healthy dose of antiauthoritarian, rebellious sentiment (often transmitted during live performances).

Alice Cooper (a band name adopted by lead singer Vince Furnier) was known for its provocative theatricality. Among other things, Furnier generally donned a boa snake for a boa wrap. Kiss took theater a little further, wearing greasypaint makeup and platform shoes and spitting fire and blood, as smoke and firebombs exploded around them. Singer Ozzy Osbourne, whose post-Black Sabbath band employed noted guitar wizard Randy Rhoads (who was killed in a crash at age twenty-five), took it one step further, using images of animal mutilation to advance his career.

Some bands softened musical elements of the hard rock—heavy metal formula on their way to substantial mainstream success. Zeppelin buddies Bad Company scored major success, as did New Hampshire’s Aerosmith (with Jagger-lookalike front man Stephen Tyler), Boston’s Boston (guitarist-composer-electronics wizard Tom Scholz

layered sounds in his basement studio), Chicago's Styx, San Francisco's Journey (with Santana veterans Rolie and Schon), and Englishmen—New Yorkers Foreigner. Seattle's Heart featured two sisters, Nancy and Ann Wilson, more acoustic guitar, lyrical sensitivity, and less onstage posturing. The Canadian power trio Rush, whose mysticism took more of a sci-fi bent, was known for carefully crafted studio productions.

These bands, plus many others that go unmentioned, made up the Zeppelin-rooted hard rock—heavy metal end of the seventies commercial rock spectrum. As this genre evolved it tended to get even harder and faster, with lyrics emphasizing escapist/rebellious/sexist content in an attempt to deal with an increasingly violent, troubled life experience and the fading of the American Dream. However, this was only one segment of the popular music audience and only one route along the rock landscape. There were teenage women and a large group of postadolescents reaching their thirties who wanted and expected music containing different lyrical and musical values, such as songs emphasizing melody, harmony, and more intricate rhythms and lyrics with less braggadocio and more substance.

These elements had their roots in the music of the Beatles, Dylan, folk-rock, and the San Francisco Sound that encouraged experimentation and a focus on society. Some was still available from the musical dinosaurs who roamed the landscape, putting out product at regular intervals. However, the conservative political environment, conservative music-industry policies and radio programming, and artist self-censorship—the common practice of artists writing solely for commercial success or to please labels—combined to reduce creative experimentation or expression of controversial ideas. Musical creativity focused on the studio and the utilization of its rapidly developing technology; the voices of political and cultural dissent faded to a whisper.

Art rock and progressive rock became common terms to describe British bands like Pink Floyd, Yes, King Crimson, and Genesis, who created lush, well-orchestrated music while expounding on the world through lyrics. More often than not, allegorical tales were woven with strange and sometimes menacing fairy-tale characters. Art rock was structurally complex when compared to blues-rooted hard rock contemporaries, and it featured a sound collage of keyboards, synthesizers, and studio-layered instruments.

Pink Floyd, who began as the darlings of the London psychedelic underground, shifted gears when leader Syd Barrett lost touch with reality and was replaced by guitarist David Gilmour. Floyd created two major lengthy works, the 1973 song-cycle *The Dark Side of the Moon*, which remained on the top-200 LP charts for fifteen years, and the two-record Roger Waters—conceived epic *The Wall*. Live performances of *The Wall* featured the construction and destruction of a gigantic brick wall during the show. Yes produced lushly orchestrated works with a revolving lineup that included guitarist Steve Howe, keyboardist Rick Wakeman, and drummer Bill Bruford. King Crimson relied on the considerable talents of guitarist Robert Fripp. Peter Gabriel began Genesis in 1967 with Mike Rutherford on bass and guitar and Tony Banks on keyboards; Phil Collins joined on drums in 1970 and, after Gabriel departed in 1975, emerged as the driving force.

Other popular artists of the period attained the large sound without the artistic pretensions. Elton John (born Reginald Dwight) played piano in Long John Baldry's R&B band before meeting lyricist Bernie Taupin, who was working as a pop songwriter; he cut his first album, *Empty Sky*, in 1969. Beginning with the 1972 *Honky Chateau* (with singles "Rocket Man" and "Honky Cat"), Elton John scored six straight #1 albums, decorating live shows with increasingly outlandish costumes and sets. Vocalist Linda Ronstadt, with the assistance of producers John Boylan and Peter Asher, molded a career interpreting a variety of classic rock, folk, country, Motown, and contemporary material.

Fleetwood Mac began in 1967 as a blues-revival group led by former Mayall guitarist Peter Green. The band was named for the rhythm section of drummer Mick Fleetwood and bassist John McVie—known for a distinctive, elementary, yet forceful rhythmic style. After many personnel shifts, only Fleetwood, McVie, and McVie's wife, Christine (who had been performing as Christine Perfect in her own band Chicken Shack), were left. Having moved to Los Angeles, they auditioned and hired singer-songwriters Lindsay Buckingham and Stevie Nicks and recorded the gem *Fleetwood Mac* (#1, August 1975). Their follow-up, *Rumours* (#1, February 1977), was recorded as relationships between the McVies and Buckingham and Nicks fell apart, but it nevertheless sold 15 million copies worldwide, stayed at #1 for thirty-one weeks, and was on the American charts for more than 130 weeks.

Bands fusing large combos and horn sections also maintained some popularity through the era. Chicago, who released their first album as Chicago Transit Authority, was the most successful, scoring five #1 releases in a row (*Chicago V* through *IX*) in the midseventies. Blood, Sweat, and Tears and the more funky Oakland-based Tower of Power (boasting the studio monster horn section known as the Tower of Power) were also well received.

By the late 1970s certain important economic and artistic trends were affecting the way music was created and sold. Record-industry consolidation was continuing at a steady pace; fewer labels, owned by larger corporations, were selling a greater percentage of the product. The ramifications of this trend were enormous. Since rock music radio programming was also highly concentrated in the hands of a few major consultants, and because smaller markets took their cues from the larger ones, AOR radio-station playlists were becoming shorter and shorter and more tightly controlled. These facts conspired to make it very difficult for musicians, other than those signed to the top labels, to become popular nationwide.

At the same time, major labels were in the process of pruning their rosters of the acts that could not guarantee significant future profits—a consequence of lawyer and accountant leadership and bottom-line thinking. The strategy of the major labels thus consisted of signing proven dinosaurs to lengthy contracts, with the rationale that these artists could be safely relied upon to sell each release. Should new artists or musical styles be needed, they could turn to the industry's farm system, the independent labels. The indies provided a place for new talent to be discovered and nurtured. This was a shift for the

major, who would previously sign and release ten new or unknown acts themselves, hoping that one would succeed and cover the losses of marketing the rest. Now, they signed only what they believed to be sure things. The ramifications of this philosophy were considerable.

Record labels and radio programmers took fewer chances on unknown talent, relying on known quantities to generate profits. The newer artists they did sign tended to sound a lot like other profitable acts, thus shrinking the aural and lyrical landscape. When listeners became bored with the same old music and infuriated at record prices that had jumped two dollars in nearly as many years, they began to react. The burgeoning cassette technology (which allowed for home taping), coupled with other economic variables plus the loss of interest on the part of certain (generally older) segments of the listening public, caused a fall in product sales in the late 1970s. The number of units sold dropped for the first time in 1979 and didn't reach the 1978 peak again until 1988. Dollar figures for gross sales took until 1984 to surpass the 1978 levels—an event that would have taken longer had it not been for the introduction of the costly compact disc (CD).

This tightly controlled, economically oriented, financially conservative environment provided the context for the fourth rock and roll explosion. Against a backdrop of lush, studio-focused rock music, with lyrics lacking significant societal commentary, there erupted a raw, primal, reactive form called punk rock. Its in-your-face mentality, primitive musicality, and relevant lyrics eventually forced popular culture, rock music, and the industry to sit up and take notice. The story of punk and its effect on popular music is the subject of our next chapter.

# PUNK ROCK

Buzzsaw Bravado  
and Shock Politics

## Chapter 17



*The Sex Pistols*

We took the rock sound into a psychotic world and narrowed it down into a straight line of energy. In an era of progressive rock, with its complexities and counterpoints, we had a perspective of non-musicality and intelligence that took over from musicianship.

—Tommy Ramone, drummer for the Ramones, quoted in Dave Laing's *One Chord Wonders*

God save the Queen

She ain't no human being

There is no future in England's dreaming.

—"God Save the Queen," the Sex Pistols (1977)

Their clothes were elaborately contrived to make the wearer appear as terrifyingly repugnant as possible, alluding to anything that would induce immediate outrage in the eye of the beholder. . . . Hair shorn close to the skull and dyed any color so long as it didn't look natural, spiked up with Vaseline; noses, ears, cheeks, lips, and other extremities pierced with a plethora of safety pins, chains and dangling insignia; ripped and torn jumble sale shirts, strangled with a thin tie and mangled with predictable graffiti of song titles, perversions or Social Observations; black leather wrist bands and dog collars studded with silver spikes sometimes with leashes attached.

—A 1977 description of punk rock fans at London's punk venue the Roxy, by Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons in *The Boy Looked at Johnny: The Obituary of Rock and Roll*

THE SUMMER OF 1976 was a hot one in London. The British economy was struggling as unemployment climbed and violence exploded in the ghettos. Into this turbulent environment swaggered the early punk rock bands, led by the Sex Pistols, trashing British sensibilities with gobs of musical distortion, shocking appearances, and spewed invective. By the time the Pistols had disintegrated less than two years later, numerous others had joined in the fun that would change the face of rock music forever. The mainstream acts would eventually adopt many elements from punk music, including lyrics, stance, and style. In so doing they rejuvenated the music industry's sagging fortunes. The subsequent amalgam, which became known as new wave, would be a popular mainstay of the eighties.

Punk was a heterogeneous style, comprising a complex mélange of ingredients and orientations, spread across a spectrum of artists. The music was generally driven by a frantic eighth-note pulse carried by the entire ensemble. Words were spewed forth by vocalists unconstrained by previous notions of pitch or melody. The majority of lyrics reflected feelings toward a disintegrating and corrupt society and the plight of subcultural compatriots. The music and lyrics were imbedded in a confrontational stance that reflected varying degrees of righteous anger, performance technique, avant-garde artistic exploration of shock value, and intent to bypass the usual music-production institutions.

The punks' music, lyrical worldview, stance, and style (clothes and behavior)—the elements of rock's fourth major explosion—had roots on both sides of the Atlantic. Groups on the fringes of sixties American rock contributed heavily. Michigan rockers the Stooges played with such an unabashed enthusiasm and minimalist musical orientation that selections from their early recordings sound remarkably like seventies punk. Lead singer Iggy Pop's (James Osterburg) behavior was self-destructive and shocking. He was sometimes so stoned and intoxicated while onstage that he stumbled about ranting and raving, threw up on the audience, and fell off the stage. Detroit-based MC5 exhibited a combative, cultural-activist stance and monotonous driving lead vocals by Rob Tyner that were also reflected in punk.

New York's Velvet Underground provided their own shocking contrast to the prevailing pop-rock sensibilities of the day. Under the watchful eye of artist Andy Warhol, the band—touring as a part of his *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* mixed media show and playing at his East Village Electric Circus venue—turned out their otherworldly version of the sixties. Rather than follow the trend toward studio-derived, complex musicality, the Underground, as they became known, viewed less as better. Lead vocalist Lou Reed (born Louis Firkbank) crooned his stories in a limited vocal range and inexact attack, a pioneer of punk's vocal drone. The strummed guitars and rhythm section emphasized sparsity and intensity over harmony and musical accomplishment. John Cale, a former Eastman music student, added tension with suspended notes and eclectic avant-garde solos on viola.

The Underground's appeal—they had a small but avid following—was also derived from Reed's chronicles of the underside of East Village life in the sixties. Absent were the flower children and euphoria of psychoactive enlightenment, replaced by personal narratives of heroin addiction, ghetto drug connections, and sexual perversity. These shocking explorations of self-destructive behavior tested society's cultural sensibilities; they also didn't have much of an impact on the rock mainstream. However, Reed (along with Iggy Pop) was taken under David Bowie's wing, had a hit album, *Transformer*, and a hit single about sexual experimentation, "Walk on the Wild Side" (#16, March 1973). The Underground and Reed were important punk forebears, creating musical, topical, and stylistic foundations upon which subsequent artists, and eventually the punk genre, stood.

The New York Dolls adopted the lack of musical pretension and group intensity and added transvestite costuming, glamour makeup, Jagger-like stage posing by lead singer David Johansen, and stage lurching by guitarist Johnny Thunders. Their no-frills repertoire included “Pills” and “Trash,” and they were popular in the burgeoning Lower Manhattan club scene (CBGB’s, for example) of the midseventies. There, they demonstrated an I-couldn’t-care-less attitude. Punk’s direct musical antecedents, the Ramones, were four leather-jacketed high school dropouts from Forest Hills, Queens. They redefined music as a sparse, intense, three-minute buzzsaw blast dominated by eighth-note unanimity from strummed, distorted guitar, bass, and drums. This became the musical basis for the Sex Pistols. (The Ramones reportedly played thirty-three songs in a single one-hour performance.) Like Lou Reed, the Ramones adopted stage names (Joey, Johnny, Richie—replaced by Dee Dee—and Tommy)—all ending with the surname Ramone.

Briton David Bowie (born David Jones) was one of punk’s most influential ancestors. Bowie, whose schooling and training included art, theater, mime, and music, was a master at creating stories and characters that both symbolized and became reality. Bowie’s incarnation as Ziggy Stardust in *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1972) embodied the struggle to succeed in the music business and society. The man who had appeared in a dress on the cover of a previous album was transformed into a cosmic traveler. Bowie’s expressions of alienation worked at two different, sometimes competing, levels: His costumed personae were sometimes symbolic, shocking statements, while his feelings were taken as a realistic expression of alienation. This duality of pretense and reality side by side also came to exist in punk.<sup>1</sup>

There are two major explanations for the emergence and in-your-face nature of punk music in midseventies England. They are contrasting but do not have to be seen as exclusive; combining them provides a plausible rationale for the birth of punk. One theory cites the deteriorating British economy as punk’s major impetus. Under this scenario, a growing underclass of disaffected youth was created by the lack of economic and educational opportunities in Britain. Jobs paying living wages were unavailable, and the schools with class-based entrance systems forced many working-class youths into a dead-end education. These increasingly disillusioned youth faced a future of subsistence living within the British welfare system (the dole). The youth saw it as no future, and so they struck back. It is possible to view the music, the reactive lyrics, and the antiauthoritarian nature of their stance as reflective of these conditions.

Another interpretation of punk music places much of the impetus, especially for the style and stance, on the art-school origins of punk mentors and rock band members. Simon Frith and Howard Horne argue that numerous band members attended art school—the Pistols’ Glen Matlock; the Clash’s Joe Strummer, Paul Simonon, and Mick Jones; punkette Siouxsie Sue; and Adam Ant, to name just a few. In addition, many important managers (like the Pistols’ Malcolm McLaren) and other genre businessmen brought their art-school backgrounds to the mix. Art-school dialogue about shock value,

performance as art, situationist theories of subversion, and fashion were manifested in punk rock. What artists wore, the material they performed, how they performed and what they said through lyrics, and audience communication during shows were the function of aesthetic considerations. To them, “punk rock was the ultimate art school music movement.”

Both arguments are mirrored in the events that brought about the rise of punk in midseventies Britain. Against the background of the studio-centered rock that dominated the charts—Elton John, Led Zeppelin, Chicago, Abba, and others—a small but enthusiastic group of “pub rock” bands belted out R&B and classic rock covers along with some originals. For them, rock’s stadium-size concert extravaganzas had lost touch with the music and its meaning. Thus, these disaffected rockers returned to the intimate, sweaty pubs where it all began in the early sixties. These bands were also critical of music-industry giants and the way they conducted business. Pub rock’s success prompted the establishment of small record labels that initially distributed records through a network of oldies specialty shops. Dave Laing credits pub rock with creating viable venues and the alternative network of labels and distribution used by transitional punk rockers. Some band members, such as Joe Strummer of the 101ers, simply stepped over the line from pub to punk.

Sex was a shop where the era’s musicians could find the latest fashions; it was an underground mecca run by music impresario Malcolm McLaren and clothes designer Vivienne Westwood. The store’s name was controversial, its designer clothing shocking—walking billboards intended to outrage society’s elders and goad them into states of apoplexy and sputtering pomposity. Anatomically correct figures on T-shirts were to be worn with appropriate leather and bondage pants joined at the knees. But Sex was more than a store, it was also a scene. Regular customers and employees were musicians and future players. McLaren, who had managed the New York Dolls for a brief period of time before their breakup, encouraged a bunch of former skinheads to form a band they called the Swankers.

Swanker bassist Glen Matlock, drummer Paul Cook, guitarist Steve Jones, and mentor McLaren were looking for a lead singer when John Lydon showed up at the store. Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons relay a marvelous description of the scene:

Mal licked lascivious lips when he clocked the lad’s sadistically mutilated Pink Floyd t-shirt with the words I HATE scribbled in a biro trembling with furious loathing above the Dodo’s moniker. John was not a pretty sight; when Mother Nature was handing out the good looks he’d been at the back of the queue, and by the time he’d got to the counter all She had left was meningitis, weak eyes, teeth held together by steel rods, stunted growth and a permanent sinus. He also boasted to having the pick of the piles, which he claimed dangled down his inside legs and required frequent pruning with a razor blade.<sup>2</sup>

The Swankers invited Lydon to join and formed the Sex Pistols in the summer of 1975. Their first gig was at St. Martin's College of Art that November.

Nineteen seventy-six saw the rise of punk rock, with the Sex Pistols as the most visible proponent. Bands were formed by former pub rockers and assorted street youth, who saw the opportunity for expression despite minimal musical proficiency. The Damned, with members Rat Scabies and Captain Sensible, released punk's first album and were known to shed clothing during their performances. The Clash formed that July and appeared with the Pistols at the 100 Club's summer punk festival. The Buzzcocks, the Vibrators, Generation X (with lead singer Billy Idol), Siouxsie and the Banshees, and the Slits all formed and had some success that year.

As quickly as venues opened for this new underground sound, fights would erupt at gigs, and the bands (even including the Pistols) would be banished. Bands were in the process of developing new modes of communicating with their audiences and also breaking down the audience/musician barrier. In a solution that was true to punk's aggressive stance and shock value, band members sometimes incited the crowd, which responded with flying bodies, cans, and gobbers (spit). Typical of this behavior was Johnny Rotten's epithet to an April 1976 audience: "Bet you don't hate us as much as we hate you!"<sup>3</sup> If punk artists sought to shock and incite their audience, as well as straight society, the ability to get an aggressive response out of the audience was a measure of potency, effectiveness, and bonding.

Other responses to the music and stage exhortations came in the form of dance, or what Robert Christgau called "airborne playfight."<sup>4</sup> With working-class macho ethos, audience members launched themselves onto the dance floor, stopping every four to five minutes for a thirty-second punch-out with fellow punkers. Others practiced the pogo, a dance introduced by Rotten's mate John Beverly (soon to change his name to Sid Vicious) at a Manchester Free Trade Hall gig in July 1976. Dancers resembled a mass of sweaty pogo sticks, bouncing and bashing one another with sinister delight. In this turbulent world of epithet and physicality, band and audience cemented their relationship as members of the same community. Interestingly, this was similar to that of sixties San Francisco bands, but the medium was aggressive and angry as opposed to philosophical and warm.

Alternative industry institutions sprang up alongside the growing musical genre. Record labels were developed to record and promote punk bands. Chiswick and Stiff, with their origins in pub rock, signed punk acts; Step Forward, Fast Product, Factory, Beggars Banquet, Rough Trade, and multitudes of others formed and followed suit. Some continued the pub rock practice of independent distribution, bypassing the majors and the economics of big-business sales and promotions. Others signed distribution contracts with industry giants EMI, WEA, and CBS. Local scene promoters also published fan magazines (called fanzines), covering what the band Desperate Bicycles termed Xerox music.<sup>5</sup> These fanzines—sporting names like *Sniffin' Glue* (by fanzine pioneer Mark P.),

*Hangin' Around*, *Jolt*, *White Riot*, and *These Things*—became the most observant and sympathetic commentators on the punk scene.

By the end of 1976 the Sex Pistols had signed a record contract with England's largest label, EMI, and recorded and released their first single, "Anarchy in the UK." The notion of playing in the corporate-rock ballpark was anathema to the punk players and caused all sorts of emotional and economic turmoil. The situation became such that the industry felt it was possible, in fact necessary, to commodify artists whose personal and performance dynamic included shocking and overtly aggressive behavior, language, and dress. The majors didn't necessarily like the music, but they knew it would sell.

The situation came to a head in three months. "Anarchy in the UK" contained the outfit's typical blast at tradition and authority. Rotten growled lyrics designed to put fear and loathing in the hearts of upstanding citizens. They contained buzzwords like *anti-Christ*, *anarchy*, and *destroy* and visions of spike-haired, self-mutilated, booted punks roaming the urban landscape bent on destruction. The music was not simplistic three-chord or one-chord idiocy, as journalists painted it. Although the verses contained the basic I-IV-V (plus ii and iii passing chords), the instrumental solos were played over the basic plus II, iii, and biv chords.

The rumor that the Sex Pistols didn't record many of their songs themselves is bolstered by this music. Although I have no authoritative information, Paul Cook's lack of drumming experience is not reflected in the drummer's precise timekeeping and fills. The guitar and bass are played with similar precision. It is possible that Matlock, who had previous experience on his instrument, was responsible for the surprisingly melodic bass part.

"Anarchy in the UK" sold 50,000 copies and reached the top-40. The print media and television had fewer vested interests in promoting punk rock than did the record industry. Mainstream newspapers were most likely to use terms such as *crazed*, *pathological*, *racist*, and *savage* to describe the music and its players. On December 1, 1976, the Pistols were interviewed live on the British news magazine show *Today*. Host Bill Grundy's not-so-subtle attempts to incite the Pistols finally paid off; he urged Steve Jones to "say something outrageous." Jones responded, "You dirty bastard." Grundy exhorted, "Go on, again," and Jones threw out, "You dirty fucker" and "You fucking rotter."<sup>6</sup> The next day's headline stories contained the U.K. press screaming with outrage over the Pistols' behavior. An upcoming U.K. concert tour, with the Clash scheduled to open, shrunk from nineteen to three dates. EMI chairman Sir John Read apologized, but pressure from a variety of sources, including other label artists, allowed EMI to drop the Pistols from its roster. The band received 30,000 pounds in compensation.

March 1977 was a busy month for the Pistols: Rotten's mate, the barely musical Sid Vicious, was recruited to play bass, and the McCartney-lovin' Glen Matlock was out. The Pistols also signed to A&M Records, but three days later they were dropped, receiving 75,000 pounds in compensation. Thus, in the space of three months the band had accrued

approximately US\$250,000 for being kicked off two record labels. Not bad for a group of malcontents.

Virgin Records became the third label to sign the band. They released “God Save the Queen” in May 1977. The negative publicity surrounding punk and the Pistols had caused the band to be banned from performing at most venues. (They would tour later in the year billed as the Spots.) “God Save the Queen” caused further problems. Its release was coordinated with Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver Jubilee, a celebration of her twenty-five-year reign as England’s beloved monarch. However, the lyrics on the new release mocked the queen and labeled her regime as mindless and fascist, and they were considered under the circumstances to have gone far beyond the boundaries of good taste. The Sex Pistols had entered the zone of sacrilege. The tune was banned from most radio playlists and was unavailable at major record stores. Yet “God Save the Queen” sold 2 million copies and was listed, signified in the racks by a blank piece of paper, at #2 on record store charts.

“God Save the Queen” contains more than early rock’s three-chord structure. Its verse includes a minor ii and iii over and above the basic I-IV-V chords, and the repetitive blues-based guitar solo is played over a vi, II, V progression. While not the techno-pop harmonic structure of material from art-rock bands like Pink Floyd, Yes, and Genesis, this song and those appearing on the subsequent album, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols*, are harmonically more complex than most blues and classic rock.

The fact that their songs contain some harmonic complexity (a chord pattern containing more than blues basics) is only one indication that punk rock was not written and played by musical illiterates. Tom Carson wrote of the Ramones that they “define the music in its purest terms: which was both primitive and revisionist.”<sup>7</sup> This is only partially true of the Sex Pistols on record. Their musicianship is a cut above that of the Ramones. Their playing is relatively precise and under control (the stop and fill on “God Save the Queen” and the cleanliness of the rhythm section on “Anarchy in the UK” are good examples). As Dave Laing points out, the guitarist had mastered the effects of distortion, reverb, and delay to play gritty, distorted guitar under control. On record, even the guitarist’s buzzsaw drone is deft at times. The bass lines, especially on earlier material, defy the tonic-note throb, displaying more melodic passages.

Two musical elements do reinforce the back-to-basics feeling of Pistols punk: the monotonous, numbing quality of the eighth-note rhythmic throb carried by the bass, guitar, and drummer’s right hand; and Rotten’s limited-range vocal style. Each contribute to the music’s droning quality and represent punk’s defiance of the complex-is-best approach that prevailed over that era’s musical mainstream. The relatively simple chord pattern, droning music, and nonmelodic vocals stood as statements against rock musical convention. Other songs from *Never Mind the Bollocks*, which was released in December 1977, were musically similar to “God Save the Queen” and attacked a variety of targets and sensibilities, including former record company EMI, Germany and the Holocaust, self-serving young Britons, and, of course, the musical and cultural mainstreams.

In time, the Sex Pistols themselves became targets of punk's violent attitude against the establishment. Rotten was slashed by razor-wielding attackers; Cook was beaten with iron bars as he emerged from the Tube (subway). By now their performing options were limited, the band had lost its most proficient songwriter in Matlock, and Vicious was feeding a healthy heroin habit (courtesy of his American girlfriend, Nancy Spungen). Under these circumstances they careened through a January 1978 U.S. tour. After their January 14 date at Winterland in San Francisco, Rotten left, Vicious overdosed, and Jones and Cook, following McLaren's instructions, flew to Rio to record with Great Train Robber Ronald Biggs. Johnny Rotten would later revert to his given name, John Lydon, and front a new band, called Public Image Ltd. (PiL). After attempting to make it solo, Vicious was charged with brutally murdering Spungen in their room at New York's Chelsea Hotel in October 1978 (see the 1989 movie *Sid and Nancy*). The next February he died of the effects of a heroin overdose. Steve Jones maintained a musical career as a studio guitarist; Paul Cook faded from the scene.

The Sex Pistols were the seminal punk group, shock rockers assaulting the strictures and conventions of mainstream society. For them it was fun and games. Other bands and artists traveled similar paths, diverging from the Pistols model at certain junctures to produce their own punk parables. The Clash functioned as an alter ego for the Pistols. Inspired by the Pistols, the Clash were also personally reckless and abusive, but as a group they were more artistically thoughtful, politically insightful, and musically creative. The Clash even endured commercial success, fought and won music-industry battles, and found life after punk.

The Clash began in July 1976 after pub rocker Joe Strummer saw the Pistols and prevailed upon former London SS members Mick Jones (guitar) and Paul Simonon (bass) to form a new band. Drummer Terry Chimes (later replaced by Topper Headon) rounded out the band. The Clash signed with manager Bernie Rhodes, a former McLaren assistant. They opened a number of shows for the Pistols and were signed to CBS Records in January 1977 for 100,000 pounds as the majors rushed to find punk acts. By spring the Clash's first single, "White Riot" (#38), and first album, *The Clash* (#12), were on the British charts.

There was something about the Clash, at least on record, that transcended the line drawn by the Pistols. Without abandoning punk's simplicity and aggressiveness, the Clash displayed more musical literacy. Their ensemble of two guitars gave the songs more texture; Simonon abandoned the eighth-note, tonic drone for more bouncy, syncopated, melodic bass parts; and Chimes used more cymbals and fills to color his drumming. As instrumentalists they were better and their musical choices were more interesting—the little touches like the harp and Cropper-like soul-guitar fills on "Garageland" and claps and stops on "Remote Control" are indicative of this approach.

The Clash also had an interest in reggae, the Jamaican import favored by Britain's West Indian working class. The band recorded with famed reggae producer Scratch Perry



*The Clash*

(“Complete Control”), recorded his song “Police and Thieves,” and also added reggae rhythmic elements to other tunes. Laing asserts that punk’s fascination with reggae ran deeper than the music. Reggae’s Rastafarians were seen as an alienated, oppressed community who had successfully been able to channel their rage into a music that combined the very personal with the political. They were its living essence with no compromise—harassed by the police, forced to live in untenable conditions, yet markedly proud and visible in their dreadlocks (long uncut hair) and camouflage clothing.

Some punk bands admired reggae from afar, adopting a symbolic stance or even some musical elements; others, like the Clash, went further and became actively involved in Britain’s racial politics. With skinheads and British Nazis (under the banner of the National Front) conducting forays into minority communities, the Clash and others (X-Ray Spex and Sham 69 being two) participated in concerts sponsored by Rock against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League. Paradoxically, punk’s anti-everything stance attracted young supporters of the rightist organizations; some punk groups didn’t care, but others rejected this audience.

Basic differences surfaced between punk’s two major proponents. Whereas the Pistols stayed within a limited musical framework, the Clash were consciously assimilating in-

fluences from external styles and rapidly expanding their musical boundaries. The Clash, through lyrics and social deeds, chose to present their criticism of imperialism, racism, and an abusive economic system in concrete personal and political terms, as opposed to the unconscious, undirected rage of the Pistols' shocking stories and situations. The Pistols were content to strike out and expose; the Clash wanted to have some impact on their audience.

To a chorus of claims that they had sold out punk, the Clash released their third album in January 1980. Chosen in 1989 as the #1 album of the eighties by *Rolling Stone*, *London Calling* contains more breadth in music and topics than previous works; as punk's audience was diminishing, the Clash was expanding beyond punk's limiting borders. A number of styles grace this double-album release: swing ("Jimmy Jazz"), Berry-style classic rock ("Brand New Cadillac"), Bo Diddley beat ("Hateful"), reggae-influenced rock ("Guns of Brixton" and "Revolution Rock"), and even a Springsteen-like song ("The Card Cheat," with familiar keyboards, sax, and lyric meter). Most songs contain social and political commentary, including the especially poignant "Spanish Bombs" (about Spain's civil war and contemporary struggles), "Guns of Brixton" (asking, "When the police kick in the door, will you die with your hands on your head or a gun in your hand?"), and the potential nuclear hell and ice-age holocaust of the title cut.

The Clash toured the United States, and their opening acts reflected some of their music's influences: Sam and Dave, Screamin' Jay Hawkins, Bo Diddley, former Dolls singer David Johansen, and American punks the Cramps. In a practical application of their politics, the Clash negotiated with CBS (even giving up some of their own royalties) to keep the price of the two-record set just above the single-disc price. The band returned to the United States later in 1980, where at Electric Ladyland Studio they recorded the three-disc successor, called *Sandinista* (named to celebrate the recent success of the leftist revolution in Nicaragua). Although both previous albums broke the top 40, their 1982 effort, *Combat Rock* (#7, June 1982), and the single release "Rock the Casbah" (#8), propelled the Clash into the American mainstream. Within a few years, however, the strains within proved too severe, and, after accusations of selling out were hurled among band members, the group disintegrated.

The vast artistic territory between the Pistols and the Clash was populated by a colorful collection of punk rockers. Some went down with the ship before 1980, clinging loyally to the true stuff; others made the transition, along with the Clash, into new wave. Punk was clearly reactive—to popular music and the music industry, to the economic and cultural status quo, and even to members of the punk community itself. Punk's intention was to disrupt the everyday life of the established order in an attempt to expose society's oppressive nature. The resulting actions—shocking, rude, and obscene behavior; confrontational dressing; minimalist music; and attacking lyrics—produced a ripple effect, first inside the music world and then moving outward.

However, punk music was too offensive and unpredictable to join the stagnating rock world. Still, when punk's musical and lyrical elements were co-opted into the mainstream,

there occurred a rejuvenation of popular music. These were the new wave musicians, a repugnant media term coined to signify an undefinably broad spectrum of music (much like the term *alternative* was used in the nineties). New wavers reproduced some of punk's minimalist musical feelings, including an eighth-note rhythm but without the rigidity, the droning vocal style, and the absence of harmony and improvised solo. Many new wave lyrics adopted punk's critical attitude toward society but without the shock element. It also borrowed punk's penchant for unconventional dress and quirky stage movement.

The first wave of this punk-pop synthesis included English artists Elvis Costello and the Attractions, the Police, the Jam, punk survivor Billy Idol, Joe Jackson, the Pretenders (with American Chrissie Hynde), UB40, and integrated (or two-tone) bands such as Madness, the Specials, and the English Beat. In the United States punk had appealed to a white drop-out aesthetic, but it did not achieve the commercial success garnered in England. American punk-pop synthesis included the Talking Heads, Blondie, the B-52s, the Motels, and Pere Ubu. Each of these bands in one way or another adapted punk's music, worldview, dress, and performance style. Thus, an era that began with a new, controversial, underground form exploding upon the public consciousness became more palatable as elements were molded and co-opted for use in the rock mainstream.

This new pop-punk had similar rejuvenating properties for the music industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as classic rock and the British invasion did in the earlier eras. Initially rejected for radio airplay and major label promotion, new wave's freshness (in the face of the tired rock formula), rebelliousness, and critical outlook caught the attention of increasingly disenchanted rock music fans. Its sartorial potential for new looks and images wasn't lost on industries connected with popular culture and the teen market. Finally, the punk fire, visible in subsequent styles of rock, gave a sense of power and community to millions of youth who, despite the assurances of the power players in the industrialized world, felt lost in a life out of control.

In the wake of the mainstream music industry's tempering of punk's more controversial and confrontational elements, many punk bands resisted. In what they perceived as a sell-out-or-get-out environment, many bands maintained the independent, non-commercial spirit of original punk and retreated to the underground. As the 1980s dawned, a scene within a scene was developing that would not only dominate punk for the next five years but also lay the foundation for the alternative rock explosion of the early 1990s as well.

By 1980, the Los Angeles punk scene, like those in New York and England, had witnessed the co-optation of its music, fashion, and name by the major labels, and, slowly but surely, its bands began to show the same overindulgence, hedonism, and pretension that had stagnated rock music a decade earlier. Bands such as the Runaways, X, and the Go-Gos had all tempered their rebelliousness and signed major label deals. Subsequently, from the suburbs of Los Angeles an underground movement was initiated to take back the scene and reestablish the confrontational, antiauthoritarian stance that had been the foundation of punk rock. It was an extension of the punk aesthetic in that it both mim-

icked and reacted to it. At its core was the rejection of new wave and the reaffirmation of an earlier attitude. It was called “hardcore” by its adherents because it was the extreme: the absolute most punk. Comprising such seminal outfits as the Germs, Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, Fear, and the Middle Class, L.A. hardcore bands set a national precedent by successfully seizing the scene from the older British-influenced punks and new wavers (this change was significant enough to inspire the 1981 documentary film *The Decline of the Western Civilization*).

Hardcore punk struck a chord with disaffected youth. Where punk had been a subset of rock and roll, hardcore was a subset of punk. Musically speaking, it was a relatively formulaic pattern of two/four rhythmic beats, leadless power chords, and angrily shouted vocals. Although its guiding philosophy implied “no rules,” the music was neither avant-garde nor experimental, and, in almost every case, it was simply about playing as fast as possible. Hardcore was a younger, faster, and angrier version of punk rock, one that again embodied the pent-up rage of dysfunctional adolescence. As writer and rock journalist Michael Azerrad summed up: “There was a quantum difference between early punk and hardcore—it was something like the difference between bebop and hardbop in jazz, or the leap from Chuck Berry’s affable rock-n-roll to Jimi Hendrix’s freaky electrocution of the blues. It was all about the intensity of the delivery.”



*Talking Heads*

Of all the L.A. hardcore bands, Black Flag stands out as the most influential. Not only did their music serve as a blueprint for the hardcore genre, but they also founded the SST label to both release and distribute their own records. On top of this, in a move not yet undertaken by any previous punk band, they toured America relentlessly. By blazing a trail to every corner of the United States, Black Flag was able to inspire and galvanize the fledgling hardcore punk scene. As a result, and almost overnight, localized scenes sprang up in Washington, D.C., Boston, New York City, Rhode Island, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Houston, Seattle, and San Francisco, to name only a few. Highly influential bands such as the Bad Brains, Minor Threat, Scream, Faith, Cause for Alarm, SSD, Negative Approach, 7 Seconds, DYS, Hüsker Dü, Articles of Faith, Verbal Assault, Dead Kennedys, Big Boys, and many others helped to sustain the genre. These scenes provided not only venues to perform in but also an underground press via fanzines, countless independent labels, mom-and-pop record stores, and avenues of distribution as well—each of which operated completely independent of the mainstream media and label powerhouses.

Like any other form of music, hardcore punk evolved. By the mid-1980s, tempos had slowed, and youthful angst gave way to intra- and interpersonal subject matter. New bands opted to maintain the “do it yourself” ethos of punk while exploring broader musical influences. For almost a decade, a second-generation underground had existed and thrived beneath the radar of the musical mainstream due to the perseverance and dedication of the hardcore community. It’s unlikely there would have been R.E.M., Dinosaur, Buck Pets, Hüsker Dü, the Replacements, Das Damen, Buffalo Tom, Fugazi, Smashing Pumpkins, Soundgarden, Mudhoney, Nirvana, Uncle Tupelo, Pearl Jam, Red Hot Chili Peppers, or Wilco had there not been an American hardcore scene. Aside from initiating, nurturing, and sustaining a vast alternative underground in the 1980s, hardcore would also provide a major impetus and inspiration for the developing speed-metal scene just getting under way.

# THE EIGHTIES

The Revolution  
Will Be Televised

## Chapter 18



*Bruce Springsteen*

They're closing down the textile mill across the railroad tracks,  
Foreman says these jobs are going boys and they ain't coming back to  
your hometown.

—Bruce Springsteen, “My Hometown” (1984)

Popular culture is important because that is where most people get their  
“entertainment” and information; it is where they find dominant  
definitions of themselves as well as alternatives, options to try on for  
size.

—Robert Walser, in his book on heavy metal music, *Running with the Devil*

Rap is Black America's CNN.

—Public Enemy's Chuck D

THE ROCK LANDSCAPE IN THE EIGHTIES was filled with a number of different styles that were arranged and formatted neatly on radio dials across the country. Rock dinosaurs like the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, Paul McCartney, the Doobie Brothers, and Rod Stewart were still significant players on album-oriented rock radio, the dominant rock format for youthful American listeners. In addition to Led Zeppelin, AOR also sported middle-of-the-road hard rockers like Foreigner, Journey, Styx, Rush, and Bob Seger and his Silver Bullet Band. Pop-rockers like Neil Diamond, Linda Ronstadt, Diana Ross, and Olivia Newton-John populated the softer adult contemporary (A/C) stations that appealed more to women and an older rock clientele.

Punk-influenced new music (the so-called new wave) was just budding on radio; within a few years it would proliferate and cover the media. The key ingredient in new wave's success was the linkage of music and video, a dynamic that was institutionalized with the birth of MTV (Music Television) on August 1, 1981. At a time of Reagan administration deregulation and declining record sales, the Warner Bros. conglomerate, in partnership with American Express, took a chance. They created a twenty-four-hour television channel, beaming to a target audience of twelve- to thirty-four-year-olds music videos much the same way that radio broadcast songs.

On a studio set in New York, actors playing the role of VJs (as opposed to DJs), dressed in the latest clothing, walking the walk and talking the talk. As writer Cathy Schwichtenberg points out, these VJs, following a rigid musical format but playing to the audience on a set designed to look casually thrown together, attempted to reproduce visually the music and feel of AOR radio. During the early years MTV lost money, in part due to cable's lack of penetration into major urban centers (entire boroughs of New York City and the city of Los Angeles were not yet wired for cable). However, after years in the

red and a continued refinement of the format, MTV was able to succeed in a way that would change popular music.

Videos or films of musical events had been around almost as long as movies. Short movies depicting songs existed in the twenties and thirties, and there was an experiment with video jukeboxes during the big-band era. In 1967 the Beatles helped pioneer the music video with a promotional film for their double #1, “Strawberry Fields” and “Penny Lane.” The former featured disappearing band members prancing about an old upright piano in the countryside; the latter depicted the band parading on horseback past a shopping district pictured as Penny Lane.

In MTV’s early years it was the more eclectic artists who were most likely to produce videos. Thus, MTV introduced numerous new wave selections to its viewing public. However, radio viewed MTV as a threat and did its best to denigrate the new format. Yet when Men at Work scored two #1 singles without significant radio airplay, MTV pointed out that the band’s videos were in heavy rotation on the channel. Exposure on MTV sold records, influenced buying habits, and provided exposure for unknown artists. Beginning in 1984 MTV charged record companies for broadcasting videos (until that time it had been free).

What may have initially been the impulse by musicians to expand artistic expression to the visual dimension was, by mid-decade, recognized as an important way for record companies to promote their product. Major labels viewed music videos essentially as TV commercials, designed to sell merchandise. Writer Simon Frith points out that in using videos the labels were also trying to help create, by emphasizing a particular visual image or identity, new audiences for their artists. Also by mid-decade numerous media analysts were exploring the impact of the new marriage between rock music and video. Music videos capitalized on what Frith asserts were contemporary rock music values of brash individualism, impatience, youthful rebellion, and sensual delight. These values came alive through cinematic techniques such as dissolves, split screens, superimpositions, backlighting, and intercutting, among others. In other words, music video equals *Miami Vice* equals movies.

Many critics felt that music videos reinforced negative trends already occurring in society. Kids already sat passively in front of a box, waiting for the “answer.” This supported President Reagan’s penchant for simplistic explanations and solutions for society’s growing problems. Some also felt that when song became video, the consequence was to lose the music; story, image, and style took precedence. In addition, others cited the issues of authenticity and lip-synching. The practice of lip-synching (pantomiming words to hit songs) was the practice on Dick Clark’s *American Bandstand* for decades. Music videos required artists to lip-synch their songs. For some, this practice merely confirmed John Lennon’s pronouncement in “Strawberry Fields” that “nothing is real.” The Milli Vanilli scandal didn’t help matters. (It was revealed that this male duo not only didn’t sing on their record but also used a tape of their voices during live concerts.) Though it was not uncommon in the eighties for performers to “double” their

voices electronically in concert (or, as in the case of the vocal group the Nylons, use additional voices on tape), lip-synching a “live” show stretched artistic credibility.

In its early years MTV had a democratizing or pluralistic impact on the music industry. It introduced new and less mainstream artists to mainstream audiences. By the mideighties, however, MTV was acting much more like a radio station in business and formatting practices. Majors soon realized the promotional and popular value of videos and began to contract with professional cinematographers and television directors for important artists. New videos contained more sophisticated, professional production and cost significantly more to create. Airtime was now a coveted vehicle, and eclectic, low-budget videos by less mainstream artists now had stiff competition. Which video would advertisers prefer to pay for—a new one from Michael Jackson, Madonna, or Prince or one from an unknown new wave band without radio exposure? Which one would generate a larger audience? The business of rock triumphed, and noncommercial music was once more relegated to the sidelines.

Charges of racism were also leveled against MTV in its early years as African American artists received little or no airplay. Very few black performers were successful on the AOR rock charts. When Michael Jackson hit big in 1982 (and “Billie Jean” and “Beat It” dominated the Billboard charts in 1983), MTV was able to point to Jackson’s videos in rebuttal. It wasn’t until the significant crossover success of rap in the late 1980s that MTV viewers were regularly exposed to black music. *Yo! MTV Raps* went on the air in 1989 and became the channel’s most popular show.

Clearly, MTV and the many other music-video channels (such as VH-1) have succeeded, also broadcasting in Europe and Asia. The video format has had an extraordinary impact on the promotion and sale of product. Recognizing the success and impact of music television, major labels have begun to release artist videos for sale. In 1988 no music video sales category existed in the annual Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) sales report. Six years later the 1994 report showed that 11.2 million music videos were sold for \$213 million (an average price of \$21 per video). We are now into our second MTV generation. Instead of doing homework to radio, these kids sit in front of the television, plugged into the audiovisual excitement of MTV.

In another business decision of the early 1980s by Sony, Philips, and other market controllers, a decision that Frith contends saved the U.S. music industry, the public was introduced to the compact disc. For about \$12 to \$15 consumers could buy the cleanest, most precise sound available. Thus, at a time when multinational conglomerates had acquired the major record labels, consumers could now buy the hardware (amplifier and CD player) and software (disc) from one company (Sony/Columbia Records, for example). The strategy was to convince consumers that the CD was so superior in quality to vinyl records and tapes that it was imperative they replace their entire record collections with CDs. It was a clever move, as the greater profit margin of the CD (\$12 per unit as compared to \$6 for records and tapes) garnered windfall profits for the record industry. In 1982 the sale of 53 million CDs generated nearly the same amount of money as 125 million albums.

By 1983 the record-selling slump was over. Total product revenue on sales of CDs, cassettes, vinyl, and videos nearly tripled between 1984 and 1994, from \$4.37 billion to \$12.06 billion. In 1994 nearly twice the number of CDs were sold (662 million) as cassettes (345 million). Vinyl LPs are nearly extinct (1.3 million total sales for 2004) but will never die; they continue to be manufactured as specialty items and are still a viable medium of exchange in some parts of the world. CD sales peaked in 2000 at 942.5 million, but are currently in a steady decline (sales of 764 million in 2004). We'll examine the digital distribution of music further in Chapter 20.



During the eighties popular music increased its dialogue around issues of political, economic, and social justice. In fact, artists and concert promoters chose to link those causes with major concert events in order to publicize issues, raise funds, involve more artists, and help promote the business of rock music. These “megaevents”—Live Aid, Farm Aid, and the Amnesty International human rights tours were the biggest—hoped to redirect some focus from sex, drugs, and rock and roll toward a discussion of social responsibility.

Scholars disagree on the cumulative impact of these and other events. Some believe that they served to co-opt the oppositional intentions of the artist and audience for industry gain while providing a social safety valve to fans wishing to express dissatisfaction. Others, like Dave Marsh, believe that it enhanced “the reawakening of a section of the rock audience to its own social potential and a quantum leap in the public awareness of the horrifying problems of poverty, hunger, homelessness and racism.”<sup>1</sup>

The megaevents of the 1980s reflected the structure and format of the golden era concerts—the Monterey Pop Festival, Woodstock, and Watkins Glen—lineups of big-name stars at highly publicized events. The Concert for Bangladesh, organized in 1971 by former Beatle George Harrison at New York’s Madison Square Garden, was a prototype that raised nearly \$250,000 with performances by Ringo Starr, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Leon Russell, and other friends. In the late 1970s anti-Nazi and antiracist groups in England staged a series of concerts called Rock against Racism featuring the Clash, Aswad, Elvis Costello, X-Ray Spex, and Steel Pulse.

Live Aid, an event organized by Boomtown Rats front man Bob Geldoff, raised \$67 million for starving Africans. On July 13, 1985, concerts were held simultaneously in London, Philadelphia, and Sydney, linked electronically and broadcast to 1.5 billion people in a hundred countries. Entertainers included Paul McCartney, the Who, and David Bowie at England’s Wembley Stadium and Eric Clapton, Mick Jagger, Tina Turner, Madonna, and the Led Zeppelin survivors at Philadelphia’s Veteran’s Stadium. Phil Collins hopped a supersonic Concorde and played both shows. Geldoff continues his work, most recently seen in the Live 8 multinational concerts held on July 2, 2005, that were orchestrated to coincide with the annual G8 meeting in Scotland and to pressure the global leaders to end world poverty, cancel national debts, and establish equitable trade relations for impoverished nations.

Live Aid was a catalyst, and it was closely followed by Farm Aid in September 1985, an effort by Willie Nelson and John (Cougar) Mellencamp to publicize the plight of the family farm. In October 1985 Artists United Against Apartheid (AUAA) released the album *Sun City*, organized by “Little Steven” Van Zandt, Bruce Springsteen’s former guitarist. AUAA members Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, Miles Davis, and others challenged all musicians to confront the political system in South Africa and also to uphold a performance ban by not playing *Sun City*—“I ain’t gonna play *Sun City*!” was their rallying cry.

Similarly, in June 1988 another musical and political challenge was issued to the South African government: Free Nelson Mandela from prison. London’s Wembley Stadium was host to Nelson Mandela’s seventieth birthday party, an eleven-hour event broadcast to 600 million people in sixty countries. The broad range of performers included Whitney Houston—who agreed to perform only if it wasn’t billed as a political event—Stevie Wonder, Dire Straits, Sting, UB40, Salt-n-Pepa, Phil Collins, and the Eurythmics. Again the message was unambiguous: Free Mandela and change the system. Commenting on popular music’s potential to promote social change, Mandela stated, “Your message can reach quarters not necessarily interested in politics, so that the message can go further than we politicians can push it.”<sup>2</sup>



*Live Aid*

In the fall of 1988 Amnesty International, the international organization working worldwide to free political prisoners, organized its Human Rights Now! Tour. Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Sting, and Tracy Chapman made up a core of touring musicians who added local performers at each stop. They played six U.S. cities and then twenty other shows in places like London, India, Zimbabwe, the Ivory Coast, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Brazil. Springsteen commented, “I think Amnesty makes the world a less oppressive, less brutal place to live, and I want to help Amnesty do its job.”<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1990 artists including Sinead O’Connor, k.d. lang, David Byrne, and Annie Lennox released *Red, Hot, and Blue*, a tribute to Cole Porter with proceeds going to benefit AIDS research.

From 1985 to 1990 the megaevents promoted progressive issues and causes. These actions raised funds and told audiences that some stars were not afraid to take public stands on political and social issues. One might ask, How much consciousness raising and political activity did these actions generate from audience members? For one thing, Amnesty International gained 200,000 new members after the tours, and, following a large letter-writing campaign, three of the six political prisoners that had been targeted were released. Other organizations also felt an upsurge of interest and activity. Thus, artist involvement did make a difference: It exposed fans to important issues, prodding them to think and act. At the same time, however, it is also apparent that the music industry, though always careful to promote its liberal image, makes decisions based on the bottom line, a status quo favorable to huge multinational corporations maintaining increasing control over the sale of popular culture. Political controversy is dangerous to this kind of control and does not sell records like other topics such as sex and (safe) rebellion. For example, when Rupert Murdoch’s FOX-TV network broadcast its five-hour version of the eleven-hour Mandela Birthday Celebration to the United States, the political introductions to songs by Peter Gabriel, Jackson Browne, and Little Steven—as well as most of the African musical performances—were cut. Thus, the American public viewed a concert devoid of much of its more forceful political content.



One of the most politically active major rock artists of the seventies and eighties was Bruce Springsteen. The son of a bus driver and hailing from Freehold, near the New Jersey shore, his songs—depicting young people as they struggled in the small-town decay of the American Dream—resonated throughout the land. Having paid his dues as a guitarist and singer in rock bands, Springsteen walked into the office of John Hammond Sr.—the man who had brought Billie Holliday, Miles Davis, Aretha Franklin, and Dylan to Columbia Records—and, strumming an acoustic guitar, sang his American parables. The Boss’s two 1973 albums, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* and *The Wild, the Innocent, and the E Street Shuffle*, display a Dylanesque stream of lyrical stories. Many were driven by what

would become the ultimate rock and roll band—the E Street Band: drums, bass, two guitars, two keyboards, and the R&B flavoring of Clarence Clemons on tenor sax. In 1974 *Rolling Stone* editor Jon Landau pronounced to the world this now famous prediction: “I saw rock and roll’s future and its name is Bruce Springsteen.”

With the release of his classic *Born to Run* in 1975, Springsteen’s stories of yearning, escape, and reflection reached the musical mainstream. In concert the E Street Band would power through an emotional three-hour journey, led by the nonstop Springsteen. The man who listened to Buddy Holly every night before he went on and paid his dues playing Jimi Hendrix covers in the sixties was viewed as a grandson of the earlier genre, delivering authentic rock and roll to the next generation of disciples. *Born to Run* went to #3, and the Boss appeared on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek*. A contractual wrangle with his former manager kept Springsteen out of the limelight for three years, though his 1980 #1 *The River* and the acoustic *Nebraska* sold well.

In the summer of 1984, when Springsteen was popular but not quite a superstar, he released *Born in the U.S.A.*, complete with American flag imagery on the cover. It went to #1 for seven weeks, stayed on the top-40 album charts for nearly two years, and produced seven top-10 singles, including “Dancing in the Dark,” “Glory Days,” and the poignant “My Hometown.” The title cut, “Born in the U.S.A.,” describes the story of dead-end working-class life in America. The singer’s brother goes to Vietnam, marries there, and is killed, and the singer, a veteran who comes home and can’t get a job, wails the agonized and cynical “Born in the U.S.A.” refrain. President Reagan once cited the song during a self-serving appeal to voters, and Springsteen was forced to rebut Reagan from the stage. He backed up his actions by donating money from concert proceeds to local food banks, veterans’ groups, the homeless, and activist trade-union groups. After a considerable hiatus, Springsteen has begun to tour again with members of the E Street Band.



Michael Jackson’s solo career spanned the same twenty years as the Boss’s; his live shows were also important to his popular success. In Jackson’s case, however, it was his use of a video representation of live performance, dance, and story that cemented his place as one of the megastars of the eighties. While still a member of the Jackson 5, Michael began to record solo albums, beginning with *Got to Be There* in 1972. A child star of extraordinary talent and charisma in the Frankie Lymon and Stevie Wonder tradition, Michael had performed since age five and had his first #1 hit at eleven. His solo career was unextraordinary until he began working with producer and arranger Quincy Jones; the team released *Off the Wall* (#3, September 1979) and *Thriller* (#1, December 1982), selling more than 40 million copies.

*Thriller* was the perfect package for the rock mainstream: a talented songwriter and storyteller; a sufficiently accomplished and innovative dancer who created a dance style combining images of hip-hop, Broadway, and disco (including the moonwalk); beat-

driven music; a combination of up-tempo dance songs and ballads; and guest appearances by contemporary stars Paul McCartney (“The Girl Is Mine”) and Eddie Van Halen (guitar solo on “Beat It”). Jackson’s use of video as a promotional tool, his conceptualization of short stories, and his focus on quality (he hired director John Landis for the “Thriller” video and shot all three videos in 35mm film) helped to solidify this album as one of the defining popular music moments of the eighties.

The quest to top an artistic and commercial success like *Thriller* usually ends in frustration and disillusionment for the artist. There is no place higher to go, especially when megastardom is achieved at age twenty-four. Two solid releases (*Bad* and *Dangerous*) followed, but the interest in Jackson in the nineties ran more toward personal history than musical accomplishment. Questions about plastic surgeries that changed his Negroid features to Caucasian; his man-child persona (living on an estate called Neverland surrounded by animals), and his marriage to Elvis’s only child, Lisa Marie, persisted. It is difficult to say whether Michael Jackson’s music will endure. It is clear, however, that Michael Jackson was a driving force behind some of the most important popular culture moments of the eighties. As of 2005, he has fathered numerous children from different mothers and has been buffeted by allegations of child sexual abuse.



Madonna



Madonna was another artist who ascended to megastardom during this period. Unlike Jackson, Madonna’s popularity reflected less her particular synthesis of disco, funk, and hip-hop than how she challenged the mainstream on issues of race, gender, sexual activity, sexual orientation, and power. Like Jackson, Madonna understood the power of

creative music video to promote both product and artist. And through the creative and intelligent use of video, radio, television, magazines, movies, and books, Madonna presented the world with such a spectrum of images that she was able to appeal to different audiences.

Madonna Louise Ciccone was born in 1958, grew up in suburban Detroit, and found her way briefly to the University of Michigan to study dance. After additional study and employment as a dancer, she immersed herself in the dance club scene of New York and released her self-titled first album in 1983. Along with her next two releases, *Like a Virgin* (#1, December 1984) and *True Blue* (#1, July 1986), also rose Madonna the artist and cultural commentator. The singles and videos from these albums offered the opportunity for the public to experience a series of contradictions. Madonna appears in *Like a Virgin* in a white bridal gown, but her movements are sexual. Who is she, a virgin or a whore? Was she Marilyn Monroe? Was her concert attire that of a slut or the redefinition of fashion and sexual power?

“Papa Don’t Preach” also presented audiences with contested moral terrain. The singer tells her father she is pregnant by her boyfriend; she is determined to keep the baby but asks the father’s blessing. At the same time, Madonna achieved critical acclaim in her first major movie role as a bohemian character afloat in Lower Manhattan in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985). Ever the cultural antagonist, Madonna’s video for the 1989 title cut from *Like a Prayer* took on the issues of religion, race, and eroticism as she played a white woman in love with a black saint-man. In the 1990 video “Justify My Love,” Madonna and her boyfriend, Tony Ward, acted out sexual fantasies, including heterosexual sex, bisexuality, and bondage. While moral critics screamed for crucifixion, Madonna signed a services contract with Time-Warner for a reported \$60 million.



At the same time the pop megastars topped the charts, heavy metal’s fourth generation was born. Together, hard rock—metal styles achieved sufficient commercial success to lay claim to being the most popular rock genre of the decade. This guitar-based power rock—the first generation was the Who, Cream, and Hendrix, the second generation Led Zeppelin—developed a third style called heavy metal in the late seventies. Though initially a cult style, metal matured and broadened its appeal in the eighties. By 1989 *Rolling Stone* had announced that heavy metal was in the mainstream of rock and roll.

Back in the 1970s the audience for early metal was most often young, white, alienated, working-class male teens, who embraced a music that offered an identity and image of power, intensity, spectacle, and danger. Some observers have maintained that the difference between a Boston-Foreigner fan (hard rock) and an Iron Maiden—Judas Priest fan (heavy metal) is that the former have a life and live with the music, whereas the latter don’t have a life and live for the music. By the mideighties the audience for heavy metal had expanded to include preteens, those in their late twenties, and some from the middle class.

The early metal ensemble consisted of drums, bass, and one or two guitars. In the mideighties, bands like Van Halen added keyboard and synthesizer, broadening both their sound and their appeal. The earlier rhythm section best reflected the Zeppelin model—solid, simple, and at times lumbering. Later on, responding to punk and classical influences, rhythm players cranked it up a couple notches in speed, thus requiring better technique. Though the guitarist shared the spotlight with the vocalist, the guitar solo remained the musical highlight. It evidenced roots in both the blues, using bent notes and repetition, and also the classical tradition, with classical music guitar technique, song structure, and arpeggiated chords and phrases. The lead vocalist drew some moves and energy from earlier hard rock performers but also adopted a shock stance from punk and dress and entertainment from glam (an early 1970s rock style dominated by the so-called glitter bands, such as the New York Dolls).

Heavy metal evolved in England and the United States simultaneously. England's Black Sabbath, with lead singer Ozzy Osbourne's wails and growls, provided an early image of death, demons, and the occult. Osbourne left to go solo in 1978, importing American guitar wizard Randy Rhoads from Quiet Riot and employing various gruesome actions as a part of his stage show. Noted for images of animal mutilation during shows, legend has it that Osbourne had to undergo painful rabies shots when he bit the head off a bat thrown from the audience. Rhoads died in a plane crash in 1982.

Judas Priest added a second guitar to its lineup in the midseventies, speeded up the songs, and became known for its biker look and leather theatricality. Iron Maiden, named for a medieval instrument of torture, continued the themes of gloom and doom along with images of the anti-Christ, as on their *Number of the Beast* album (1982). Def Leppard paid close attention to studio details and used keyboards and special effects to move closer to the musical mainstream and increased commercial success.

In the United States, Van Halen released its self-titled first album in 1978—produced by Kiss's Gene Simmons—and by the mideighties had a #1 single, "Jump" (1985), and #1 album, *5150* (1986). David Lee Roth flaunted his showmanship and ego as front man, but it was Eddie Van Halen, the guitarist and composer, who drove the band. Eddie reinvented metal-guitar virtuosity, using superior dexterity, speed, and a two-hand hammer/harmonic technique on the fret board that challenged and awed all other contemporaries. With "Eruption," the second cut on the first Van Halen album, Eddie served notice of his arrival. Robert Walser maintains that Van Halen's classical music training as a pianist and violinist and his study of music theory were instrumental to this success. The education and advanced technique were reflected in the facility, fluidity, and musicianship that Eddie demonstrated as composer and guitarist. (He even quotes violin études in the "Eruption" solo.)

Los Angeles was also the base for other American bands, like Mötley Crüe, Quiet Riot, and later Guns 'n' Roses, whose 1987 release, *Appetite for Destruction*, was hailed as a blend of old hard rock boogie and the deep emotionality of the blues. Lead singer Axl Rose drew praise from fans for his performance style, nihilistic authenticity, and vocal wail. At the



Van Halen

neer. Malmsteen studied classical guitar and piano as a youth and was especially dazzled by the music of violin virtuoso Niccolò Paganini. Crediting Bach and Paganini on his albums, Malmsteen developed a style based on technique, speed, and precision. Like Eddie Van Halen and Randy Rhoads, Malmsteen doesn't just quote from classical music, he integrates his training and attitude with that musical form. Listen to a young Yngwie playing the instrumental "Evil Eye" on Alcatraz's 1984 live album, *Live Sentence*.

Many mainstream critics describe heavy metal music as unidimensional, artistically impoverished, vacant, and deviant. Though the level of musicianship varies in any style, it is clear that some metal musicians and composers are among the most accomplished of any rock genre. In addition, some critics don't understand audience attraction to heavy metal music, painting it as a style imposed upon youth by artists and the music industry. These critics posit that if they could only censor it or, even better, make it disappear, the problems of teens would go away.

Scholar Robert Walser addresses some of those criticisms by placing the music in its historical context:

same time, however, he was criticized for lyrics and remarks that put down gays, women, African Americans, and immigrants.

Another strain of metal, which derived some of its power and pace from punk, is speed metal—a style considered by metal purists to be more authentic. Metallica, speed metal's most successful proponent, combines outstanding guitar work with fast and synchronized ensemble playing. In her description of "Master of Puppets," the title cut from their 1986 album, writer Katherine Charlton notes that this is far from a simplistic form, with changes in meter, tempo, accent, and the use of arpeggio patterns—all coordinated at a speed of more than 200 beats per minute.

Swedish-born Yngwie Malmsteen is another metal guitarist acknowledged as a stylistic pio-

The context . . . is the United States during the 1970s and 1980s, a period that saw a series of damaging economic crises, unprecedented corruptions of political leadership, erosion of public confidence in governmental and corporate benevolence, cruel retrenchment of social programs along with policies that favored the wealthy, and tempestuous contestations of social institutions and representations, involving formations that were thought to be stable, such as gender roles and family.<sup>4</sup>

With society's social and economic institutions, including family relationships and the educational system, faltering and the number of family-sustaining jobs disappearing, it was natural for a style of popular music to reflect the disillusionment, fear, and powerlessness that accompanied those conditions. Male teens look for identities of power, and early metal was male and powerful. There are still bands that appeal to that particular segment of the population, and with the broadening of stylistic characteristics such as increased tempo, less morbid lyrics, and stunning guitar virtuosity combined with existent performance theatricality and a driving beat, hard rock—heavy metal maintains a place in the nineties mainstream.



Rap is another style that began as the soundtrack of a marginal musical community and has come to greatly influence the American musical mainstream. Rap lyrically reflects roots in the African, African American, and Caribbean cultural traditions of “playing the dozens,” “signifying,” the griot tradition of reporting and praise, and also “toasting” and “dub” from Jamaican sound-system DJs. These expressive forms contributed boasting, praise, mockery, and storytelling to the genre. Musically, rap derived from jazz improvisations and avant-garde musical essentialism, social commentary of the blues and rhythm and blues, and the syncopated soul and funk sounds of James Brown and others from the seventies.

These influences combined during the mid-1970s in New York's South Bronx, with its neighborhoods dominated by crumbling housing and its lack of economic opportunity for citizens. Rising from this environment of urban decay was the multiethnic culture called hip-hop, a phenomenon that created a source of identity and group affiliation in “crews”—such as DJ Afrika Bambaataa's Zulu Nation—and acted as an alternative to gang warfare. This hip-hop culture spawned dress styles, break dancing, graffiti, and rap music.

Initially modeling themselves after the Jamaican mobile sound-system DJs, early rap DJs played at indoor dance clubs or tapped into power from a city lamppost and set up an outdoor dance. DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican living in New York, is credited with numerous innovations that led to rap. With his monster speakers (named Herculords), Herc extended the instrumental breaks from selections to such an extent that dancers would seize the time to demonstrate their latest steps. As Tricia Rose describes in her outstanding book on rap, these “break-dancers” would take ten to thirty seconds to show off their

latest acrobatic steps and pantomime moves. The DJs soon began inviting the dancers to the local dance clubs where the DJs worked. DJ Kool Herc sometimes recited rhymes along with these breaks.

Grandmaster Flash was another South Bronx DJ and pioneer who is credited with popularizing scratching, and thus the use of the turntable as an instrument. He would manually turn a record back and forth under the needle, causing a scratching sound to provide rhythmic accents and syncopation. Flash, after attaching a microphone to his system, invited friends Melle Mel and Cowboy to rap along with him. As rappers began to display lyrical and rhythmic talent, they became entertainers along with, and then eventually superseded, the dancers. Rap crews like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five were formed alongside the already existing dance and graffiti crews.

A small New Jersey label, Sugar Hill Records, capitalized on this new sound, releasing “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979. Over a disco track lifted from the group Chic, the Sugar Hill Gang introduced rap to the musical mainstream. In spite of criticism from the ’hood that the record’s rap was plastic, it eventually sold more than 10 million copies worldwide and made the top-40 charts at #36. In 1982 Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released “The Message,” a song chronicling the hardships of life in the neighborhood. Jon Schecter, in the liner notes to the 1992 Rhino release *Street Jams*, calls it an “epic poem of the urban landscape.” In the refrain, in response to the litany of struggles, the rapper decries, “It’s like a jungle sometimes, makes me wonder, how I keep from goin’ under.”

Rap musicians had a steady stream of releases on independent labels like Tommy Boy, Profile, and Def Jam through the mideighties. In 1986 Run-DMC, three Queens rappers, had a #4 hit with their remake of the Aerosmith song “Walk This Way.”<sup>5</sup> Critics cited the unique use of rock music samples, including some of the original guitar and vocals, but Tricia Rose notes that rappers had been appropriating a variety of musics in their genre for years.<sup>6</sup> From this point in time, with the tremendous media exposure of Run-DMC, rap entered mainstream consciousness. A white New York group, the Beastie Boys, followed the next year with “(You Gotta) Fight for the Right (to Party)” (#7, January 1987). The same year, Queens rapper L. L. Cool J (for Ladies Love Cool James) had the first of his five top-40 hits, “I Need Love.”

Rap artists emerged from other African American communities. Gangsta rap was a new subgenre with commentaries on urban life in Los Angeles, gangs in the community, ordinary citizens in danger, and a police force viewed as perpetrators of violence. Ice-T was its first popular voice and had a hit album, *Power*, in 1988. On his 1992 album *Body Count* the cut “Cop Killer” contained the lyric “dust off” some cops, and his record company, under public pressure, removed the song from subsequent releases.

N.W.A. (Niggas With Attitudes) profiled struggles in the L.A. ghetto of Compton much the same way Grandmaster Flash had done for the Bronx earlier in the decade. Their 1989 release, *Straight Outta Compton* (#37, April 1989), was described as “graphic, lurid streetscapes” and included the single, “F—k the Police.” Set as a courtroom trial of the police, the cut charged that the police “think they have authority to kill the minority”



*Public Enemy*

and “thinkin’ every nigga sellin’ narcotic.” A “gangsta” was a tough-talking, streetwise, expletive-hurling black man, and the album earned N.W.A. a warning from the FBI. Like white working-class youth finding power in the heavy metal identity, it is easy to see how disfranchised black youth could concur with these macho expressions of power and bravado. It is also clear that rap’s characterization of American society as oppressive and unfriendly found support across broad segments of the African American community.

Back on the East Coast, Public Enemy released its second album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, in 1988. Evident were not only the illuminating black power sermons of “Bring the Noise,” “Party for Your Right to Fight,” and “Prophets of Rage” but also the brilliant collage of samples, sounds, and beats driving the message. This musical maturing of the rap style manifests itself in a more sophisticated use of samples to layer multitimbral, rhythmic elements behind Malcolm X speeches and guitar solos by Living Color’s Vernon Reid. Public Enemy continues its tradition of strident commentary on the hypocrisy and injustices of American society into the new millennium with leader Chuck D positioned as a renowned philosopher/critic of the contemporary music industry.

At the same time, Queen Latifah emerged as one of the few women to accept the rapper challenge. Up to this point a considerable segment of the rap genre contained sexist sentiment, describing women as objects for sexual gratification and physical domination.

On her 1989 album, *All Hail the Queen* (which included KRS-One as a producer), the cut “Ladies First” proclaimed, “A woman can bear you, break you, take you / Now it’s time to rhyme, can you relate to.”

2 Live Crew typified the kind of objectification Latifah fought. In all likelihood they would have remained only a southeastern regional success if a Broward County, Florida, judge had not cited as obscene the sexually explicit lyrics found on the album *As Nasty as They Wanna Be*. A censorship battle ensued that garnered national attention and increased record sales. In 1990 rapper M. C. Hammer—his music is termed by some as rap lite—sold 15 million copies of *Please Hammer Don’t Hurt ’Em*, thanks in part to his dance-oriented, high-energy shows.

Rap is, historically, one of many African American styles that initially became popular as a regional effort and was sold by independent labels before breaking into the musical mainstream—rhythm and blues and soul followed similar paths. And, like these other styles, rap was a synthesis combining numerous musical and lyrical roots to produce a broad, heterogeneous form—there is no such thing as rap but many different kinds and styles. Music ranged from the most elemental sampled or produced beats to the most complex multirhythmic layering, from few melodic or harmonic elements to rich melodies and chords. The topical spectrum is just as broad, and includes personal stories of romance and relationship, sophisticated political analyses, calls for action, sexually explicit fantasies, and violent rage and terror.

Rap has had a significant impact on American popular music, not because we find other musicians emulating the style, but because it expresses a clear and direct relationship between popular music and the struggles involved in increasingly problematic everyday life. In addition, its strident tone has called upon Americans to again consider the continuing struggles of the African American community. As Tricia Rose explains, “African-American musicians find a way to unnerve and simultaneously revitalize American culture.” In our next chapter, we will take a further look at rap in the nineties as well as that decade’s “alternative” music movement.

# NOTIONS FROM UNDERGROUND

The Alternative  
Rock and Rap Uprisings  
By Peter Miller

## Chapter 19



*Nirvana*

There's at least one form of social change that the early 90s has brought—the attainment of finally accepting various styles of music (and/or style of dress) amongst the youth.

—Kurt Cobain, in his posthumously published *Journals*

I'm gonna show the most graphic details of what I see in my community and hopefully they'll stop it quick.

—Tupac Shakur, in *Tupac: Resurrection, 1971–1996*

They say music can alter moods and talk to you  
Well can it load a gun up for you, and cock it too?

—Eminem, “Sing for the Moment” (2002)

**I**N THE U.S. CULTURAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC MALAISE of the late seventies, nihilistic punk rock clashed with hedonistic disco. Democratic U.S. president Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) struggled to revive America's innocence, tattered by the Vietnam War and revelations of presidential impropriety disclosed through the Watergate scandal. In this setting, *Saturday Night Live* comic Dan Aykroyd joined famous rock producer Bill Graham and the Grateful Dead for the 1978 New Year's Eve closing of San Francisco's Winterland auditorium. “Now, ladies and gentlemen,” said Aykroyd, as Graham piloted and ultimately crashed a ramshackle twelve-foot-long marijuana cigarette over the audience and into the stage. “Yes, a momentous occasion as we cruise into the 1980s here at Winterland in San Francisco—1978 going on 1981.”

Whether Aykroyd was voicing his generation's discontent with the seventies and the Carter administration or simply overindulging in the alcohol-and-drugs scene characteristic of the late-seventies rock milieu and forgetting that they were actually celebrating the new year 1979, we may never know. It is convenient to say that the mayhem at Altamont in December 1969 officially silenced the peace, free love, and musical experimentation of the sixties or that the Disco Demolition Night at Chicago's Comiskey Park in 1979 officially rendered disco dead and made way for mainstream acceptance of new wave acts in the early eighties. Aykroyd reminds us that decades make poor bookends, and that as one decade blends into the next, so do cultural, political, and musical movements. Let's not forget this as we cruise through the nineties, 1988 going on 1991, and explore the musical influences of the late eighties and early nineties that spawned the “alternative rock,” hard rock, and rap uprisings, arguably the most eclectic musical landscape since the fertile sixties.



As Michael Jackson slid from his status as the “King of Pop” to the king of schlock in the late eighties, acts ranging from U2 and R.E.M. to Jane’s Addiction, the Pixies, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers were on the rise. These acts paved the way for Nirvana to set off the early-nineties alternative rock boom, which delivered the coup de grâce to the mainstream styles of music that had dominated the eighties.

Although Jackson’s encore performance, the *Bad* tour in 1987, drew a record 4.4 million fans and generated more than \$125 million, it was the Irish rock band U2 that beat out Michael for the Best Album of the Year and Best Rock Vocal Performance by a Duo or Group Grammy awards in 1988 with *The Joshua Tree* (1987). The album caught the ears and attention of U2’s fans with the sing-along hits “With or Without You,” “Where the Streets Have No Name,” and “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.”

Developing out of the rigid religious environs of Dublin, Ireland, in the late seventies, U2 included Bono (Paul Hewson, singer), the Edge (Dave Evans, guitar), bassist Adam Clayton, and drummer Larry Mullen Jr., who mixed the leftist worldview of the Clash and the edge of the post-punk musical landscape with a Christian concern for social justice. Their album *The Joshua Tree* included U2’s trademark political material, such as the song “Bullet the Blue Sky” that protested U.S. foreign policies in Central America, where CIA operatives had been covertly supporting anticommunist Contra forces and Bono had traveled the year before. The song was emblematic of the band’s progressive worldview and took a stance on one of the most controversial scandals of the decade.

With *The Joshua Tree*, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), and their appearance at Live Aid in 1985, U2 countered the conservative worldviews espoused by British prime minister Margaret



U2

Thatcher and President Reagan as well as the greed of the world's superpowers. As Niall Stokes explains in *U2: Into the Heart*, "Irangate, the details of which had emerged during 1986, had exposed the greed, duplicity and corruption which had taken over Washington during the Reagan era."<sup>1</sup>

The band took the world by storm with its second full-length album, *War* (1983). Bono, one part preacher, one part rock god, was anchored by Mullen's belligerent backbeat and the Edge's mix of deft electric guitar fingerpicking on the album's hit single "Sunday Bloody Sunday." The song waved a white flag in the face of Ireland's cycles of sectarian violence throughout the twentieth century. U2 then placed its overt political statements on the back burner and leveraged Bono's onstage charisma to reinvent themselves with *Achtung Baby* (1992).

The cold war power structure dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union crumbled, literally, as the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and former Soviet states in Eastern Europe breathed in the fresh air of freedom with the new decade. *Achtung Baby*, recorded in East Berlin, captured Europe's new craze for freedom and electronic dance music and quickly catapulted U2 to the top of the charts. Its postmodern companion, the Zoo TV tour, provided updated entertainment to a generation of attention-deficient fans raised on the sensory overload of MTV and video games. Zoo TV delivered a complex arrangement of video screens, multimedia, and Las Vegas schmaltz that deconstructed the rock god myth and introduced U2's intergenerational fans to "Fly," one of Bono's alter egos for the tour, as conflicting statements on big screens, including "Everything you know is wrong" and "Believe everything," supplanted the band's past political posturing. *Achtung Baby* and Zoo TV made it safe for conventional rock acts to tiptoe through new musical territory.

As U2 took the world by storm, R.E.M. was building their reputation touring college towns throughout the southern United States. Inspired by punk rock, garage rock, and folk rock and the mysticism of the pastoral South, R.E.M. became one of the most important role models for underground acts of the eighties on how to navigate the rocky waters of the recording industry without "selling out," much like the "do-it-yourself" (DIY) method of the eighties hardcore punk scene.

Led by singer Michael Stipe and backed by guitarist Peter Buck, bassist Mike Mills, and drummer Bill Berry, R.E.M. signed with the large independent label I.R.S. in the early eighties. In an effort to avoid becoming a commercialized pop sensation with a short shelf life, the unfortunate fate of many bands of the era, the band retained 100 percent artistic control over their albums and agreed to split songwriting royalties four ways, cementing their independent stance. "We made a contract with the world that says: 'We're going to be the best band in the world; you're going to be proud of us,'" R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck explained in 1985. "But we have to do it our way."<sup>2</sup>

R.E.M. garnered early critical acclaim with *Murmur* (1983) and spoon-fed its alternative style to the masses with "It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine)" (*Document*, 1987). The song was similar to Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues" in its scattershot references, which included composer Leonard Bernstein, Soviet leader



R.E.M.

Leonid Brezhnev, comedian Lenny Bruce, and music journalist Lester Bangs; all were names inspired by a dream Michael Stipe had in which everyone at a party had the initials L. B. Although Stipe remained lyrically apolitical, R.E.M. embraced Greenpeace and Stipe took up issue with poverty, animal rights, and the environment as the decade drew to a close.

Stipe provided an element of mystery with his ashen look and cryptic lyrics, while Buck, Mills, and Berry remained musically mercurial, with Buck playing a hauntingly beautiful mandolin for “Losing My Religion,” off R.E.M.’s *Out of Time* album (1991); the song also included orchestral strings, keyboards, and a guest appearance by rapper KRS-One.

One year later, as many acts were trying to hop the grunge railroad, R.E.M. unveiled *Automatic for the People* (1992). The album offered string work from Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones and “Man on the Moon,” an ode to comedian, pop icon, and star of the late seventies hit TV show *Taxi* Andy Kaufman. The song “Everybody Hurts” encouraged listeners to hold on during rough times. As Stipe explained in 1994, “‘Everybody Hurts’ was a very fucking ballsy song. It could be and can be heard as one of the most sappy, maudlin, sentimental, cry-in-your-coffee songs. But it succeeded.”<sup>3</sup>

Like U2 with *Achtung Baby*, R.E.M. stretched its wings in later albums, tossing aside the mandolin for the electric guitar and falling back in with the alternative rock establishment with *Monster* (1994).



A little lower on the radar screen than U2 and R.E.M., hardcore punk and underground acts charted their own road map for touring the United States and reaching the disfranchised mass of listeners not content with tailgating in heavy metal parking lots and being fleeced at the high-priced, multibill rock spectacles of the eighties. Embracing the DIY work ethic, these underground groups established their own touring circuits and scenes through homemade magazines, or “zines,” and independent promoters and record labels, including L.A.’s SST, San Francisco’s Alternative Tentacles, Washington, D.C.’s Discord, and Seattle’s Sub Pop.

Ian MacKaye, lead singer for the progressive hardcore punk band Minor Threat, launched the Dischord label in 1980 and espoused the virtues of sobriety, social progressiveness, and community action over rock and roll excess and political indifference. There was plenty to protest, as President Reagan was then implementing his laissez-faire economics policy, “Reaganomics,” increasing defense spending, and neglecting many of the progressive social programs and laws created in the sixties and seventies to advance the social and economic standing of minorities.

Seven years after launching Dischord, MacKaye founded the band Fugazi. Punk rock editor Jim Testa commented in 1996, “Virtually a synonym for punk integrity and commitment, Fugazi continue to record for their own Dischord label and play only low-priced, all-ages shows, long after achieving the sort of popularity that would have goaded other bands to pursue the major-label brass ring and distance themselves from the DIY scene.”<sup>4</sup>

A derivative of the hardcore punk scene and the likes of Fugazi, the Pixies blended surf rock, angular guitars, and sugary-sweet male-female pop melodies built on lead singer Black Francis’s oddball lyrical reflections. Along with Sonic Youth, the Pixies were a major influence on Nirvana and the seemingly endless list of alt rockers in the nineties. Led by Francis and fellow singer and guitarist Kim Deal, the band’s jolting slow-fast song structure was captured on their full-length debut, *Surfer Rosa* (1998). “Joyously antisocial,” explains rock critic Dave Thompson, “[*Surfer*] *Rosa* waded into the maelstrom without excuse and emerged a blue print for the next generation of alt.rockers.”<sup>5</sup>

The Red Hot Chili Peppers, when they weren’t fastening socks to their genitalia, mixed the dripping sexual innuendoes of buff and tattooed lead singer Anthony Keidis and the slippery and funky bass lines of Michael Balzary (“Flea”) with the sparse but thundering stick work of drummer Chad Smith and the loose blues-based leads of guitarist John Frusciante, who at times seemed to channel the ghost of Jimi Hendrix. The Chili Peppers were influenced by the SST scene in L.A. and seventies funk and hit pay dirt

with *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* (1991). Keidis wore his heart on his sleeve for the album's megahit, "Under the Bridge." *Blood Sugar Sex Magik's* alternative rock ballad, the song refers to the downtown L.A. bridge under which Keidis used to buy heroin, depicting the loneliness he suffered at the nadir of his drug abuse and the love he feels for the city of Los Angeles: "Under the bridge downtown I gave my life away."

Like the Chili Peppers, Jane's Addiction did their best to challenge mainstream sexual taboos, as gender-bending lead singer Perry Farrell and guitarist Dave Navarro often kissed during shows. Founded in the seedy Hollywood, California, music scene, Jane's Addiction incorporated glam rock, jazz, metal, jam band, and folksy influences in their eclectic euphoria, as well as the funky bass lines of Eric Avery and the skilled drumming of Stephen Perkins, who added a tribal element to Jane's Addiction's sound.

Their second release, *Nothing's Shocking* (1988), showed the musical range and instrumental talent of the foursome, notably on "Jane Says" as well as the complexly structured "Summertime Rolls" and adventurous "Mountain Song." The album also garnered its share of controversy. "In 1988, nine of the 11 leading record chains refused to carry *Nothing's Shocking* because of its cover [which featured a photo of the Farrell/Niccoli sculpture of two naked Siamese-twin nymphettes]." As Perkins explained, "We had to issue the record covered with brown paper."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, MTV banned the group's "Mountain Song" video, which featured Farrell and his girlfriend in their birthday suits.

Jane's Addiction's *Ritual de lo Habitual* (1990) penetrated the mainstream and the top-20. The cover was once again shocking to some. Farrell's artwork included a depiction of full-frontal male and female nudity; this time there was an alternate cover, with the text of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution on it, so that the album could be stocked in more conservative retail outlets. The album's hit single and video, "Been Caught Stealing," a raw and irreverent ode to shoplifting, became the feel-good ear worm of the year. But the swan song was the *Ritual de lo Habitual* tour, which started out as Jane's Addiction's "farewell tour" in the summer of 1991 and turned into Farrell's alternative rock festival, Lollapalooza.



The major rock explosion of the nineties, "alternative rock," happened the week of January 11, 1992, when Nirvana's *Nevermind* bumped eighties pop icon Michael Jackson's new album, *Dangerous*, from the #1 slot in *Billboard* magazine's Top-200 Albums chart. Nirvana's grunge sound offered the right mix of pop hooks and eighties hardcore punk to capture the hearts and minds of a lost generation that had been spoon-fed mixed messages of conservative cultural mores and MTV seduction, cold war fear and all-you-can-eat platters of classic rock. Nirvana spoke to and for America's Generation X latchkey kids—often remnants of emotionally broken homes caused by a U.S. divorce rate that had more than doubled from 1970 to 1980—who were seeking an outlet for their bottled-up angst.

Nirvana and other Seattle Sound bands derived their grunge sound not only from the hardcore punk of the eighties but also the early punk of Iggy Pop's Stooges and the guitar riffs of heavy metal godfathers Black Sabbath and seventies stadium rock gods Led Zeppelin. According to an early bio, Nirvana's influences included, "*H.R. Puffnstuff*, *Speed Racer*, divorces, drugs, sound effects records, the Beatles, rednecks, hard rock, punk rock, Leadbelly, Slayer and, of course, the Stooges."<sup>7</sup>

Raised in the struggling blue-collar logging town of Aberdeen, Washington, lead singer Kurt Cobain was no stranger to domestic disputes, drug and alcohol abuse, or the effects of unemployment. Kurt grew up battling feelings of isolation and impotence as he bounced back and forth between the homes of his divorced parents, relatives, and friends, sometimes spending months of his teenage years homeless. He used his natural talents in visual and musical media to pursue his fascination with sexuality, reproduction, abortion, suicide, and disease, as he himself suffered from manic depression, stomach ailments, and drug abuse.

Growing up, Cobain listened to and liked everything from R.E.O. Speedwagon and Meatloaf to seventies and early eighties heavy metal. He was turned on to the ethos and edge of early-eighties hardcore punk through the Melvins (a local post-punk act influenced by Black Sabbath), a Black Flag gig in Seattle, and his first punk rock album, the Clash's *Sandinista!*

Aberdeen newcomer Krist Novoselic and Cobain played in early outfits such as the Sellouts (a Creedence Clearwater Revival cover band), as well as the Stiff Woodies, Skid Row, and eventually Nirvana. After moving to the college town of Olympia, Washington, and recording and releasing a demo in 1987, Nirvana was discovered by Jonathan Poneman, the co-owner of the upstart Seattle indie label Sub Pop, which also fostered the Seattle Sound acts Mudhoney and Soundgarden. Poneman signed Nirvana to a three-album recording contract.

Inspired by a "Bleach Your Works" poster that encouraged heroin users to clean their needles, Kurt named Nirvana's Sub Pop debut *Bleach*, and the album did quite well in the United Kingdom, where Poneman had used his talent for guerrilla publicity to generate a buzz for the Seattle scene's music available through Sub Pop. At this time, in 1990, Dave Grohl, a somewhat diminutive man but talented drummer raised in Washington, D.C., home of Dischord's straightedge punk scene, joined Nirvana.

Nirvana cemented their underground credibility with European and U.S. tours in support of *Bleach*. During the West Coast leg of their U.S. tour, Nirvana opened up for Sonic Youth, who helped Nirvana eventually sign a deal with DGC, an imprint of Geffen, which gave the band a \$287,000 advance for their DGC debut. *Nevermind* was released in September 1991.

When Kurt was living in Olympia, local K Records producer Calvin Johnson had an impact on him; Johnson believed that musicianship was secondary to emotion. Kurt co-opted this philosophy, writing in his journal: "1. learn *not* to play your instrument [and] 2. don't hurt girls when you dance (or any other time)."<sup>8</sup> *Nevermind*'s recipe of vocal and mu-

sical apathy would be welcomed with open arms by the disfranchised slackers in Generation X, but it was initially criticized by some radio programmers, reluctant to schedule airtime for the album's single "Smells Like Teen Spirit," which showcased Kurt's notoriously mumbled lyrics. Named for an ex-girlfriend's deodorant, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" is typical of the band's bipolar song structures. The song builds on soft, enigmatic verses backed by bass and drums before unleashing a visceral storm of hardcore with four-chord progressions on guitar. The screamed chorus, "A mulatto / An albino / A mosquito / My libido," captured Kurt's obsession with opposites and contradictions. Much like punk rock godfathers the Who, the music's intensity was the message, and like those of R.E.M. lead singer Michael Stipe, the lyrics were mysterious and not easily interpreted. The anti-Eddie Van Halen, Kurt wasn't afraid to toss in lazy guitar solos and milk basic power chords for all they were worth on "Smells Like Teen Spirit," which relies on a V-IV-II-I chord arrangement and is similar to the band Boston's song "More than a Feeling."

Although Nirvana's sound was related to that of their Seattle Sound brethren, Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, Kurt scraped the dregs of his soul for his lyrics and vocal delivery. It was a musical middle finger extended to the mainstream and far from the progressive we-can-be-together musical themes of the socially progressive sixties. The message was literally, on "Smells Like Teen Spirit," "Oh, well, whatever, never mind."

Adjacent to an early draft of "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Kurt wrote in one of his journals: "Pep Assemblys Become Rallys revolutionary debris litters the floor of wallstreet, your children have taken over, you have been warned. The representatives of gluttony will be given 24 hours to vacuum and shave their ways or leave, or they will be weeded out and assassinated with A Ho to the back of the neck to save Bullets."<sup>9</sup> The journal entry is a window into Nirvana's artistic intentions for the "Smells Like Teen Spirit" video. Accompanied by sexy cheerleaders with anarchy symbols on their sweaters, Nirvana thrashes through the song during a mock pep rally as high school students are usurped by raging fans and societal outcasts subvert the preeminent suburban indoctrination ceremony for American youth—the high school pep rally.

When DGC released *Nevermind*, the label predicted that the album would sell approximately 50,000 copies, but after the video for "Smells Like Teen Spirit" found its way into rotation on the MTV program *120 Minutes*, the song helped *Nevermind* rise to the top of the charts. "We never set out to knock Michael Jackson off the top of the chart," Kurt explained. "We simply wanted something we could live with." But could he? Immediately after hitting the top of the *Billboard* charts and living out his lifelong dream of playing on *Saturday Night Live*, Kurt overdosed on heroin and had to be brought back to life by his new girlfriend, Courtney Love, the lead singer of the all-female punk band Hole. Trying to justify his success with his hardcore punk belief in not selling out, Kurt struggled with an uneasy conscience, increasing drug abuse, and the media's attempt to pigeonhole Kurt and Courtney as the new "Sid and Nancy." Adding to his own self-destructive mystique, Kurt stated, "To mature, to me, is to wimp out. [I] hope I die before I turn into Pete Townshend."<sup>10</sup>

In 1992, Courtney became pregnant and an article in *Vanity Fair* alleged that she had been using heroin early in her pregnancy. After Kurt and Courtney's daughter, Frances Bean Cobain, was born, the Los Angeles County Department of Children's Services took custody of the child. Subverting the media's portrayal of him as a junkie and unfit father, Kurt rolled onto the stage at the U.K.'s 1992 Reading Festival in a wheelchair, fell out of the chair, and faked death before popping up and launching into *Nevermind*'s "Breed." He then ripped through twenty-five songs with Novoselic and Grohl; Nirvana ended the show by demolishing their instruments. As the band's road manager, Alex MacLeod, explained, "They wanted to stand up, in front of all these people who were saying, 'It's over, he's a fuck-up, he's useless,' and say to them, 'Fuck you. It's not over.'"<sup>11</sup> Carrying on, Nirvana recorded its second major-label album, *In Utero* (1993), generating the hit single "Heart-Shaped Box."

Stretching their wings, Nirvana played a semiacoustic set for MTV's new acoustic-oriented *Unplugged* program. Kurt took advantage of his celebrity to produce *The Priest They Call Him By* with legendary beat-generation writer William S. Burroughs, whose illustrious book *Naked Lunch* is a surreal depiction of sexuality and drug use. Novoselic, on the other hand, took up the cause surrounding the former Yugoslavia and the killing and rape of Bosnian Muslims. Having spent 1980 abroad in his native Croatia, where he was influenced by touring British punk acts, Novoselic used his familiarity with the region and newfound fame to organize a benefit concert in San Francisco in 1993 for the Bosnian women survivors of the atrocities.

In the meantime, wrote music critic Steve Taylor, "Cobain could barely breathe without someone smelling his breath, and editorializing on the subject." After a suicide attempt in Rome, Italy, Kurt admitted himself to a California rehab facility, before sneaking out and returning to Seattle. There he referenced folk artist Neil Young in a suicide note, "It's better to burn out than to fade away," before taking his own life with a shotgun blast on April 5, 1994. Fans across the United States mourned at Kurt Cobain wakes. As Charles Cross notes in his book *Heavier than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*, "Not since [John] Lennon has such a high-profile musician died so violently; not since [John F.] Kennedy has so beloved an American been taken away."<sup>12</sup>

After Cobain's death, Krist Novoselic used his notoriety to help the Washington Music Industry Coalition fight censorship in the birthplace of the Seattle Sound. In his book *Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy!* (2004), he recalls how he was introduced to social and political issues through the hardcore punk scene of the eighties and how he was inspired to seek a higher consciousness after reading *The Dharma Bums*, beat legend Jack Kerouac's semiautobiographical novel depicting a search for truth, or "dharma," in the mountains of northern California. After Kurt's death, Novoselic dedicated more time to learning how to navigate the twists and turns of Washington State's political bureaucracy, as he continued to counter music censorship, endorse the Seattle-based music scene, and fight discrimination against gays and les-

bians. In *Of Grunge and Government*, he argues against anarchy, nihilism, and voter apathy, characteristic traits of some of his Generation X fans, and explains how discontented youth and fringe political groups can use existing community organizations to effect political change at a local level.



If Nirvana was the Beatles of grunge, fellow Seattle band Pearl Jam was the Led Zeppelin. Pearl Jam mixed the anger of its hardcore punk forefathers with the magnitude of classic seventies stadium rock and generated millions of fans with their debut *Ten*'s hits "Alive," "Evenflow," and "Jeremy," a song about a kid who kills himself in front of his classmates. Including veteran Seattle rockers Stone Gossard on guitar, Jeff Ament on bass, Mike McCready on drums, and former San Diego surfer Eddie Vedder on the mic, Pearl Jam released *Ten* at the right time in 1991 and rose quickly to the top of the charts on the coattails of Nirvana's success; however, the commercialized act lacked the grime of their grunge brethren. Vedder was known for his good looks and gruff vibrato voice as much as his athletic stage presence, climbing scaffolding and rafters to thrill the crowds of moshers and crowd surfers below.

In 1994, Pearl Jam's alternative credibility was augmented when the U.S. Justice Department asked the band to testify on the monopolistic practices of Ticketmaster, the dominant ticket seller at the time that had recently added a \$3.50 service fee to the \$18 tickets the band sold for two shows in Chicago. Gossard and Ament testified before the U.S. Congress, but the Justice Department ended up not prosecuting Ticketmaster and Pearl Jam was cut off from playing many of the large venues in the United States that had exclusive ticketing deals with Ticketmaster. The battle and the band were emblematic of the social-consciousness zeitgeist and desire by some alternative rock bands to give back to their fans in an era when concert ticket prices were reaching the \$100 mark. As Gossard explained in a 1998 interview with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "Ticketmaster was just one of the many things that we think about all the time. We think about having low ticket prices, low T-shirt prices, a great barricade, and well-informed security."<sup>13</sup>



A thousand miles south of the Seattle Sound, Sublime was becoming one of the most popular acts of the mid- to late nineties with their eponymous third album. *Sublime* included the hit single "What I Got" and was released two months after the trio's lead guitarist, lyricist, and vocalist, Bradley Nowell, died from a heroin overdose. Nowell, bassist Eric Wilson, and drummer Bud Gaugh had a style similar to Berkeley's Operation Ivy/Rancid, mixing punk and ska, but Nowell drew from Los Angeles's well of socioeconomic ills and hip-hop culture, exploring the ghetto beverage malt liquor in "40 Oz. to

Freedom,” hatred against women in “Date Rape,” and urban crime in “Robbin’ the Hood,” which features samples of the bass- and drums-oriented Jamaican dub style. Like the tragic deaths of gangsta rap superstars Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls, the untimely demise of Nowell is one of the great misfortunes of the decade. The remaining members of Sublime released *Stand by Your Van* (1998) and *Acoustic Bradley Nowell and Friends* (1998) before launching the group the Long Beach Dub All-Stars.



At the same time that the Seattle Sound was gripping the nation’s white youth, rap was becoming the music of choice for the African American community. West Coast gangsta rap stars N.W.A. gradually disintegrated in the late eighties and early nineties, as rapper and lyricist Ice Cube left to pursue a solo career after feuding with N.W.A.’s Jewish manager, Jerry Heller. Cube’s *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted* (1990) and *Death Certificate* (1991), though dismissed as racist, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic by many, chronicled the socioeconomic blight in south-central Los Angeles and the building tension between the community and the Los Angeles Police Department. Cube also embodied this dynamic in the John Singleton film *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), in which he launched his prosperous film career and played the violent delinquent “Doughboy.”

In April 1992, a controversial art form became a Technicolor reality as south-central L.A. erupted in riots after police officers who had been videotaped beating motorist Rodney King were acquitted of police-brutality charges. All of this was well documented on the evening news. Ice Cube, raised by UCLA professors and a member of Louis Farrakhan’s controversial Nation of Islam, said, “I Told You So” on *The Predator* (1992), especially with “We Had to Tear This Motha—Up.” “You got to give [credit] to a lot of these gangsta rappers,” DJ Easy Mo Bee argues. “They are talking about hard social issues. They are angry, and this is the only voice they have.”<sup>14</sup>

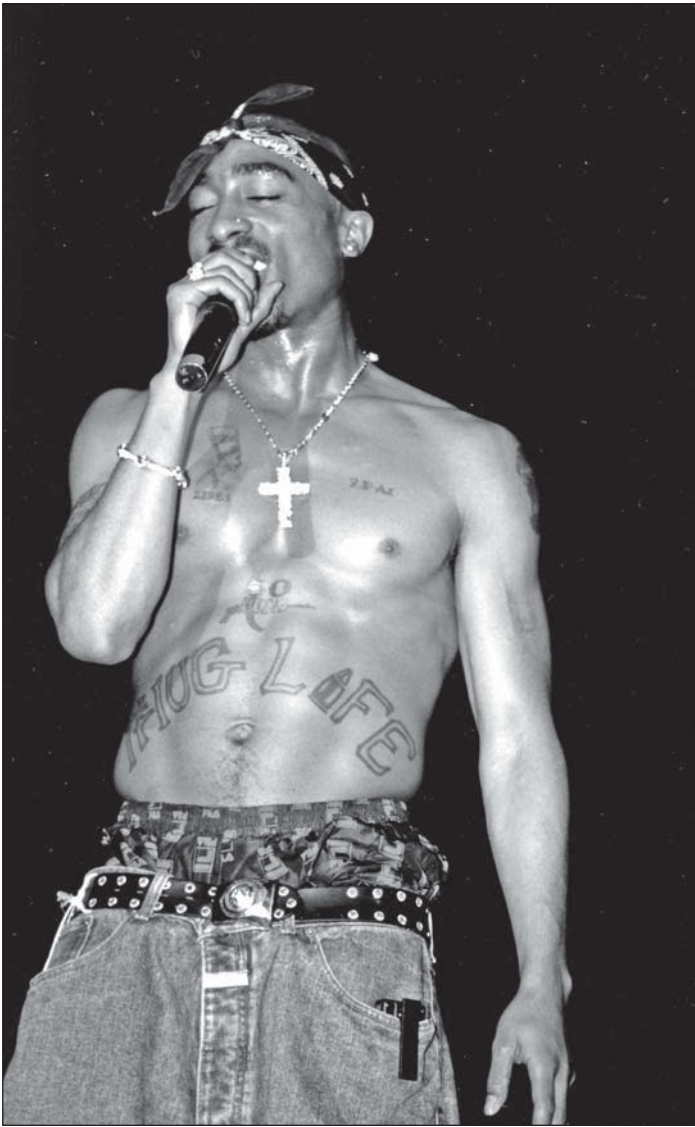
Then Dr. Dre left N.W.A. to launch his own label, Death Row Records, with controversial L.A. entrepreneur Suge Knight in 1991. He quickly became the most influential rap producer of the decade, merging his N.W.A. gangsta rap past with seventies funk and R&B to become the ultimate hip-hop tastemaker of the decade. Dre sparked the gangster rap explosion with the release of *The Chronic* (1992), which launched the career of Snoop Doggy Dogg (Calvin Broadus), whose lazy nasal flows on southern California gangbanging shifted rap listeners’ focus from the historically New York-centered music style to West Coast rap and established Dre as the godfather of “G-Funk,” with backing tracks chock-full of funky beats and laced with catchy synthesizer lines. Dre and Snoop Dogg, with his solo debut *Doggystyle* (1993), paved the way for the violent and hedonistic rap style that would make rapper Tupac Shakur and East Coast rapper Biggie Smalls (aka the Notorious B.I.G., signed to Sean “Puffy” Combs’s Bad Boy Records label in New York City) not only rap megastars but also dead rap megastars, the tragic victims of an East Coast versus West Coast rivalry that spiraled out of control in the midnineties.

As the U.S. war on drugs escalated in the early nineties, judges were forced to adopt the controversial practice of handing out mandatory minimum sentences, with longer prison terms for the possession of crack cocaine than powder cocaine, the former usually sold in economically deprived communities and the latter usually sold in economically vibrant communities. A disproportionate number of African American men ended up spending the prime of their lives behind bars. By the late nineties, one out of every four African American men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine was in prison. The prison industrial complex boomed, a result of U.S. society's trying to manage a growing population and high levels of inequality in the postindustrial era, according to Christian Parenti in his book *Lockdown America*. African Americans composed approximately three-fourths of the U.S. prison population doing time for drug-related offenses in 1996, the same year that William F. Buckley's conservative magazine *National Review* joined many others in concluding that the war on drugs was a failure.

Assassinated black role models, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Black Panther Huey Newton, were mere ghosts in America as less controversial figures such as Rainbow Coalition leader Jesse Jackson and daytime talk-show host Oprah Winfrey tried to fill their shoes. Young African Americans, many of whom were convinced in the nineties that the only way to improve their socioeconomic standing was to sell drugs, looked to gangsta rappers and their glamorizing of the drug trade as leaders.

Enter young and talented gangsta rapper Tupac Shakur, who added more gasoline to the cops-versus-rappers conflagration already scorching hot from the Ice-T "Cop Killer" controversy. The heir apparent of the American Black Power movement, Tupac Amaru Shakur was born to two Black Panthers: his father, William Garland, abandoned Tupac as a child, and his mother, Afeni Shakur, was the sister of former Black Panther and Cuban exile Assata Shakur. Throughout his childhood, Tupac developed a love for poetry and strong ties to his mother; he spent his high school years at the Baltimore School for the Performing Arts. After moving from Maryland to northern California in the late eighties, Tupac dabbled unsuccessfully in drug dealing and became the chairman of the New African Panthers, a quasi-Black Panthers youth group, before landing a spot performing as a dancer and rapper in the seriocomic rap group Digital Underground, known for their hit single "The Humpty Dance."

According to rap writer Armond White in his book *Rebel for the Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur*, because Tupac never had a strong fatherly influence in his life he had to learn to be a man from pimps and drug dealers. Tupac was well informed on the struggles and failures of African Americans to achieve a meaningful equality over the past three decades and possessed the verbal abilities and performance skills needed to reach out and make a lasting impression on his fans and followers. Nonetheless, he escalated the tension between rappers and U.S. police after a series of events, including suing the Oakland Police Department for \$10 million for allegedly brutalizing him after he was arrested for jaywalking; allegedly inspiring a Texas teen to shoot a Texas state trooper to death with the antipolice lyrics on his debut, *2Pacalypse Now* (1992); being subsequently denounced by



*Tupac Shakur*

Republican vice president Dan Quayle for recording and releasing said album; allegedly shooting two off-duty police officers in Atlanta in 1993 (the charges were dropped); and allegedly inspiring two teenagers to kill a police officer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with his song “Souljah’s Story,” also from *2Pacalypse Now*.

After portraying street hustler Bishop in the film *Juice* in 1993, Tupac embraced “thug life,” and blurred the lines between art and life by promoting the gangsta lifestyle. The rest of the time he was in the studio drawing from his background in literature, history, and politics to craft hour after hour of rhymes, using his sometimes sensitive lyrics and progressive worldview to explore everything from unwanted pregnancy in “Brenda’s Got a Baby” to deliverance in “Thugz Mansion.”

In “Thugz Mansion,” which was posthumously released in two versions (one acoustic, with New York rap superstar Nas) on *Better Dayz* (2002), Tupac used his

bold flow and unique socio-musical-political perspective to rap about a gangster paradise where he can escape his earthly problems. For example, he rhymes, “Dear momma don’t cry, your baby boy’s doin good / Tell the homies I’m in heaven and they ain’t got hoods / Seen a show with Marvin Gaye last night, it had me shook / Drippin peppermint schnapps, with Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke / Then some lady named Billie Holiday / Sang sittin there kickin it with Malcolm [X], ’til the day came.”

But his talent couldn’t keep him out of trouble. Tupac was shot five times on his way to Sean Combs’s Quad Recording Studios in a Manhattan high-rise in 1994, and the fol-

lowing year he was sent upriver to a New York State prison to serve an eight-month sentence on sexual assault charges. Tupac was behind bars as his third release, *Me against the World*, debuted at #1 on the *Billboard* pop chart. Like many other rappers in the nineties, his fame and financial success came at the cost of “keeping it real,” or attempting to live the macho gangsta life he portrayed in his songs. Paradoxically, *Me against the World* helped Tupac cement his popularity with his female fan base, one of the largest in the hip-hop genre. The album includes “Keep Ya Head Up,” a song encouraging single mothers to remain optimistic despite their difficult position in society, and “Dear Mama,” a courageous, heartfelt ode to his mother, Afeni, that undermines the predominant and usually well-founded stereotype that gangsta rap is inherently misogynistic.

After being bailed out by Suge Knight for an estimated \$1.4 million, Tupac recorded and released the bold double album *All Eyes on Me* (1996), which includes a remix of the smash Dre-produced single “California Love.” On the video for the album’s “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted,” Tupac implied that Bad Boy Records owner Combs and his protégé Biggie arranged Tupac’s assassination attempt, and he even boasted of having an affair with Biggie’s wife, Faith Evans, in *Vibe* magazine. Tension between both coasts escalated. On September 7, 1996, a car pulled up beside Tupac and Knight at a stoplight on the Las Vegas Strip, after a Mike Tyson fight, and a gunman shot Tupac multiple times; he died six days later. Biggie met the same fate six months following in Los Angeles. For many, Tupac remains a martyr who died before his prime and a young and talented African American who could easily have become a more positive role model for black America, if only he had escaped the trappings of hip-hop’s most violent style.

In the early twenty-first century, Tupac was almost always the standard by which other up-and-coming rappers were measured, and the deaths of Tupac and Biggie remained a cautionary tale of what can go wrong if rap is taken too seriously. Others, such as Chuck D, claimed that Tupac and Biggie were mere pawns in an American culture that treats talented African Americans as commodities, as rap became the fastest-growing musical genre in the United States between 1995 and 1998. Chuck D argued that “the 1990s has been filled with Black men being systematically ripped down and oversexed in the media like we’re the worst criminals on the planet.”<sup>15</sup> But rap was also the wind beneath the wings of other predominantly African American genres, such as R&B, which experienced a 12 percent sales boost in 1998 that was largely attributed to the work of African American female artists Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, and Janet Jackson.

The ghost of Tupac bridged the gap between the late nineties and early 2000s, as Knight and Afeni Shakur mined the deep vaults of Tupac’s recorded music and mixed his voice tracks with contemporary hip-hop artists for from-the-grave recordings that have appeared on twelve posthumous albums.

Fed up with the Mafia-type tactics of label co-owner Knight, Dre left Death Row in the summer of 1996 to launch his own label, Aftermath, and focused on developing the careers of R&B artists, such as Snoop Dogg’s cousin Nate Dogg. Knight was imprisoned in

1997 on racketeering charges, and Snoop Dogg left Death Row to sign with Master P's No Limit label.

After a respite from controversy, Dre signed explicit white rapper Eminem, a rising white star in the hip-hop underground in the postindustrial wasteland of downtown Detroit. Because of his skin color, Eminem was inevitably compared to his white antecedents: the Beastie Boys, Vanilla Ice, Marky Mark, House of Pain, and others, as well as the talented New York MC Nas, but he stood out from the crowd by being able to shift from scathing humor in one bar to deeply personal and shocking material in the next. An angry, outspoken kid from the gutter, Eminem was cultural conservatism's worst nightmare—a typical white American face spouting anger and resentment at the status quo in verse after verse of unrestrained id and skilled wordplay.

In 1999, Dre and Eminem released *The Real Slim Shady*, which included the hit single "My Name Is." The song's catchy hook helped catapult Eminem to the top of the charts and, as Eminem explains in the song "White America," from *The Eminem Show* (2002), "Helped [Dre] get back to the top / Every black fan that I got / Was probably his in exchange for every white fan that's he's got / Like damn we just swapped." With his rapid-fire rhymes and extraordinary narrative talent, Eminem raised the rap bar for the rest of the hip-hop nation, white and black, shifting his lyrics and stance from himself, Marshall Mathers, to his rap act, Eminem, to his evil alter ego, Slim Shady, who spewed vitriolic, violent, self-destructive, misogynistic, and homophobic rhymes, which sparked a backlash everywhere, from women's groups and gay activists to U.S. congressmen and the wife of U.S. vice president Dick Cheney, Lynne Cheney. In a blatant publicity stunt, Eminem briefly silenced his critics by performing his hit single "Stan" at the 2000 Grammy Awards with singer and pianist Elton John, who is openly gay. Eminem subsequently released *The Marshall Mathers LP* and *The Eminem Show*, before crossing over into the movie business in *8 Mile* (2002)—the *Rocky* of the rap world—where Eminem plays a semiautobiographic role as "Rabbit," a battle-rapping poor white kid from a trailer park in downtown Detroit who struggles to the top of the local hip-hop scene. The movie's hit single, "Just Lose Yourself," lyrically and musically captured the self-doubt, determination, and dedication needed to rise above the pack in the highly competitive MC job market and inspired a new generation of white rappers to reach for the brass ring.

Eminem also started his own label, Shady Records, which like Aftermath is a subsidiary of the Interscope Records conglomerate. He signed D12, his hometown rap outfit; bawdy Detroit rapper Obie Trice; and New York hardcore gangsta rapper 50 Cent, a former drug dealer who had survived being shot nine times in Queens, New York, to become a rap superstar in the early 2000s with his debut, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2003).



One of Eminem's white predecessors, the Beastie Boys, took the coveted rap tradition of sampling other artists' recorded music to the extreme with the sleeper 1990 classic *Paul's Boutique*, which broke down musical barriers and mixed styles with reckless abandon. The tightly compressed album features loops and beats recorded and created by the Beastie Boys and L.A. producers the Dust Brothers. It also mixes the Beastie Boys' self-aware boasts and quirky narratives with samples taken from everything from the Curtis Mayfield hit "Superfly" to the Ramones' "Suzy Is a Headbanger."

Sampling, the use of a device (or computer) to record part of an already recorded work for use in a new recording, had been practiced by classical composers in the 1940s. One of the first rap groups, the Sugar Hill Gang, sampled Chic's song "Good Times" for its hit "Rapper's Delight" and ended up having to pay \$500,000 for copyright infringement and back royalties. The days of sampling-heavy classics like *Paul's Boutique* drew to a close in the early nineties when rapper Biz Markie sampled the Gilbert O'Sullivan standard "Alone Again (Naturally)," and O'Sullivan sued and won. Subsequently, all music samples had to be cleared before they were released on a hip-hop (or rock) album. A sampling music artist has to pay a fee up front to the artists whose work he or she is sampling—usually anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000—or offer the copyright holder a percentage (or "cut") of the new song's royalties, which usually translates to between \$.01 and \$.07 for every record sold. "Now that every sample has to be cleared," Mike D. complained, "it's gonna be something only really rich bands can do. Whereas the whole thing that originally appealed to us about rap was the same thing that appealed to us about punk, which is part of the aesthetic of the music: that anyone can do it. For me, sampling was a great extension of that."<sup>16</sup>

With *Check Your Head* (1993), the Beastie Boys outrocked the alternative rock boom, returning to their early-eighties DIY roots as a hardcore New York City punk band, strapping on their own instruments and thrashing out punk-edged rockers over which they layered their trademark rhymes, mixing their unique flavor of golden-age rap with a new, raw indie sound. With *Ill Communication* (1994), the group acquired more alt rock credibility and delved into more aggressive territory, especially with the hardcore hit "Sabotage," which was embraced wholeheartedly by Generation X fans eager to vent pent-up aggression in swirling mosh pits. Starting in 1996, the Beastie Boys funneled their interest in Buddhism and nonviolent activism into the Tibetan Freedom Festival, which not only educated fans on the Chinese invasion and suppression of Tibet, starting in the cold war fifties, but also promoted alternative, peaceful means to resolving global conflict.

Likewise, Public Enemy cemented the bond between rap and rock when they teamed up with the heavy metal band Anthrax for Anthrax's 1991 tour. The bands' collaborative version of "Bring the Noise" fused rap and heavy metal, and later Public Enemy crossed over again to the rock world and toured with alternative acts Sisters of Mercy and Primus, as well as U2, who convinced the militant African American act to perform at a



*The Beastie Boys*

Greenpeace protest that U2 was hosting to create awareness of the dumping of nuclear waste into the Irish Sea.

Throughout the mid- to late nineties, along with the Beastie Boys, A Tribe Called Quest (ATCQ) and progressive rap acts such as Arrested Development were the gangsta rap antidote. As Chuck D said, “ATCQ knew that hip-hop needed to provide an alternative to gang violence so they reintroduced the art form to a market saturated with hardcore rap.”<sup>17</sup> With the early-nineties releases *The Low End Theory* (1991) and *Midnight Marauders* (1993), A Tribe Called Quest’s Q-Tip, Phife Dawg, and Ali Shaheed Muhammad fused their abstract rhymes with jazz samples and inspired acts such as the Fugees, which launched female rapper Lauryn Hill’s career, as well as the Roots and Common—both members of the Okayplayer collective, an Internet-based organization of like-minded and progressive rap artists focused on the organic elements of hip-hop music; Okayplayer currently also includes Dilated Peoples, Talib Kweli, and female singer Erykah Badu.



The streams of music that flowed from the hip-hop and alternative rock music communities maintained their popularity and significance into the twenty-first century. In our next chapter, we shall chronicle artists from metal, house, dance, and trance genres, explore the proliferation and importance of more recent rock festivals, and detail the technological “perfect storm”—the confluence of the MP3 digital music file, the rise of the Internet, and the creation of peer-to-peer music software.



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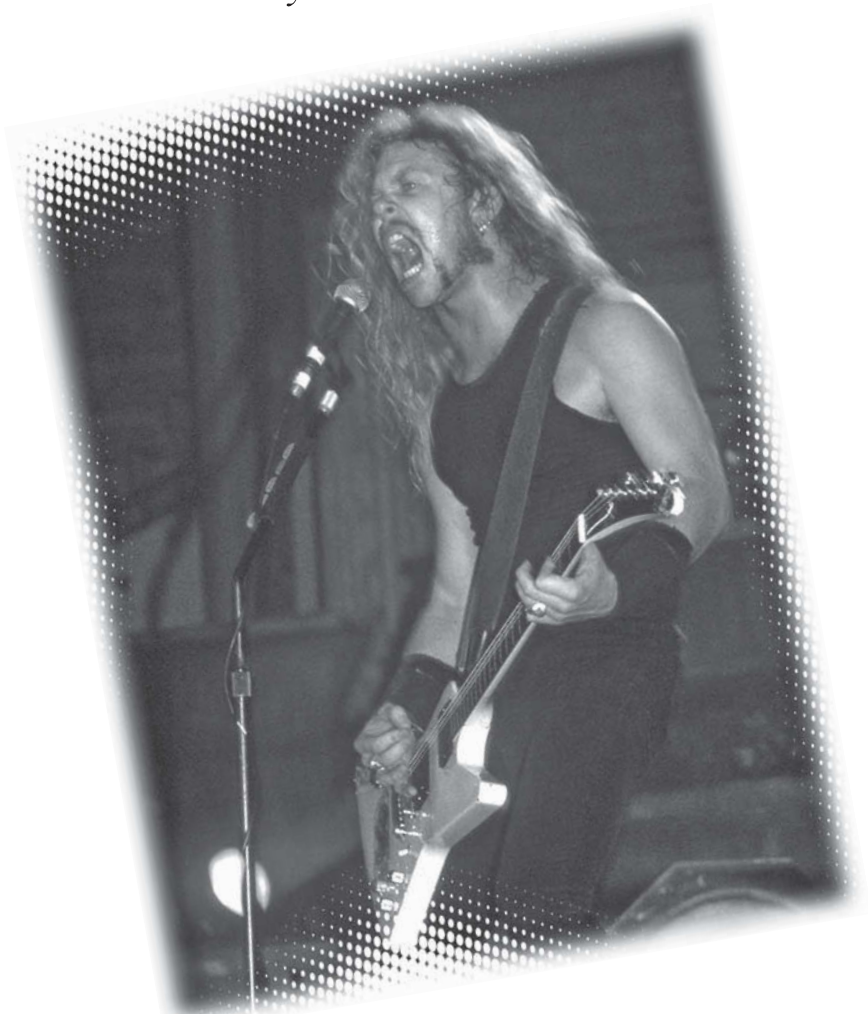
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# WE SHOULD BE TOGETHER

Festival Frenzies, Electronic Dance  
Music Culture, Heavy Metal  
Metamorphoses, and the Deregulation  
of Radio and File Sharing  
By Peter Miller

Chapter

20



*Metallica*

There were just waves of hatred bouncing around the place. It was clear we had to get out of there. It was like a concentration camp.

—MTV News reporter Kurt Loder, in *U.S.A. Today*, on the thirtieth anniversary of Woodstock

The current youth culture that involves taking drugs like Ecstasy and staying up all night dancing to House music is the latest chapter in a very long history of taking drugs, staying up listening to music, and dancing.

—Nicholas Saunders and Rick Doblin, *Ecstasy: Dance, Trance, and Transformation*

With this whole Seattle thing, it's like the attitude has been driven out of hard rock in the last four or five years. I like Soundgarden, I liked Nirvana, some of Pearl Jam's stuff, but where's the attitude?

—Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich, in Mark Putterford's *Metallica "Talking": Metallica in Their Own Words*

JANE'S ADDICTION FRONT MAN PERRY FARRELL nourished the acts of the alternative rock boom on his Lollapalooza tours. "Remember those paint-wheel things they used to have at carnivals and you squish out the paint?" Farrell asked. "It spins, stops, and there's your painting. That's what I want to do with entertainment."<sup>1</sup> Launched as both the *Ritual de lo Habitual* tour and the Jane's Addiction farewell tour, Lollapalooza 1991 featured headliners Jane's Addiction, West Coast gangsta rapper Ice-T, hardcore punker Henry Rollins, as well as the alternative metal acts Living Color, Butthole Surfers, and Nine Inch Nails. And by the time Lollapalooza went on temporary sabbatical in 1998, what started out as a touring freak show had featured every major-label act from rap rockers Rage Against the Machine and stoner rappers Cypress Hill and Snoop Dogg to the thrash metal band Metallica and the electronic dance music acts Orbital, Prodigy, and Tricky.

Not to be outdone by Lollapalooza, one of the original organizers of the original Woodstock, Michael Lang, joined with Polygram president John Scherer to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Woodstock with "Three More Days of Peace and Music" in Saugerties, New York, in August 1994. Woodstock II featured everyone from sixties icons Crosby, Stills, and Nash and Bob Dylan to the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Metallica. With the success of the original Woodstock, baby boomer rock music fans proved to their conservative parents that men, women, and children could live together for a few days of musical entertainment and actually bring to life their concern for the community and the environment and explore the mind through experimentation with drugs. Woodstock

II, conversely, celebrated two eras of music (sixties and nineties) and played with the mythology of the original event while bowing at the altar of free-market capitalism. Lang and partners Arti Kornfelt, Joel Rosenman, and John Roberts spent \$9 million on the original Woodstock, and all lost their shirts before recouping their loss through the sale and screening of the award-winning Woodstock record and film. Woodstock tickets cost \$18; Woodstock II tickets cost \$135. Lang and Scherer, who ended up spending \$50 million on Woodstock II, also arranged an advertising deal with Pepsi and a pay-per-view deal with cable television providers in a bid to cash in.

The Garden of Eden mythology associated with the original Woodstock was further turned on its head in the reprisal when mud-caked fans surfed and moshed to more aggressive styles of music and ravers danced all night sucking on baby pacifiers and wearing glow-in-the-dark jewelry at “RaveStock.” Alternative rock critic Jim DeRogatis, who was there and wrote a review of the event for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, criticized the lack of amenities, plumbing, food, site preparation, and the jam band Spin Doctors’ cover of Joni Mitchell’s “Woodstock”: “In ’94 as in ’69, promoters told the media to focus on people pulling together and making the best of things. ‘A reaffirmation of the human spirit,’ co-promoter John Scherer called it. But what was the alternative? Were concertgoers supposed to revert to the primitive savages running around in *The Lord of the Flies*?”<sup>2</sup>

Stadium concerts and music festivals have long been established rites of passage for teens and cherished opportunities to drop out, turn on, tune in, and drop back in for



*Phish*

doctors, stockbrokers, and other baby boomer weekend warriors. Jam band pioneers the Grateful Dead already sated more adventurous music fans' bohemian impulses. Like the Dead, the jam bands Phish, Blues Traveler, and Widespread Panic drew from jazz, rock, bluegrass, the blues, and other styles, using traditional rock song structures as foundations from which to launch into improvisational voyages or sail through uncharted musical waters during twenty- or thirty-minute-long jams. The jam band craze, fueled largely by Phish and Widespread Panic after the death of Jerry Garcia in 1995, inspired late-nineties acts the Dave Matthews Band, as well as the hip-hop- and blues-based G. Love and Special Sauce and bass impresario and iconoclast Les Claypool, known for his intricate six-string bass work in the alternative metal band Primus. Also like the Dead, these new jam bands relied on virtually nonstop touring and their fans' free-tape trading to fuel their popularity. After all, the Grateful Dead sold approximately \$226 million in tickets and reaped approximately \$50 million in revenue from 1990 to 1995, the year Jerry Garcia died and the band temporarily parted ways. Phish never made much money from its studio releases, but the Vermont-based jam band played an average of 140 shows per year, in its prime, and could easily sell out Madison Square Garden. When the band finally retired in August 2004, Phish played a four-set two-day-long marathon jam session in Coventry, Vermont. Continuing on their long, strange trip, eight years after Garcia's death, the remaining members of the Grateful Dead started playing again using "the Dead" as their name.

In 1997, singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan launched her own women-only tour, Lilith Fair, which was based on Lollapalooza and named after the legendary first wife of Adam (of Adam and Eve fame). Giving one dollar from each ticket to a local women's charity, Lilith Fair featured such acts as the Dixie Chicks, Queen Latifah, Dido, and Tracy Chapman and ended in 1999.

At the brink of the new millennium, Lang organized yet another Woodstock. But Woodstock III was definitely not your parents' Woodstock. Woodstock had Country Joe McDonald urging 500,000 fans to chant "F . . . U . . . C . . . K . . ." and Pete Townshend whacking Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman with his guitar. Love was "free," not stolen. People got along under harsh conditions. Woodstock III, hosted at a former U.S. Air Force base outside Rome, New York, in 1999, featured a \$15 inflation in ticket price from \$135 at Woodstock II to \$150 at Woodstock III, razor-wire fences, and \$4 water bottles. The Saturday-night lineup featured Limp Bizkit, Rage Against the Machine, and Metallica, talented bands but ones capable of stirring drunken and drugged fans into frenzies more reminiscent of a European soccer riot than Woodstock 1969. After the Chili Peppers performed as the closing act, unruly fans ran amok, starting fires, throwing bottles at police, and looting ATMs and retail kiosks. Police arrested forty-four people, and four women reported being raped.

Lollapalooza rose from the ashes in 2003. Jane's Addiction, which had regrouped in 2002 and recently released *Strays* (2003), was the headlining act for a show that included everyone from Audioslave—essentially Rage Against the Machine with Soundgarden's

Chris Cornell in place of former Rage front man Zack De La Rocha—to the nu-metal act Incubus and the retro-rock ambassadors Queens of the Stone Age. Lollapalooza 2004 was supposed to include one day of Morrissey, Sonic Youth, and Modest Mouse and a second day with String Cheese Incident, the Pixies, and Wilco. But, as was common in the summer of 2004, fans weren't willing to pay the high ticket price, and the tour had to be canceled.



The death knell for disco sounded at the Disco Demolition Night at Chicago's Comiskey Park in 1979, when disco-despising Chicago rock DJs Steve Dahl and Garry Meier blew up disco records between the first and second baseball games of a Chicago White Sox double-header. As the electronic beat-based music genre dwindled in popularity in the years following the publicity stunt, electronic dance music evolved underground in Chicago, Detroit, and New York City nightclubs, in fringe establishments that catered mostly to gay and minority patrons. Electronic dance music experienced a renaissance during the British rave boom and its smaller counterpart in the United States, which exploded in the late eighties and early nineties.

In Belleville, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, the Belleville Three—Juan Atkins, Derrick May, and Kevin Saunders—invested in cheap analog synthesizers and Roland 909 drum machines and created an intense, postindustrial sound, “techno,” featuring layered melodies, a four-four time signature, and an average of 120 beats per minute (BPMs). “The music is just like Detroit, a complete mistake,” Atkins said. “It’s like [Parliament/Funkadelic front man] George Clinton and [electronic music pioneers] Kraftwerk stuck in an elevator.”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, in nearby Chicago, DJs Frankie Knuckles and Ron Hardy crafted a soothing, synthesizer-heavy sound called “house,” named after the nightclub where Knuckles and Hardy played music, the Warehouse. DJs at the Paradise Garage nightclub in New York City blended house with R&B, inventing “garage.”

In 1987, the U.S. electronic music collective M/A/R/R/S released the single “Pump Up the Volume,” which quickly climbed to the #1 slot on the U.K. charts and incited European DJs and electronic music enthusiasts to import techno, house, and garage albums from the United States and add their own creative input to the U.S. styles. In a twist on house, British DJs developed “acid house” and played for fans in abandoned warehouses and remote fields. On the Continent, DJs in Germany, Belgium, and Holland spawned European techno and increased its BPMs to produce “trance,” which has hard, fast rhythms and driving melodies.

Electronic dance music went from being categorized simply as “electronic dance music,” “techno,” “house,” or “garage” to inspiring a laundry list of names for each slight stylistic variation. “Record label niche-marketing wizards,” dance music critic Todd Souvignier explains, “witnessed the success of house, acid house and techno. With help

from the music press, they proceeded to balkanize dance music, splitting it into an array of ill-defined sub-genres and styles. Flavors of the month have included drum and bass, garage, speed garage, jungle, and many other variations.”<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the overwhelming number of labels, most differences in style are based on variations in tempo, or BPMs. Hip-hop and R&B songs, for instance, usually have between 60 and 100 BPMs, whereas house and techno average 120 BPMs and “speed garage” and “drum and bass” have 135 BPMs or more.

DJs have to master sampling and scratching techniques, as well as learn how to isolate and loop drum breaks and “slip queue” two turntables to seamlessly mix music from each record on the fly, using turntables and mixing equipment. To properly get their postmodern messages across, many DJs spend countless hours sifting through bins of new and used vinyl (or, in some cases, CDs for play on new CD turntables) to find the right samples. A familiar hook or instrumental line, usually played on the legendary Technics SL-1200 turntable, can jolt dancers and listeners to familiar musical terrain. “When a song has been embedded in one’s mind,” Souvignier notes, “it takes just a few notes to push the button of recognition, evoking all associated memories and emotions.”<sup>5</sup>

European record labels started investing in electronic music, and both the United Kingdom and Europe experienced a “rave” boom in the late eighties, notably during the summer of 1988, the other “Summer of Love.” The phenomenon was also exported back to the United States, in a dynamic similar to the British co-optation, reinvention, and exploration of American blues in the early sixties by the Beatles and Rolling Stones. The cross-cultural exchange triggered an American rave boom of its own, albeit underground, in the early nineties.

The generation of electronic dance music fans that latched onto the pulsing beats and textures of techno, house, and garage in the late eighties and early nineties, giving rise to the rave booms, embraced the empathy-inducing drug Ecstasy, which the German pharmaceutical company Merck invented in 1912 and labeled methylene dimethamphetamine (MDMA). The U.S. Army considered using the substance for psychological warfare during the cold war fifties, psychiatrists and new age—medicine advocates leveraged MDMA’s calming effect to treat mental illness in the seventies, while others experimented with it for recreational purposes. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, however, used its new powers in the war on drugs to classify MDMA as a Schedule 1 narcotic, prohibiting its sale and use and considering it as dangerous as cocaine and heroin.

The British rave boom, and American rave underground across the Atlantic, defied Ecstasy prohibition. Ecstasy, though easy to find, could easily be tainted with other more dangerous substances. Even pure Ecstasy could cause extreme dehydration in ravers. As a result of these two primary factors, there were isolated incidents of ravers either dying from drug overdoses or, fearing dehydration, drinking too much water and dying as a result of their brain tissue swelling. Diehard ravers and casual users defended the drug, a “penicillin for the soul,” as a relatively harmless chemical whose effects were capable of

uniting previously isolated individuals—homosexuals and heterosexuals, blacks and whites, boys and girls, athletic types and academic types—in a communal atmosphere promoting peace, love, unity, and respect (PLUR). As dance club critic Frank Owen pointedly explains, “[When on Ecstasy] the kid you savagely beat up two years ago was now your best friend.”<sup>6</sup>

British rave promoters could earn up to six figures per rave and faced, at most, fines up to \$3,000 for licensing violations. That started to change in 1990, when U.K. legislatures passed the Entertainment (Increased Penalties) Act, increasing the possible punishment to six months in jail. The crackdown simply pushed the fringe rave culture into bars and nightclubs and didn’t stop motivated rave promoters from organizing parties—more than 25,000 ravers, for example, gathered for a three-day party in Worcestershire, England, in 1992. In a draconian bid to stem the popularity of rave culture, conservative British prime minister John Major drew up the Criminal Justice Bill of 1994, which was passed by Parliament and severely limited Britons’ right to assemble, especially those Britons with a predilection for electronic dance music.

By the mid- to late nineties, many ravers in the United Kingdom and the United States developed a high tolerance for Ecstasy and started using harder drugs and demanding more BPMs to match their mind-sets. As a result, the period produced the most hardcore of electronic dance music, including tech step, gabber, and DHR (digital hardcore recordings), featuring owner Alec Empire’s Atari Teenage Riot, which layered political rants over breakneck tempos of more than 200 BPMs. PLUR often devolved into a maelstrom of hedonism and self-destructive behavior, as is recounted in Owen’s book *Clubland*, which chronicles the rise and fall of New York City nightclub magnate Peter Gatien and his Limelight, Tunnel, and Palladium venues. The clubs ended up attracting drug-dealing gangsters and becoming outlets for Ecstasy, cocaine, ketamine (“Special K”), and sex.

Around the same time, the midnineties, the DJ duo the Chemical Brothers and DJ superstars Fat Boy Slim and Prodigy became popular in the United States, and rising alternative rock icon Beck helped popularize hip-hop DJ techniques on his musically adventurous debut, *Mellow Gold* (1994), and *Odelay* (1996). British DJs such as Sasha and (John) Digweed and Felix Da Housecat and U.S. DJs such as Armand Van Helden, Moby, and Junior Vasquez could, by the late nineties, charge upward of \$100,000 for one-night-only performances. But electronic dance music was firmly entrenched in its normalization phase in 2000, when Madonna released *Music*, a collection of heavy electronic dance tracks. “The glitterati were co-opting underground dance music,” Owen explains. “Supermodels were dating DJs, who were treated like superstars. The country’s revolutionary forces of elitism and posing, VIP rooms and VVIP rooms were overwhelming the inclusive and idealistic dance flavor of the early ‘90s.”<sup>7</sup>

Somewhat similar to postmodern pop culture artist Andy Warhol’s co-opted advertising with Campbell’s Soup labels that he turned into “art,” the U.K. and U.S. advertising industries co-opted electronic dance music and turned it into money. “The DJ is now the



Beck

hero of his age,” argue Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, “a popstar, a crowd-draw, a reliable brand name.” As a case in point, the British alcohol industry, allegedly trying to recoup sales lost to competitor Ecstasy, developed and advertised a new product line—“Alco-Pops.” According to Brewster and Broughton, these “fruit-flavored alcoholic beverages, designed and marketed to compete with the psychedelic experience, became one of the fastest-established new product sectors ever, the kings of day-glo underage vomit.” Furthermore, the BBC, which had stopped broadcasting acid house music during the British rave witch hunts of the early nineties, underwent an interesting sea change in its position on rave culture, using the spelling “e-lection” to promote its 1997 U.K. election coverage; *E* is British slang for Ecstasy.<sup>8</sup>

In the United States, advertising executives signed a \$10 million contract with the electronic music label Moonshine and used its artists’ work

in ads for Levi’s jeans, Absolut Vodka, and Camel cigarettes, as well as the highly caffeinated club drink Red Bull. New York DJs Ming and FS freelanced for the Japanese automotive company Nissan, sampling engine, door, and horn sounds and then remixing them throughout a hip thirty-second TV commercial.

Others simply dismissed electronic dance music. U.S. DJ superstar Moby, then in his late thirties, criticized Eminem for his misogynistic and homophobic lyrics during the 2001 Grammy Awards. Eminem shot back: “You don’t know me, you’re too old, let go / It’s over, nobody listens to techno,” on his song “Without Me” from *The Eminem Show*. “I’ve figured it out,” Moby subsequently posted on his Web site. “He [Eminem] has a crush on me. And at some point he figured out that I was straight and he’s so upset and hurt, the fact that he has this unrequited crush on me, that’s why he’s so upset. I’m just waiting for Eminem to come out of the closet.”<sup>9</sup>

Another critic of rave culture, U.S. senator Joe Biden sought in 2002 to grant U.S. law enforcement more jurisdiction over the late-blooming U.S. rave scene by expanding an

existing “crack house” statute with his Reducing Americans’ Vulnerability to Ecstasy (RAVE) Act. Although his act was initially blocked by the U.S. Congress, Biden tacked a “midnight rider,” or a last-minute addendum, onto the popular 2003 Amber Alert bill, which enables U.S. citizens to help law enforcement find victims of child abduction. Passing on the back of the popular bill, the RAVE Act held business owners responsible for drug offenses occurring on their premises and authorized judges to sentence business owners convicted of violating the act to pay up to \$250,000 in fines in civil court or up to \$500,000 in fines and/or to serve up to twenty years in prison in criminal court. “Punishing innocent businessmen and women for the crimes of their customers is unprecedented in U.S. history,” argues the Electronic Music Defense Education Fund. “The federal government can’t even keep drugs out of prisons, yet they seek to incarcerate business owners for failing to keep people from sneaking drugs onto their premises.”<sup>10</sup>



All of this heightened awareness of music’s alleged ability to stir evil in young listeners’ innocent souls was an outgrowth of the Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMRC), formed in 1984 by the wives of 10 percent of the U.S. Senate, including Tipper Gore, and cabinet member James Baker’s wife, Susan Baker. Just as MTV was becoming as natural a living room fixture as the family dog, the PMRC argued that the rising rape and suicide rates among American teens were a result of lyrically explicit rock music and visually demeaning music videos. A PMRC fundraising letter from the mideighties reads: “Too many of today’s rock artists—through radio, records, television videos, videocassettes—advocate aggressive and hostile rebellion, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, irresponsible sexuality, sexual perversions, violence and involvement in the occult.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the protestations from Twisted Sister front man Dee Snider, Frank Zappa, and even boy-next-door folk singer John Denver, the Recording Industry Association of America caved in to the PMRC in late 1985 and agreed to voluntarily label material that could be considered offensive, thereby beginning the first censorship of rock music across the music industry.

It’s important to note that the standardized “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics” stickers that adorned CDs, cassettes, and records starting in 1990 became not only a quick and easy way for teenagers to grab the “good stuff” but also a co-opted slogan stamped and sold on black T-shirts, mocking the PMRC’s conservative values. Regardless, six U.S. states in the nineties took the stickering seriously and attempted to adopt legislation that would criminalize the sale of stickered materials to minors.

This conservative attitude could be found in other areas as well. By the midnineties, most of the Satanic imagery and bombast that had dominated the heavy metal scene in the eighties was either sucked from the scene as heavy metal was watered down by the alternative rock boom or ripe for parody on *Saturday Night Live*’s hit skit “Wayne’s World.” Yet jurors in the conservative community of West Memphis, Arkansas, couldn’t see past the black heavy metal T-shirts of local teenagers Jessie Misskelley, Damien Echols, and Jason

Baldwin, and without physical evidence or witnesses to back their judgment convicted the trio of the murder of three boys in 1994. The controversial court decision was documented in the 1996 HBO documentary *Paradise Lost* and 2000 sequel *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations*, which includes songs that Metallica provided free of charge.

Music censorship reared its head again as the twentieth century drew to a close. In the late nineties, conservative Democratic senator Joe Lieberman denounced the graphic lyrics of the death metal band Cannibal Corpse, before running unsuccessfully with Tipper's husband, Al Gore, in the 2000 presidential election. During a lackluster bid for the presidency in 2004, Lieberman said, "I have taken on the entertainment industry for peddling sex and violence to our children—and spoken up for parents who feel they are in competition with the popular culture to raise their children."<sup>12</sup> The topic seemed antiquated, though, considering the more important national issues at stake—the post-9/11 crackdown on global terrorism and war in Iraq.



Metallica burst onto the American heavy metal scene with *Kill 'Em All* (1983). The speed metal band was heavily influenced by the new wave of British heavy metal bands—such as Judas Priest and Iron Maiden—but started venturing more into social issues on their follow-up album, *Ride the Lightning* (1984). *Ride the Lightning* focuses on the destruction of war in "For Whom the Bell Tolls," deriving its title and material from the Ernest Hemingway novel of the same name. In Hemingway's book, an antifascist fighter in the Spanish civil war confronts life, love, death, and dying; lead singer and rhythm guitarist James Hetfield was inspired by a scene in the book in which five soldiers are killed by a warplane. "Make his fight on the hill in the early day," Hetfield said. "Constant chill deep inside / Shouting gun, on they run through the endless grey / On they fight, for they are right, yes, by who's to say? / For a hill men would kill, why? They do not know / Suffered wounds test their pride / Men of five, still alive through the raging glow / Gone insane from the pain that they surely know."

"Fade to Black," actually inspired by the suicidal thoughts that Hetfield had after his favorite amplifier was stolen, features an acoustic guitar intro backing Hetfield in ballad mode before devolving into thrashing guitar chords and solos. "Fade to Black" lyrics include, "Emptiness is filling me / To the point of agony / Growing darkness taking dawn / I was me, but now he's gone."

With integrity in tow, Metallica was the most important guitar-based heavy metal act to bridge the late eighties and prosper through the alternative rock-dominated nineties. Metallica caught critics' ears in 1988 with their double album . . . *And Justice for All*. Although the speed metal foursome, Hetfield, drummer Lars Ulrich, lead guitarist Kirk Hammet and newcomer bassist Jason Newsted, shared the long locks and scary stage presence of glam metal's Mötley Crüe and Guns 'n' Roses, they didn't sing about girls, girls, girls or Paradise City, where the grass was green and the girls were pretty. Instead,

they raised the bar and continued to comment lyrically on social controversies such as war, the faulty U.S. justice system, and the destruction of the environment on . . . *And Justice for All*. As heavy metal writer Ian Christe notes, “As recession and covert wars [Irangate] came alive after ten years of relative prosperity, the country started to demand music that faced troubled times with strong emotion and spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

With . . . *And Justice for All*, Metallica wove a dark and damning masterpiece in disparate time signatures and thick layers of guitar arpeggios. They funneled their classical music chops—derived primarily from original bassist Cliff Burton, who had died a year earlier in a tour bus accident—and well-placed anger into what became their first top-40 hit, “One,” a nearly eight-minute-long song. “One” sounded similar to a song by another band in the new wave of British heavy metal. Venom’s “Buried Alive” had lyrics inspired by Dalton Trumbo’s novel *Johnny Got His Gun*, the film version of which is spliced throughout the “One” video. The song captures the tragic circumstances of Trumbo’s World War I antihero, Johnny, chewed up and spit out by the machinery of war (a land mine), left limbless and senseless. Including everything from helicopter and artillery sounds to pulsing two-four rhythm guitar and drumming to guitars and drums mimicking machine guns, “One” is a startling first-person narrative, more disturbing and intense than Black Sabbath’s “War Pigs,” but also a timeless classic in rank with World War I soldier and poet Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est.”

In the late eighties, heavy metal bled into hardcore rap and alternative rock. Ice-T sampled Black Sabbath. Public Enemy sampled Metallica’s speed metal brethren Slayer. Faith No More and Primus mixed metal’s intensity with funk, spawning an alternative metal miniboom in the early nineties with Helmet, Ministry, and White Zombie. Ministry and White Zombie mixed their metal with music samples, easily crossing over into the alternative rock fan base. Queensryche took the soft road and had a hit with “Silent Lucidity.” And a new Best Metal Performance category was included in the 1989 Grammy Awards, but nominee Metallica lost to aging flute-based prog rock vets Jethro Tull, showing how utterly out of touch the Grammy committee was with heavy metal.

For *Metallica* (1991), the band cut their tempo and guitar riffs in exchange for tighter compositions and explored lighter musical terrain with “Nothing Else Matters,” which relied on not only a twelve-string acoustic guitar, synthesizer, and sitar but also an orchestra arranged by cinematic conductor Michael Kamen. (Kamen also collaborated with Metallica in 1999 on *S&M, Symphony & Metallica*, for which Metallica played with the San Francisco Symphony.) “The Unforgiven” derives its title from the Clint Eastwood movie of the same name and was inspired by Eastwood’s famous spaghetti westerns, especially *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1967). The spaghetti-western soundscapes were composed by Ennio Morricone, who used everything from guitars and whistles to ocarinas and organs in his work. Released at the same time as Nirvana’s *Nevermind*, in the fall of 1991, *Metallica* shot to the top of the *Billboard* chart and, in only two weeks, became a double platinum record and in 1992 won the Grammy for Best Metal Performance with Vocal. As Christe notes, “It would turn America into a nation

of headbangers—housewives, sailors, software programmers, major-league ballplayers, and all.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1995, though, MTV drove a nail into the coffin of heavy metal when it canceled its *Headbangers Ball* show. Essentially, heavy metal bands had to adapt and transform their styles to flourish in the alternative rock-dominated nineties. Metallica committed the heavy metal sin of shaving their long hair in 1996, posing for pictures with fashionable rock photographer Anton Corbijn, and trading in their classical European song structures for blues-based guitar solos on their *Black* album follow-up, *Load*. “In the thirteen years since *Kill ‘Em All*, Metallica’s early headbanging accouterments—jean jackets, Saxon pins, and the pubescent mustache on Lars Ulrich’s face—had given way to a uniform of matching black jeans and shirts,” Christe complains. “Now, in one fell swoop, Metallica’s members cropped their long locks—the traditional signifier of a metallur’s commitment to the cause.” Metallica also decided to headline the 1996 Lollapalooza tour. Many fans were up in arms. One wrote to a guitar magazine that “the band that set the path for many heavy metal bands and was the whole reason I like heavy metal has shit on everyone and followed the alternative bandwagon.”<sup>15</sup>

Metallica released a double CD of cover songs in 1998, *Garage Inc.*, featuring everything from Bob Seger’s “Turn the Page” to Thin Lizzy’s “Whiskey in a Jar.” Free to do as they pleased, “By the late 1990s Metallica was arguably the most popular modern rock act in the world,” adds Christe, “competing only with U2, R.E.M., and Madonna.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout the early 2000s, Metallica were heavy metal gods and superrich pop culture superstars. Ulrich appeared on TV shows, such as *The Charlie Rose Show* and the apropos *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Bassist Newsted left the band, citing a lack of respect from his bandmates. Hetfield went into rehab to treat his alcoholism. The band replaced Newsted with Robert Trujillo in 2003 and used Newsted’s departure and Hetfield’s new perspective on his two decades of boozing as fodder for *St. Anger* (2003) and the film *Some Kind of Monster* (2004), which documents the group therapy the band went through while making the album.



Black Sabbath front man Ozzy Osbourne and his business-savvy wife, Sharon, one-upped the Lollapalooza tour in the late nineties with their Ozzfest tours. Ozzfest embraced the so-called nu-metal acts: Korn, Kid Rock, Limp Bizkit, Incubus, Godsmack, System of a Down, Papa Roach, Slipknot, Tool, Rob Zombie, and the all-female Canadian band Kittie. All distinguished themselves from traditional heavy metal by either mixing metal with rap, like Korn, Kid Rock, and Limp Bizkit; mixing syncopated metal with rap and political rage, like System of a Down; blending metal with outrageous stage personas, like Slipknot and Rob Zombie; or subverting heavy metal stereotypes simply through gender, such as Kittie. As Christe recounts, “Harking back to the alternative metal wave of 1991, the nu-metal bands were grinders of a slam-dancing musical sausage—picking and choosing influences like the aggressive cable-ready channel surfers they were.”<sup>17</sup>

System of a Down, nu-metallers from Los Angeles's Armenian exile community, mixed classically influenced heavy metal à la Metallica with front man Serj Tankian's political rants, which included protests of the systematic genocide of Armenians at the hands of Turkey during the early twentieth century. Musically, guitarist Daron Malakian and bassist Shavo Odadjian tuned down their guitars, and drummer John Dolmayan was known for his unpredictable backing beats and time signature changes. Tankian thrilled crowds and MTV viewers with his schizophrenic singing styles and penchant for face paint and Afro hairstyles. Though nu-metal to the core, System of a Down offered the intense performances and political stance needed to become a Rage Against the Machine of the 2000s.

Incubus, who played Ozzfest in 1998, formed in California in the early nineties and was influenced by alternative rockers the Red Hot Chili Peppers and rap-metal as much as by electronic music and the speed metal sound made famous in the eighties by Metallica, Slayer, Anthrax, and Megadeth. On *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.* (1997), Incubus mixed everything from metal and funk to hip-hop and techno. In addition to a traditional lineup of vocalist Brandon Boyd, guitarist Mike Einziger, and drummer Jose Pasillas, Incubus included DJ Lyfe (followed by DJ Kilmore) on turntables. Using its cross-genre appeal and positive worldview, Incubus not only followed up Ozzfest with Korn's Family Values tour but also used its DJ element to cross over to the dance music-centered Area One tour in 2001.

Purveyors of the rap-rock hybrid style, Korn, Linkin Park, and Limp Bizkit were three of the many rap-rockers to attain mainstream fame during this period. Latino stoner rappers Cypress Hill, whose broad fame in the early nineties celebrated L.A.'s Latin gang culture, even released a double-disc set of rock and rap songs on their 2000 release, *Skull and Bones*, which includes one rock-oriented CD and one rap-oriented CD.

Heavy metal suffered two serious blows in the early 2000s. Ninety-five people died after a fire broke out from a pyrotechnics display at a Great White show in West Warwick, Rhode Island, in early 2003. An aging heavy metal band that had a hit with "Once Bitten, Twice Shy" in the hair-band eighties, Great White suffered the deaths of their guitarist, Ty Longley, and scores of fans. "This is far and away the biggest tragedy in rock history," said Ray Waddell, the senior editor for *Billboard* magazine. "It transcends rock and roll to become just an American tragedy, a human tragedy."<sup>18</sup>

A year later, renowned heavy metal guitarist "Dimebag" Darrell Abbott, who founded the heavy metal act Pantera and was playing in his post-Pantera band Damageplan, was shot to death at a show in Columbus, Ohio, by a deranged fan who believed Abbott had caused the breakup of Pantera. Although Pantera had bowed at the altar of glam rock in the eighties, they had changed their image in the nineties and, like Metallica, garnered vast critical acclaim.



Always outspoken, Metallica's drummer, Lars Ulrich, did not take kindly to Napster.com's supporting the unauthorized downloading of Metallica MP3 files. Along

with the Recording Industry Association of America, Metallica sued Napster in 2000. Even though Metallica, like the Grateful Dead, had helped build its following by allowing fans to tape its live shows, Ulrich held his ground, despite the protestations of Metallica fans: "Why is it only people who've computers have the right to free music? Should all music not be free then? Can we just throw the doors open at Tower Records and do away with the cash registers? It doesn't make sense."<sup>19</sup> Many antiauthority Metallica fans weren't too happy when the band kicked more than 300,000 Metallica fans and file sharers off Napster.com in late 2000.

The MP3 (Moving Picture Experts Group-1, layer three) file format was born in 1990. Using the new technology, sound engineers could compress digital audio files by a factor of twelve and transfer them from one computer to another without compromising sound quality. The U.S. Congress passed the Audio Home Recording Act of 1992, which required manufacturers of electronic devices capable of playing MP3s and MP3-type files to pay a 2 percent royalty fee up front to protect artists from possible copyright infringements. The Recording Industry Association of America unsuccessfully sued Diamond Multimedia in 1997 when purchasers of its new Rio MP3 player used the device to store and play RIAA artists' material. Subsequently, artists such as Prince started using MP3 technology to distribute new material to Internet-savvy fans online.

But it wasn't until early 1999 that the MP3 and file-sharing controversies heated up. By then, computer modems were fast enough to support easy downloading and North-eastern University student Sean Fanning had launched Napster.com, after writing his own MP3 file-sharing computer application in his dorm room. Napster.com quickly became popular with college students and Internet surfers, and from June 1998 to June 1999 the number of people sharing music online jumped from an estimated 500,000 to 4 million.

Many embraced the new MP3 format and Napster and Napster-knockoff services, which enabled them to download music for free by accessing and copying music from their fellow Napster users' digital music libraries, offering a virtually unlimited diversity of musical styles at no cost. Technology writer Bill Mann argued, "[Consumers] are forced from the need to spend \$17 on a CD to get the one song they like, and they get easy access to the vast amount of music [on the Internet] that is not being pushed by the big record companies."<sup>20</sup> Many up-and-coming artists also considered the new technology a free and easy way to distribute their music and develop their fan bases.

Others, such as the RIAA and recording artists Metallica, Dr. Dre, and Don Henley, were up in arms, crying foul and arguing that illegal file sharing was petty theft that ultimately hurt artists who were reliant on royalty payments to make their living. Succeeding with its lawsuit, the RIAA won an estimated \$36 million and caused Napster.com to temporarily shut down in October 2001. File sharers simply flocked to Napster knockoffs Kazaa.com, Morpheus.com, and Grokster.com, which offered only the software needed to support file sharing. As a result, the unauthorized files of RIAA artists' music were stored not on any of the companies' servers but on computing systems all over the globe, and the RIAA was unsuccessful in suing them. The RIAA

launched a sting on illegal MP3 file sharers in 2003 and 2004, arresting hundreds of file sharers across the country. “As of March 2004,” according to technology writer Jay Lickfett, “the RIAA has tried to sue 1,977 individuals for allegedly sharing music illegally on file-sharing networks.”<sup>21</sup>

Good apples eMusic.com and MP3.com have been offering legal file-sharing services since 2000. But the concept of actually paying for music online didn’t become acceptable—and profitable—until Apple Computers launched its hip and compact iPod MP3 players and companion iTunes Web site in 2003. Charging only \$0.99 per song, Apple raked in \$70 million in 2003 alone and sold some 8 million iPods in 2004. According to *Rolling Stone*, iTunes, Rhapsody, Napster, and newcomer Microsoft Music Store generated online sales of 140 million songs in 2004, or seven times the number sold online in 2003. The 2004 figures were boosted by the pop-punk act Green Day’s hit single “Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” off their pre-2004 election album *American Idiot*, and “Drop It Like It’s Hot,” Snoop Dogg’s collaboration with hit producer Pharrell from the Neptunes.

Whereas online sales were absolutely booming, the record industry experienced a three-year slump. It finally rebounded in 2004 with a 1.6 percent increase in CD sales. The bounce was buoyed mostly by sales from established acts Eminem and U2, as well as the soft jazz songstress Norah Jones and R&B star Usher, whose 2004 hit “Yeah” blended his impressive vocal range with the “Dirty South” hip-hop sounds of Ludacris and Lil’ John. With *Encore* (2004), Eminem roasted Michael Jackson on the song “Just Lose It” and took on the Bush reelection campaign with his song and video “Mosh,” which explicitly criticized the Bush administration for its ongoing military debacle in Iraq. The other top seller was U2’s *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004), featuring the hit single “Vertigo,” which served as the basis for both a visually groundbreaking video filmed in the Spanish desert and a marketing campaign for the iPod. Both albums were commercially successful but not masterworks, mere examples of the industry’s tendency to put all of its eggs in one basket and hope that they all hatch. However, the industry did focus more attention on the digital arena, especially music DVDs, digital downloads, and cell phone ring tones, popular melodies that cell phone owners can use for a monthly fee.

But the industry has a ways to go before reaching previous prosperity. In 2001, it generated \$40 billion in sales, and in 2004 it reaped only \$28 billion (a 30 percent decrease). In an attempt to spin a 10 percent decrease in CD sales in 2001 as a problem out of the industry’s control, RIAA head Hilary Rosen explained, “The economy was slow and 9/11 interrupted the fourth quarter plans, but, a large factor contributing to the decrease in overall shipments last year is online piracy and CD burning. When 23 percent of surveyed music consumers say they are not buying more music because they are downloading or copying their music for free, we cannot ignore the impact on the marketplace.”<sup>22</sup> But according to RIAA statistics, the industry cut its number of new releases from 38,900 in 1999 to 27,000 in 2000 and 2001, decreasing their inventory and investments in artists by more than 25 percent and raising the price of its offerings from \$13.65 in 1999 to \$14.23 in 2001. These moves are partially understandable. Although CDs cost less than a dollar to make,

music distributors and labels have to cover the costs associated with artist development and marketing. According to CEO of Tower Records Stan Goman in *Rolling Stone*: “A label has to sell three or four hundred thousand copies to break even. If they hit a home run with a big record, fine. But there aren’t that many home runs.”<sup>23</sup>

Others blame the downturn in the global economy after the nineties’ information technology-based economy went bust in 2000 and the terrorist attacks on the financial core of the United States on 9/11. Also responsible are the poor compressed sound of the CD format, which dropped from \$14.6 billion in sales in 1999 to a mere \$11.8 billion in 2003 (a 20 percent decrease), and a dearth of quality offerings. The *Wall Street Journal* noted the fragility of the CDs’ easily scratched or damaged plastic material and estimated that by 2001, “between \$1 billion and \$4 billion worth of unplayable CDs had accumulated in America’s collective living rooms, assuming that a modest 1 percent damage rate translates into \$1 billion worth of faulty discs.”<sup>24</sup>

The industry finally started reducing the cost of CDs in 2002 with so-called “developing-artist pricing,” selling new acts such as the White Stripes, Jack Johnson, and N.E.R.D., the Neptunes’ group, for \$6.99 to \$13.99. And all of the bands made it to the *Billboard* 200 list.

The industry cut its losses in 2004. Warner Music Group laid off more than 20 percent of its workforce, and Sony merged with BMG, leaving four large remaining companies: Sony/BMG, Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, and the EMI Group, which together control approximately 80 percent of the world music market. The punk-based Warped Tour did well, charging only \$25 per ticket. Other tours had to be canceled, such as Lollapalooza, as rock music fans weren’t willing to shell out the average of \$52.06 per ticket. Adding new life to the rock landscape were indie bands Modest Mouse with their top-40 album, *Good News for People Who Love Bad News*, as well as the Killers, Interpol, and Franz Ferdinand.



At the height of the Great Depression, the U.S. Communications Act of 1934 established the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and mandated that the U.S. airwaves were public domain and that radio stations had an obligation to broadcast material that serves the “public interest, convenience, and necessity.” Six decades later, in 1996, President Bill Clinton passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Telecom Act) and opened the floodgates for media conglomerates to snap up independently owned radio stations (and telecommunications companies) and wield unprecedented control over what’s on the radio dial. Opponents of the Telecom Act and music fans feared that media consolidation would lead to less diversity on the airwaves as conglomerates ran sovereign stations out of town and sacrificed musical heterogeneity for the advertising-friendly homogeneity of music that was market-tested and easy to sell, scraps from the industries’

cornucopia of sounds tossed to sheep willing to go out and gobble up that latest pop sensation that had been drilled into their heads through constant airplay.

Although the Telecom Act was an octane booster for the telecommunications- and information technology-dominated economy of the late nineties and turn of the twenty-first century, it unleashed hounds, growth-driven companies such as Clear Channel Communications and Infinity Broadcasting that rolled across the country devouring independent radio stations as if they were first editions of *Atlas Shrugged*. Before the Telecom Act, Clear Channel owned only forty radio stations; after the act's passage, Clear Channel took advantage of the increase in the national ownership cap, which previously prevented corporations from owning more than four radio stations in a local market but now allowed companies to own twice that many.

In 2000, the FCC offered licenses for independent community-based stations to broadcast between 10- and 100-watt signals on the FM dial, also known as low-power FM (LPFM), stipulating that LPFM applicants need only two open frequencies on each side of their proposed frequency. But the National Association of Broadcasters and National Public Radio lobbied Congress and helped pass the Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act of 2000, which required at least three open frequencies on each side of the LPFM candidate's proposed frequency for an LPFM license to be granted. As a result, an estimated 75 percent of the FM dial that had been allocated to LPFM was eliminated, angering both amateur radio enthusiasts hoping to broadcast their own eclectic playlists and rural, conservative Christians seeking to broadcast their own locally oriented religious programming.

Chaired by conservative Republican Michael Powell, the FCC passed the Indecency Act of 2001, which authorized the FCC to fine radio stations for broadcasting songs depicting or describing sexual acts and/or excretory functions. The FCC fined radio station KKMZ, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, \$7,000 for playing an *edited* version of Eminem's "Real Slim Shady," and fined radio station KBOO, in Portland, Oregon, for playing "Your Revolution." The latter is a song from feminist poet and rapper Sarah Jones that states, "Your revolution will not happen between these thighs / because the revolution, when it finally comes, is gon' be real." As writer Chisun Lee commented in the *Village Voice* at the time, "Ironically, Jones's 'Your Revolution' makes a powerful statement against indecency—in particular, the sexual exploitation of women in popular music."<sup>25</sup>

Following the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, Clear Channel sent an internal memo to station programmers across its vast radio empire suggesting that they not play a list of songs, including everything from seventies folk legend Cat Stevens's "Peace Train" to southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Tuesday's Gone." Not to be outdone, media conglomerate Cumulus Radio summarily banned the all-women country act the Dixie Chicks from their affiliate stations after lead Dixie Chick Natalie Maines criticized President Bush's call for war with Iraq in early 2003; a Cumulus station in Louisiana even staged a rally where a tractor ran over a pile of Dixie Chicks CDs. Clear Channel, whose CEO, Lowrey Mays, has close ties with the Bush family and contributed

heavily to Bush's 2000 and 2004 presidential campaigns, countered as some of its station managers hosted "Rally for America" events in support of the war. In the lead-up to the close U.S. presidential election of 2004, Clear Channel also banned shock jock and Bush basher Howard Stern from its stations, ostensibly for indecency, as the FCC tried to crack down on lewd pop culture after singer Janet Jackson revealed part of her breast during the 2004 Super Bowl half-time show.

By 2004, Clear Channel owned more than 1,200 U.S. stations and was capable of reaching the ears of two-thirds of the total U.S. population. It also owned a significant number of music venues and music publicity companies in each market, which provides Clear Channel with unprecedented power to pick and choose which artists are played on its stations and in its venues. Artists and music industry personnel complain not only of the difficulty of scheduling airtime and concert events in Clear Channel-dominated towns but also of the quasi-legal practice of music labels paying third-party independent promoters to pad radio station bank accounts for their artists' airtime. The scam costs thousands of dollars per song and is a new twist on the ongoing practice of "payola," which was practiced directly between labels and stations up through the early sixties. "In less than a decade, Clear Channel has become a music company on steroids—and a company that's increasingly under fire," music reporter Damien Cave wrote in *Rolling Stone*. "Critics contend that Clear Channel uses its size to crush the competition while force-feeding audiences the same play lists no matter where they live. Bands, managers and music-industry executives argue that Clear Channel has ruined the concert business."<sup>26</sup>



As of this writing (2005), a look into the future of popular and rock music reveals more questions than answers. What genres or styles of music will capture the attention of the listener? How will they be packaged and distributed? Who will own them and how will we pay for the music?

Today's music is fragmented into many listening communities, divided by radio formats and record industry marketing schemes. Rock, hip-hop, R&B, country and pop account for 70 percent of CD sales. However, there is no visible new genre like hip-hop, metal, or grunge bubbling underground and waiting to explode. There is a considerable independent (or "indie") sector releasing approximately three-quarters of the annual 30,000 CDs. These indie releases are popular with a significant number of fans who are generally disenchanted with the paucity of choices in the musical mainstream, but they account for only 15 to 18 percent of sales.

Since rock and roll's first era in the midfifties, the record industry and its marketing and sales partners—radio and retail—have dominated the ownership and distribution of popular music. At present, although digital music files and new distribution technology exists, music's future path to the listener remains unclear. We may receive it via the Internet, mobile phone, cable or telephone line, or in a post-CD container. Young music

listeners, having experienced the availability of an unlimited catalogue of free music, are unlikely to return to the old business model of buying album-length music in a high-priced container. They seem to prefer single songs or a few of them and are willing to buy them at a reasonable price as long as there are no usage strings attached. Jim Griffin's "Celestial Jukebox," the archiving and transmission of all recorded music distributed via wireless or Internet for a subscription fee, might be a viable future. Will mainstream listeners take advantage of the availability of heterogeneous and global musical styles? Will "on demand" music catalogues be stored in all-communication, mobile storage devices? We'll leave those answers for the next generation of rock music historians. Hope you've enjoyed the journey.



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## APPENDIX A

# SOME ARTISTS WHO FELL THROUGH THE CRACKS

There are numerous important contributors to the development of rock music whose stories fell outside our historical narrative. In the following pages we chronicle a few of the many who deserve mention.

### JACKIE WILSON

Jackie Wilson was one of the most talented rock vocalists, with a career spanning three decades. Yet commercial success and recognition commensurate with Wilson's talent and skill eluded the singer. A native of Detroit, he sang gospel music, was a welterweight golden gloves boxing champion, and had recorded "Danny Boy" for Dizzy Gillespie's Dee Gee label by the age of seventeen. When Clyde McPhatter left the gospel-turned-R&B group Billy Ward and His Dominoes to later form the Drifters, Wilson was chosen to take his place as lead vocalist.

Three years later Wilson left to pursue a solo career, signed with Brunswick Records (the same Decca subsidiary that signed Buddy Holly), and recorded "Reet Petite," "To Be Loved" (#22, April 1958), and "Lonely Teardrops" (#7, December 1958)—all of which were cowritten by Berry Gordy Jr. Wilson chose to stay with Brunswick rather than go with the fledgling Motown label. He had twelve top-40 hits during 1960–1961, but fate and the lack of label and management clout prevented his rise to the top during the soul era. In a temporary setback, Wilson was shot by a frustrated female admirer in 1961. By the midsixties Wilson had made the stylistic transition to soul and the pop charts with "Whispers" (#11, November 1966) and the classic "(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher" (#6, September 1967).

During live shows this charismatic, handsome, sexy performer went through a series of physically demanding moves—matched only by other former athletes like James Brown—twirling, dropping to his knees, and even wading out into an adoring audience. As a singer, Wilson, with his gospel and R&B background, displayed a soaring tenor virtuosity similar to stars like Clyde McPhatter and Sam Cooke. Relegated to oldies shows in the seventies, Wilson

suffered a heart attack onstage in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, in September 1975. Wilson never fully recovered and died on January 21, 1984.

## ROY ORBISON

Initially, the Texas-born Orbison resembled the second-generation classic rockers. Raised on country, bluegrass, and popular music, the young Orbison came from a musical family and started playing guitar at age six. Like Holly, Orbison performed through high school, with the Wink (Texas) Westerners, entertaining at local functions until he enrolled at North Texas State University in Denton. His college group, the Teen-Kings, recorded “Ooby Dooby” at Norman Petty’s studio in Clovis, New Mexico (where Holly recorded most of his early hits). Sun Records liked Orbison’s demo, so he went to Memphis and rerecorded “Ooby Dooby,” which broke into the top 100.

Not really comfortable with the Sun rockabilly sound—the Sun roster included Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, and Carl Perkins, among others—Orbison left for Nashville to make a living as a songwriter for one of the area’s giants, Acuff-Rose Publishing. “Claudette,” written for his wife, was recorded as the B side of the Everly Brothers hit “Dreams” and went to #30. In Orbison’s second attempt at a singing career, he signed with RCA and entered the studio with Presley/Everlys producer Chet Atkins, but was still unsuccessful.

Not until he signed with indie Monument Records (the classic rock era had faded by then) did Orbison’s softer but heartfelt sound mature and find acceptance. From 1960 through 1964 he scored seventeen top-40 hits, including “Only the Lonely” (#2, June 1960), “Running Scared” (#1, April 1961), “Crying” (#2, August 1961), and “Pretty Woman” (#1, September 1964). The formula called for rich, supple tenor crooning, in both regular voice and soaring falsetto, and emotional tributes to mostly absent lovers. Although an accomplished guitarist, Orbison chose to surround his voice with studio orchestration and background vocals. During the calm before the British invasion, Orbison provided a unique alternative to the teen idols.

Orbison was also quite popular in England, where he headlined shows that included the Beatles. He continued to have English hits into the seventies. In 1966, just as he scored his last top-40 hit in the United States, his wife was killed in a motorbike accident. Two years later during a tour in England, Orbison learned that his two eldest sons had burned to death at home in Nashville. In 1978 he underwent open-heart surgery. Just as his career was taking off again—including his 1987 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and a hit song as a member of the Traveling Wilburys (the illustrious crew of Orbison, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, Tom Petty, and ELO’s Jeff Lynne)—Orbison died of a heart attack suffered while visiting his mother.

## THE ANIMALS

We mention the Animals not only because of their talent and commercial success but also because they represent the numerous blues-rooted groups to emerge from the English countryside during the sixties British blues revival. Although best known for their black-sounding lead vocalist, Eric Burdon, the band began in Newcastle-on-Tyne as a traditional jazz band in 1961. Burdon joined as vocalist and helped shift the focus toward blues, R&B, and classic rock material. On the strength of their regional popularity, their quality of cover material, and the success of the British invasion, producer Mickie Most found them a contract with the giant EMI label.

In 1964 the Animals recorded two covers of American rural blues tunes Burdon had heard on Bob Dylan's first album. "Baby, Let Me Take You Home" achieved moderate success in England (#21), but "House of the Rising Sun" (#1, August 1964) took both Britain and the United States by storm. Played at a dirgelike pace, the song centered on the arpeggiated hook on keyboard as Burdon wailed his gritty tale of self-destruction. It was a hard song to duplicate, but the musicianship of the band (especially keyboardist Alan Price) and Burdon's authentic lead vocals helped the band to maintain popularity. They turned to contemporary material and recorded the raucous "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" and "It's My Life" before Price left. With a new lineup Burdon appeared at the Monterey Pop Festival and turned countercultural with "[Warm] San Francisco Nights" and "Sky Pilot," both hits in the late sixties.

## THE KINKS

The Kinks were unique. Musically, they were minimalists, resisting the first-generation British invasion trend toward the use of orchestral instrumentation, increasingly complex arrangements, and a studio-based sound. Instead, they proffered simple strummed rhythm guitar, Ray Davies's flat lead vocal, classic rock-style bass and drums, and an occasional James Burton/Scotty Moore-type guitar solo. Lyrically, they began in the boy-girl British invasion groove but quickly expanded their horizons with composer Ray Davies writing numerous parables about, and parodies of, English life. Because of their artistic focus on England, the Kinks had less of an impact on the U.S. market than many of their contemporaries.

Their first two hits, "You Really Got Me" (#7, October 1964) and "All Day and All of the Night" (#7, January 1965), were sparse representations of a "Louie Louie" mentality. They featured percussive distorted rhythm-guitar strokes (guitarist Dave Davies sliced the speaker cones with a razor blade to get the sound), Dave's classic rock lead solo, and Ray's urgent, nonmelodic lead vocals. (Jimmy Page admitted in a 1973 interview that, contrary to popular rumor, Dave Davies played lead guitar on the Kinks' records.) One reason for the Kinks' seventies postpunk revival was the raw, driving, distorted, nontechnical nature of these early hits.

By late 1965, however, Ray Davies's attention had turned to societal rather than personal relationships, and he developed a lighter musical sound without the power chords and blared vocals. His "Well Respected Man" (#13, January 1966) satirized the proper but hypocritical lifestyle of straight British society. The music remained anchored in the Beatles-rooted first British invasion. Their 1966 hit "Dedicated Follower of Fashion" satirized the pleasure-seeking, trend-conscious London mods, musically invoking the English music hall with the one-and-three bass pattern (mimicking a tuba) and a call and response. Davies's "Sunny Afternoon" (#14, August 1966) found the singer having lost a partner and material possession but garnering solace in a sunny afternoon. It was a "good-time tune" with a strong resemblance to the Lovin' Spoonful.

The Kinks managed these hits even though they were unable to tour in the United States due to an intemperate incident that involved a musicians' union representative. The band was banned from union-sanctioned gigs. Members also regularly engaged in intraband bouts. Lacking a Brian Epstein, or even the commercial common sense of a Mick Jagger, the Kinks were unable and unmotivated to rectify the situation until 1969. They continued to write well-received songs (like the wistful, working-class ballad "Waterloo Sunset") and tour throughout the rest of the world.

Like the Who, the Kinks turned to thematic projects of connected songs in the late sixties, and this garnered them increased critical acclaim. (In another parallel to the Who, Ray, like Pete Townshend, was the dominant composer.) *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* introduced the listener to a “quaint” village in the English countryside, its inhabitants, and their daily pursuits. *Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*, originally composed for the soundtrack to a TV movie production, followed. Davies again focused on and was able to capture the essence of the life of the citizenry. This project’s songs encompassed subjects ranging from the aspirations of working-class Britons to sexual mores in Victorian England. Later projects helped the band regain their popularity in America and retain it in England. The song about a transvestite, “Lola” (#9, September 1970), became part of *Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround*. *Muswell Hillbillies* reflected life in the working-class London district (Muswell Hill) of their youth.

Had they enjoyed stronger management and record-company support, the Kinks may have garnered the acclaim and financial rewards of their contemporaries. However, their laissez-faire attitude let them drift, yet it also guided them to their particular brand of creativity. They exhibited an unusually wide range of autobiographical, political, and social commentary on British life. Their unpretentious music, a simple guitar-based, rhythmically unadulterated sound, was alluring and played a stark contrast to the increasingly studio-based rock of the late sixties. They also engaged in self-destructive behavior (involving violence and substance abuse). They exhibited an uncanny resemblance to the next decade’s punk dynamic.

## VAN MORRISON

When he had it together, Van Morrison was one of the golden era’s most talented singer-songwriters. He began in northern Ireland as the vocalist for the R&B-revival band Them. The group wrote and recorded the classic “Gloria.” Eventually, Morrison left the band, migrated to the United States, and released a series of critically acclaimed albums in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His 1969 *Astral Weeks*, a synthesis of the celestial and the emotional, didn’t chart, yet it was named Album of the Year by *Rolling Stone*. Later hits included albums and title cuts from *Moondance* (#29, May 1970), *Tupelo Honey* (#27, November 1971), and *St. Dominic’s Preview* (#15, September 1972). At his best Morrison combined his passion for black-rooted American music with an intense search for some basic truths.

## STEVE WINWOOD AND TRAFFIC

Steve Winwood is another supremely talented artist who possesses, among other things, one of white rock’s finest and unique voices. A teen prodigy, Winwood joined Birmingham, England’s R&B/blues-revival outfit the Spencer Davis Group in 1964 at age sixteen. Before leaving in 1967 to form Traffic, Winwood wrote, sang, and played organ on “Gimme Some Lovin’.” With lyricist-drummer Jim Capaldi, winds player Chris Wood, and the intermittent contributions of guitarist-writer Dave Mason, Winwood crafted Traffic—the thinking person’s rock band. They relied on the musicianship of Winwood and company to weave a textured tapestry of interesting melodies, rhythms, and instrumentation over which Winwood’s distinctive voice soared. Songs with the eclectic titles of “Paper Sun” (nicely integrating sitar), “Shanghai Noodle Factory,” and “Empty Pages” are good examples of Traffic hitting its stride. The band experienced several personnel changes and survived into the midseventies. In the eighties Winwood returned for a suc-

successful solo career (going by the name Stevie Winwood), though it's the Traffic of "Please, Mr. Fantasy" and "John Barleycorn Must Die" that has withstood the test of time.

## FRANK ZAPPA

The late Frank Zappa was an extraordinarily talented rock composer who was equally comfortable playing rock and roll guitar, scoring an album titled *Jazz from Hell* (for which he won a 1987 Grammy Award), or conducting the London Symphony Orchestra playing one of his original compositions. Zappa treated his moderate-sized but dedicated audience to a stream of eclectic rock music for three decades, offering social and political satire. His album titles alone were worth the price of admission: *Freak Out* (1966), *We're Only in it for the Money* (1968), *Uncle Meat* (1969), and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (1970), just to name a few. Zappa is also to be commended for not abandoning his intellect and principles in the pursuit of status and monetary reward. This is evidenced by his appearances in Washington, D.C., to testify before the Parents' Music Resource Council (PMRC). Zappa died from prostate cancer on December 4, 1993.

## PAUL SIMON

Paul Simon was one of the most consistent, high-quality song crafters of the sixties and seventies, creating two generations of musically and lyrically sophisticated folk-rooted pop-rock music. A native New Yorker, his career began with partner Art Garfunkel (as the duo Tom and Jerry) with "Hey Schoolgirl" (#49, 1957). His early efforts reflected a combination of classic rock and Brill Building pop stylings. For a few years Simon worked in the bustling New York pop music scene pushing his songs—he worked with a young Carole King (then Klein)—embarking on a solo career, and enrolling in law school. Struck by the nascent folk scene of the early sixties, Simon turned toward material accompanied by acoustic guitar about self-awareness, relationships, and the changing cultural climate.

In 1964 Simon and Garfunkel reunited and, performing under their real surnames, signed to Columbia Records with Dylan producer Tom Wilson. Their initial album, *Wednesday Morning, 3 AM*, sold poorly, but Wilson took one of the cuts, "The Sounds of Silence," and added drums, bass, and electric guitar. (The additional instrumentation is not quite synchronized with its acoustic predecessor; the electric rhythm guitar closely resembles the circular cross-picking style of CBS label mates the Byrds.) It went to #1 on the charts, and the stunned Simon returned from solo dates in England to tour with Garfunkel. For the next five years the duo enjoyed popularity with a series of Simon-penned songs combining Garfunkel's ethereal tenor voice, Simon's strummed acoustic guitar, and a variety of instrumental shadings. Simon's songs captured a personalized odyssey through the alienating and fast-changing society of the sixties.

Simon and Garfunkel contributed five tracks to the movie soundtrack to *The Graduate*, including the Grammy-winning cut "Mrs. Robinson." After approximately 800 hours in the studio, exacerbating already strained relations, they released the album *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and scored with the title cut (#1, February 1970); this effort garnered six Grammy Awards, including single, album, and song of the year. They then dissolved the team, Garfunkel to concentrate on moviemaking and Simon on moving into the solo spotlight. They would reunite periodically over the years.

As a solo artist, Simon's vision of the world matured and expanded. He remained searching and skeptical, often glancing at life with a sardonic smile. His musical frontiers expanded, offering

his listeners the unique fusion of folk-rooted strumming and a variety of international musical flavors. This brilliant recipe surfaced immediately on the album *Paul Simon* (#4, February 1972) with “Mother and Child Reunion” (recorded with reggae musicians), “Duncan” (which included Latin American instruments like the panpipes and charengo), and “Me and Julio Down by the School Yard” (featuring Brazilian percussionist Airto Moreira). His follow-up album, *There Goes Rhymin’ Simon*, continued to mix genres. “Loves Me Like a Rock” featured the gospel virtuosity of the Dixie Hummingbirds and their famous lead vocalist, the Reverend Claude Jeter. “Something So Right” ventured into the jazz realm with time-signature changes and some well-known sidemen.

The 1975 release *Still Crazy After All These Years* continued the jazz and gospel trend (employing fusion session players like drummer Steve Gadd and saxman Phil Woods) and reflects the turmoil caused by conflict between a stable family relationship and life on the road as a musician. In 1980 Simon appeared in the movie *One Trick Pony*, the delightful semiautobiographical portrait of an artist torn between family responsibility and the road, artistic compromise and creative integrity. Simon continued his international approach with *Graceland* (#3, September 1986), inspired by South African black music and featuring groups such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Stimela, the Boyoyo Boys, bassist Baghiti Khumalo, and drummer Isaac Mtshali. His use of South African musicians generated substantial controversy (in light of the UN boycott of the South African government’s apartheid policies). It also once again showed Simon’s extraordinary ability to combine very personal insights and tales of alienation with some of the best musical genres the world has to offer.

## APPENDIX B

# THE ROCK WINDOW— ONE WAY TO LISTEN AND UNDERSTAND

The Rock Window is a tool designed to help the listener seek, identify, organize, and analyze the elements contained in rock music. The process involves listening to the song and collecting aural information, collecting written information, and organizing both into five major topic areas: Music, Lyrics, Artist History, Societal Context, and Stance. This method allows the listener to analyze and make some sense of the nature and context of song and artist and provides a format for comparing music.

Imagine if you were trying to compare one song from the 1950s and another from the 1980s. What information would you collect from each one in order to make a viable comparison? The Rock Window will help you compare similar aspects of each song in the music, lyrics, artist's life, and artist's public actions.

The following is an example of how the Rock Window is applied; let's use Chuck Berry's 1958 hit "Johnny B. Goode" as our sample song. Remember that the answers listed, especially in the music and lyrics sections, are subjective in nature. Therefore, they are not the only "correct" answers, but they are the most defensible.

### I. MUSIC

#### a) Ensemble

What instruments are present in the selection?

Drums, bass, two electric guitars, piano.

#### b) Rhythmic Emphasis

What is the **dominant** beat? This answer comes in two parts:

- 1) What is the beat? and
- 2) What instrument carries this beat?

Choices for the first part consist of either half-, quarter-, or eighth-note pulses or a syncopated beat. Generally, the dominant beat will be carried by an instrument in the rhythm section; thus, the choices will often be drums, bass, guitar, or piano.

Half-note pulse by drums (two and four on the snare), quarter-note pulse by the bass, and eighth-note pulse by the rhythm guitar are all acceptable answers.

**c) Vocal Style**

What is (1) the level of emotionality and (2) the articulation? (3) What are two adjectives that you would use to subjectively describe the vocal style? In order to quantify (1) and (2), use the following scales: Emotion—1 = Pat Boone singing “Love Letters in the Sand” (#1, 1957); 10 = Robert Plant’s bansheelike screams during “Dazed and Confused”; in the second, the slur quotient depends on how well you understand the lyrics—think of it as the number of marbles lodged in the mouth—where 0 = totally understandable and 3 = totally slurred and garbled, much like Big Joe Turner’s third verse in “Shake, Rattle, and Roll.”

Emotionality level at a 7; articulation is .5; adjectives suggested are shouting, playful, and urgent.

**d) Instrumental Solo**

Is there an instrumental solo, and if so, what instrument is playing it and what is its most important stylistic root? A solo is defined as: (1) the absence of sung lyrics, (2) an instrumentalist plays an improvised melody, and (3) he does so for at least a verse in length.

Guitar solo from the blues. Indicators are bent notes and repetition.

**e) Harmonic Structure**

What chords are present in the song?

Chords are I, IV, and V.

## II. LYRICS

**a) Story**

Summarize the major lyrical theme or themes in the song. Use these topical classifications as a way of beginning your organization of the material: (1) romantic love, (2) sexuality, (3) alienation, (4) justice and injustice, (5) introspection/the person, (6) personal narrative or story, and (7) other. Use at least three sentences of lyrics from the song to clarify your thematic choices.

“Johnny B. Goode” is a personal narrative about a young, impoverished “country boy,” a talented guitarist, who is encouraged to pursue a dream of musical fame.

**b) Message**

Do you find there is an underlying message of cultural and/or political importance contained in the lyrics? If so, describe the message. If not, answer no.

Although aspirations of artistic and/or economic success are not culturally or politically unique for the middle 1950s, it is important to note that Berry’s original lyrics contained the words *colored boy* in the place of *country boy*. Berry consciously changed the words because of his awareness that existent racism would make it more difficult for this song to be commercially successful were the hero an African American. Thus, this song could be construed, in its original form, as an exploration of black aspirations.

## III. ARTIST HISTORY

**a) Youth and Personal Characteristics**

What **two** things about the artist’s youth or early career are most important in helping to understand the work? Why?

- 1) Berry was a talented musician who had some early training on piano, saxophone, and guitar, as well as in voice and choral singing. This helped him to achieve later success as an instrumentalist and enabled Berry to supplant Johnny Johnson as leader of his early quartet.
- 2) As an African American living in a border state, Berry was in the position to bear the full burden of American racism. His arrest as a teenager for robbery—he was a passenger in a stolen car and was present at a hold-up—and subsequent ten-year sentence, of which he served three years, gave him plenty of ammunition to use in chronicling paradoxes of teen life that might parallel the black experience.

**b) Musical Roots**

What **two** musical styles or artists were the most important influences on this artist? What evidence substantiates this?

- 1) Urban blues—Berry’s innovative synthesis of guitar styles begins with the blues. Bending notes, choke, and repetition are cornerstones of his playing and are evidenced in both the guitar introduction and instrumental solo of “Johnny B. Goode.” Berry cites T-Bone Walker and Carl Hogan (Louis Jordan) as major influences.
- 2) Popular music—Both lyrically and vocally, Berry consciously reflects the popular music of his youth. He cites Frank Sinatra and Nat “King” Cole as his favorite singers, and his well-articulated vocal style evidences this. Berry tells us that his lyrics were carefully crafted in a painstaking process of creation, and they closely represent the complexity, form, and humor of the works of Tin Pan Alley tune-smiths such as Porter and Gershwin (see “Too Much Monkey Business” and “Roll Over Beethoven” for examples).

**c) Career Landmarks**

What **three** events do you believe are the most important landmarks of this artist’s career? Why?

- 1) Chuck Berry journeyed to Chicago with a friend, and while making the rounds of some South Side blues clubs, he garnered enough courage to approach Muddy Waters for advice on recording his songs. Waters, who was the king of the Chess Records blues roster, said, “Go see Leonard Chess.” Berry met with Chess, played a tape of some material and had a recording session scheduled for his fast-paced “hillbilly” tune “Ida Red” for May 21, 1955, in Chicago. Berry’s first record, now titled “Maybellene,” became a top-5 hit on the pop charts that August.
- 2) Within the space of ten months, Berry placed his three important teen anthems on the popular charts, “School Days” (April 1957), “Rock and Roll Music” (November 1957), and “Sweet Little Sixteen” (February 1958). Each chronicles an important segment of teen life and its concomitant generational struggles. “School Days” follows the difficult and boring student existence to day’s end in the soda shop or “juke joint.” The final refrain begins with, “Hail, hail rock and roll, deliver me from the days of old.” “Rock and Roll Music” celebrates the music itself, its various components and kinesthetic impulses to dance derived from the famed “backbeat.” Finally, “Sweet Little Sixteen” delivers the paradox of every father’s little girl begging Mommy to convince Daddy that it’s okay just to have fun at the dance while at the same time denoting the potential pitfalls of rocking and rolling in tight dresses, lipstick, and a case of the “grown-up blues.” In these three selections, Berry was a magnificent rock-poet and chronicler.

- 3) Chuck Berry was prosecuted twice in 1960 on charges stemming from alleged sexual misconduct. In the first instance he was charged with a violation of the Mann Act, a federal statute designed to curtail racketeering and prostitution. He was charged with bringing Janice Escalante—an Apache-Mexican woman he added to his entourage in El Paso, Texas, and gave a job to in his nightclub—to St. Louis for the purpose of engaging in prostitution. The first guilty verdict was vacated due to the racism evidenced by the prosecutor and the judge. In May 1960 he was charged with another offense, this time of having sex with Joan Bates, a married white woman aged eighteen. On the stand Bates admitted to having sex with and loving Berry. He was acquitted of any crime. Berry was retried for the first offense, found guilty, and served time in a federal penitentiary from 1961 to the fall of 1963. Although the classic rock era was coming to an end, Berry, with his songwriting talent and artistic charisma, may have had a chance of transcending the musical eras between the fifties and the British invasion. These prosecutions sealed his fate and essentially ended his creative career.

#### IV. SOCIETAL CONTEXT

##### a) Cultural and Political Forces

Describe **two** important cultural and/or political movements of the era and how they relate to the music of this artist. **Explain why they are important.**

- 1) The mid-1950s were a time when racism remained a potent political and cultural force. Discrimination due to race was still legal in many states, lynching still occurred in the South, as did the persecution (and occasional assassination) of leaders of the growing civil rights movement. On a macro level, an artist as talented as a writer, guitarist, and performer and as handsome as Chuck Berry could still achieve only a limited level of commercial success. The world would await a lesser talent like Elvis Presley to be crowned the “King of Rock and Roll.” On the micro level, the racially motivated prosecution of Berry by St. Louis authorities essentially destroyed Berry’s career by forcing him to spend nearly two years defending himself (during which time he lost a significant amount of resources, including his successful club).
- 2) As Berry’s career began, he was able to capitalize on a changing popular music marketplace formed at the confluence of forces. The adolescent lifestyle had been institutionalized in postwar America, and with a rapidly growing economy, evidenced by a burgeoning suburbia, a teen economic cohort was born. Products, including rock and roll records, were offered to teens, who had an increasing amount of disposable income. At the same time, television had challenged radio for media dominance and was winning. Radio’s prospects were dim when markets for rhythm and blues, country, and rock and roll records provided a unique entertainment format that could again deliver listeners to advertisers. Radio recovered because of artists like Berry.

##### b) Music Industry

Is this music being produced by the music industry mainstream (the majors), by alternative means (indies), or a combination of both? Explain.

Berry recorded for the Chess label based in Chicago; it was run by rock and roll visionaries Leonard and Phil Chess. With its subsidiary, Checker, it challenged, along with

Atlantic (New York), King (Cincinnati), Sun (Memphis), Imperial and Specialty (Los Angeles), and others, the dominance that the majors enjoyed in the popular music marketplace. By 1958 the indies had twice as many hits on the top-100 charts as did the majors.

## V. STANCE

### a) Live Performance

What image does the artist present during live performances through dress and actions?

Berry's dress was typical of the day's rock and rollers. Onstage he was costumed in fancy suits, or jackets and slacks, and bow ties. His hair was well coifed—slicked back—and he sported a pencil-thin mustache. Berry's stage presence was fairly active and included his famous duckwalk. (Rock mythology has Berry developing his most famous bit after he appeared at an important multiday gig with only one pair of pants. In order to hide his pant creases, he bent over, guitar in front of thighs, and shuffled across the stage.) Berry also swung his guitar back and forth while singing his songs at the mic.

### b) Public Positions

Does the artist take public positions on political and/or cultural issues?

Though never noted for taking public stances on issues, Berry—once described as open and easygoing—was characterized as uncommunicative, terse, and even morose after his incarceration in 1961.

## ROCK WINDOW

ARTIST: The Beatles      SONG: Strawberry Fields

## I. MUSIC

### a) Ensemble—What instruments are playing?

Drums, bass, two guitars, piano, harpsichord, percussion (tambourine, bongo, tympani), cellos, flute, trumpet, horns, flute, mellotron (early synthesizer), backward tapes, Indian drone.

### b) Rhythmic Emphasis—What is the **dominant** beat? What instrument is playing it?

Half-note pulse on the drums and quarter-note on the harmonium.

### c) Vocal Style—What is (1) the level of emotionality (1–10)? (2) What are two adjectives that you would use to subjectively describe the vocal style?

5, dreamy, nasal.

### d) Instrumental Solo—Is there an instrumental solo, and if so, what instrument is playing it? What musical style is most apparent in this solo? Defend your choice.

The solo is a cacophony of instruments including drums, backward tapes, and orchestral instruments.

## II. LYRICS

### a) Story—What is the essential story line or meaning of the song as described by the lyrics?

Use at least three sentences and lyrics from the song where applicable.

Abstract musings on reality and childhood. Strawberry Fields was a Salvation Army orphanage around the corner from Lennon's boyhood home. Does he want to return to a childlike state, or is he questioning reality? "Living is easy with eyes closed / Misunderstanding all you see / It's getting hard to be someone but it all works out / It doesn't matter much to me."

- b) **Message**—Do you find there is an underlying message of social and/or political **importance** contained in the lyrics? If so, describe the message.

Given these lyrics' distinctly abstract nature, one only interprets at best. Lennon is clearly involved in existential questioning, an exercise of some benefit to our students.

### III. ARTIST HISTORY

- a) **Youth and Personal Characteristics**—What **two** things about the artist's youth or early career are most important in helping to understand their work? **Why?**

- 1) Lennon was abandoned twice by his mother, Julia, once around age five, when he was given to his mother's sister Mimi, to be raised and again at age seventeen, when his growing friendship with Julia was cut short by her death at the hands of a drunk off-duty policeman. As a youth, Lennon was a troublemaker at school and prone to biting sarcasm.
- 2) At Quarry Bank High School, Lennon and his buddies formed the Quarrymen (1956), which eventually included Paul McCartney (1956) and George Harrison (1958). They played skiffle (folk) and rock and roll favorites, evolved into the Beatles, and acquired manager Brian Epstein (1961), a producer, George Martin, a record contract with Parlophone (1962), and their final drummer, Richard Starkey (Ringo Starr, 1962).

- b) **Musical Roots**—What **two** musical styles or artists were the most important influences on this artist? What **evidence** substantiates this?

Rock and Roll—The early Beatles years were dominated by music from rock and rollers including Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, and Little Richard. In addition, stylistically, the Beatles adopted the four-piece band from Holly, vocal harmony from the Everly Brothers, the falsetto wails from Little Richard, and straight-ahead drive from Berry.

It's a tie between African American styles of the late 1950s and early 1960s—R&B, early soul, and Motown—and pop and show tunes of the era. They recorded the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout," Arthur Alexander's "Anna," the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman," and Barrett Strong's "Money." In the pop vein, they recorded "Till There Was You" from the show *Music Man*, Bacharach and David's "Baby It's You," and "A Taste of Honey," from the show of the same name. During this first era, the Beatles evidenced the emotionality and beat-driven music from African American roots and the lushness of a broad harmonic Broadway and pop palate.

- c) **Career Landmarks**—What **three events** do you believe are the most important landmarks of this artist's career? **Why?**

- 1) The Beatles conquered the American musical mainstream with their original mixture of redefined rock and roll plus a witty irreverence and the spirit of their generation. Into the fallen Camelot of January 1964 America rode the Fab Four and the bouncy drive of "I Want to Hold Your Hand." Within two months the Beatles were dominating American TV, radio, and the movies. They appeared on *The Ed*

*Sullivan Show* three consecutive weeks, released the movie *A Hard Day's Night*, and owned the pop music charts.

- 2) Lennon stated that although the Beatles may have been in the crowd's nest shouting "Land ho!" we were all in the same boat of cultural and political change. Society was in a tempestuous transition, with youth counterculture questioning mainstream's very foundations of work, relationships, sexuality, and authority. When Bob Dylan visited the Beatles at their New York hotel in August 1964 and gave them their first marijuana cigarette, the "Boys'" horizons expanded even further. They added orchestral and Eastern instruments to their records and introspective and political topics to their lyrics, expanding the boundaries of rock music itself.
- 3) Having played their last live concert (San Francisco, August 1966), the Beatles rested and then in November 1966 returned to Abbey Road Studios to begin recording what they desired to be an album of some consequence. Their record label pressured them for a single, and the Beatles removed two of the first three songs from the album and released "Strawberry Fields" and "Penny Lane" in February 1967. The subsequent *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* turned out to be a "landmark of Western civilization," according to sage Kenneth Tynan.

#### IV. SOCIETAL CONTEXT

- a) **Cultural and Political Forces**—Name **two** cultural or political forces that are important to the artist's music. **Explain why they are important.**
  - 1) A number of the counterculture's political and social forces had a significant impact on the Beatles. As artists, they were searching for new methods and messages and became involved individually in the study of Eastern music and religion (George), classical music and art (Paul), and avant-garde music and art (John). The Beatles were also using psychoactive drugs to enhance this search and publicly stated their support for marijuana and LSD.
  - 2) The Beatles publicly supported the global peace movement. Not all members were overtly political, however. John Lennon, the most active, demonstrated against the U.S. war in Vietnam. In June 1967, the Beatles recorded and played "All You Need Is Love" to 400 million people in twenty-four countries on the first worldwide TV broadcast.

#### V. STANCE

- a) **Live Performance**—What image does the artist present during live performances, through dress and actions?

In the early years, Brian Epstein imbued rock and roll with sartorial splendor. Although the "Boys" were dressed in Pierre Cardin suits, their hair was a scandalous length, touching their ears. This produced contradictory messages to the viewing public, the result of which was the desired "safe rebellion," a comfortable position for the era's youth and young adults. As society loosened its collective tie, the Beatles' costumes and hair grew more ornate and colorful. Note the uniforms and Beatles appearance gracing the *Sgt. Pepper* cover and album interior.

- b) **Public Positions**—Does the artist take public positions on political and/or cultural issues?

As stated previously, the Beatles were forthright in their expression of support for universal peace, religious tolerance, and lifestyle experimentation and opposition to the Vietnam War. After the Beatles' breakup in April 1970, John Lennon moved to New York and became active in the antiwar movement, which earned him a dirty-tricks FBI operation by J. Edgar Hoover, who attempted to force his deportation back to England.

## ROCK WINDOW

ARTIST: Nirvana      SONG: Smells Like Teen Spirit

### I. MUSIC

- a) **Ensemble**—What instruments are playing?  
Drums, bass, two guitars.
- b) **Rhythmic Emphasis**—What is the **dominant** beat? What instrument is playing it?  
Half-note drums, syncopated bass guitar.
- c) **Vocal** —What is (1) the level of emotionality (1–10)? (2) What are two adjectives that you would use to subjectively describe the vocal style?  
9, intense, rough, shouting.
- d) **Instrumental Solo**—Is there an instrumental solo, and if so, what instrument is playing it? What musical style is most apparent in this solo? Defend root choice.  
Guitar solo; hard rock/punk distorted tone setting; country-style, single-string, non-blues melodic style.

### II. LYRICS

- a) **Story**—What is the essential story line or meaning of the song as described by the lyrics? Use at least three sentences and lyrics from the song where applicable.  
Kurt Cobain's anthemic combination of insecure sincerity and nihilism, a typical stream-of-consciousness patchwork of ideas. He uses opposites like "mulatto-albino" and "loser and self-assured." "I'm worse at what I do best / And for this gift I feel best / Our little group has always been / and always will until the end."
- b) **Message**—Do you find there is an underlying message of social and/or political **importance** contained in the lyrics? If so, describe the message.  
Considered reflective of an alienated generation with no future. "With the lights out, it's less dangerous / Here we are now, entertain us / I feel stupid, and contagious / Here we are now, entertain us."

### III. ARTIST HISTORY

- a) **Youth and Personal Characteristics**—What **two** things about the artist's youth or early career are most important in helping to understand their work? **Why?**  
1) Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic grew up in the depressed logging town of Aberdeen, Washington. All bandmates came from divorced families. Lyricist

Cobain spent his youth being shuttled from his mom to dad, to uncles and aunts, to grandparents, and finally ended up sleeping under a highway bridge. Their teen culture included the ingestion of significant quantities of alcohol and psychoactive and anesthetizing drugs.

- 2) Kurt moved to the nearby Washington capital of Olympia, the home of the alternative Evergreen State University. There he wrote music and hung out in the burgeoning alternative music scene led by the Melvins. His four years there paved the way for contacts in Seattle, sixty miles to the north and a laboratory for his musical development.
- b) **Musical Roots**—What **two** musical styles or artists were the most important influences on this artist? What **evidence** substantiates this?
  - 1) *Hard Rock*—All three members of Nirvana were drawn to the harder end of the seventies hard rock spectrum and cite Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith, and Kiss as their early influences. This is evident in Dave Grohl's driving drums and Kurt Cobain's intense vocal delivery.
  - 2) *Punk*—As teens they were all introduced to early British (Sex Pistols, Clash) and American punk groups (Black Flag, Dead Kennedys, Circle Jerks, Bad Brains). Their music (high-energy, eighth-note pulse, and distorted buzzsaw guitar), lyrics (nihilistic, in-your-face), and stance (stage diving) reflected the punk aesthetic.
- c) **Career Landmarks**—What **three** events do you believe are the most important landmarks of this artist's career? **Why?**
  - 1) Nirvana connects with emerging seminal Seattle independent record label Sub Pop to release their first single, "Love Buzz" (November 1988) and later two more singles, an EP, and a CD, *Bleach* (June 1989). At the time, the Seattle scene had blossomed, with Soundgarden, Mudhoney, Skin Yard, TAD, and Mother Love Bone leading the way.
  - 2) Major labels are drawn to Seattle, and Geffen Records signs Nirvana, an event that causes the ambivalent Cobain the agony of being a principled antiestablishment alternative/punk sleeping with the major-label man. The band records the CD *Nevermind* in L.A. at Sound City Studios, where Fleetwood Mac—they recorded their platinum album *Rumours* there—and others such as the Jackson 5 and Tom Petty recorded. It is released in September 1991, featuring the single "Smells Like Teen Spirit." The "Teen Spirit" music video gets heavy rotation on MTV, the single and album go to #1, and *Nevermind* sells 10 million units.
  - 3) Cobain leads a highly successful but tortured existence. He is one of the era's most recognized songwriters and group leaders. He falls in love with and marries Courtney Love, lead singer for Hole, and they have a baby girl. But the "king" is fraught with conflict and self-doubt. They struggle with heroin addiction and each other. Kurt, who has lived with loneliness, betrayal, and a sense of abandonment all his life, commits suicide on April 4, 1994. Charges of foul play surround the death.

#### IV. SOCIETAL CONTEXT

- a) **Cultural and Political Forces**—Name **two** cultural or political forces that are important to the artist's music. **Explain why they are important.**
  - 1) Nirvana's geographical and chronological generation was "born under a bad

sign.” Living under the Reagan deconstruction of the safety net and the increasing mechanization of big timber, the gray winters of a declining economy and fractured families took their toll on the teenage spirits of the Northwest. Rebellion and revolutionary fervor shared the soul with nihilism and depression.

2) Out of these objective conditions emerged a sound and culture identified as “grunge.” Drummer Dave Grohl described it as “derelict kids playing music that sounded like we were pissed.” Nirvana manager Danny Goldberg put it, “Nirvana embodied the yearning for a moral universe that was more real and more sincere than what was going on . . . at the time. . . . They convey a set of values that’s egalitarian and ethics-driven and less macho, power driven.”

## V. STANCE

- a) **Live Performance**—What image does the artist present during live performances through dress and actions?

Nirvana and especially Cobain dressed in deliberate northwestern disarray, sporting jeans severely torn at the knees, a T-shirt topped by a flannel shirt, sometimes a sweat-shirt, and long, often unkempt hair. This appearance spawned the national “grunge look.” At other times, in both concert and on national TV, Cobain wore dresses and lingerie. Their show reflected some of the punk and metal aesthetics, including audience surfing, stage diving, hurled epithets, and instrument throwing and smashing.

- b) **Public Positions**—Does the artist take public positions on political and/or cultural issues?

There is a seeming incongruity between the wholly reactive and violent stage behavior and the expressed political consciousness against racism, sexism, and homophobia. Cobain was accused of railing against the apathy of his generation, to which he responded: “I don’t mean to do that because I know throughout the eighties, my generation was fucking helpless. There was so much right-wing power that there was almost nothing we could do.” Both Novoselic and Grohl also exhibited considerable political understanding.

## ROCK WINDOW

ARTIST: Public Enemy      SONG: Fight the Power (1989)

### I. MUSIC

- a) **Ensemble**—What instruments are playing?  
Drum machine, bass, guitar, turntables, sampler (samples).
- b) **Rhythmic Emphasis**—What is the **dominant** beat? What instrument is playing it?  
Half-note drums, syncopated bass and kick drum.
- c) **Vocal Style**—What is (1) the level of emotionality (1–10)? (2) What are two adjectives that you would use to subjectively describe the vocal style?  
7, shouting, evocative.
- d) **Instrumental Solo**—Is there an instrumental solo, and if so, what instrument is playing it? What musical style is most apparent in this solo? Defend root choice.  
N/A

## II. LYRICS

- a) **Story**—What is the essential story line or meaning of the song as described by the lyrics? Use at least three sentences and lyrics from the song where applicable.

“Our freedom of speech is freedom or death / We got to fight the powers that be.” To paraphrase, the rhythm bounces but the rhymes are designed to fill your mind with black pride and “mental self-defense fitness.” Elvis and John Wayne weren’t heroes to me, “most of my heroes don’t appear on no stamps.” “Power to the people no delay.”

- b) **Message**—Do you find there is an underlying message of social and/or political **importance** contained in the lyrics? If so, describe the message.

A call to “brothers and sisters” to develop awareness of pride in being black, recognize the history of oppression, and develop a mental attitude and toughness that will help to “fight the powers that be.”

## III. ARTIST HISTORY

- a) **Youth and Personal Characteristics**—What **two** things about the artist’s youth or early career are most important in helping to understand their work? **Why?**

1) Chuck D (Carleton Ridenhour), the artistic and political leader of Public Enemy, was born in 1960 in Queens, New York, and raised in middle-class surroundings in the 90 percent black town of Roosevelt, Long Island. His family imbued him with a consciousness of the monumental events that transpired throughout the next fifteen years, including the civil rights and Black Power movements, the assassinations of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, the U.S. war in Vietnam, and the accomplishments of the Black Panther Party.

2) Chuck D attended Long Island’s Adelphi University, where he majored in graphic arts and plunged into the college radio station, WBAU, and the evolving hip-hop scene. There he formed the dance, club, and concert promotion company Spectrum City and began to work with the future Public Enemy family: producer Hank Shocklee, sidekick Flavor Flav (William Drayton), DJ Terminator X (Norman Rogers), and “Minister of Information” Professor Griff (Richard Griffin).

- b) **Musical Roots**—What **two** musical styles or artists were the most important influences on this artist? What **evidence** substantiates this?

1) The roots of rap are deep and diverse—African, Caribbean, and African American oral and lyric traditions such as toasting and boasting, the griot, Jamaican mobile sound systems and “dub” style, and dozens of other rhythmic lyrical games. Music roots are as old as the syncopated backbeat dating back to Africa and as recent as samples from this year’s hits, plus musical styles such as jazz, funk, and R&B.

2) Public Enemy drew musically and topically from roots artists and early-era rappers. They cite prerappers Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets as influences. They were also inspired by exposure to African and African American history in local summer programs and at Adelphi. Musically, their vocalizing was affected by hip-hop locals L. L. Cool J and Run-DMC and pregangsta Philly-based Schoolly D. The interplay between Chuck D and Flavor Flav derives from partnerships like James Brown and announcer/commentator Bobby Bird.

c) **Career Landmarks**—What **three** events do you believe are the most important landmarks of this artist's career? **Why?**

- 1) In June 1986, Public Enemy—named because of lyrics from their first record and also in recognition of black second-class citizenship—signs with the rap independent record label Def Jam (distributed by Columbia Records and run by producer Rick Rubin and his partner, Russell Simmons). Their first single, “Public Enemy #1,” was released in February 1987, and their first album, *Yo, Bum Rush the Show*, the next month. Although the album contained some “conscious” material like “Rightstarter (Message to a Black Man),” it was more a highly innovative version of contemporary New York sounds.
- 2) With *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (July 1988), PE's explosive sociopolitical vision takes center stage. The Bomb Squad, Shocklee's production team, provides a dense and powerful musical underpinning to the message of black self-awareness and struggle. PE tackles topics such as poverty, drugs, prisons, and ideological pursuits in the album Vibe Magazine reviewer Alan Light calls “quite simply, the finest hip-hop album ever made.”
- 3) Public Enemy gets mired in controversy over Professor Griff's comments in a Washington Times May 1989 interview stating that Jews are responsible for “the majority of wickedness that goes on across the globe.” Griff, a former member of the Nation of Islam, is the leader of Public Enemy's dance and security crew, “Security of the First World” (S1W). Their dark uniforms, black berets, and plastic Uzis reflect the Black Panther Party militancy of the previous decade. PE leader Chuck D suspends Griff, recants, and then after further racist comments fires him. PE is accused of inaction and anti-Semitism.

#### IV. SOCIETAL CONTEXT

a) **Cultural and Political Forces**—Name **two** cultural or political forces that are important to the artist's music. **Explain why they are important.**

- 1) Increased conditions of poverty, including reduced spending for education and health care in poor communities, soaring incarceration rates of black men, a recession, and the loss of living-wage jobs in the inner city, inspired some rap artists to reflect these objective conditions. At a time when popular music, rap included, was largely devoid of societal commentary, Public Enemy introduced the sociopolitical reality of the black condition to the American commercial music mainstream. Chuck D called rap “Black America's CNN.” At the same time, West Coast rap was adopting a similar tack with “gangsta” rap, a supreal chronicle of life in the Los Angeles black underclass. Having endured nearly twenty years of conservative Republican “benign neglect,” elements from the black artistic community were fighting back.
- 2) Technological advances in electronic instruments and sampling machines allowed rap artists to create their collages of sound cheaply and efficiently. Thus, regional sounds could emerge without the involvement and control of the Big 5, which empowered artists to seek alternative modes of recording and distribution. Public Enemy returned to the spotlight in 1999 with “There's a Poison Goin' On,” re-

leased by Internet-focused label Atomic Pop, and Chuck D has taken a leading role in heralding the Internet as an alternative to the stranglehold and greed of the music business.

## V. STANCE

- a) **Live Performance**—What image does the artist present during live performances through dress and actions?

PE is the whole show. A mobile Chuck D claims the stage, while sidekick Flav in top hat, comic glasses, and huge clock pendant provides counterpoint and commentary. Terminator X mans the turntables, while the ever vigilant security guard S1W does their dance/drill. Symbols of black empowerment and self-defense abound, with S1W costuming and the Public Enemy logo of a black silhouette caught in the crosshairs of a rifle site, for example.

- b) **Public Position**—Does the artist take public positions on political and/or cultural issues?

*Vibe Magazine* stated that PE “introduced intellectual rigor (and) controlled chaos. . . to hip-hop. They were, to sample a phrase from the Clash, the only band that mattered.”



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# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1

1. For a more detailed explanation of the Rock Window and its application, see Paul Friedlander, “A Characteristics Profile of Eight Classic Rock and Roll Artists, 1954–1959: As Measured by the ‘Rock Window,’” December 1987, *Dissertation Abstracts Volume 49A*, 652. Not published.

2. Bonnie Wade, *Thinking Musically: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

3. A hit song or album is defined as one that attained at least #40 on either the Billboard Hot 100 singles chart or top-200 album chart. The weekly *Billboard* magazine popular music charts, though not above criticism, are considered to be the most accurate gauges of commercial success. All chart quotations are taken from Joel Whitburn’s *Billboard* books, *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* (New York: Billboard Books, 2004) and *The Billboard Book of Top Pop Albums* (New York: Record Research Inc., 2002).

4. See Paul Friedlander, “A Characteristics Profile of the Eight Classic Rock Era Artists, 1954–1959” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1987).

## CHAPTER 2

1. Don J. Hibbard and Carol Kaleialoha, *The Role of Rock* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 13.

2. Cousin Brucie Morrow and Laura Baudo, *Cousin Brucie: My Life in Rock and Roll Radio* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987), 59.

## CHAPTER 3

1. Jerry Hopkins, *The Rock Story* (New York: Signet Books, 1970), 31.

2. Charles White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984), 47–48.

3. Arnold Shaw, *The Rockin’ ’50s: The Decade That Transformed the Pop Music Scene* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1974), 139.

4. *Ibid.*, 143.

5. Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1972), 34.
6. Decca executive and Haley producer Milt Gabler had suggested that part of the success of “Rock Around the Clock” was due to the fact that it was a rewrite of an old blues tune, “My Daddy Rocks Me with a Steady Roll.” He claimed that the words *rock and roll* came straight from the lyrics of that song.
7. Chuck Berry, 1969 interview with Greil Marcus, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 175.
8. Ibid.
9. White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard*, 47.
10. Gillett, *The Sound of the City*, 37.
11. Little Richard, 1969 interview with David Dalton, “Rolling Stone” Interviews, 366.

## CHAPTER 4

1. Peter Guralnick, *Lost Highway: Journeys and Arrivals of American Musicians* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1979), 120.
2. Peter Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home: Portraits in Blues and Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971), 140.
3. Guralnick, *Lost Highway*, 100–101.
4. Jerry Hopkins, *Elvis: A Biography* (New York: Warner Paperback Library, 1972), 135; Guralnick, *Lost Highway*, 120.
5. Alfred Wertheimer, *Elvis '56* (New York: Collier Books, 1979), 26.
6. Red West, Sonny West, and Dave Hebler, with Steve Dunleavy, *Elvis: What Happened?* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), 188–89.
7. Arnold Shaw, *The Rockin' '50s: The Decade That Transformed the Pop Music Scene* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1974), 191; Guralnick, *Feel Like Going Home*, 147.
8. J. W. Brown tinkered with technology. Experimenting with electric instruments, he was one of the era's first major bass players to adopt the Fender electric bass for use in the studio and on the road.
9. John Goldrosen, *The Buddy Holly Story* (New York: Quick Fox, 1975), 61.
10. Holly had hits under two different names, the Crickets and Buddy Holly. Although not exactly typical, it is not unique. Black vocal groups sometimes recorded up-tempo music under one name and ballads under another. Holly also had a more compelling reason to exclude his name from “That’ll Be the Day.” Brunswick Records rushed to sign Holly immediately after hearing the song. However, Holly was still under contract to Decca (ironically, Brunswick’s parent company), which, had it known, could have prevented Holly from signing with Brunswick. Even worse, the label might have released its terrible, inferior version of the song that languished somewhere in their vaults. Holly chose to hide as a member of the Crickets; thus, the record was released under the group’s name. Once the Decca contract expired, Holly nevertheless decided to maintain the black vocal group tradition—most fast songs were re-released by the Crickets and the ballads by Buddy Holly.
11. Goldrosen, *The Buddy Holly Story*, 91.
12. See *ibid.* for a marvelous description of the 1957 tour.
13. *Ibid.*, back cover.
14. Bruce Pollack, *In Their Own Words* (New York: Collier Books, 1975), 139–40.

15. Terence J. O'Grady, *The Beatles* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 11; Chuck Berry, 1972 interview with Patrick Salvo, *The "Rolling Stone" Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 233.

## CHAPTER 6

1. Cousin Brucie Morrow and Laura Baudo, *Cousin Brucie: My Life in Rock and Roll Radio* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987), 74.
2. Alan Betrock, *Girl Groups: The Story of a Sound* (New York: Delilah Books, 1982), 106.
3. Steven Gaines, *Heroes and Villains: The True Story of the Beach Boys* (New York: New American Library, 1986), 79, 108.

## CHAPTER 7

1. Nicholas Schaffner, *The Beatles Forever* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 22.
2. John Lennon, *The "Rolling Stone" Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 142; Schaffner, *The Beatles Forever*, 59.
3. Terence J. O'Grady, *The Beatles* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 109.
4. Barry G. Golson, ed., *The "Playboy" Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono* (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 149.
5. Ray Coleman, *Lennon* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 261–62.
6. See interview with Jann Wenner, in *"Rolling Stone" Interviews*, 140; *Rolling Stone* 5, no. 12, 47.
7. Golson, *"Playboy" Interviews*, 166.
8. Beatles friend Jimi Hendrix was recruited to join the tour, but his extraordinary success at the Monterey Pop Festival in June led to a series of important concert dates, and he was released from his commitment.
9. Peter McCabe and Robert Schonfeld, *Apple to the Core: The Unmaking of the Beatles* (New York: Pocket Books, 1974), 94.
10. Golson, *"Playboy" Interviews*, 160.
11. McCabe and Schonfeld, *Apple to the Core*, 113.
12. *Ibid.*, 142.
13. *Ibid.*, 134, 179.

## CHAPTER 8

1. Philip Norman, *Symphony for the Devil: The Rolling Stones Story* (New York: Linden Press, Simon and Schuster, 1984), 41.
2. Keith Richards, 1971 interview with Jeff Greenfield, *The "Rolling Stone" Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 159.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 160.
5. Nicholas Schaffner, *The British Invasion: From the First Wave to the New Wave* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 59.
6. *Ibid.*, 68; Mick Jagger, interview with Mikal Gilmore, *Rolling Stone*, no. 512, 34.
7. Richards, interview with Greenfield, *"Rolling Stone" Interviews*, 170.
8. *Ibid.*, 168, 166.
9. Stanley Booth, *The True Adventures of the Rolling Stones* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 248.

10. Chet Flippo, *On the Road with the Rolling Stones* (Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, 1985), 37.
11. Jagger, interview with Gilmore, *Rolling Stone*, 32.
12. Richards, interview with Greenfield, “*Rolling Stone*” Interviews, 171.
13. Tony Sanchez, *Up and Down with the Rolling Stones* (New York: New American Library, 1979).
14. Booth, *True Adventures*, 156.
15. *Ibid.*, 374.
16. *Ibid.*, 339, 394.
17. Norman, *Symphony for the Devil*, 337.
18. Jagger, interview with Gilmore, *Rolling Stone*, 35.

## CHAPTER 9

1. Dave Marsh, *Before I Get Old: The Story of the Who* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 80.
2. Richard Barnes, *The Who: Maximum R&B* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 41.
3. Pete Townshend, interview with Jann Wenner, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 34.
4. Marsh, *Before I Get Old*, 126.
5. Townshend, 1987 interview with David Fricke, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews: The 1980s* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Rolling Stone Press, 1989).
6. Townshend, interview with J. Cott, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews*, vol. 2 (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1973), 41.
7. *Ibid.*, 45.
8. Townshend, interview with Fricke, “*Rolling Stone*” Interviews.
9. Townshend, interview with Cott, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews*, 2:53.
10. *Ibid.*, 49.
11. Townshend, interview with Fricke, “*Rolling Stone*” Interviews.
12. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 10

1. Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan* (New York: Signet Books, 1973), 69.
2. Robbie Woliver, *Bringing It All Back Home* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 67, 73.
3. Bob Dylan, interview with Jann Wenner, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews: The 1980s* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 83.
4. Roseburg is a city of 20,000 located in western Oregon. It is sufficiently removed from major markets to be served during the day by only radio stations located within the area. In the 1960s Roseburg had only one top-40 radio station playing rock music. “Roseburg status” postulates that if a song reached the playlist on a top-40 station in a market so removed as Roseburg, Oregon, it was most probably available to all listeners nationwide.
5. Paul Gambaccini, *Critics’ Choice: The Top 100 Rock ‘n’ Roll Albums of All Time* (New York: Harmony Books, 1987), 8.
6. Alan Rinzler, *Bob Dylan: The Illustrated Record* (New York: Harmony Books, 1978), 63, 68.

## CHAPTER 12

1. Peter Guralnik, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 243.

## CHAPTER 13

1. Since the band recorded rhythm-section parts—usually consisting of the drums, bass, keyboard, and guitar—to numerous songs during the course of a working day, it was often difficult to recall, years later, who actually recorded on which songs. Some controversy has arisen over who played on what songs. New York session drummer Bernard Purdie claims to have rerecorded numerous drum parts for Motown over the course of the 1960s. Los Angeles bassist Carol Kaye was also known to have recorded for the label during this era. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Funk Brothers were innovative, high-quality players and played on the vast majority of Motown hits.

2. Nelson George, *Where Did Our Love Go?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 67.

3. Though Motown groups are known for background harmony, the HDH formula often called for background vocalists to sing in unison (for example, "Sugar Pie" and "Where Did Our Love Go").

4. Gaye contends that Terrell was so ill during the last album, *Easy* (1969), that writer-producer Valerie Simpson, copying Terrell's style, sang on the hits "What You Gave Me" and "The Onion Song."

## CHAPTER 14

1. See James Carey, "Changing Courtship Patterns in the Popular Song," *American Journal of Sociology* 74 (May 1969): 720–31.

2. Ralph J. Gleason, *The Jefferson Airplane and the San Francisco Sound* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), 17.

3. Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 96.

4. Gleason, *Jefferson Airplane and San Francisco Sound*, 41, 43.

5. Gene Sculatti and David Seay, *San Francisco Nights: The Psychedelic Music Trip, 1965–1968* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 99.

6. Perry, *Haight-Ashbury*, 208.

7. Myra Friedman, *Buried Alive: The Biography of Janis Joplin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 319.

## CHAPTER 15

1. John Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton* (Suffolk: Panther, 1976), 19.

2. *Ibid.*, 55.

3. Eric Clapton, interview with John Hutchinson, *Musician*; Ray Coleman, *Clapton!* (New York: Warner Books, 1985), 58–59.

4. Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton*, 69.

5. Clapton, 1968 interview with Jann Wenner, *The "Rolling Stone" Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 26.

6. Coleman, *Clapton!* 89.

7. Anthony DeCurtis et al., *The "Rolling Stone" Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Random House, 1992), 411–12.

8. David Henderson, *'Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky: The Life of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 114.

9. The four final songs, “Like a Rolling Stone,” “Rock Me Baby,” “Can You See Me,” and “Wild Thing,” are available as one side of *Historic Performances Recorded at the Monterey International Pop Festival*, Otis Redding/Jimi Hendrix (Reprise Records).

10. Jerry Hopkins, *Hit and Run: The Jimi Hendrix Story* (New York: Perigee Books, 1983), 118, 119.

11. *Ibid.*, 180, 182.

12. *Ibid.*, 191.

13. *Guitar Player Magazine*, Jimi Hendrix special edition.

14. Henderson, ‘*Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky*, 359–65.

15. *Ibid.*, 365; Hopkins, *Hit and Run*, 304.

16. Hopkins, *Hit and Run*, 170.

17. *Guitar Player Magazine*, special Hendrix edition.

18. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 16

1. Jimmy Page, 1977 interview with Steve Rosen, *Rock Guitarists: Volume II* (New York: Guitar Player Books, 1978), 151.

2. Stephen Davis, *Hammer of the Gods: The Led Zeppelin Saga* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 51.

3. *Ibid.*, 56.

4. *Ibid.*, 81, 87, 88.

5. *Ibid.*, 155.

6. *Ibid.*, 242, 104.

7. Robert Plant, 1975 interview with Cameron Crowe, *The “Rolling Stone” Interviews: 1967–1980* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1981), 318.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Davis, *Hammer of the Gods*, 259.

10. Ed Ward et al., *Rock of Ages: The “Rolling Stone” History of Rock and Roll* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, Summit Books, 1986), 485.

## CHAPTER 17

1. In *One Chord Wonders* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), Dave Laing raises this and other important theoretical issues about the nature of punk music and its roots.

2. Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons, *The Boy Looked at Johnny: The Obituary of Rock and Roll* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987), 18.

3. Laing, *One Chord Wonders*, 83.

4. *Ibid.*, 90.

5. *Ibid.*, 17.

6. *Ibid.*, 36.

7. *Ibid.*, 59.

## CHAPTER 18

1. Neal Ullestad, “Diverse Rock Rebellions Subvert Mass Media Hegemony,” in *Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, edited by Reebee Garofalo (Boston: South End Press, 1992),

46. A good place to begin reading up on this issue is Reebee Garofalo's own chapter, "Rockin' the Boat."
2. Garofalo, "Rockin' the Boat," 65.
3. Ibid., 50.
4. Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), xvii.
5. MC is a hip-hop term for "mic controller."
6. See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).
7. Ibid., 188.

## CHAPTER 19

1. Niall Stokes, *U2: Into the Heart: Stories Behind Every Song* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2001), 68.
2. *Rolling Stone* magazine, *R.E.M.: The "Rolling Stone" Files: The Ultimate Compendium of Interviews, Articles, Facts, and Opinions from the Files of "Rolling Stone"* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 6.
3. Jim DeRogatis, *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the 90's* (New York: Da Capo, 2003), 240.
4. Scott Schinder and the Editors of Rolling Stone Press. "*Rolling Stone*''s *Alt-Rock-a-Rama: An Outrageous Compendium of Facts, Fiction, Trivia, and Critiques on Alternative Rock* (New York: Delta, 1996), 52.
5. Dave Thompson, *Alternative Rock: Third Ear—the Essential Listening Companion* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 548.
6. Brendan Mullen and Marc Spitz, "The Dance of Decadence: The Uncensored History of Jane's Addiction," *Spin*, June 2003.
7. Schinder, "*Rolling Stone*''s *Alt-Rock-a-Rama*, 150.
8. Michael Azerrad, *Come As You Are* (New York: Broadway Books, 1993).
9. Kurt Cobain, *Journals* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002), 136; Azerrad, *Come As You Are*.
10. Azerrad, *Come As You Are*, 13.
11. Ibid., 184.
12. Steve Taylor, *The A to X of Alternative Music* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 16; Charles R. Cross, *Heavier than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain* (New York: Hyperion, 2001), 45.
13. DeRogatis, *Milk It!*, 67.
14. James Haskins, *One Nation under a Groove: Rap Music and Its Roots* (New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2000), 77.
15. Chuck D and Yusuf Jah, *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (New York: Delta, 1997), 8–9.
16. Gregor Ehrlich and Dimitri Ehrlich, *Move the Crowd: Voices and Faces of the Hip-Hop Nation* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999), 72.
17. Chuck D and Jah, *Fight the Power*.

## CHAPTER 20

1. Scott Schinder and the editors of Rolling Stone Press. "*Rolling Stone*''s *Alt-Rock-a-Rama: An Outrageous Compendium of Facts, Fiction, Trivia, and Critiques on Alternative Rock* (New York: Delta, 1996), 468.

2. Jim DeRogatis, *Milk It! Collected Musings on the Alternative Music Explosion of the 90's* (New York: Da Capo, 2003), 145.
3. Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey* (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 332.
4. Todd Souvignier, *The World of DJs and the Turntable Culture* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2003).
5. Ibid.
6. Frank Owen, *Clubland: The Fabulous Rise and Murderous Fall of Club Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 66.
7. Ibid., 117.
8. Brewster and Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, 341, 396–97.
9. <http://www.moby.com>, “Journal,” (2002).
10. From Electronic Music Defense Education Fund.
11. Ian Christe, *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 119.
12. William Saletan, “G.I. Joe: Joe Lieberman’s Risky Conservative Campaign,” January 12, 2003. <http://www.slate.com/id/2076679>.
13. Ian Christe, *Sound of the Beast*, 204.
14. Ibid., 216.
15. Ibid., 307–8; David Konow, *Bang Your Head: The Rise and Fall of Heavy Metal* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002), 373.
16. Christe, *Sound of the Beast*, 322.
17. Ibid., 325.
18. Steve Gorman, “Great White—Rock’s Worst Tragedy,” *Billboard*, February 2003.
19. Mark Putterford, *Metallica “Talking”: Metallica in Their Own Words* (London: Omnibus Press, 2004), 121.
20. Bill Mann, *I Want My MP3: How to Download, Rip, and Play Digital Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000).
21. Jay Lickfett, *MP3 FYI: Digital Music Online: Your Q&A to MP3* (Cincinnati: Muska and Lipman, 2000), 38.
22. George Ziemann, “RIAA’s Statistics Don’t Add Up to Piracy,” *Rolling Stone*, December 2002.
23. From “CDs Getting Cheaper,” by Jenny Eliscu (June 2002).
24. Mark Coleman, *Playback: From the Victrola to MP3, 100 Years of Music, Machines, and Money* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 173.
25. Chisun Lee, “Counter ‘Revolution’: FCC Dubs Feminist Lyricist ‘Patently Offensive,’” *Village Voice*, June 2001.
26. Damien Cave, “Inside Clear Channel,” *Rolling Stone*, August 2003.

# DISCOGRAPHY

*by John Etheredge*

*Jivin' Johnny Etheredge is a middle school social studies teacher and record collector who has hosted his syndicated Son of Saturday Gold rock and roll oldies radio show since 1971. This show, along with his Country Classics and 60s Beat, is currently airing each week on KRVM-FM in Eugene, Oregon, and KSYD-FM in Reedsport, Oregon. You can check them out online at [www.krvm.org](http://www.krvm.org). You can e-mail Jivin' Johnny and harangue him about his choices for this discography at [john@krvm.org](mailto:john@krvm.org).*

This discography is designed to guide the casual fan or beginning listener who is interested in building a good “starting place” CD collection for each artist listed. I’m aware that many listeners will prefer to obtain music by downloading or online file sharing. I suppose I may be “old-fashioned,” or perhaps just plain “old,” but I find something attractive about owning the packaging that accompanies a CD or record release. I find that the graphics, the liner notes, and the less familiar tunes that are to be found mixed in with the more familiar hits all contribute something to the listening experience.

The discography is heavily weighted in favor of “Best of” or “Greatest Hits” packages. In recent years record companies have found that reissues can be quite profitable because of the limited production expenses involved. In other words, it’s cheaper to go to the vaults and reissue previously recorded tracks than it is to record, produce, promote, and release new material. This economic fact has led to the release of some fairly extensive multi-CD reissue packages. These collections, generally known as “boxed sets,” usually contain from three to five CDs, but in some cases the complete works of an artist have been made available in boxed sets of up to ten discs or even more. These I’ve generally not included here, recognizing that their purchase price gives them appeal only to the most ardent fan. I’ve tried to list only smaller and less expensive packages, opting for single-disc releases whenever possible.

I have tried to list material that is currently in print and easily available as of June 2005. Releases are regularly deleted from record-company catalogs, and new releases hit the shelves every week. If the ink is dry on this discography, it is probably somewhat out-of-date.

Beware rerecording! Many artists of the 1950s and 1960s have rerecorded their better-known material for a succession of labels. Almost invariably these rerecordings are

inferior to the originals. With labels leasing masters to other labels, and big labels gobbling up little labels, it's sometimes difficult to tell just by looking at a release whether you have the original recordings. I must make mention of some trustworthy reissue labels: Rhino, Collectables, and Varèse Saraband are among the best.

A personal bias: don't overlook the possibilities of your neighborhood mom-and-pop music store. A knowledgeable independent dealer can help you find what you're looking for. Clerks at the chain stores in the mall seldom have a clue. (Look in the yellow pages under "compact discs"—the "record store" heading has gone the way of the buggy whip.) You're likely to get to know somebody with whom you can just talk music. Moreover, when you support a local music store, you are likely supporting a local merchant who in turn supports the local music scene in your area. Many independent music stores buy and sell used CDs, and you may find some real bargains. Many of these stores also deal in used vinyl LPs. Hey, just because they're old doesn't necessarily mean they're expensive to buy. For those listeners who still have turntables, these LPs can be a joy to own. Some of the cover graphics can never be fully appreciated in smaller formats, and there are still a lot of out-of-print LPs out there that have never been reissued in other formats.

When local sources can't get it for you, you can find almost anything you're looking for online. I recommend [allmusic.com](http://allmusic.com) for its usually accurate discographies and reviews. You can also purchase new in-print CDs there. Try [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) to buy new CDs as well as used and out-of-print music at set sale prices. Of course, there's [ebay.com](http://ebay.com) to buy used and out-of-print music at auction. Since the advent of the Internet, I have never had any problem finding even the most rare or obscure record. The object of my search has always been out there someplace—for a price.

If it's just information you're looking for, you can have some fun exploring the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame at [rockhall.com](http://rockhall.com). For musician histories and archived news articles, there's *Rolling Stone* magazine's [rollingstone.com](http://rollingstone.com).

A word of caution: This rock and roll is highly addictive. When you find you can't pay the rent or stock the fridge because you spent your last dollar to obtain a rare alternate-mix B side released only in Japan, don't say I didn't warn you!

## CHAPTER 2

**Robert Johnson:** *King of the Delta Blues Singers*, Columbia Legacy

**Leadbelly:** *Absolutely the Best*, Fuel

**Muddy Waters:** *Best of*, Chess

**B. B. King:** *Live at the Regal*, MCA

**Howlin' Wolf:** *Best*, Chess

**The Soul Stirrers with Sam Cooke:** *The Gospel Soul of, Vol. 2*, Specialty

**The Dixie Hummingbirds:** *Best of*, MCA

**The Swan Silvertones:** *Do You Believe/Very Best of*, Collectables

**Louis Jordan:** *Best of*, MCA

**Lionel Hampton:** *Best of*, MCA

**Jimmie Rodgers:** *Essential*, RCA

**The Carter Family:** *RCA Country Legends*, RCA Nashville/BMG Heritage

**Bob Wills:** *Anthology*, Rhino

**Hank Williams:** *Very Best of*, Legacy

**Billy Ward and the Dominoes:** *Have Mercy Baby*, Charly (import)  
**Big Joe Turner:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Ruth Brown:** *Best of*, Rhino  
**Elvis Presley:** *Sunrise*, RCA  
**Carl Perkins:** *Original Sun Greatest Hits*, Rhino  
**Johnny Cash:** *Essential*, Columbia Legacy

## CHAPTER 3

**Fats Domino:** *Jukebox/20 Greatest Hits the Way You Originally Heard Them*, Capitol  
**Bill Haley:** *From the Original Master Tapes*, MCA  
**Chuck Berry:** *The Great Twenty-Eight*, Chess  
**Little Richard:** *The Essential*, Specialty

## CHAPTER 4

**Elvis Presley:** *Elvis Presley*, RCA (his first album); *Elvis*, RCA (his second album); *The Top Ten Hits*, RCA (all of them, from the 1950s to the 1970s)  
**Jerry Lee Lewis:** *Eighteen Original Sun Greatest Hits*, Rhino  
**Buddy Holly:** *Greatest Hits*, MCA  
**The Everly Brothers:** *All-Time Original Hits*, Rhino  
**Bo Diddley:** *His Best*, Chess  
**Gene Vincent:** *The Screaming End/Best of*, Razor & Tie  
**Eddie Cochran:** *Somethin' Else/The Fine Lookin' Hits of*, Razor & Tie  
**Ricky Nelson:** *Greatest Hits*, Capitol

## CHAPTER 5

**The Platters:** *Enchanted/Best of*, Rhino  
**The Coasters:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**The Drifters:** *Clyde McPhatter & the Drifters/Rockin' & Driftin'*, Collectables (covers 1953–58); *Very Best of*, Rhino (covers 1959–1965)  
**The Orioles:** *Sing Their Greatest Hits*, Collectables  
**Various artists:** *Best of Doo Wop Ballads*, Rhino; *Best of Doo Wop Uptempo*, Rhino. (Many vocal groups of the 1950s were “one-hit wonders.” These two releases are indispensable.)

## CHAPTER 6

(Note: There are collections available by Frankie Avalon, Fabian, and Bobby Rydell, but they have nothing to do with rock and roll. Moreover, they are not even examples of the best rock music of their time. They are interesting only as artifacts of their era.)

**Chubby Checker:** *All the Best*, Teec Recording Company  
**Dion:** *Greatest Hits*, Liberty  
**Bobby Darin:** *The Ultimate*, Warner Brothers  
**Brenda Lee:** *20<sup>th</sup> Century Masters/Best of*, MCA

**Leslie Gore:** *Sunshine, Lollipops & Rainbows/Best of*, Rhino

**Connie Francis:** *Best of*, Collectables

**Various artists:** *Best of the Girl Groups, Vols. 1 & 2*, Rhino (highly recommended!)

**The Shirelles:** *25 All-Time Greatest Hits*, Varèse Saraband

**The Crystals:** *Best of*, ABKCO

**The Ronettes:** *Best of*, ABKCO

**Darlene Love:** *Best of*, ABKCO

Note: Instead of the three single CDs immediately above, you might prefer *Back to Mono*, a four-CD boxed set on ABKCO that includes Phil Spector productions by the above three artists, plus Ike and Tina Turner, the Righteous Brothers, and many more.

**The Kingston Trio:** *Capitol Collector's Series*, Capitol

**Peter, Paul, and Mary:** *Best of*, Warner Brothers

**Harry Belafonte:** *Very Best of*, RCA

**Jan and Dean:** *All Time Greatest Hits*, EMI America

**The Beach Boys:** *Sounds of Summer/Very Best of*, Capitol

**The Ventures:** *Walk, Don't Run/Best of*, EMI

**Duane Eddy:** *Twang Thang/Anthology*, Rhino

## CHAPTER 7

**The Beatles:** *The Beatles 1*, Apple/Capitol. This single-disc anthology is a good place to start, but the group's entire output is really indispensable. Beatles albums before *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* differed in their British and American versions. Capitol has recently begun reissuing the American versions. I recommend the British versions. This gives you the music in its original context and gives you a more complete collection with less duplication of tracks.

All of the following releases are on Capitol:

*Please Please Me*

*With the Beatles*

*A Hard Day's Night*

*Beatles for Sale*

*Help!*

*Rubber Soul*

*Revolver*

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

*Magical Mystery Tour*

*The Beatles (The White Album)*

*Yellow Submarine*

*Abbey Road*

*Let It Be*

*Past Masters, Volume One*

*Past Masters, Volume Two*

These last two releases collect non-LP singles.

**John Lennon:** *Collection*

**Paul McCartney:** *All the Best*

**George Harrison:** *Best of*

**Ringo Starr:** *Blast from Your Past*

## CHAPTER 8

**The Rolling Stones:** *Forty Licks*, ABKCO

The two-CD set listed above is the essential one. All of the Rolling Stones albums have something to recommend them, but those listed below are among the best.

*The Rolling Stones/England's Newest Hitmakers*, ABKCO

*Aftermath*, ABKCO

*Beggars Banquet*, ABKCO

*Let It Bleed*, ABKCO

*Get Yer Ya-Yas Out*, ABKCO

*Sticky Fingers*, Virgin

*Exile on Main Street*, Virgin

## CHAPTER 9

**The Who:** *Ultimate Collection*, Universal

After the one above, try these originals, all on MCA:

*Sings My Generation*

*Sell Out*

*Tommy*

*Who's Next*

*Quadrophenia*

*Who Are You*

## CHAPTER 10

**Woody Guthrie:** *This Land Is Your Land/The Asch Recordings, Vol. 1*, Smithsonian/Folkways

**The Weavers:** *Best of*, Vanguard

**Joan Baez:** *The First Ten Years*, Vanguard; *20<sup>th</sup> Century Masters: The Millennium Collection/Best of*, A&M

**Pete Seeger:** *Greatest Hits*, Columbia/Legacy

**Bob Dylan** (all releases listed are on Columbia): *Greatest Hits*; *Greatest Hits, Volume Two*

The two releases above do a good job of distilling his 1960s output. *Greatest Hits, Volume Three* gives you the best of his 1970s and 1980s work. The originals listed below are all worthwhile.

*Bob Dylan*

*The Freewheelin'*

*The Times They Are a-Changin'*

*Another Side of*

*Highway 61 Revisited*

*Bringing It All Back Home*

*Blonde on Blonde*

*John Wesley Harding*

*Nashville Skyline*

*Self-Portrait*

*New Morning*

*Before the Flood*

*Blood on the Tracks*

*Desire*  
*Slow Train Coming*

## CHAPTER 11

**The Byrds:** *Greatest Hits*, Columbia/Legacy  
**Buffalo Springfield:** *Retrospective/Best of*, Atco  
**Poco:** *The Ultimate Collection*, Hip-O  
**Crosby, Stills, and Nash (and Young):** *The Greatest Hits*, Rhino  
**The Flying Burrito Brothers:** *20<sup>th</sup> Century Masters—The Millennium Collection/Best of*, A&M  
**The Eagles:** *Very Best of*, WSM  
**The Mamas and the Papas:** *Greatest Hits*, MCA  
**The Lovin' Spoonful:** *Greatest Hits*, Buddha  
**The Band:** *Best of*, Capitol

## CHAPTER 12

**Ray Charles:** *Ultimate Hits Collection*, Rhino  
**James Brown:** *Twenty All Time Greatest Hits*, Polydor  
**Sam Cooke:** *Greatest Hits*, RCA  
**Booker T. and the M.G.s:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Otis Redding:** *Very Best of, Vol. 1*, Rhino  
**Wilson Pickett:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Sam and Dave:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Solomon Burke:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Aretha Franklin:** *Aretha's Best*, Rhino  
**Joe Tex:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
The Atlantic label's eight-CD set *The History of Rhythm 'n' Blues* is out of print but worth looking for. It covers all of the label's best, from the late 1940s to the 1970s.

## CHAPTER 13

**Smokey Robinson and the Miracles:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**The Temptations:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**Mary Wells:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**Martha and the Vandellas:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**The Supremes:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**The Four Tops:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
**Marvin Gaye:** *Ultimate Collection*, Universal International  
**Stevie Wonder:** *Definitive Collection*, Motown  
**Gladys Knight and the Pips:** *Essential Collection*, Hip-O  
**The Jackson 5:** *Ultimate Collection*, Motown  
Much of the Motown material listed above, and some by other Motown artists, is distilled into the four-CD boxed set *Hitsville, USA: The Motown Singles Collection, Volume One*, Motown.

## CHAPTER 14

**Jefferson Airplane:** *Worst of*, RCA (a “best of” collection)

**Janis Joplin:** *Greatest Hits*, Columbia/Legacy

**Creedence Clearwater Revival:** *Chronicle, Vol. 1*, Fantasy

**The Grateful Dead:** *Very Best of*, Rhino

**Santana:** *Best of*, Columbia/Legacy

**Country Joe and the Fish:** *Collected, 1965–1970*, Vanguard

**Quicksilver Messenger Service:** *Best of*, Capitol

**The Steve Miller Band:** *Best of 1968–1973*, Capitol

**Moby Grape:** *Crosstalk/Best of*, Sony U.K. (import)

**The Youngbloods:** *Get Together/Essential*, RCA

**Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks:** *Return to Hicksville/Best of the Blue Thumb Years*, Hip-O

## CHAPTER 15

**Eric Clapton:** *Crossroads*, Polydor. This is a four-CD boxed set, but it’s the one you want. It covers Clapton’s career with the Yardbirds and Cream, his solo efforts, and other stops along the way. A single-disc set, with no Yardbirds material on it, is *The Cream of Clapton*, Polydor/Chronicles.

**Jimi Hendrix:** *Smash Hits*, Reprise

## CHAPTER 16

**Led Zeppelin:** *Early Days and Latter Days, Vols. 1 and 2*, Atlantic. This 2-disc set distills the group’s first six LPs into a single package. You may prefer: *Led Zeppelin*, Atlantic; *Led Zeppelin 2*, Atlantic; *Led Zeppelin 3*, Atlantic; *Led Zeppelin 4*, Atlantic; *Houses of the Holy*, Atlantic; *Physical Graffiti*, Swan Song.

**MC5:** *The Big Bang/Best of*, Rhino

**Vanilla Fudge:** *Psychedelic Sunda/Best of*, Rhino

**Iron Butterfly:** *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*, Rhino. Avoid “best of” collections that include edited versions of “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida.” You have to hear the seventeen-minute version to fully appreciate it!

**Black Sabbath:** *We Sold Our Souls for Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Warner Brothers (a “best of” collection)

**Deep Purple:** *Very Best of*, Rhino

**Alice Cooper:** *Greatest Hits*, Warner Brothers

**Aerosmith:** *O Yeah!/Ultimate Hits*, Columbia

**Boston:** *Greatest Hits*, Epic

**Heart:** *Greatest Hits*, Epic/Legacy

**Journey:** *Greatest Hits*, Columbia

**Rush:** *The Spirit of Radio/Greatest Hits, 1974–87*, Universal

**Kiss:** *Very Best of*, Universal

**Bad Company:** *10 from 6/Best of*, Swan Song/Atlantic

**AC/DC:** *Who Made Who*, Epic (not quite a “best of,” but a good retrospective anthology)

**Pink Floyd:** *Echoes/Best of*, Capitol; *The Dark Side of the Moon*, Capitol

**Yes:** *Very Best of*, Atlantic

**King Crimson:** *In the Court of the Crimson King*, E.G. This 1969 debut LP is preferable to any anthology.

**Genesis:** *Turn It On Again/The Hits*, Atlantic

**Moody Blues:** *Best of*, Polydor

**Jethro Tull:** *Very Best of*, EMI

**David Bowie:** *Best of, 1969/1974*, Virgin; *Best of, 1974/1979*, Virgin

**Elton John:** *Greatest Hits, 1970–2002*, Mercury

**Fleetwood Mac:** *Greatest Hits*, Sony International (covers late '60s and early '70s); *Greatest Hits*, Reprise (covers the late '70s and into the '80s)

**Chicago:** *Greatest Hits (Chicago IX)*, Chicago

**Linda Ronstadt:** *Very Best of*, Rhino

## CHAPTER 17

**The Velvet Underground:** *Best of*, Verve

**The Doors:** *Very Best of*, Rhino

**The Stooges:** *Raw Power*, Columbia/Legacy (the third of their three LPs—the band is peaking just as it's self-destructing).

**The Ramones:** *Ramones Mania*, Sire

**The Sex Pistols:** *Kiss This/Best of*, Alex (all of their first LP, *Never Mind the Bollocks*, plus additional tracks)

**The Clash:** *The Singles*, Epic/Legacy

**Elvis Costello:** *The Very Best of*, Rhino

**The Pretenders:** *The Singles*, Sire

**The Talking Heads:** *Best of*, Sire/Warner Brothers/Rhino

**The B-52s:** *Time Capsule*, Warner Brothers

**Devo:** *Greatest Hits*, Warner Brothers

**Blondie:** *Best of*, Chrysalis

**The Dead Kennedys:** *Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*, Alternative Tentacles

**XTC:** *Compact XTC/The Singles, 1978–1985*, Virgin

**Bruce Springsteen:** *The Essential*, Columbia/Legacy

**Prince:** *Very Best of*, Rhino

**The Police:** *Every Breath You Take/The Classics*, A&M

## CHAPTER 18

**Various-artists anthologies:**

*Farm Aid, Vol. 1, Live*, Turn Up the Music

*The Concert for New York City*, Columbia

*Live Aid*, Rhino Video (in print only as a DVD, it's a virtual "who's-who" of rock and roll, circa 1985)

*Alternative NRG*, Hollywood (proceeds benefit Greenpeace)

*Born to Choose*, Rykodisc (proceeds benefit abortion-rights groups)

*Sweet Relief II*, Columbia (proceeds benefit Victoria Williams)

*In Defense of Animals, Vol. 2, Caroline* (proceeds benefit animal-rights groups)

*Peace Together*, Island (proceeds benefit youth of Northern Ireland)

**Michael Jackson:** *Number Ones*, Epic

**Madonna:** *The Immaculate Collection*, Sire

**U2:** *Best of 1980–1990*, Island; *Best of 1990–2000*, Island

## CHAPTER 19

**Nirvana:** *Singles*, Alex

**Jane's Addiction:** *Nothing's Shocking*, Warner Brothers; *Ritual de lo Habitual*, Warner Brothers

**The Pixies:** *Wave of Mutilation*/*Best of*, 4AD

**Red Hot Chili Peppers:** *Greatest Hits*, Warner Brothers

**R.E.M.:** *Eponymous*, I.R.S. (a compilation of material from their first five albums)

**Fugazi:** *13 Songs*, Dischord (a combination of the *Fugazi* and *Margin Walker* EPs)

**Pearl Jam:** *Rearview Mirror*/*Greatest Hits, 1991–2003*, Epic

**Sublime:** *Greatest Hits*, MCA

**Van Halen:** *Best of Volume 1*, Warner Brothers

**Mötley Crüe:** *Greatest Hits*, Hip-O

**Def Leppard:** *Vault*/*Greatest Hits*, Mercury

**Metallica:** *Kill 'Em All*; *Master of Puppets*; *Metallica* (all on Elektra)

**Guns 'n' Roses:** *Greatest Hits*, Geffen

**Grandmaster Flash:** *Message from Beat Street: The Best of*, Rhino

**Run-DMC:** *Greatest Hits*, Arista

**Kurtis Blow:** *Best of*, Mercury

**L. L. Cool J:** *All World*/*Greatest Hits*, Def Jam

**Beastie Boys:** *The Sounds of Science*/*Anthology*, Grand Royal

**Ice-T:** *Greatest Hits*/*The Evidence*, Atomic Pop

**Queen Latifah:** *She's a Queen*/*A Collection of Hits*, Motown

**Public Enemy:** *20<sup>th</sup> Century Masters: The Millennium Collection*/*Best of*, Def Jam

**N.W.A.:** *Greatest Hits*, Priority

**2 Live Crew:** *Greatest Hits*, Luke.

**Tupac Shakur:** *Greatest Hits*, Death Row

**Eminem:** *The Slim Shady LP*, Interscope; *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Interscope

**Dr. Dre:** *Chronicle*/*Best of the Works*, Death Row

**A Tribe Called Quest:** *Anthology*, Jive

## APPENDIX A

**The Kinks:** *Greatest Hits, Vol. 1*, Rhino (covers their mid-1960s heyday); *Kronikles*, Reprise (covers 1966–1972)

**The Animals:** *Absolute Animals*, Raven

**Sly and the Family Stone:** *Anthology*, Epic

**Traffic:** *Feelin' Alright*/*Very Best of*, Island

**Van Morrison:** *Best of*, Mercury

**Various Artists:** *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*, Atlantic (a four-CD set, out-of-print, but worth looking for!)

**Donna Summer:** *Endless Summer*, Casablanca

**The Bee Gees:** *Their Greatest Hits*/*The Record*, Polydor

**The Village People:** *Best of*, Casablanca  
**Various artists:** *Saturday Night Fever (Soundtrack)*, Polydor  
**Bob Marley:** *Legend/Best of*, Tuffgong  
**Various Artists:** *The Harder They Come (Soundtrack)* (Jimmy Cliff and others), Mango  
**The Allman Brothers:** *A Decade of Hits 1969–1979*, Polydor  
**Frank Zappa:** *Strictly Commercial/Best of*, Rykodisc  
**Jackie Wilson:** *Very Best of*, Rhino  
**Steely Dan:** *A Decade of*, MCA  
**Simon and Garfunkel:** *Best of*, Columbia/Legacy  
**Paul Simon:** *Graceland*, Warner Brothers; *Negotiations and Love Songs, 1971–86*, Warner Brothers  
**Roy Orbison:** *For the Lonely: 18 Greatest Hits*, Rhino

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# INDEX

- Abba, 247  
*Abbey Road*, 95–96, 344  
 Abbott, “Dimebag” Darrell, 305  
 ABC, 70  
 “ABC,” 183  
 ABC/Dunhill, 177  
 ABC-Paramount, 68, 70, 157  
 Abraxis, 201  
*Absolute Animals*, 347  
*Absolutely the Best of Leadbelly*, 342  
 Absolut Vodka, 300  
 AC/DC, 347  
*Achtung Baby*, 276, 278  
 Acid house, 297, 300  
*Acoustic Bradley Nowell and Friends*, 284  
 “Across the Universe,” 94  
 Acuff-Rose Publishing, 314  
 Adler, Lou, 152, 196  
*The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, 59  
 Advertising industry, electronic dance music and, 299–300  
 Aerosmith, 239–240, 270, 347  
 Aesthetics, music and, 9  
 African Americans  
   gangsta rap and, 284–288  
   rock music and, 16–18  
*After Bathing at Baxter’s*, 198  
 Aftermath, 287, 288  
*Aftermath*, 345  
*After the Gold Rush*, 149  
 “Ain’t It a Shame,” 29  
 “Ain’t Nothin’ Like the Real Thing,” 180  
 “Ain’t She Sweet,” 79  
 “Ain’t That Peculiar,” 174, 180  
 Airborne playfight, 248  
 Alabama White Citizens Council, 27  
*Alan Freed’s Moon Dog Rock and Roll House Party* (radio show), 22  
 Albin, Peter, 203  
 Alcatraz, 268  
 Alcohol industry, 300  
 AlcoPops, 300  
 Aldon Music, 71, 73  
 Alexander, Arthur, 166  
 Alexander, J. W., 160  
 Alexander, Joe, 72  
*Alice in Wonderland* (Carroll), 195  
 “Alive,” 283  
 “All Along the Watchtower,” 221  
 “All Day and All of the Night,” 315  
 Allen, Steve, 50  
*All Eyes on Me*, 287  
*All Hail the Queen*, 272  
 “All I Really Want to Do,” 147  
 Allison, Jerry, 53, 57  
 Allison, Mose, 127  
 Allman, Duane, 164, 215  
 Allman Brothers, 87, 161, 215, 350  
 “All Shook Up,” 46  
 Allsup, Tommy, 55  
*All the Best of Chubby Checker*, 343  
*All the Best of Paul McCartney*, 344  
*All Things Must Pass*, 97  
*All Time Greatest Hits of Jan and Dean*, 344  
*All Time Original Hits of The Everly Brothers*, 343  
*All World: Greatest Hits of L. L. Cool J.*, 349  
 “All You Need Is Love,” 98  
 Almanac Singers, 133  
 “Almost Grown,” 235  
 “Alone Again (Naturally),” 289  
 Altamont, 274  
*Alternative NRG*, 348  
 Alternative rock, 274–292, 301  
   hardcore rap, heavy metal and, 303  
 Alternative Tentacles, 278  
*Amazing Grace*, 166  
 Amazon.com, 342  
 Amber Alert bill of 2003, 301  
 Ament, Jeff, 283  
*American Bandstand* (TV show), 35, 69, 259  
*American Beauty*, 202  
 American Express, 258  
*American Idiot*, 307  
 Americans Blue Cheer, 239  
*AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted*, 284  
 “Amie,” 154  
 Ammons, Albert, 29, 49  
 Amnesty International, 261, 263  
 A&M Records, 249  
 “Anarchy in the UK,” 249, 250

- Anatomically Correct Rock and Roll Doll, 11
- Anderson, Signe, 189, 190
- “And I Love Her,” 84
- And Justice for All*, 302–303
- Andrew, Sam, 203
- Andrews, Lee, 65
- “And Your Bird Can Sing,” 87
- Animals, 196, 217, 218, 314–315, 349
- Anka, Paul, 54, 70
- Anna label, 171
- Another Side of Bob Dylan*, 345
- Ant, Adam, 246
- Anthology of A Tribe Called Quest*, 349
- Anthology of Bob Wills*, 342
- Anthology of Sly and the Family Stone*, 349
- Anthrax, 289, 305
- Anti-Nazi League, 252
- “Anyway, Anywhere, Anyhow,” 122
- AOR radio, 258, 260
- Apollo Theater, 53
- Appetite for Destruction*, 267
- Apple Computers, 307
- Apple firm, 91–92, 94
- Area One tour, 305
- Areas, Jose Chepito, 201
- Aretha's Best*, 346
- Are You Experienced?*, 219, 220
- “Are You Lonesome Tonight?”, 47
- Arrested Development, 290
- Arthur (*or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire*), 316
- Articles of Faith, 256
- Artist history, Rock Window and, 5, 319–331
- Artists United Against Apartheid (AUAA), 262
- Art rock, 240
- Art school, punk rock and, 246–247
- Asher, Jane, 90
- Asher, Peter, 241
- Ashford, Nicholas, 180
- Ashford and Simpson, 183
- As Nasty as They Wanna Be*, 272
- Aspinall, Neil, 90
- Associated Studios, 71
- “As Tears Go By,” 108
- Astral Weeks*, 316
- Aswad, 261
- Atari Teenage Riot, 299
- ATCQ. *See* A Tribe Called Quest
- Atkins, Chet, 45, 56, 57, 209, 314
- Atkins, Cholly, 176, 179
- Atkins, Juan, 297
- Atlantic/Atco, 229
- Atlantic Records, 22, 45, 46, 64, 148, 157, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 232
- Led Zeppelin and conflict between, 237
- “At My Front Door,” 65
- “At the Hop,” 65
- Attractions, 254
- ATV, 94
- AUAA. *See* Artists United Against Apartheid
- Audio Home Recording Act of 1992, 306
- Audioslave, 296–297
- Auger, Brian, 142
- Authenticity, music and, 6
- Automatic for the People*, 277
- Avalon, Frankie, 31, 69, 343
- Avery, Eric, 279
- Axis: Bold as Love*, 220, 221, 222
- Aykroyd, Dan, 274
- Azerrad, Michael, 255
- Azoff, Irv, 151
- Baba, Meher, 125, 127
- “Baba O'Reilly,” 127
- “Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You,” 232
- “Baby, I Need Your Lovin’”, 177
- “Baby, Let Me Take You Home,” 315
- “Baby Love,” 176
- Bach, Johann Sebastian, 268
- “Back in the USSR,” 92
- Backstage Passes* (Koop), 140
- Back to Mono*, 344
- Bad*, 265, 275
- Bad Boy Records, 284, 287
- Bad Brains, 256
- Bad Company, 239, 347
- Badu, Erykah, 290
- Baez, Joan, 72, 137, 139, 143, 199, 345
- Baker, Ginger, 93, 211, 212, 214, 233, 238
- Baker, La Vern, 54
- Baker, Susan, 301
- Baldry, Long John, 241
- Baldwin, Jason, 301–302
- Balin, Marty, 113, 189, 190, 198
- Balladeers, 147
- “Ballad of a Thin Man,” 140
- “The Ballad of Hollis Brown,” 138
- “Ball and Chain,” 203
- Ballard, Florence, 175–176, 176–177
- Ballard, Hank, 22, 69
- “Ball of Confusion,” 179
- Balzary, Michael, 278
- Bambaataa, Afrika, 269
- “Banana Boat Song,” 72
- The Band, 141, 142, 143, 153–154, 202, 346
- The Band*, 215
- Band of Gypsies, 223
- Band of Joy, 231
- Bangs, Lester, 277
- Banks, Tony, 240
- Banquet Foods, 229
- Banshees, 248
- “Barbara-Ann,” 65, 72, 73
- Bar-Keys, 163
- Barnes, Richard, 120
- Barrett, Syd, 240
- Barry, Jeff, 71
- Bartholomew, Dave, 28, 29, 30
- The Basement Tapes*, 142, 153
- Baskin, Lloyd, 154
- Bath Festival, 234–235
- Baxter, Les, 147
- BBC, 300
- Beach Boys, 65, 72–73, 106, 134, 173, 344
- Beastie Boys, 270, 288, 289, 290, 349
- copyright infringement and, 289
- political activism and, 289
- sampling and, 289
- Beat generation, 21
- “Beat It,” 260, 265
- Beatlemania, 81–82, 83
- Beatles, 39, 48, 55, 58, 60, 76–99, 109, 121, 146, 163, 187, 219, 228, 236, 238, 240, 298, 314, 344
- album art of, 89
- Apple firm and, 91–92
- as backing group, 79
- Beatlemania and, 81–82, 83
- Capitol Records and, 84–85
- club performances of, 78–79
- concert tours of, 85–86

- contract negotiations of, 93–94  
cultural influence of, 76  
demise of, 96–98  
Dylan and, 139  
*The Ed Sullivan Show* and, 83  
first recording contract of, 80  
“Get Back” tapes and, 94–95, 96  
group conflict and, 92–93, 96–97  
hair styles of, 79  
Indian pilgrimage of, 92  
individual interests of, 87–88  
Lennon–McCartney  
    songwriting and, 84. *See also*  
    *under individual Beatles*  
Lennon’s departure from, 96  
LSD use and, 87  
lyrical style of, 86–87  
management of, 79–80  
McCartney’s departure from,  
    96–97  
musical creativity of, 81, 86,  
    88–89, 98–99  
musical roots of, 81  
music of, and *Rock Window*,  
    example of, 323–326  
music video and, 259  
name origin of, 78  
popularity of, 82, 98  
as the Quarrymen, 77–78  
record sales of, 98  
Rolling Stones and, 104–105  
Royal Variety Show concert of,  
    81–82  
serious music of, 87  
songwriting of. *See under individual*  
    *Beatles*  
*Sunday Night at the Palladium* and,  
    82  
transcendental meditation and,  
    89–90, 90–91  
TV exposure of, 82, 83  
unidentifiable sounds in  
    recordings of, 86  
in the U.S., 82–83  
Who versus, 119  
*The Beatles*, 92–93  
*The Beatles 1*, 344  
*Beatles for Sale*, 344  
*The Beatles (The White Album)*, 344  
Beatniks, 188  
Beaulieu, Priscilla. *See* Presley,  
    Priscilla
- “Beauty Is Only Skin Deep,” 179  
“Be-Bop-A-Lula,” 58  
“Because,” 96  
Beck, Jeff, 221, 225, 230, 231, 233,  
    234, 299  
*Beck-Ola*, 225  
Bee, Easy Mo, 284  
Beecher, Frankie, 209  
Beefeaters, 147  
Bee Gees, 350  
“Been Caught Stealing,” 279  
*Before I Get Old* (Marsh), 120  
*Before the Flood*, 143, 345  
Beggars Banquet, 248  
*Beggars Banquet*, 110, 112, 114, 345  
“Behind Blue Eyes,” 127, 237  
Belafonte, Harry, 72, 344  
Bell, William, 161, 166  
“Bell Bottom Blues,” 215  
“Belleville Three,” 297  
Belmonts, 55, 65  
Benjamin, Benny “Papa Zita,”  
    171–172  
Berkeley, California, 187, 188  
Bernstein, Leonard, 276  
Berry, Bill, 276, 277  
Berry, Chuck, 28, 32–36, 38, 39, 46,  
    54, 58, 60, 64, 73, 80, 81, 103,  
    104, 105, 106, 123, 193, 206,  
    207, 209, 210, 216, 235, 253,  
    343  
    music of, and *Rock Window*,  
    example of, 319–323  
Berry, Raynoma, 171  
“Besame Mucho,” 80  
Best, Pete, 78, 80, 121  
*Best of Blondie*, 348  
*Best of Connie Francis*, 344  
*Best of Darlene Love*, 344  
*Best of David Bowie*, 348  
*Best of the Dixie Hummingbirds*, 342  
*Best of Doo Wop Ballads*, 343  
*Best of Doo Wop Uptempo*, 343  
*Best of George Harrison*, 344  
*Best of Howlin’ Wolf*, 342  
*Best of Kurtis Blow*, 349  
*Best of Lionel Hampton*, 342  
*Best of Louis Jordan*, 342  
*Best of Moody Blues*, 348  
*Best of Muddy Waters*, 342  
*Best of Peter, Paul, and Mary*, 344  
*Best of Quicksilver Messenger Service*, 347
- Best of Ruth Brown*, 343  
*Best of Santana*, 347  
*Best of Simon and Garfunkel*, 350  
*Best of the Band*, 346  
*Best of the Crystals*, 344  
*Best of the Girl Groups*, 344  
*Best of the Ronettes*, 344  
*Best of the Steve Miller Band*, 347  
*Best of the Talking Heads*, 348  
*Best of the Velvet Underground*, 348  
*Best of the Village People*, 350  
*Best of the Weavers*, 345  
*Best of U2*, 349  
*Best of Van Halen*, 349  
*Best of Van Morrison*, 349  
*Better Dayz*, 286  
Beverly, John. *See* Vicious, Sid  
Beyond the Fringe, 80  
B–52s, 254, 348  
Bias, music and, 13  
Biden, Joe, 300–301  
Big-band era, 19  
*The Big Bang: Best of MC5*, 347  
Big Bopper. *See* Richardson, J. P.  
Big Boys, 256  
Big Brother, 187, 195, 196, 197, 203,  
    204, 215  
Big Brother and the Holding  
    Company, 186, 194, 203  
Biggest Show of Stars tour, 54  
Biggs, Ronald, 251  
“A Big Hunk of Love,” 46  
Bigsby, Paul, 208  
Bigsby tailpiece, 208  
*Billboard* magazine, 279, 281, 287,  
    303, 305, 308  
Bill Haley and His Comets, 31  
Bill Haley and the Saddlemen, 31  
“Billie Jean,” 260  
Billy Ward and His Dominoes, 65,  
    313, 343  
“Bird Dog,” 57  
“Bird” groups, 62  
Birdsong, Cindy, 177  
“Birthday,” 92  
Black, Bill, 44  
“Blackbird,” 92  
*Blackboard Jungle* (film), 32, 35  
Black Bull publishing company,  
    182  
“Black Dog,” 237  
Black Flag, 255, 256, 280

- “Black Magic Woman,” 201  
 Blackmore, Richie, 231  
 “Black Mountain Side,” 232  
 Black Panthers, 285  
 Black Power movement, 285  
 Black Sabbath, 239, 267, 280, 303, 304, 347  
 Black Shit Puppy Farm, 187  
 Blackwell, Otis, 46, 50  
 Blackwell, Robert “Bumps,” 29, 37–38  
 Blackwood Brothers, 43  
 Blaine, Hal, 47, 120  
 Blake, Norman, 142  
 Bland, Bobby “Blue,” 166  
*Blast from Your Past*, 344  
*Bleach*, 280  
 Blind Faith, 214  
*Blonde on Blonde*, 141–142, 345  
 Blondie, 254, 348  
 Blood, Sweat, and Tears, 241  
*Blood on the Tracks*, 143, 345  
*Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, 279  
 Bloomfield, Mike, 140, 217–218, 222, 223, 225  
 Blow, Kurtis, 349  
 “Blowin’ in the Wind,” 72, 137, 160  
*Blows against the Empire*, 198  
 “Blueberry Hill,” 29  
 Blue Boys, 103  
 Blue Caps, 58  
 “Blue Monday,” 29  
 “Blue Moon,” 65, 213  
 Blue Öyster Cult, 239  
 Blues  
     Depression-era, 18  
     independent record companies and, 22  
     lyrical style of, 16–17  
     musical style of, 16  
     radio stations and, 22  
     revivalist, 186  
     rural, 16, 17  
     urban, 16, 17  
 Blues Band, 112  
 Bluesbreakers, 210–211  
 Blues Incorporated, 211  
 Blues Project, 124  
 Blues Traveler, 296  
 “Blue Yodel #1,” 19  
 “Blue Yodel #2,” 19  
 BMG, 308  
*Bob Dylan*, 136, 345  
 “Bob Dylan’s 115th Dream,” 139  
 Bob Seeger and His Silver Bullet Band, 258  
 Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, 19  
 “Bo Diddley,” 58  
*Bo Diddley: His Best*, 343  
*Body Count*, 270  
 Bond, Graham, 211  
 Bonham, John “Bonzo,” 230, 231, 233, 234, 235, 236  
     death of, 238  
     drug use and, 238  
     musical style of, 239  
     violent insanity of, 238  
 Bono (Paul Hewson), 275, 276  
 Booker T. and the M.G.s, 72, 161–162, 163, 196, 217, 346  
 Boomtown Rats, 261  
 Boone, Pat, 29  
 Boone, Steve, 153  
 “Boots of Spanish Leather,” 138  
 Bop, Ree, 215  
 “Born in the U.S.A.,” 264  
*Born in the U.S.A.*, 264  
*Born to Choose*, 348  
 Boston, 239, 347  
 “Both Sides Now,” 152  
 “Boulevard of Broken Dreams,” 307  
*Bound for Glory*, 135  
 Bowen, Jimmie, 54  
 Bowie, David (David Jones), 39, 245, 246, 261, 348  
 Boyd, Brandon, 305  
 Boylan, John, 150, 241  
 Boyoyo Boys, 318  
*Boyz N the Hood* (film), 284  
 BPMs, electronic dance music and, 297, 298, 299  
 Bramlett, Bonnie, 203, 215  
 Bramlett, Delaney, 203, 215  
 Brand, Oscar, 135–136  
 “Brand New Cadillac,” 253  
 “Breathless,” 50  
 “Breed,” 282  
 “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” 286  
 Brewster, Bill, 300  
 Brezhnev, Leonid, 277  
 Brian Poole and the Tremeloes, 80  
*Bridge over Troubled Water*, 317  
 “Bridge over Troubled Waters,” 165  
 Bridges, Harry, 188  
 Brill Building, 70–71  
*Bringing It All Back Home*, 138–139, 140, 345  
 “Bring It on Home to Me,” 160  
 “Bring the Noise,” 271, 289  
 British invasion, 73, 76  
 “Bron-Y-Aur Stomp,” 236  
 Broonzy, Big Bill, 103, 210  
 Broughton, Frank, 300  
 Brown, J. W., 50, 51  
 Brown, James, 37, 106, 157–160, 161, 167, 180, 269, 313, 346  
     early years of, 159  
 Brown, Myra, 49, 50  
 Brown, Peter, 95  
 Brown, Roy, 18  
 Brown, Ruth, 343  
 Browne, Jackson, 151, 263  
*Brown v. Board of Education*, 21  
 Bruce, Jack, 211, 212, 213, 214  
 Bruce, Lenny, 277  
 Bruford, Bill, 240  
 Brunswick Records, 313  
 Bryant, Boudleaux, 46, 56–57  
 Bryant, Felice, 56–57  
 Buck, Peter, 276, 277  
 Buckingham, Lindsay, 241  
 Buckley, William F., 285  
 Buck Pets, 256  
 Buddy Holly and the Three Tunes, 53  
 Buddy Miles Express, 223  
 Buffalo Springfield, 147, 148, 150, 346  
 Buffalo Tom, 256  
 “Bullet the Blue Sky,” 275  
 Burchill, Julie, 247  
 Burdon, Eric, 196, 314–315  
 Burke, Solomon, 166, 217, 346  
 Burrell, Kenny, 171  
 Burroughs, William S., 238, 282  
 Burton, Cliff, 303  
 Burton, James, 59, 209, 231, 315  
 Bush, George W., 307, 309–310  
*Bustin’ Out*, 154  
 Butler, Joe, 153  
 Butterfield, Paul, 196  
 Butterfield Blues Band, 217  
 Butthole Surfers, 294

- Buttrey, Kenny, 142  
 Buzzcocks, 248  
 "Bye Bye Love," 57  
 Byrds, 84, 147, 150, 197, 317, 346  
 Byrne, David, 263  
 Byrnes, Edward "Kookie," 70
- Cable television, 295  
 Cadence Records, 56, 57  
 Cadets, 63  
 Cadillacs, 65  
 "California Dreamin'," 152  
 "California Girls," 73  
 "California Love," 287  
 Calypso, 68  
 Calypso music, 72  
 Camel cigarettes, 300  
 Cameo-Parkway, 69  
 Campbell, Choker, 171  
 Canned Heat, 196  
 Cannibal Corpse, 302  
 "Can't Buy Me Love," 84  
 Capaldi, Jim, 215, 316  
*Capitol Collector's Series, the Kingston Trio*, 344  
 Capitol (film company), 22, 68  
 Capitol Records, 45, 46, 73, 82, 84–85, 154  
 Capricorn Records, 161  
 Captain Sensible, 248  
 Carabello, Mike, 201  
 "The Card Cheat," 253  
 Cardinals, 62  
 Carey, James, 187  
 "Car" groups, 65  
 Caribbean music, 68, 72, 73  
 "Carol," 105  
 Carroll, Lewis, 88, 90, 195  
 "Carry That Weight," 96  
 Carson, Tom, 250  
 Carter, Jimmy, 274  
 Carter, Reuben "Hurricane," 144  
 Carter Family, 19, 342  
 Casady, Jack, 189, 190, 198, 221  
 "Casey Jones," 202  
 Cash, Johnny, 20, 44, 142, 143, 314, 343  
 Cassette tapes, compact discs versus, 260, 261  
 Cassette technology, 242  
 "Cathy's Clown," 57, 216  
 Cause for Alarm, 256
- Cave, Damien, 310  
 CBS Records, 248, 251, 253, 317  
 CBS TV, 108, 229  
 CCR. *See* Creedence Clearwater Revival  
 CDs. *See* Compact discs  
 Cecil, Malcolm, 182  
 "Celestial Jukebox", 311  
 Celestin, Papa, 28  
 Censorship  
     Novoselic and, 282–283  
     Presley and, 46  
     radio stations and, 309–310  
     rap and, 272  
     rock music and, 301–302  
     Rolling Stones and, 108  
     self-, artist, 240  
     television and, 108  
*Centerfield*, 200  
 Chad Mitchell Trio, 147  
 "Chain Gang," 160  
 "Chain of Fools," 165  
 "Chains," 71  
 Chancellor, 69  
 Chandler, Chas, 218, 221  
 "A Change Is Gonna Come," 160  
 Chantels, 65  
 Chapman, Tracy, 154, 263, 296  
 Chapple, Steve, 21  
 Charlatans, 189, 190  
 Charles, Ray, 18, 22, 31, 38, 81, 166, 180, 346  
     early years of, 157  
 "Charlie Brown," 64  
*The Charlie Rose Show* (TV show), 304  
 Charlton, Katherine, 268  
*Cheap Thrills*, 203, 215  
 Checker, Chubby (Ernest Evans), 69, 343  
*Check Your Head*, 289  
 Chemical Brothers, 299  
 Cheney, Dick, 288  
 Cheney, Lynne, 288  
 Chess, Leonard, 34, 35, 114  
 Chess, Marshall, 114  
 Chess Records, 22, 34, 58, 106, 114, 177  
 Chic, 270, 289  
 Chicago, 241, 247, 348  
*Chicago Sun-Times*, 284, 295  
 Chicago Transit Authority, 241  
*Chicago V* through *IX*, 241
- Chicken Shack, 241  
 Chiffons, 71  
 Chimes, Terry, 251  
 Chinmoy, Sri, 201  
 Chiswick, 248  
 Chordettes, 56  
 Chords, 22  
 Christe, Ian, 303–304  
 Christgau, Robert, 220, 248  
 Christian, Neil, 231  
*The Chronic*, 284  
*Chronicle: Best of the Works of Dr. Dre*, 349  
*Chronicle: Creedence Clearwater Revival*, 347  
 Chuck D, 271, 287, 290  
 Chudd, Lew, 28, 30  
 A Cid Symphony, 186  
 "Cinnamon Girl," 149  
 Circle Jerks, 255  
 Civil War era, 132  
 Clapton, Eric, 17, 92, 95, 96, 97, 111, 112, 149, 154, 206, 209–216, 218, 221, 225–226, 228, 231, 232, 261, 347  
     Blind Faith and, 214  
     Bluesbreakers and, 210–211  
     Cream and, 211–214  
     drug use and, 215  
     early years of, 210  
     Harrison and, 215  
     solo career of, 214–216  
 Clark, Dick, 35, 69–70, 220, 259  
 Clark, Gene, 147  
 Clarke, Alan, 105  
 Clarke, Michael, 147  
 Clash, 246, 249, 251–253, 261, 275, 280, 348  
     lyrical style of, 253  
     musical style of, 251  
     political activism and, 253  
     reggae and, 251–252  
     in U.S., 253  
*The Clash*, 251  
 Classical music, 268  
 Classic rock  
     artistic control and, 68–69  
     end of, 59–60  
     first generation of, 26–40  
     independent record companies and, 22  
     radio, television and, 20

- Classic rock (*continued*)
- radio stations and, 23
  - roots of, 18–19
  - second generation of, 28, 42–60
  - teen disillusionment and, 20–21
  - white interest in black music and, 21–22
- “Claudette,” 314
- Claypool, Les, 296
- Clayton, Adam, 275
- Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band, 187
- Clear Channel Communications, 309–310
- Cletones, 65
- Clemons, Clarence, 264
- Cleveland, James, 165, 166
- Cliff, Jimmy, 350
- Clifford, Doug, 199, 200
- Clinton, Bill, 308
- Clooney, Rosemary, 26
- “Cloud Nine,” 179
- Clubland* (Owen), 299
- Clyde McPhatter & the Drifters: Rockin’ and Driftin’*, 343
- “C’mon Everybody,” 59
- Coasters, 63, 64, 80, 216, 343
- Cobain, Frances Bean, 282
- Cobain, Kurt, 280–282
- death of, 282
  - drug use and, 280, 281, 282
  - and Love, Courtney, 281–282
- Cochran, Eddie, 54, 58–59, 127, 209, 216, 343
- “Coffee Blues,” 153
- Cold War, 21
- Cole, Nat King, 26, 31, 33, 180
- Cole, Richie, 232, 234
- Collectables label, 340
- Collected, 1965–1970, Country Joe and the Fish*, 347
- Collection of John Lennon*, 344
- Collins, Judy, 148, 152
- Collins, Phil, 240, 261, 262
- Columbia Records, 22, 31, 56, 80, 134, 136, 137, 138, 141, 142, 165, 177, 197, 201, 203, 229, 263, 317
- Combat Rock*, 253
- Combs, Sean “Puffy” (a.k.a. P-Diddy), 284, 286, 287
- “Come Go with Me,” 65
- “Come On,” 104
- “Come Together,” 96
- “Come to Me,” 171
- Comets, 31
- Commercial success, music and, 10
- Common, 290
- “Communication Breakdown,” 232, 233
- Como, Perry, 26
- Compact discs (CDs), 260–261
- collecting, 341–342
  - sales of, 307–308
- Compact XTC: The Singles*, 348
- “Complete Control,” 252
- Concert for Bangladesh, 143, 261
- The Concert for New York City*, 348
- Concerts, 295–296
- megaevents, political activism and, 261–263
  - See also individual concerts*
- Conley, Arthur, 163
- Conservatism, heavy metal and, 301–302
- Contours, 172, 179
- Cook, Paul, 123, 247, 251
- Cook, Peter, 80
- Cook, Stu, 199, 200
- Cooke, Sam, 160–161, 163–164, 165, 313, 342, 346
- early years of, 160
  - melisma and, 160
- Cookies, 71
- Cooper, Alice (Vince Furnier), 239, 347
- “Cop Killer,” 270, 285
- Copyright infringements, electronics manufacturers and, 306
- Corbijn, Anton, 304
- Cornell, Chris, 297
- Cornyn, Stan, 219
- Cosmo’s Factory*, 200
- Costello, Elvis, 254, 261, 348
- Cotton, James, 221
- Country/blues/R&B, synthesis of, 20
- Country Classics* (radio show), 341
- Country Joe and the Fish, 186, 188, 196, 198–199, 347
- Country music, 18–20
- Cousin Lee, 31
- Covay, Don, 165, 166
- Cowboy, 270
- “Cowgirl in the Sand,” 149
- Cox, Billy, 217, 222, 223
- Cramer, Floyd, 45, 57
- Cramps, 253
- “Crazy Arms,” 50
- Crazy Horse, 148, 149
- “Crazy Man Crazy,” 31
- Cream, 93, 119, 124, 206, 211–214, 230, 232, 238, 266
- demise of, 214
  - group conflict and, 214
  - at Murray the K’s Easter Show, 213
  - name origin of, 211
  - Summer of Love and, 213
- The Cream of Clapton*, 347
- Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR), 111, 188, 199–201, 280, 347
- “Creeque Alley,” 153
- Crewcuts, 22, 65
- Crickets, 53, 54–55, 57, 78
- Criminal Justice Bill of 1994, 299
- Criteria Studios, 215
- Cropper, Steve, 161, 162, 163, 164, 217
- Crosby, David, 147, 148, 150
- Crosby, Hank, 182
- Crosby, Stills, and Nash*, 215
- Crosby, Stills, and Nash (CSN), 148, 202, 236, 294, 346
- Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young (CSNY), 113, 148–150, 152, 346
- Cross, Charles, 282
- Crossroads*, 347
- “Crossroads,” 213, 232
- Crosstalk: Best of Moby Grape*, 347
- Crowley, Aleister, 235
- Crows, 62
- Crudup, Arthur “Big Boy,” 44
- Crusaders, 231
- “Cry for a Shadow,” 79
- “Crying,” 314
- “Crying in the Chapel,” 62
- Crystals, 71, 344
- CSN. *See* Crosby, Stills, and Nash
- CSNY. *See* Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young
- Culture, music and, 6
- Cumulus Radio, 309

- Curtis, King, 64, 217  
Cypress Hill, 294, 305
- Dahl, Steve, 297  
Dale, Dick, 72  
Daltrey, Roger, 118  
    early years of, 119–120  
    musical creativity of, 126  
    and Townshend, conflict  
        between, 121, 123  
Damageplan, 305  
Damned, 248  
“Dancing in the Dark,” 264  
“Dancing in the Street,” 175  
Danemann, Monica, 223  
*Dangerous*, 265, 279  
Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks, 347  
Daniels, Charlie, 142  
Danko, Rick, 153, 154  
Danny and the Juniors, 65  
“Danny Boy,” 313  
Darin, Bobby, 343  
*The Dark Side of the Moon*, 240, 347  
“Dark Star,” 188  
Das Damen, 256  
“Date Rape,” 284  
Dave Matthew’s Band, 296  
Davies, Dave, 315  
Davies, Ray, 315–316  
Davis, Bette, 124  
Davis, Clive, 148  
Davis, Miles, 136, 262, 263  
Davis, Stephen, 235  
Davis, Thulani, 159–160  
Dawg, Pfife, 290  
“Daydream,” 153  
“A Day in the Life,” 88, 89  
“Dazed and Confused,” 232, 233, 236  
Dead Kennedys, 256, 348  
Deal, Kim, 278  
“Dear Mama,” 287  
*Death Certificate*, 284  
Death Row Records, 284, 287  
*A Decade of Hits of the Allman Brothers*, 350  
*A Decade of Steely Dan*, 350  
Decca Records, 22, 23, 31, 53, 80, 105, 110, 133, 313  
*The Decline of the Western Civilization* (documentary film), 255  
“Dedicated Follower of Fashion,” 315  
“Dedicated to the One I Love,” 152  
Dee Gee, 313  
Deep Purple, 231, 239, 347  
*Definitive Collection of Stevie Wonder*, 346  
Def Jam Records, 270  
Def Leppard, 267, 349  
*Deja Vu*, 148–149  
De La Rocha, Zack, 297  
Dells, 65  
Dell-Vikings, 65  
Delmore Brothers, 209  
Delphis, 175  
Deltones, 72  
Denver, John, 301  
“Deportees,” 133  
Depression-era blues, 18  
Derek and the Dominos, 215  
DeRogatis, Jim, 295  
Derringer, Rick, 221  
De Shannon, Jackie, 85  
*Desire*, 143, 346  
*Desperado*, 151  
Desperate Bicycles, 248  
*Desperately Seeking Susan* (film), 266  
Detours, 120  
Detractors, 46  
Detroit Wheels, 124  
Devo, 348  
DGC, 280  
DHR. *See* Digital Hardcore Recordings  
Diamond, Neil, 258  
Diamond Multimedia, 306  
“Diamonds and Rust,” 139  
*Diana Ross Presents the Jackson 5*, 183  
Dick Dale and the Deltones, 72  
Diddley, Bo (Elias McDaniel), 58, 103, 104, 106, 180, 253, 343  
Dido, 296  
DiFranco, Ani, 154  
Diggers, 192  
Digital Hardcore Recordings (DHR), 299  
Digweed, John, 299  
Dilated Peoples, 290  
Dimension, 70  
Dinosaur, 256  
Dion, 343  
Dion and the Belmonts, 55, 65  
Dire Straits, 262  
“Dirty South,” 307  
Disc jockeys. *See* DJs  
Disco, 274  
    end of, 297  
Disco Demolition Night, 274, 297  
Discord, 278, 280  
Disneyland label, 70  
*Disraeli Gears*, 213  
Dixie Chicks, 296, 309  
Dixie Cups, 71  
Dixie Hummingbirds, 318, 342  
Dixon, Willie, 17, 34, 104, 106, 234  
DIY method. *See* Do-it-yourself method  
DJs (disc jockeys)  
    electronic dance music, 298, 299–300  
    rap and, 269–270  
    R&B, radio stations and, 22–23  
    VJs versus, 258  
Dogg, Nate, 287  
Dogg, Snoop Doggy, 284, 287–288, 294, 307  
*Doggystyle*, 284  
Doherty, Denny, 152, 153  
Do-it-yourself (DIY) method, 276, 278  
Dolls, 246, 247, 253  
    transvestite costuming of, 246  
Dolmayan, John, 305  
Domino, Fats, 22, 28–30, 31, 39, 49, 54, 60, 160, 343  
Dominoes (Billy Ward and His Dominoes), 65, 313, 343  
Dominos, 215  
Donahue, “Big Daddy” Tom, 195  
Donovan, 88, 231  
“Don’t Be Cruel,” 46  
“Don’t Knock the Rock,” 38  
*Don’t Look Back* (film), 139  
“Don’t Mess with Bill,” 174  
“Don’t Pass Me By,” 92  
“Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright,” 137  
Doobie Brothers, 258  
Doors, 346  
Doo-wop, 62–66  
    recording categories of, 63  
“Do Right Woman,” 165  
Dorsey, Thomas, 18  
*Double Fantasy*, 97

- Dowd, Tom, 165  
*Downbeat* magazine, 32  
 “Down by the River,” 149  
 “Down on the Corner,” 200  
*Do You Believe in Magic*, 153  
 Dozier, Lamont, 174, 176  
 Dr. Hudson’s Medicine Show, 36  
 Drake, Pete, 142  
 Dre, Dr., 284, 287–288, 306, 349  
 Dreamers, 85  
 “Dreams,” 57, 314  
 Drifters, 54, 64, 65, 71, 313, 343  
 “Drinkin’ Wine Spo-Dee-o-Dee,” 18  
 “Drop It Like It’s Hot,” 307  
 Drum and bass, 298  
 Dryden, Spencer, 190, 198  
 “Dulce et Decorum Est” (Owen), 303  
 “Duncan,” 318  
 Dunhill Records, 152  
 Dunn, Donald “Duck,” 161, 162  
 Dupree, Cornell, 217  
 Durham, Eddie, 207  
 Dust Brothers, 289  
 Dwight, Reginald. *See* John, Elton  
 Dylan, Bob, 58, 72, 86–87, 97, 132, 134–144, 140, 147, 153, 154, 160, 173–174, 186, 197, 217, 220, 240, 261, 262, 263, 276, 294, 314, 315, 345–346  
   backup band of, 141  
   Baez and, 137, 139  
   Beatles and, 139  
   biblical allusion and, 142, 144  
   as born-again Christian, 144  
   career management of, 137  
   civil rights activism and, 138  
   concert performances of, 143  
   concert tours of, 137, 141  
   country music and, 143  
   drug use and, 141  
   early years of, 134–135  
   first album of, 136  
   folk-rock trilogy of, 140  
   at Harrison’s Concert for Bangladesh benefit, 143  
   Lowndes and, 140, 142  
   motorcycle accident of, 142  
   musical direction changes and, 138–139, 140, 143–144  
   musical style of, 136  
   name change of, 135  
   at Newport Folk Festival, 137, 139, 140  
   personality of, 136  
   protest music and, 143  
   recording contract of, 136  
   at Rolling Thunder Review, 139, 143  
   Rotolo and, 136, 137  
   songwriting for other artists and, 142  
   songwriting genius of, 137  
   stream-of-consciousness lyrics of, 138  
 DYS, 256  
  
 Eagles, 150–152, 346  
*The Eagles*, 151  
*Early Days and Latter Days*, 347  
 “Early in the Morning,” 54  
 “Earth Angel,” 62  
 Eastman, John, 93  
 Eastman, Lee, 93  
 Eastman, Linda. *See* McCartney, Linda  
 East Village Electric Circus, 245  
 Eastwood, Clint, 303  
 eBay.com, 342  
*Echoes: Best of Pink Floyd*, 347  
 Echols, Damien, 301–302  
 Ecstasy (methylene dimethamphetamine), 298–299, 300–301  
   peace, love, unity, and respect and, 299  
 Eddy, Duane, 206, 344  
 Edge (Dave Evans), 275, 276  
 Edsels, 65  
*The Ed Sullivan Show*, 46, 83, 106  
 Edwards, Dennis, 179  
*Eighteen Original Sun Greatest Hits of Jerry Lee Lewis*, 343  
 8 Mile (film), 288  
 Einziger, Mike, 305  
 El Dorados, 65  
 “Eleanor Rigby,” 86, 87  
 Electric Flag, 223  
 Electric folk, 147  
*Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Wolfe), 90, 191  
*Electric Ladyland*, 220, 221, 222  
 Electric Ladyland Studio, 182, 222, 253  
*Electric Music for the Mind and Body*, 199  
 Electronic dance music, 297–301  
   advertising industry and, 299–300  
   BPMs and, 297, 298, 299  
   DJs and, 298, 299–300  
   drugs and, 298–299, 300–301  
   Ecstasy and, 298–299, 300–301  
   rave culture and, 298–301  
   sub-genres of, 297–298  
 Electronic manufacturers, copyright infringements and, 306  
 Electronic Music Defense Education Fund, 301  
 Elektra/Asylum, 229  
 “The Eleven,” 201  
 Elliman, Yvonne, 215  
 Elliot, Jack, 143  
 Elliot, Mama Cass, 149, 150, 152, 153  
 Elliot, Ramblin’ Jack, 134, 147  
 ELO, 314  
*Elvis*, 343  
 Elvis Costello and the Attractions, 254  
*Elvis Presley*, 343  
 Emerick, Geoff, 95  
 Eminem, 288, 289, 300, 307, 309, 349  
   film career of, 288  
   political activism and, 288  
*The Eminem Show*, 288, 300  
 EMI Records, 80, 81, 82, 88, 248, 250, 308, 314  
 Empire, Alec, 299  
 “Empty Pages,” 316  
*Empty Sky*, 241  
 Emusic.com, 307  
*Enchanted: Best of The Platters*, 343  
*Encore*, 307  
*Endless Summer*, 349  
*England’s Newest Hitmakers, The Rolling Stones*, 345  
 English Beat, 254  
 Entertainment (Increased Penalties) Act, 299  
 Entwistle, John, 118, 126, 127, 214  
   death of, 128

- drug use and, 122
- early years of, 119–120
- Epic Records, 183
- Eponymous*, *I.R.S.*, 347
- Epstein, Brian, 79–80, 81, 82, 83, 93, 94, 104, 121, 315
  - death of, 89–90
- Epstein, Clive, 93
- Eras, music and, 12
- Ertegun, Ahmet, 148, 229
- “Eruption,” 267
- Essential Bruce Springsteen*, 348
- Essential Gladys Knight and the Pips*, 346
- Essential Jimmie Rodgers*, 342
- Essential Johnny Cash*, 343
- Essential Little Richard*, 343
- Essex label, 31
- E Street Band, 264
- Etheredge, Jivin’ Johnny, 341
- Eurythmics, 262
- Evans, Dave. *See* Edge
- Evans, Ernest. *See* Checker, Chubby
- Evans, Faith, 287
- Evans, Gil, 223
- “Evenflow,” 283
- Everly, Don, 56, 57, 60
- Everly, Ike, 56
- Everly, Margaret, 56
- Everly, Phil, 56, 57, 60
- Everly Brothers, 40, 42, 54, 56–58, 104, 216, 314, 343
- Evers, Medgar, 138
- “Everybody Hurts,” 277
- Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, 149
- “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool,” 70
- Every Breath You Take: The Classics of the Police*, 348
- The Evidence: Greatest Hits of Ice-T*, 349
- “Evil Eye,” 268
- Exile on Main Street*, 110, 114, 345
- Expanding Headband, 182
- Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, 245
- Fabian, 69, 343
- Factory, 248
- “Factory Girl,” 111
- “Fade to Black,” 302
- Fahey, John, 236
- Fairport Convention, 239
- Faith, 256
- Faithfull, Marianne, 109, 114
- Faith No More, 303
- Falcons, 164, 182
- Fame studios, 156
- Family, 214
- Family Dog, 189, 190, 194
- Famous Flames, 158, 159
- Fanning, Sean, 306
- Fantasy Records, 199, 200
- Fanzines, 248–249
- Farm Aid, 261, 262
- Farm Aid*, 348
- Farrakhan, Louis, 284
- Farrell, Perry, 279, 294
- Fast Product, 248
- Fathering of Tribes, 194–195
- Father Knows Best* (TV show), 20
- “The Fat Man,” 28, 29
- FCC. *See* Federal Communications Commission
- Fear, 255
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC), 308, 309
  - Indecency Act of 2001, 309
  - radio censorship and, 309, 310
- Feelin’ Alright: Very Best of Traffic*, 349
- Felder, Don, 151
- Felix Da Housecat, 299
- Fender, Leo, 208, 209
- Fender company, 56
- Fender Electrical Instrument Company, 208
- Ferdinand, Franz, 308
- 50 Cent, 288
- “Fight the Power”
  - and Rock Window, example of, 328–331
- File sharing, 305–307
- “Fingertips Part II,” 181
- Firbank, Louis. *See* Reed, Lou
- The First Ten Years of Joan Baez*, 345
- Fish, 186, 188, 198–199, 204, 347
- Fisher, Eddie, 26
- Five Satins, 65
- Flamingos, 62
- Flash Gordon* (TV show), 189
- Flatt, Lester, 52
- Fleetwood, Mick, 241
- Fleetwood Mac, 201, 211, 221, 348
  - name origin of, 241
- Fleetwood Mac*, 241
- Fleetwoods, 65
- Flint, Hughie, 211
- Flock, 234
- Floyd, Eddie, 163, 166
- “Fly,” 276
- Fly (dance), 69
- Flying Burrito Brothers, 113, 114, 150, 346
  - “Flyin’ High,” 180
- Fogerty, John, 199, 200
- Fogerty, Tom, 199, 200
- Folk music, 18–20, 68, 72, 73, 132–134, 146
- Folk rock, 146–154, 186, 240
- Fontana, D. J., 45, 47
- Fontana Records, 121
- “Fool on the Hill,” 90
- Ford, Mary, 208
- Foreigner, 240, 258
- “For No One,” 86
- “For the Benefit of Mr. Kite,” 89
- For the Lonely: 18 Greatest Hits of Roy Orbison*, 348
- “Fortunate Son,” 188, 200
- Forty Licks*, 343
- “40 Oz. to Freedom”, 283–284
- “For What It’s Worth,” 147–148
- “For Whom the Bell Tolls,” 302
- For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Hemingway), 302
- “For Your Love,” 210
- Four Aces, 31
- Four Seasons, 65
- 461 Ocean Boulevard*, 215–216
- “Four Sticks,” 237
- Four Tops, 174, 177, 178, 183, 346
- “Foxey Lady,” 219
- FOX-TV, 263
- Francis, Black, 278
- Francis, Connie, 70, 71, 342
- “Frankie and Johnny,” 160
- Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, 54, 63–64, 343
- Franklin, Aretha, 136, 160, 161, 163, 165–166, 171, 263, 344
  - early years of, 165
- Franklin, Rev. C. L., 165, 166
- Franklin, Melvin, 178
- Freak Out*, 141, 317
- Freddie and the Dreamers, 85
- Freddie (dance), 69
- Freed, Alan, 22–23, 31, 34, 70, 78
- The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, 136, 345
- Fresh Cream*, 213

- Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables*, 348  
 Frey, Glenn, 150  
 Fripp, Robert, 240  
 Frith, Simon, 246, 259, 260  
*From Elvis in Memphis*, 47  
*From the Original Master Tapes of Bill Haley*, 343  
 Frumious Bandersnatch, 186–187  
 Frusciante, John, 278  
 Fugazi, 256, 278, 349  
 Fugees, 290  
*Fulfillingness First Finale*, 182  
 Fuller, Craig, 154  
 Full Tilt Boogie Band, 203  
 Funicello, Annette, 70  
 Funk Brothers, 171, 174, 182  
 “Funky Broadway,” 164  
 Fuqua, Harvey, 172, 183  
 Furay, Richie, 146, 147, 148  
 Furious Five, 270  
 Furnier, Vince. *See* Cooper, Alice
- G. Love and Special Sauce, 296  
 Gabriel, Peter, 240, 262, 263  
 Gadd, Steve, 318  
 “Gallows Pole,” 236  
 Gamble, Kenny, 179  
 Gangsta rap, 270–271, 284–287  
     African Americans and, 284–287  
     drugs and, 285–287  
     political activism and, 284–285  
 Garage, 297–298  
*Garage Inc.*, 304  
 “Garageland,” 251  
 Garcia, Jerry, 112–113, 193  
     death of, 202, 296  
     LSD and, 192  
 “Garden Party,” 59  
 Garfunkel, Art, 317  
 Garland, William, 285  
 Garofalo, Reebee, 21  
 Gatién, Peter, 299  
 Gaugh, Bud, 283  
 Gaye, Marvin, 72, 106, 172, 174, 175, 179, 180–181, 228, 346  
     death of, 181  
     drug use and, 181  
 “Gee,” 62  
 Gee Records, 63  
 Geffen, David, 151, 280  
 Geldoff, Bob, 261
- Generation X (punk rock group), 248  
 Genesis, 240, 250, 348  
 Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps, 58  
*Genius Plus Soul Equals Jazz*, 157  
 Gentle, Johnny, 78  
 George, Nelson, 174  
 “Georgia on My Mind,” 157  
 Germs, 255  
 Gershwin, George, 203  
 “Get a Job,” 173  
 “Get Ready,” 174  
*Get Rich or Die Tryin’*, 288  
*Get Together: Essential Youngbloods*, 347  
*Get Yer Ya-Yas Out*, 345  
 “G-Funk,” 284  
 Gibson, Bob, 134, 136  
 Gibson, Orville, 206  
 Gibson Company, 206, 207, 208  
 Gilbert, Ronnie, 133  
*Gilded Palace of Sin*, 150  
 Gillespie, Dizzy, 171, 313  
 Gillett, Charlie, 38  
 Gilley, Mickey, 49  
 Gilliam, Michelle, 152, 153  
 Gilmour, David, 240  
*Gimme Shelter*, 113  
 “Gimme Shelter,” 110, 112, 115  
 “Gimme Some Lovin’,” 316  
 Ginsberg, Allen, 143, 194–195  
 “The Girl Can’t Help It,” 38  
 “Girl from the North Country,” 137, 143  
 Girl groups, 68, 70–72, 73  
 “The Girl Is Mine,” 265  
 Gladys Knight and the Pips, 172, 179, 183, 346  
 Gleason, Ralph J., 113, 189, 195, 197  
 “Gloria,” 231, 316  
 “Glory Days,” 264  
 “God Save the Queen,” 250  
 Godsmack, 304  
 Goffin, Gerry, 71  
 Go-Gos, 254  
 “Going to California,” 237  
*Go Johnny Go* (film), 35  
 Goldberg, Danny, 238  
 Goldman, Albert, 46–47, 126  
 Goldrich, Henry, 224  
 Goldrosen, John, 53  
 Goldstine, Richard, 221
- Goman, Stan, 308  
 Gomelsky, Georgia, 210  
*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (film), 303  
 “Good Day Sunshine,” 86  
 “Good Golly Miss Molly,” 38  
 Goodman, Benny, 33, 207, 209  
 “Good Morning,” 89  
 “Good Morning Little School Girl,” 210  
*Good News for People Who Love Bad News*, 308  
 “Goodnight Irene,” 133  
 “Good Times,” 289  
 “Good Times Bad Times,” 232  
 “Good Vibrations,” 73  
 Gordon, Jim, 215  
 Gordy, Anna, 171, 180  
 Gordy, Berry, Jr., 72, 170–171, 172, 173, 175, 176, 177, 178, 181, 182–183, 183–184, 313  
 Gordy, Berry “Pops,” 170, 171  
 Gordy, Esther, 171  
 Gordy, Gwen, 171  
 Gordy, Louyce, 171  
 Gore, Al, 302  
 Gore, Leslie, 70, 343  
 Gore, Tipper, 301, 302  
 Gospel, 17–18  
     musical style of, 18  
*The Gospel Soul of the Soul Stirrers with Sam Cooke*, 342  
 Gossard, Stone, 283  
 “Gotta Serve Somebody,” 144  
*Got to Be There*, 264  
 Grabber, 299  
*Graceland*, 318, 350  
 Grade, Sir Lew, 94  
*The Graduate* (film), 317  
 Graham, Bill, 113, 189, 190, 201, 204, 213, 274  
 Graham Bond Organization, 211  
 Grammy Awards, 303  
 Grandmaster Flash, 270, 349  
*Grand Ole Opry*, 43, 45, 52  
 Grant, Peter, 230, 232, 234  
 Grappelli, Stephane, 207  
 Grateful Dead, 112, 113, 124, 152, 186, 187, 188, 189, 192–194, 195, 197, 201–202, 203, 204, 220, 274, 296, 306, 347

- egalitarianism and, 192  
 name origin of, 192  
 "Great Balls of Fire," 50  
 Great Depression, 133, 308  
*Greatest Hits of Alice Cooper*, 347  
*Greatest Hits of Bob Dylan*, 345  
*Greatest Hits of Boston*, 347  
*Greatest Hits of Buddy Holly*, 343  
*Greatest Hits of Chicago*, 348  
*Greatest Hits of Crosby, Stills, and Nash (and Young)*, 346  
*Greatest Hits of Devo*, 348  
*Greatest Hits of Dion*, 343  
*Greatest Hits of Elton John*, 348  
*Greatest Hits of Fleetwood Mac*, 348  
*Greatest Hits of Guns 'n' Roses*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of Heart*, 347  
*Greatest Hits of Janis Joplin*, 347  
*Greatest Hits of Journey*, 347  
*Greatest Hits of Mötley Crüe*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of N.W.A.*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of Pete Seeger*, 345  
*Greatest Hits of Rick Nelson*, 343  
*Greatest Hits of Run-DMC*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of Sam Cooke*, 346  
*Greatest Hits of Sublime*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of the Bee Gees*, 350  
*Greatest Hits of the Byrds*, 346  
*Greatest Hits of the Kinks*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of the Lovin' Spoonful*, 346  
*Greatest Hits of the Mamas and the Papas*, 346  
*Greatest Hits of the Red Hot Chili Peppers*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of Tupac Shakur*, 349  
*Greatest Hits of 2 Live Crew*, 349  
 "The Great Pretender," 62, 63  
 Great Society, 189, 190, 195  
 Great Train Robbers, 251  
 Great Train Robbery, 82  
*The Great Twenty-Eight of Chuck Berry*, 343  
 Great White, 305  
 Green, Jerome, 58  
 Green, Peter, 201, 241  
 Green, Richard, 154  
 Greenbriar Boys, 134  
 Green Day, 307  
 Greenfield, Howard, 71  
 "Green Onions," 162, 217  
*Green River*, 200  
 "Green River," 200  
 Greenwich, Ellie, 71  
 Greenwich Village, 136  
*Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*, 263  
 Gretch, Rick, 214, 215  
 Griffin, Rick, 191  
 Griffin, Jim, 311  
 Grohl, Dave, 280, 282  
 Grokster.com, 306  
 Grossman, Albert, 137, 139, 197, 203  
 Grossman, Loyd, 47  
 Grossman, Sally, 138, 140  
 Grundy, Bill, 249  
 Grunge sound, 280  
 "Guantanamo," 134  
 Guitar, development of, 206–209  
 Guitar Kings, 206–226  
*Guns* (TV show), 135  
 Guns 'n' Roses, 267–268, 302, 349  
 "Guns of Brixton," 253  
 Guthrie, Arlo, 135  
 Guthrie, Woody, 132, 133, 134, 135, 345  
 death of, 133  
 Guy, Buddy, 221  
 Haight-Ashbury community, 191, 194–195, 196, 197  
 Halen, Van, 349  
 Haley, Bill, 23, 28, 30–32, 39, 46, 52, 53, 60, 209, 235, 343  
 Haley, William, Sr., 30  
 Hall, Rick, 165  
 Hallyday, Johnny, 218  
 Hamill, Pete, 107  
 Hammer, M. C., 272  
*Hammer of the Gods* (Davis), 235  
 Hammet, Kirk, 302  
 Hammond, John, Jr., 217, 223  
 Hammond, John, Sr., 136, 137, 165, 217, 263  
 Hampton, Lionel, 31, 342  
 Hancock, Hunter, 23  
 Haney's Big House, 49  
*Hangin' Around* fanzine, 249  
 "The Happening," 176  
 "Happy Jack," 123  
 Hardcore punk, 255–256, 278  
 musical style of, 255  
 Hardcore rap  
 heavy metal, alternative rock and, 303  
*A Hard Day's Night* (album), 84, 86, 344  
*A Hard Day's Night* (film), 83–84, 85, 147  
*The Harder They Come* (Soundtrack), 350  
 "Hard Headed Woman," 46  
 Hard punk, evolution of, 256  
 "Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," 136–137  
 Hard rock, 230, 274  
 heavy metal and, difference between, 266  
 Hard rock-heavy metal, 239–240, 266, 269  
 evolution of, 240  
 Hardy, Ron, 297  
 "Harmony Song," 154  
 Harris, Emmylou, 150  
 Harrison, George, 81, 87, 105, 108, 114, 143, 147, 215, 261, 314, 344  
 death of, 97  
 early years of, 77–78  
 individual interests of, 88  
 post-Beatles career of, 97  
 songwriting of, 95–96  
 Harrison, Patti, 108, 215  
 Harry, Bill, 79  
*Harvest*, 149  
 Harvey and the Moonglows, 65  
 "Hateful," 253  
*Have Mercy Baby*, 341  
 Hawkins, Dale, 199, 209  
 Hawkins, Ronnie, 153, 154  
 Hawkins, Screamin' Jay, 199, 253  
 Hayes, Isaac, 164, 179  
 Hays, Lee, 133  
 HDH. *See* Holland/Dozier/Holand  
*Headbanger's Ball* (MTV show), 304  
 Headon, Topper, 251  
 Heart, 240, 347  
 "Heartbeat," 55  
 Heartbeats, 65  
 "Heartbreaker," 234  
 "Heartbreak Hotel," 20, 45, 238  
 "Heart of Gold," 149  
 Hearts, 65  
 "Heart-Shaped Box," 282  
 "Heatwave," 171–172, 175  
*Heavier than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain* (Cross), 282

- Heavy metal, 238, 239–240, 266–269  
 classical music and, 268  
 conservative attitude and, 301–302  
 criticism of, 268–269  
 demise of, 304  
 evolution of, 267  
 guitar solos and, 267  
 hardcore rap, alternative rock and, 303  
 hard rock and, difference between, 266  
 MTV and, 304  
 nu-metal and, 304  
 pyrotechnics and, 305  
 rap and, 289  
 speed metal and, 268
- Heifetz, Jasha, 112
- Heller, Jerry, 284
- Hellerman, Fred, 133
- “Hello Mary Lou,” 59, 238
- Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club, 113
- Helm, Levon, 141, 153
- Helmet, 303
- Helms, Chet, 194
- Help!*, 84, 86–87, 344
- “Help Me, Rhonda,” 73
- “Helter Skelter,” 92
- Hemingway, Ernest, 302
- Henderson, David, 223
- Hendrix, Al, 216
- Hendrix, Jimi, 17, 39, 93, 124, 149, 150, 152, 163, 179, 182, 197, 206, 208, 209, 210, 213, 215, 216–225, 225–226, 228, 230, 232, 238, 264, 266, 278  
 career management and, 222, 223  
 club performances of, 217–218  
 concert tours of, 220–221  
 death of, 223–224, 238  
 drug use and, 217, 222, 223, 224  
 early years of, 216–217  
 in England, 218–219  
 guitar style of, 224–225  
 legacy of, 224–225  
 in military, 217  
 at Monterey Pop Festival, 220  
 musical style of, 216, 217–218, 218–219, 220  
*See also* Jimi Hendrix Experience
- Henley, Don, 150, 306
- Herculords, 269
- “Here, There, and Everywhere,” 84
- “Here Comes the Sun,” 95–96
- “Her Majesty,” 96
- Herman’s Hermits, 124
- Heroes of Tellemark*, 122
- Hertz Rent-a-Car, 229
- Hesseman, Howard, 189
- Hetfield, James, 302, 304
- Hewson, Paul. *See* Bono
- “Hey Joe,” 218
- Hey Jude*, 84, 96
- “Hey Jude,” 164
- “Hey Schoolgirl,” 317
- Hibbard, Don, 21
- Hicks, Dan, 347
- “Hideaway,” 211
- “Hide Your Love Away,” 86, 87
- High Numbers, 121
- “High School Confidential,” 50
- Highwaymen, 72, 134
- Highway 61 Revisited*, 140–141, 345
- Hill, Joe, 132
- Hill, Lauryn, 290
- Hillman, Chris, 147, 150
- Hip-hop, 269, 298
- The History of Rhythm ‘n’ Blues*, 346
- Hite, Les, 207
- “Hit Parade,” 21
- Hitsville, USA: The Motown Singles Collection*, 346
- “Hit the Road, Jack,” 157
- HMV Records, 80
- Hobbsweedle, 231
- Hoffman, Abbie, 126, 296
- Hogan, Carl, 33
- “Hold On, I’m Comin’”, 164
- “Hold on to What You’ve Got,” 165
- Hole, 281
- Holiday, Billie, 136, 165, 177, 263
- Holland, Brian, 174, 176
- Holland, Eddie, 174
- Holland/Dozier/Holand (HDH), 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 180, 183
- Hollies, 105, 120
- Holly, Buddy, 32, 39, 40, 42, 51–56, 58, 60, 70, 78, 81, 103, 105, 135, 206, 209, 216, 238, 264, 313, 314, 343
- Holmes, Jake, 232
- Holzman, Jac, 229
- Homemade magazines, 278
- “Honky Cat,” 241
- Honky Chateau*, 241
- “Honky Tonk Woman,” 112, 115
- “Hoochie Coochie Man,” 17
- Hooker, John Lee, 17
- Hopkins, Lightnin’, 17, 52
- Hopkins, Nicky, 231
- Horne, Howard, 246
- Hot Buttered Soul*, 164
- Hotel California*, 152
- Hot Licks, 347
- Hot Tuna, 198
- “Hound Dog,” 46, 64
- House, 297–298
- House of Pain, 288
- “House of the Rising Sun,” 315
- Houses of the Holy*, 237–238, 347
- House Un-American Activities Committee, 134, 188
- Houston, Whitney, 262
- Howe, Steve, 225, 240
- “How High the Moon,” 208
- Howlin’ Wolf, 17, 34, 43, 106, 210, 222, 342
- “How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You,” 180
- How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, 307
- Hudson, Garth, 153
- Huff, Leon, 179
- Human Be-In, 194–195
- Human rights, 230
- Human Rights Now! Tour, 263
- Hunter, Ivory Joe, 22
- Hunter, Meredith, 113
- Hunter, Robert, 202
- “The Hunter Gets Captured by the Game,” 174
- “Hurdy Gurdy Man,” 231
- “Hurricane,” 144
- Hurt, John, 153
- Hüsker Dü, 256
- Huston, Cisco, 134
- Hynde, Chrissie, 254
- “I Almost Lost My Mind,” 22
- “I Am The Walrus,” 90
- “I Can See for Miles,” 123, 124, 127
- “I Can’t Explain,” 122, 124, 231
- “I Can’t Get Next to You,” 179
- “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” 106–107

- "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch)", 177  
 "I Can't Quit You Baby," 232  
 "I Can't Stop Loving You," 157  
 Ice Cube, 284  
     film career of, 284  
 Ice-T, 270, 285, 294, 303, 349  
 Idol, Billy, 248, 254  
 "I Feel Fine," 86  
 "I Feel Free," 213  
 "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," 188, 198  
 "If I Had a Hammer," 137  
 "If 6 Was 9," 221  
 "I Got a Woman," 18, 157  
 "I Got You (I Feel Good)," 159  
 "I Heard It through the Grapevine," 172, 179, 180, 200  
 "I Just Want to Make Love to You," 105  
 "I'll Be Doggone," 174  
*Ill Communication*, 289  
 "I Love You So," 62  
 "I'm a Boy," 123  
 "Imagine," 97  
 "I'm a King Bee," 105  
 "I'm Gonna Love You Too," 55  
*The Immaculate Collection*, 349  
 "Immigrant Song," 236  
 Impalas, 65  
 Imperial Records, 22, 30  
 Imperials, 65  
 "I'm So Happy," 63  
 "I'm Sorry," 70  
 "I'm the Face/Zoot Suit," 121  
 "I'm Walkin'", 29  
*In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*, 347  
 Increased Penalties Act. *See* Entertainment Act  
 Incubus, 297, 304, 305  
 Indecency Act of 2001, 309  
*In Defense of Animals*, Vol. 2, *Caroline*, 348  
 Indigo Girls, 154  
 "I Need Love," 270  
 "I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Loved You)," 165  
 Infinity Broadcasting, 309  
 Ink Spots, 44, 62, 63  
 "In My Life," 87  
 "In My Room," 73  
 "Inner City Blues," 180  
*Innervisions*, 182  
 Interpol, 308  
 Interscope Records, 288  
*In the Court of the Crimson King*, 348  
*In the Dark*, 202  
 "In the Ghetto," 47  
 "In the Still of the Nite," 65  
*In Utero*, 282  
 iPod, 307  
 "I Put a Spell on You," 199  
 Iraq war, 309–310  
 Iron Butterfly, 232, 233, 238, 347  
 Iron Maiden, 267, 302  
 "I Saw Her Standing There," 83  
 "I Second That Emotion," 172  
 "I Shall Be Released," 153  
 "I Shot the Sheriff," 216  
 "Isis," 143  
 Isley Brothers, 81, 183, 217  
 "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," 275  
 "It Doesn't Matter Anymore," 54, 70  
 "I Thank You," 164  
 ITM Agency, 183  
 "It's My Life," 315  
 "It's My Party," 70  
 "It's Not Unusual," 231  
 "It's Now or Never," 47  
 "It's So Easy," 55  
 "It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine)", 276  
 "It's the Same Old Song," 177  
*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, 271  
 "I've Been Loving You Too Long," 163  
 "I Want to Be Loved," 104  
 "I Want to Be Wanted," 70  
 "I Want to Hold Your Hand," 82, 83  
 "I Want to Walk You Home," 29  
 "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," 45  
 "I Want You Back," 183  
 "I Want You (She's So Heavy)", 96  
 "I Was Made to Love Her," 182  
 "I Wish It Would Rain," 179  
 Jacks, 63  
 Jackson, Al, Jr., 161, 162, 166  
 Jackson, Janet, 310  
 Jackson, Jesse, 285  
 Jackson, Joe, 254  
 Jackson, Mahalia, 165  
 Jackson, Michael, 47, 63, 158, 181, 183, 228, 260, 264–265, 275, 279, 281, 307, 349  
     allegations against, 265  
     cultural influence of, 265  
     music video and, 265  
 Jackson, "Papa" Joe, 182  
 Jackson 5, 182–183, 264–265, 346  
 Jagger, Joe, 102, 103  
 Jagger, Mick, 39, 104, 158, 261, 315  
     androgynous stage persona of, 112  
     drug use and, 108–109  
     early years of, 102–103  
     Faithfull and, 109, 114  
     as male chauvinist, 108  
     performance style of, 107, 115  
     political activism and, 111  
     vocal style of, 107  
*Jailhouse Rock* (film), 46, 64  
 Jam, 254  
 "Jamaica Farewell," 72  
 Jam bands, 296  
 Jamerson, James, 154, 172  
 James, Dick, 81, 94  
 James, Elmore, 103, 104, 216, 231  
 James Gang, 225  
 Jan and Dean, 72, 344  
 Janes, Roland, 51  
 Jane's Addiction, 275, 279, 294, 296–297, 349  
     MTV ban and, 279  
     record chain ban and, 279  
 Jane's Addiction farewell tour, 294  
 "Jane Says," 279  
 Janis Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company, 203  
 Jansch, Bert, 232, 236  
 Jardine, Al, 72  
*Jazz from Hell*, 317  
 J.D. Sumner and the Sunshine Boys, 43  
 Jefferson, Blind Lemon, 17, 207  
 Jefferson Airplane, 113, 163, 179, 186, 187–188, 189–190, 195–196, 197, 198, 204, 221, 347  
*Jefferson Airplane Takes Off*, 190  
 Jefferson Starship, 198

- Jeffries, Mike, 222
- Jelly Beans, 71
- Jenkins, Gordon, 133
- Jenkins, Jimmy, 161
- Jennings, Waylon, 55
- "Jeremy," 283
- "Jesus Gave Me Water," 160
- Jeter, Reverend Claude, 318
- Jet Set, 147
- Jimi Hendrix Experience, 93, 111, 119, 206, 218–223
- "Jimmy Jazz," 253
- J&M Studios, 28–29, 37
- Jobete Publishing Company, 171, 183
- Johansen, David, 246, 253
- John, Elton (Reginald Dwight), 241, 247, 288, 348
- "John Barleycorn Must Die," 317
- "Johnny B. Goode," 34  
and Rock Window, example of, 319–323
- Johnny Got His Gun* (Trumbo), 303
- Johns, Glyn, 94, 112, 127, 151, 231
- Johnson, Ann, 36
- Johnson, Calvin, 280–281
- Johnson, Jack, 308
- Johnson, Jimmy, 162
- Johnson, Johnny, 33, 36
- Johnson, Marv, 171, 172
- Johnson, Pete, 29, 49
- Johnson, Robert, 17, 103, 210, 213, 342
- John Wesley Harding*, 142, 345
- Jolson, Al, 165
- Jolt* fanzine, 249
- Jones, Booker T., 161, 162. *See also* Booker T. and the M.G.s
- Jones, Brian, 102  
death of, 111–112  
departure from group of, 111  
drug use and, 108, 109  
early years of, 103  
musical creativity of, 107, 115  
Pallenberg and, 108
- Jones, Casey, 132
- Jones, David. *See* Bowie, David
- Jones, George, 53
- Jones, Hoppy, 62
- Jones, John Paul, 230, 231, 233, 236, 277
- Jones, Mick, 246, 251
- Jones, Norah, 157, 307
- Jones, Quincy, 37–38, 70, 157, 264
- Jones, Raymond, 79
- Jones, Steve, 123, 247, 249, 251
- Jones, Tom, 121, 231
- Joplin, Janis, 163, 186, 194, 196, 215, 347  
death of, 203  
drug use and, 203
- Jordan, Louis, 18, 31, 33, 342
- Jordinares, 45
- The Joshua Tree*, 275
- Journey, 201, 240, 258, 347
- "Joyously antisocial," 278
- Judas Priest, 267, 302
- "Judy's Turn to Cry," 70
- Juice* (film), 286
- Jukebox: 20 Greatest Hits the Way You Originally Heard Them*, 343
- "Julia," 92
- "Jump," 267
- Jump-band jazz, 18
- "Jumping Jack Flash," 110, 113, 115
- Jungle, 298
- Juniors, 65
- "Justify My Love," 266
- "Just Like a Woman," 142
- "(Just Like) Starting Over," 97
- "Just Lose It," 307
- "Just Lose Yourself," 288
- Kaempfert, Burt, 79
- Kagy Music, 160
- Kaleialoha, Carol, 21
- Kallen, Kitty, 21
- Kamen, Michael, 303
- Kansas City Five, 207
- Kantner, Paul, 189, 198
- Kaufman, Andy, 277
- Kaufman, Phil, 150
- Kaukonen, Jorma, 189, 190, 198
- Kaye, Lenny, 112
- Kazzaa.com, 306
- KBOO radio, 309
- "K.C. Lovin'", 64
- KDAV radio, 52
- KDKH radio, 45
- Keen Records, 160
- "Keep Ya Head Up," 287
- Keidis, Anthony, 278, 279
- Keisker, Marion, 44
- Kelly, Alton, 191
- Kendricks, Eddie, 172
- Kennedy, John F., 83
- Kenny, Bill, 62, 63
- Kern, Jerome, 63
- Kerouac, Jack, 282–283
- Kesey, Ken, 90, 111, 190, 191
- "Keys to the Highway," 215
- Khumalo, Baghiti, 318
- Kid Rock, 304
- Kill 'Em All*, 302, 304, 349
- Killers, 308
- Killmore, 305
- Kindricks, Eddie, 178, 179
- King, Albert, 210
- King, Ben E., 64, 71
- King, Carole, 71, 81, 317
- King, Freddie, 210, 211
- King, Rev. Martin Luther, Jr., 21, 159, 285
- King, Maurice, 172
- King, Riley "B. B.", 17, 31, 43, 166, 194, 207, 208, 210, 216, 231, 232, 342
- King, Rodney, 284
- King Creole* (film), 46
- King Crimson, 240, 348
- King/Federal Records, 22
- "King Harvest," 153
- King of the Delta Blues Singers*, 342
- Kingston Trio, 72, 134, 344
- Kinks, 121, 122, 231, 315–316, 349
- The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*, 316
- Kinney Corporation, 229
- Kirchherr, Astrid, 79
- Kirshner, Don, 71
- Kiss, 267, 347
- Kiss This: Best of the Sex Pistols*, 348
- Kittie, 304
- KKMG radio, 309
- Klein, Allen, 93, 95, 96, 97, 107
- Kleinow, Sneaky Pete, 150
- KMPX radio, 195
- Knight, Gladys, 179, 182, 183, 346
- Knight, Suge, 284, 287
- "Knock on Wood," 166
- Knuckles, Frankie, 297
- Kool Herc, 269, 270
- Kooper, Al, 140, 221
- Korn, 304, 305
- Korner, Alexis, 103, 104, 111, 211
- Kornfeld, Barry, 140

- Kornfeld, Arti, 295  
 Korn's Family Values tour, 305  
 Korschmeier, Bruno, 78  
 Kosmic Blues Band, 203  
 Kottke, Leo, 236  
 K Records, 280  
 Kreutzmann, Bill, 193  
 KRS-One, 272  
 Krupa, Gene, 120  
 KRVM-FM radio, 341  
 Kulburg, Andy, 154  
 Kweli, Talib, 290  
 KWEM radio, 43  
 KWKH radio, 52  
 KYA radio, 190
- L. L. Cool J, 270, 349  
 "La Bamba," 216  
 La Bostrie, Dorothy, 38  
 "Ladies First," 272  
 "Ladies of the Canyon," 152  
 "Lady Jane," 107, 108  
*Lady Sings the Blues* (film), 177  
 Ladysmith Black Mambazo, 318  
*Lady Soul, Live at the Fillmore West*, 165–166  
 Laine, Frankie, 26  
 Laing, Dave, 247, 250  
 Lambert, Kit, 125  
     Townshend and, 121–122  
 Landau, Jon, 112, 220, 221, 264  
 Landis, John, 265  
 "Land of a Thousand Dances," 164  
 Lang, Eddie, 207  
 lang, k. d., 263  
 Lang, Michael, 294, 295, 296  
 Lansky, Brothers, 44  
 Larks, 62  
 La Rosa, Julius, 56  
 "Last Night," 161  
 "The Last Time," 106  
 Latteef, Yusef, 171  
 "Layla," 215  
*Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, 215  
 "Lay Lady Lay," 142  
 Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter), 17, 133, 342  
 Leadon, Bernie, 150  
*Leave It to Beaver* (TV show), 20  
 Ledbetter, Huddie. *See* Leadbelly
- Led Zeppelin, 119, 122, 127, 214, 221, 224, 225, 226, 230–239, 247, 258, 261, 266, 267, 277, 280, 347  
     Atlantic Records and, conflict between, 237  
     at Bath Festival, 234–235  
     commercial success of, 236  
     concert tours of, 233, 237–238  
     demise of, 238  
     drugs use and, 233  
     first album of, 232–233  
     management of, 234–235  
     musical style of, 234  
     name origin of, 232  
     popularity/review paradox and, 233, 234  
     success of, 236  
     in U.S., 233, 237–238  
     violence and, 233, 234–235  
*Led Zeppelin*, 347  
*Led Zeppelin 2*, 233–234, 347  
*Led Zeppelin 3*, 236–237, 347  
*Led Zeppelin 4*, 347  
 Lee, Albert, 231  
 Lee, Alvin, 225  
 Lee, Brenda, 70, 343  
 Lee, Chisun, 309  
 Lee Andrews and the Hearts, 65  
*Legend: Best of Bob Marley*, 350  
 "The Lemon Song," 234  
 Lennon, Cynthia, 92  
 Lennon, John, 82, 83, 85, 86–87, 111, 228, 259, 344  
     assassination of, 97  
     departure from group of, 96  
     early years of, 76–77  
     individual interests of, 88–89  
     and McCartney, conflict between, 92–93, 96–97  
     Ono and, 88, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97  
     post-Beatles career of, 97  
     songwriting of, 96  
 Lennon, Julia, 76–77  
 Lennon, Julian, 88  
 Lennox, Annie, 263  
 "Leopard Skin Pillbox Hat," 142  
 Lesh, Phil, 193  
 Lester, Richard, 84  
*Let It Be*, 94, 95, 96–97, 344  
*Let It Bleed*, 110, 114, 345  
 "Let It Bleed," 112
- "Let's Go Trippin'", 72  
 "Let's Spend the Night Together," 108  
 Levi's jeans, 300  
 Lewis, Elmo, 49, 104  
 Lewis, Jerry Lee, 20, 35, 40, 42, 44, 48–51, 59, 60, 103, 235, 314, 343  
 Lewis, Meade Lux, 29  
 Lewis, Molly, 49  
 Liberty Records, 59  
 Lickfett, Jay, 307  
 Lieber, Jerry, 46, 64, 73, 81  
 Lieberman, Joe, 302  
 Life cycle, music and, 12–13  
*Lifehouse*, 126–128  
*Life* magazine, 233  
*Like a Prayer*, 266  
 "Like a Rolling Stone," 140, 147, 186, 220  
*Like a Virgin*, 266  
 Lilith Fair, 296  
 Lil' John, 307  
 Limbo rock (dance), 69  
 Limelitters, 147  
 Limp Bizkit, 296, 304, 305  
 Linkin Park, 305  
 "Lipstick on Your Collar," 70  
 Little Anthony and the Imperials, 65  
 Little Boy Blue and the Blue Boys, 103  
 Little Caesar and the Romans, 65  
 Little Eva, 71  
 Littlefield, Little Willie, 64  
 "Little Girl of Mine," 65  
 "Little Red Rooster," 160  
 Little Richard (Richard Penniman), 28, 30, 35, 36–39, 48, 50, 51, 58, 59, 60, 77, 81, 103, 104, 134–135, 159, 160, 161, 217, 235, 343  
 Little Steven, 263  
 "Little Things Mean a Lot," 21  
 Little Walter, 17, 52  
 "Little Wing," 215, 219, 221  
 Live Aid, 261–262, 275  
*Live Aid*, 348  
*Live at Leeds*, 127  
*Live at the Apollo*, 159  
*Live at the Regal, B. B. King*, 342  
*Live Dead*, 201

- Live 8, 261  
*Live Sentence*, 268  
 Living Color, 271, 294  
 Load, 304  
 Loar, Lloyd, 207  
*Lockdown America* (Parenti), 285  
 “The Loco-motion,” 71  
 “Lodi,” 200  
 Loggins, Kenny, 148  
 “Lola,” 316  
*Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround*, 316  
 Lollapalooza tour, 279, 294, 296–297, 304, 308  
 London Bach Choir, 112  
 London Symphony Orchestra, 317  
 “Lonely Teardrops,” 171, 313  
 “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” 138  
 “Long and Winding Road,” 94, 95  
 Long Beach Dub All-Stars, 284  
 Long John and the Silver Beatles, 78  
 Longley, Ty, 305  
 “Long Tall Sally,” 77, 85  
 Lorenz, George “Hound Dog,” 23  
 Los Angeles County Department of Children’s Services, 282  
*Los Angeles Times*, 220  
 “Losing My Religion,” 277  
 “Louie Louie,” 315  
*Louisiana Hayride*, 45, 52  
 Love, Courtney, 281–282  
 Love, Darlene, 71, 344  
 Love, Mike, 72  
*Love and Theft*, 144  
 “Love Child,” 177  
 “Love Me,” 46  
 “Love Me Do,” 80, 81  
 “Love Me Tender,” 46  
*Love Me Tender* (film), 46  
 “Loves Me Like a Rock,” 318  
 “Love to You,” 87  
*Loving You* (film), 46  
 Lovin’ Spoonful, 148, 153, 189, 315, 346  
*The Low End Theory*, 290  
 Lowndes, Sara, 140, 142  
 Low-power FM. *See* LPFM  
 LPFM (low-power FM), 309  
 “Lucille,” 208  
 “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” 88–89
- Ludacris, 307  
 Lydon, John (Johnny Rotten), 247–248, 251  
 Lyfe, 305  
 Lymon, Frankie, 54, 63–64, 183, 264, 343  
 Lymon, Louie, 63  
 Lynch, 259  
 Lynne, Jeff, 314  
 Lyp-synching, 259–260  
 Lyrics, Rock Window and, 5, 319, 320, 323, 326, 329
- “Machine Gun,” 223  
 MacKaye, Ian, 278  
 MacLeod, Alex, 282  
 Macmillan, Harold, 82  
 Madness, 254  
 Madonna, 260, 261, 265–266, 299, 304, 349  
   early years of, 266  
   movie career of, 266  
   music video and, 265–266  
   services contract and, 266  
 Magazines, homemade, 278  
 “Maggie’s Farm,” 140  
 “Magical Mystery Tour,” 90  
*Magical Mystery Tour* (album), 344  
*Magical Mystery Tour* (film), 220  
 “Magic Bus,” 127  
 Mahesh Yogi, 89, 90–91  
 Maines, Natalie, 309  
 Mainstream Records, 194  
 Major, John, 299  
 Malakian, Daron, 305  
 Malcolm X, 161, 271, 285  
 Malmsteen, Yngwie, 268  
 Malo, Ron, 106  
 Malone, Bonz, 292  
 Mamas and the Papas, 124, 152–153, 196, 220, 346  
 Mandela, Nelson, 262, 263  
 Mann, Barry, 71  
 Mann, Bill, 306  
 Mann, Manfred, 142, 211  
 Mann Act, 35  
 Manny’s, 224  
 “Man on the Moon,” 277  
 Manuel, Richard, 153  
*Marblehead Messenger*, 154  
 Marbles, 189  
 Marcells, 65
- Marcus, Greil, 112, 143  
 Margouleff, Robert, 182  
 Mark, Marky, 288  
 Mar-Keys, 161, 163  
 Markie, Biz, 289  
 Mark P., 248  
 Marley, Bob, 216, 350  
 Marquis, 180  
 M/A/R/R/S, 297  
 Marsh, Dave, 120, 261  
 Marshall, Maithe, 62  
*The Marshall Mathers LP*, 288, 349  
*Mars Hotel*, 202  
 Martha and the Vandellas, 171, 174, 175, 183, 346  
 Martin, Barbara, 175–176  
 Martin, C. F., 206  
 Martin, Dewey, 147  
 Martin, George, 80–81, 82, 83, 89, 94, 95, 109  
 Marvelettes, 72, 172, 174  
 Mason, Dave, 316  
*Master of Puppets*, 349  
 “Master of Puppets,” 268  
 No Limit label, 288  
 “Masters of War,” 136  
 Ma Sweetie’s Tiny Tots, 37  
 Matadors, 172  
 Matassa, Cosimo, 29, 30  
 Matlock, Glen, 246, 247, 249, 251  
 Matrix club, 189  
 Matthews, Dave, 154  
 Mauldin, Joe B., 53, 57  
 May, Derrick, 297  
 Mayall, John, 112, 210, 218, 241  
 “Maybe,” 65  
 “Maybe Baby,” 55  
 “Maybellene,” 34  
 Mayfield, Curtis, 179, 289  
 Mays, Lowrey, 309–310  
 McCarthy era, 21, 72, 133–134, 188  
*McCartney*, 96–97  
 McCartney, Jim, 77  
 McCartney, Linda (née Eastman), 92, 93, 95, 97  
 McCartney, Mary, 77  
 McCartney, Michael, 77  
 McCartney, Paul, 83, 152, 218, 220, 228, 258, 261, 265, 344  
   departure from group of, 96  
   drug use and, 197  
   early years of, 77

- Eastman and, 92, 93, 95, 97  
individual interests of, 88  
and Lennon, conflict between,  
92–93, 96–97  
post-Beatles career of, 97  
solo album of, 96–97  
songwriting of, 92, 96
- McCarty, Jim, 231
- McCoy, Charlie, 142
- McCready, Mike, 283
- McDaniel, Elias. *See* Diddley, Bo
- McDonald, Country Joe, 198–199,  
296
- MC5, 233, 239, 245, 347
- McGee, Stick, 18
- McGuinness, Tom, 210
- McGuinn, Jim, 146, 147
- McGuinn, Roger, 84, 143, 152
- McKenzie, Scott, 196
- McKernan, Ron “Pigpen,” 193
- McLachlan, Sarah, 296
- McLaren, Malcolm, 246, 247, 251
- McPhatter, Clyde, 18, 54, 64–65,  
313
- McVie, Christine, 241
- McVie, John, 211
- MDMA. *See* Methylene  
dimethamphetamine
- Meaden, Pete, 120–121  
drug use and, 121
- Me against the World*, 287
- “Me and Julio Down by the School  
Yard,” 318
- Meaning, music and, 7–8
- “Mean Mr. Mustard,” 96
- Meatloaf, 280
- Meaty, Beaty, Big and Bouncy*, 128
- Meerio, A. M., 26–27
- Megadeth, 305
- Megaevents  
political activism and, 261–263  
*See also* individual events
- Meier, Garry, 297
- Meisner, Randy, 150
- Melisma*, 160
- Melle Mel, 270
- Mellencamp, John (Cougar), 262
- Mellow Gold*, 299
- Melody Maker* magazine, 126, 236
- Melvins, 280
- “Memphis,” 80
- Memphis Horns, 163
- Memphis Mafia, 46, 47
- Men at Work, 259
- Mendelsohn, John, 233, 234
- Merck pharmaceutical company,  
298
- Mercury, Freddie, 120
- Mercury Records, 63
- “Mercy Mercy Me,” 180
- Merry Pranksters, 90
- Mersey Beat*, 79
- “The Message,” 270
- Message from Beat Street: The Best of  
Grandmaster Flash*, 349
- Messina, Jim, 148
- Metallica, 268, 294, 296, 302, 349  
clothing style of, 304  
Napster.com, unauthorized  
downloading and, 305–306  
political activism and, 302–303,  
304
- Metallica*, 303, 349
- Methylene dimethamphetamine  
(MDMA). *See* Ecstasy
- Metzker, Gustav, 120
- MGM, 68
- M.G.s, Booker T. and the, 72,  
161–162, 163, 164, 196, 217, 346
- “Michael (Row Your Boat  
Ashore),” 72, 134
- “Michelle,” 84
- Mickey Mouse Club, 70
- Microsoft Music Store, 307
- Middle Class, 255
- “Midnight Hour,” 164
- Midnight Marauders*, 290
- “Midnight Moonlight,” 154
- “Midnight Rambler,” 112
- Midwest Winter Dance Party tour,  
55
- “The Mighty Quinn,” 142
- Mike D., 289
- Miles, Buddy, 221, 223
- “Milkcow Blues Boogie,” 48
- Millender, Lucky, 31
- Miller, Jimmy, 110, 112
- Miller, Larry, 195
- Miller, Stanley “Mouse,” 191
- Miller, Steve, 196, 347
- Milli Vanilli, 259
- Mills, Mike, 276, 277
- Mills Brothers, 62
- Milne, A. A., 111
- The Milton Berle Show*, 46
- Ministry, 303
- Minor Threat, 256, 278
- Miracles, 171, 172–173, 174, 346
- “Miracles,” 198
- Misskelley, Jessie, 301–302
- Mitchell, Bobby, 195
- Mitchell, Guy, 26
- Mitchell, John “Mitch,” 93, 111,  
218, 219, 222, 223, 233, 239
- Mitchell, Joni, 151, 152, 237, 295
- Mitch Ryder and the Detroit  
Wheels, 124
- “Mixed-Up Confusion,” 138–139
- Moby, 299, 300
- “Moby Dick,” 234
- Moby Grape, 190, 197, 203, 347
- Modest Mouse, 297, 308
- Moman, Chips, 162
- “Money,” 171
- Monkees, 71, 197, 220
- Monroe, Bill, 52, 53, 58
- Monroe, Charlie, 58
- Monster*, 278
- Monterey Pop Festival, 124, 152,  
163, 196–197, 220, 261, 315
- Montgomery, Bob, 52–53
- Montgomery, Wes, 219
- Monument Records, 314
- Moody Blues, 348
- Moon, Keith, 93, 118, 119, 121, 123,  
126, 214, 231, 233, 238, 239  
death of, 128  
drug use and, 121, 122, 124–125  
early years of, 120
- Moondance*, 316
- Moon Dog Coronation Ball, 23
- Moondog Matinee*, 154
- Moondog Rock and Roll House Party*  
(radio show), 78
- Moondogs, 78
- Moonglows, 62, 65, 180
- Moonshine, 300
- Moore, Dudley, 80
- Moore, Merrill, 49
- Moore, Sam, 164
- Moore, Scotty, 44, 47, 53, 81, 206,  
209, 231, 315
- Moore, Warren, 173
- Moreira, Airto, 318
- Morganfield, McKinley. *See* Waters,  
Muddy

- Morocco, Victor, 191
- Morpheus.com, 306
- Morricone, Ennio, 303
- Morrison, Van, 154, 157, 316, 349
- Morrissey, 297
- Morrow, Cousin Brucie, 23, 69
- "Mosh," 307
- Most, Mickie, 231, 314
- Motels, 254
- "Mother and Child Reunion," 318
- "Mother's Little Helper," 108
- Mothers of Invention, 189
- Mötley Crüe, 267, 302, 349
- Motortown Revues, 176
- Motown, 68, 72, 73, 81, 162, 170–184
  - assembly-line production
    - method of, 174–175
  - lyrical style of, 173–174
  - musical elements of, 173
  - "quality control" and, 175
- Mountain, 225
- "Mountain Song," 279
- "Mozambique," 143
- MP3 technology, 291, 305–307
- Mr. Dynamite Review, 180
- "Mr. Rock and Roll," 38
- Mr. Rock and Roll* (film), 35
- "Mr. Soul," 148
- "Mr. Tambourine Man," 139, 140, 147
- "Mrs. Robinson," 317
- Mtshali, Isaac, 318
- MTV (Music Television), 258–260, 279, 281, 282
  - business practices of, 260
  - criticism of, 259
  - early years of, 259
  - formatting practices of, 260
  - heavy metal and, 304
  - impact of, on music industry, 260
  - lyp-synching and, 259–260
  - racism and, 260
  - record companies and, 259
  - success of, 260
- Mudhoney, 256, 280
- Mugwumps, 152, 153
- Muhammad, Ali Shadeed, 290
- Mullen, Larry, Jr., 275, 276
- Mullican, Moon, 49
- Murdoch, Rupert, 263
- Murmur*, 276
- Murray the K's Easter Show, 124, 213
- Music
  - aesthetics and, 9
  - Anatomically Correct Rock and Roll Doll and, 11
  - authenticity and, 6
  - bias and, 13
  - commercial success and, 10
  - culture and, 6
  - eras and, 12
  - life cycle and, 12–13
  - listening to, 3–4
  - meaning and, 7–8
  - music borrows and, 5–6
  - music industry and, 11–12
  - objectivity and, 13
  - oppositionality and, 8–9
  - performance codes and, 9
  - Rock Window and, 4–5, 319, 320, 323, 326, 328
  - Roseburg status and, 10
  - situation and, 7
  - spirituality and, 9–10
  - themes and, 10–11
  - transmission and, 12
- Music*, 299
- Music borrows, 5–6
- Music-business establishment
  - artistic control and, 68–69
- Music festivals, 295–296. *See also individual music festivals*
- Music from Big Pink*, 153
- Music industry, 11–12
  - artist self-censorship and, 240
  - cassette technology and, 242
  - conservatism in, 240, 242
  - evolution of 60s and 70s and, 229–230
  - major versus independent
    - labels and, 241–242
  - MTV and, impact of, 260
  - radio programmers and, 240, 241, 242
  - record company consolidation
    - and, 229, 230, 241
  - record sales and, 242
  - See also* Record industry
- Music of My Mind*, 182
- Music Television. *See* MTV
- Music video, 258–260
  - Jackson and, 265
- Madonna and, 265–266
  - success of, 260
  - See also* MTV
- "Mustang Sally," 164
- Muswell Hillbillies*, 316
- "My Babe," 17
- "My Bonnie," 79
- "My Boy Lollipop," 72
- My Cherie Amour*, 182
- "My Ding-a-Ling," 35
- "My Generation," 118–119, 123, 124, 126, 127
- "My Girl," 172, 174, 178–179
- "My Guy," 172, 178
- "My Happiness," 44
- "My Hometown," 264
- "My Name Is," 288
- "My Prayer," 63
- "My Wife," 127
- "Nadine," 35
- Naked Lunch* (Burroughs), 282
- Napster, 307
- Napster.com
  - unauthorized downloading
    - and, 305–306
- Nas, 286, 288
- Nash, Graham, 105, 148, 150
- "Nashville Cats," 153
- Nashville Skyline*, 142–143, 345
- National Association of Broadcasters, 309
- National Front, 252
- National guitar company, 207
- National Public Radio, 309
- National Review* magazine, 285
- Nation of Islam, 284
- Navarro, Dave, 279
- Nazis, 252
- Nebraska*, 264
- Negative Approach, 256
- Negotiations and Love Songs*, 350
- Neil Christian and the Crusaders, 231
- Nelson, Ricky, 59, 209, 238, 343
- Nelson, Willie, 157, 262
- NEMS, 79, 80, 93
- Neptunes, 307, 308
- N.E.R.D., 308
- Nevermind*, 279, 280–281, 282, 303
- "Never Mind the Bollocks," 348

- Never Mind the Bullocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*, 250
- Nevins, Al, 71
- New Christy Minstrels, 147
- "Newer-value" songs, 187–188
- New Morning*, 143, 345
- New Musical Express* magazine, 140
- Newport Folk Festival, 137, 139, 140
- News of the World*, 108, 109
- Newsted, Jason, 302, 304
- Newsweek* magazine, 264
- Newton, Huey, 285
- Newton-John, Olivia, 258
- New wave, 253, 254, 255, 258–259  
music video and, 258
- New Yardbirds, 230
- New York Daily News*, 137
- New Yorker* magazine, 112
- New York's Blues Project, 197
- New York Times*, 126, 136, 221
- Nicholas Brothers, 158
- Nicks, Stevie, 241
- "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," 153
- Nine Inch Nails, 294
- Nirvana, 256, 275, 279–283, 303, 349  
concert tours and, 280  
lyrical style of, 281  
on MTV, 281, 282  
music of, and Rock Window,  
example of, 326–328  
political activism and, 282–283  
recording contract and, 280  
on *Saturday Night Live*, 281
- Nissan automotive company, 300
- Nixon, Richard, 154, 160
- "No Particular Place to Go," 35
- Northern Songs, 81, 93, 94
- Nor Va Jak, 53
- "Norwegian Wood," 86, 87
- "Not Fade Away," 58, 105
- "Nothing Else Matters," 303
- Nothing's Shocking*, 279, 349
- Novoselic, Krist, 280  
music censorship and, 282–283
- Nowell, Bradley  
death of, 283
- "Nowhere Man," 87, 140–141
- Number of the Beast*, 267
- Number Ones*, 349
- Nu-metal, 304
- N.W.A. (Niggas With Attitudes),  
270–271, 284, 349
- Nylons, 260
- Objectivity, music and, 13
- O'Brien, Jack, 46
- Ochs, Phil, 134, 146
- O'Connor, Sinéad, 263
- Odadjian, Shavo, 305
- Odelay*, 299
- Ode Records, 196
- Off the Wall*, 183, 264
- Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy!* (Novoselic),  
282–283
- O'Grady, Terence, 58, 86
- "Oh, Darling," 96
- "Oh, What a Nite," 65
- "Oh Boy," 55
- "Ohio," 154
- Okayplayer collective, 290
- Okeh label, 39
- Oldaker, Jamie, 215
- Oldham, Andrew Loog, 104–105,  
107, 120, 121, 231
- Oldham, Spooner, 165
- "Old Shep," 43
- "On Broadway," 65
- "Once Bitten, Twice Shy," 305
- "One," 303
- "One after 909," 94
- "One Fine Day," 71
- 100 Club's summer punk festival,  
248
- 101ers, 247
- 120 Minutes* (MTV), 281
- "One Too Many Mornings," 138
- One Trick Pony*, 318
- "Only a Pawn in the Game," 137,  
138
- "Only the Lonely," 314
- "Only You," 62, 63
- Ono, Yoko, 88, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97
- "Ooby Dooby," 314
- Operation Ivy/Rancid, 283
- Oppositionality, music and, 8–9
- Oracle*, 192
- Orbison, Roy, 20, 44, 314, 350
- Orbital, 294
- Original Sin Greatest Hits*, 343
- Orioles, 62, 343
- The Orioles Sing Their Greatest Hits*, 343
- Ormsby-Gore, Alice, 215
- Ory, Kid, 28
- Osbourne, Ozzy, 239, 267, 304
- Osbourne, Sharon, 304
- Osterburg, James. *See* Pop, Iggy
- O'Sullivan, Gilbert, 289
- Otis, Johnny, 216
- Otis Blue*, 163
- "Outlaw Blues," 139
- Out of Time*, 277
- Owen, Alan, 84
- Owen, Frank, 299
- Owen, Wilfred, 303
- O Yeah!: Ultimate Hits of Aerosmith*, 347
- "Oye Como Va," 201
- Ozzfest tours, 304–305
- Paganini, Niccolò, 268
- Page, Jimmy, 122, 123, 210, 225,  
231–232, 233, 234, 236–237,  
315  
bizarre behavior of, 235–236  
early years of, 230–231  
guitar style of, 236, 238–239  
mysticism and, 235
- Page, Patti, 26
- "Paint It Black," 88, 107, 108
- Pallenberg, Anita, 108
- Palmer, Ben, 210
- Palmer, Bruce, 147
- Palmer, Robert, 50, 51, 221
- "Panama Red," 154
- Pantera, 305
- "Papa Don't Preach," 266
- Papa Roach, 304
- "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone," 179
- "Paper Sun," 88, 316
- Paradise Lost 2: Revelations* (HBO  
documentary), 302
- Paradise Lost* (HBO documentary),  
302
- Paramount Pictures, 22, 164
- Parenti, Christian, 285
- Parent's Music Resource Center  
(PMRC), 301, 317
- Parker, Colonel Tom, 30, 43, 45, 46,  
82
- Parkway, 69
- Parlophone Records, 80–81
- Parsons, Gram, 114, 150
- Parsons, Tony, 247
- "Party for Your Right to Fight," 271

- Pasillas, Jose, 305  
*Past Masters*, 344  
 “Pastures of Plenty,” 133  
 Paul, Clarence, 182  
 Paul, Les, 55, 208, 209  
 Paul Butterfield Blues Band, 140  
*Paul’s Boutique*, 289  
*Paul Simon*, 318  
 Paxton, Tom, 146  
 Peace, love, unity, and respect (PLUR), 299  
 “Peaceful Easy Feeling,” 151  
*Peace Together*, 349  
 “Peace Train,” 309  
 Peacock label, 37  
 Pearl Jam, 256, 283, 349  
     Ticketmaster and, 283  
 Peer, Ralph, 19  
 Peer-Southern Publishing, 54  
 “Peggy Sue,” 238  
 Pelicans, 62  
 Penguins, 62  
 Penn, Dan, 162  
 Pennebaker, D. A., 139, 140, 197  
 Penniminen, Leva Mae, 36  
 Penniminen, Richard. *See* Little Richard  
 “Penny Lane,” 88, 259  
 Pentangle, 239  
 Pepsi, 295  
 Pep’s Music Barn, 31  
 Pere Ubu, 254  
 Perfect, Christine, 241  
 Performance codes, music and, 9  
 Perkins, Carl, 20, 35, 44, 81, 209, 314, 343  
 Perkins, Stephen, 279  
 Perry, Scratch, 251–252  
 Peter, Paul, and Mary, 72, 134, 137, 344  
 Petty, Norman, 53, 54–55, 55–56, 314  
 Petty, Tom, 314  
 Philips Records, 80, 260  
 Phillies, 70  
 Phillips, John, 146, 152, 153, 196  
 Phillips, Sam, 44, 45  
 Phish, 154, 296  
*Physical Graffiti*, 238, 347  
 Pickett, Wilson, 124, 162, 164–165, 217, 346  
 “Pictures of Lilly,” 123  
 “Piece of My Heart,” 203  
 “Piggies,” 92  
 PiL. *See* Public Image Ltd.  
 “Pills,” 246  
 Pinetoppers, 161  
 Pink Floyd, 240, 250, 347  
 Pips, 172, 179, 183, 346  
 Pitney, Gene, 108  
 Pixies, 275, 278, 297, 349  
 Plant, Robert, 230, 231–232, 232–233, 234, 235–236, 236–237  
 Plastic Ono Band, 96  
 Platters, 62, 63, 343  
 “Play It, Steve,” 164  
 “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” 71  
 “Please, Mr. Fantasy,” 317  
 “Please, Please, Please,” 158  
*Please Hammer Don’t Hurt ’Em*, 272  
 “Please Mr. Postman,” 172  
*Please Please Me*, 344  
 “Please Please Me,” 81, 104  
 PLUR. *See* Peace, love, unity, and respect  
 PMRC. *See* Parent’s Music Resource Center  
 Poco, 148, 150, 346  
 Pogo, 248  
 Police, 254, 348  
 “Police and Thieves,” 252  
 Political activism, 253  
     Beastie Boys and, 289  
     Clash and, 253  
     concerts, megaevents and, 261–263  
     Eminem and, 288–289  
     gangsta rap and, 285  
     Jagger and, 111  
     Metallica and, 302–303, 304  
     Nirvana and, 282–283  
     Public Enemy and, 289  
     R.E.M. and, 276–277  
     Richards and, 111  
     Rolling Stones and, 110–111  
     in San Francisco, 188, 198  
     System of a Down and, 305  
     U2 and, 275–276  
 Polydor, 79  
 Polygram, 294  
 “Polythene Pam,” 96  
 Pompelli, Rudy, 31, 32  
 Poneman, Jonathan, 280  
 Pony (dance), 69  
 Poole, Brian, 80  
 “Poor Little Fool,” 59  
 Pop, Iggy (James Osterburg), 245, 280  
 Pop music, 21–22  
*Porgy and Bess*, 203  
 Porter, Cole, 263  
 Porter, David, 164  
 Powell, Michael, 309  
*Power*, 270  
 Prater, Dave, 164  
*The Predator*, 284  
*Preflyte*, 147  
 Presley, Elvis, 19–20, 23, 28, 30, 32, 35, 40, 42–48, 53, 58, 59, 60, 64, 82, 135, 209, 216, 238, 265, 343  
     censorship of hip movement of, 46  
     drug use and, 47  
     induction into army of, 46  
     music developmental periods of, 43  
 Presley, Gladys, 43  
 Presley, Lisa Marie, 47, 265  
 Presley, Priscilla (née Beaulieu), 47  
 Presley, Vernon, 43  
 Preston, Billy, 94  
 Pretenders, 254, 348  
 “Pretty Woman,” 314  
 Price, Alan, 315  
 Price, Lloyd, 29, 31, 171  
 Price, Ray, 50  
*The Priest They Call Him By*, 282  
 Primes, 178  
 Primettes, 175–176  
 Primus, 289, 296, 303  
 Prince, 39, 260, 306, 348  
 Procol Harum, 225, 231  
 Prodigy, 294, 299  
 Profile, 270  
 Profumo affair, 82  
 Progressive rock, 240  
*A Prophecy of a Declaration of Independence*, 192  
 “Prophets of Rage,” 271  
 Protest songs, 132  
 “Proud Mary,” 199–200  
 “P.S. I Love You,” 80  
 Psychedelic light show, 191

- Psychedelic Sunday: Best of Vanilla Fudge*, 347
- Public Enemy, 271, 303, 349  
     music of, and Rock Window, example of, 328–331  
     political activism and, 289–290
- Public Image Ltd. (PiL), 248
- Pub rock, 247
- “Puff the Magic Dragon,” 137
- “Pump Up the Volume,” 297
- Punk-pop, 254
- Punk rock, 244–256, 274  
     airborne playfight and, 248  
     anti-anything stance and, 252  
     artist behavior and, 245, 246, 248–249, 253  
     art school and, 246–247  
     audience incitement and, 248  
     clothing style and, 245, 247  
     emergence of, reasons for, 246–247  
     fanzines and, 248–249  
     hardcore punk and, 255–256  
     Los Angeles underground movement and, 254–255  
     lyrical style of, 245, 246, 253–254  
     musical style of, 245, 246, 250, 253–254  
     new wave and, 253, 254, 255, 258  
     pogo and, 248  
     print media and, 249  
     pub rock and, 247  
     punk-pop synthesis and, 254  
     shock value and, 248–249  
     television and, 249  
     in U.S., 254
- Pure Prairie League, 154
- “Purple Haze,” 219
- Pye Records, 80
- Pyrotechnics, 305
- Pythian Temple, 31
- Q-Tip, 290
- Quad Recording Studios, 287
- Quadrophonia*, 128, 345
- Quant, Mary, 104
- Quarrymen, 77–78
- Quayle, Dan, 286
- Queen Latifah, 271–272, 296, 349
- Queens of the Stone Age, 297
- Queensryche, 303
- A Quick One While He's Away*, 124
- “Quicksand,” 175
- Quicksilver Messenger Service, 195, 196, 203, 347
- Quiet Riot, 267
- Quinn Ivy studios, 156
- Quintet of the Hot Club of Paris, 207
- Racism, MTV and, 260
- Radio  
     television, and classic rock, 20
- Radio Broadcasting Preservation Act of 2000, 309
- Radio programmers, music industry and, 240, 241, 242
- Radio stations  
     blues and, 22  
     censorship of, 309–310  
     classic rock and, 23  
     conglomerates versus independent ownership and, 308–309, 310  
     independent community-based, LPFM and, 309  
     media conglomerates and, 308–310  
     payola and, 59, 69–70, 310  
     programming and, 240, 241, 242  
     “Rally for America” events and, 310  
     white disc jockeys, R&B and, 22–23
- Radle, Carl, 215
- Rage Against the Machine, 294, 296
- “Rain,” 86
- Rainbow Coalition, 285
- Rainey, Chuck, 154
- Rainey, Ma, 16, 207
- “Rainy Day Women,” 141, 142
- Raitt, Bonnie, 262
- “Rally for America” events, 310
- Ram, Buck, 63
- Ramones, 246, 250, 289, 348
- Ramones Mania*, 348
- Rap, 269–272, 274, 284  
     censorship battle and, 272  
     cultural influence of, 272  
     DJs and, 269–270  
     gangsta rap and, 270–271  
     heavy metal and, 289  
     lyrical style of, 269, 272  
     musical maturation of, 271  
     musical style of, 269, 271, 272  
     sexist sentiment and, 271–272
- “Rapper’s Delight,” 270, 289
- Rap-rock, 305
- Rastafarians, 252
- Rat Scabies, 248
- RAVE Act. *See* Reducing American’s Vulnerability to Ecstasy Act
- Rave culture, 298–301  
     criticism of, 300–301
- Ravens, 62
- Rawls, Lou, 160
- Raw Power*, 348
- Ray, Johnnie, 26
- R&B (rhythm and blues), 17–18, 21, 26  
     DJs, radio stations and, 22–23  
     independent record companies and, 22
- RCA Country Legends*, 342
- RCA Records, 20, 22, 23, 31, 37, 43, 45, 46, 48, 154, 160, 190, 199, 314
- “Reach Out I’ll Be There,” 177
- Read, Sir John, 249
- Reading Festival, 282
- Ready, Steady, Go* (TV show), 122
- Reagan, Ronald, 160, 259, 264, 276, 278
- “Real Slim Shady,” 309
- The Real Slim Shady*, 288
- Rearview Mirror: Greatest Hits of Pearl Jam*, 349
- Rebel for the Hell of It: The Life of Tupac Shakur* (White), 285
- Record companies  
     independent, 20, 22, 241–242, 248, 278, 308–309, 310  
     white interest in black music and, 21–22
- Record industry  
     Beatles and, 98  
     copyright infringement and, 305–307  
     “Hit Parade” and, 21  
     punk, independent distribution and, 248  
     record sales and, 22, 242, 260–261, 307–308

- Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), 260, 301, 306–307
- Red, Hot, and Blue*, 263
- Red, Tampa, 49
- Red Bird, 70
- Red Bull club drink, 300
- Redding, Noel, 218, 222, 223
- Redding, Otis, 37, 72, 160, 161, 162, 163–164, 164, 165, 197, 346
- Red Hot Chili Peppers, 256, 275, 278–279, 296, 305, 349
- “Red House,” 232
- Reducing American’s Vulnerability to Ecstasy (RAVE) Act, 301
- Reed, Jimmy, 135
- Reed, Lou (Louis Firbank), 245, 246
- “Reet Petite,” 171, 313
- Reeves, Martha, 171, 174, 175, 183, 346
- “Reflections,” 176
- Regents, 65
- Reggae, 73, 251–252
- Reid, Terry, 231
- Reid, Vernon, 271
- Reilly, Terry, 127
- Reinhardt, Django, 207
- Relf, Keith, 231
- R.E.M., 154, 256, 275, 276–278, 304, 349
- lyrical style of, 277
- political activism and, 276–277
- “Remote Control,” 251
- Renbourn, John, 232, 236
- R.E.O. Speedwagon, 280
- Replacements, 256
- Reprise Records, 39, 219
- “Respect,” 163, 165, 166
- Retrospective: Best of Buffalo Springfield*, 346
- Return to Hicksville: Best of the Blue Thumb Years*, 347
- Revivalist blues, 186
- “Revolution Rock,” 253
- Revolver*, 84, 86, 87, 344
- Rhapsody, 307
- Rhino label, 342
- Rhoads, Randy, 239, 267, 268
- Rhodes, Bernie, 251
- Rhythm and blues. *See* R&B
- Rhythm Kings, 33
- RIAA. *See* Recording Industry Association of America
- Rich, Buddy, 120
- Richards, Doris, 103
- Richards, Keith, 17, 102, 104, 105–106, 111
- drug use and, 109, 114
- early years of, 103
- and Jones, death of, 112
- musical creativity of, 115
- police raid on home of, 108
- political activism and, 111
- songwriting of, 106
- Richardson, J. P. (the Big Bopper), 55
- Richbourgh, “John R,” 23
- Rickenbacker guitar company, 207
- Ricks, Jimmy, 62
- Ride the Lightning*, 302
- Righteous Brothers, 71, 85, 344
- Rinzler, Alan, 143
- “Ripple,” 202
- The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (film), 246
- Rituel de lo Habitual*, 279
- Rituel de lo Habitual* tour, 294
- The River*, 264
- Rivers, Johnny, 196
- Robbins, Marty, 52
- “Robbin’ the Hood,” 284
- Roberts, John, 295
- Robertson, Jaime “Robbie,” 141, 153
- Robin Hood* (TV show theme), 94
- Robins, 62, 64
- Robinson, Bill “Bojangles,” 158
- Robinson, Claudette, 173
- Robinson, Sugar Ray, 157
- Robinson, William “Smokey,” 72, 106, 152, 161, 171, 172–174, 178, 180, 346
- Rock, Rock, Rock* (film), 35
- “Rock-a-Beatin’ Boogie,” 31
- Rockabilly, 20
- “Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody,” 165
- Rock against Racism, 252, 261
- Rock and roll
- adult antagonism toward, 27
- elements of, 27
- emergence of, 26–27
- fusion of styles of, 27–28
- lyrical style of, 27
- as teen rebellion against conservatism, 27
- See also* Rock music
- “Rock and Roll,” 237
- “Rock and Roll Music,” 34
- Rock and Roll Party* (radio show), 23
- “Rock Around the Clock,” 30, 31–32, 35, 235
- “Rocket Man,” 241
- Rockets, 148
- “Rockin’ at Midnight,” 18
- Rocking Kings, 216
- Rock music
- audience expansion and, 229, 230
- black roots of, 16–18
- censorship of, 301–302
- of the 1970s, 228–242
- See also* Rock and roll
- Rock of Ages*, 154
- “Rock the Casbah,” 253
- “Rock This Joint,” 31
- Rock Window
- artist history and, 5, 319, 320–331
- examples of, 323–331
- lyrics and, 5, 319, 320, 323, 326, 329
- music and, 4–5, 319–320, 323, 326, 327–328
- societal context and, 5, 319, 322, 325, 327, 330
- stance and, 5, 319, 323, 325, 328, 331
- Rodgers, Jimmie, 18–19, 43, 340
- Rolie, Gregg, 201, 240
- Rollingstone.com, 340
- Rolling Stone* magazine, 35, 92, 113, 143, 197–198, 214, 220, 221, 233, 234, 253, 264, 266, 307, 308, 310, 316, 342
- Rolling Stone Records, 114
- Rolling Stones, 59, 88, 102–115, 120, 121, 148, 150, 163, 187, 210, 217, 228, 237, 258, 298, 345
- Altamont concert of, 113
- as bad boys of rock, 107, 115
- Beatles and, 104–105
- club performances of, 104
- concert tours of, 105–106, 112–113, 114

- drug use and, 108–109  
 first album of, 105  
 in France, 114  
 group conflict and, 111  
 Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club and, 113  
 Jagger-Richards songwriting and, 105, 108, 115  
 lyrical style of, 108, 112  
 management of, 104–105, 110  
 musical creativity of, 107  
 musical maturation of, 109–110, 115  
 musical style of, 115  
 name origin of, 102  
 political activism and, 110–111  
 power relationships within, 108  
 reaction to, 107  
 recording contracts of, 105  
 Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus film and, 111  
 Satanism and, 112  
 as support act, 104  
 TAMI show performance of, 106  
 TV censorship and, 108  
 in U.S., 106–107, 114  
 violence controversies and, 112  
 Who versus, 119  
*The Rolling Stones*, 105  
 Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus, 111  
 Rolling Thunder Review, 139, 143  
 Rollins, Henry, 294  
 “Rollin’ Stone,” 102  
 “Roll On, Columbia,” 133  
 “Roll Over Beethoven,” 34, 235  
 Romans, 65  
 Ronettes, 71, 344  
 Ronstadt, Linda, 150, 241, 258, 348  
 Rooney, Mickey, 124  
 Roosters, 210  
 Roots, 290  
 Rose, Axl, 267–268  
 Rose, Fred, 56  
 Rose, Tricia, 269–270, 272  
 Rose, Wesley, 56  
 Roseburg status, 10  
 Rosen, Hilary, 307  
 Rosenman, Joel, 295  
 Ross, Diana, 175–176, 177, 179, 183, 258  
 Roth, David Lee, 267  
 Rotolo, Suze, 136, 137  
 Rotten, Johnny (John Lydon), 248, 251  
     lyrical style of, 249  
 Rough Trade, 248  
 Roulette Records, 164  
 Rowan, Peter, 154  
 Rowe, Dick, 80, 105  
 Royal Variety Show concert, 81–82  
*Rubber Soul*, 87, 344  
 “Ruby Tuesday,” 107, 108  
 Ruffin, David, 171, 172, 178, 179, 183  
*Rumours*, 241  
 Runaways, 254  
 Run-DMC, 270, 349  
 “Running Scared,” 314  
 Rupe, Art, 37  
 Rural blues, 16, 17  
 Rush, 240, 258, 347  
 Russell, Leon, 97, 143, 215, 261  
 Rutherford, Mike, 240  
 Rydell, Bobby, 69, 343  
 Ryder, Mitch, 124  
 “Sabotage,” 289  
 Saddlemen, 31  
 “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” 142  
 Salsa, 73  
 Salt-n-Pepa, 262  
 “Salt of the Earth,” 111  
 Salutations, 65  
 Salvo, Patrick, 35  
 Sam and Dave, 162, 163, 164, 166, 253, 346  
 Sam and Dave Revue, 164  
 Sampling, 289  
 Samwell-Smith, Paul, 210  
 Sanchez, Tony, 108  
 Sander, Ellen, 233  
*Sandinista!*, 253, 280  
 Sandom, Doug, 119, 121  
 Sands, Tommy, 70  
 SANE Nuclear Policy, 21  
 San Francisco  
     counterculture businesses in, 191  
     drug use in, 187, 191, 192, 197  
     Fathering of Tribes in, 194–195  
     Haight-Ashbury community in, 191, 194–195, 196, 197  
     Human Be-In and, 194–195  
     political activism in, 188, 198  
     student activism in, 188  
     Summer of Love in, 194, 196, 197  
     support systems in, 192  
     Vietnam War and, 198  
 San Francisco-area rock, 240  
     “anything goes” reputation of, 188  
     ballroom dance/concert and, 188–189, 189–190, 190–191, 192  
     beatniks and, 188  
     counterculture values and, 187, 194–195, 204  
     cultural influence of, 204  
     emergence of, 188–189  
     LSD and, 196  
     lyrical style of, 187  
     Monterey Pop Festival and, 196–197  
     musical ingredients of, 187  
     musical maturation of, 198  
     national media and, 196  
     newer-value songs and, 187–188  
     psychedelic light show and, 191  
     underground music, KMPX and, 195  
     “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)”, 196  
*San Francisco Chronicle*, 189  
 San Francisco Mime Troupe, 189  
 San Francisco Symphony, 303  
 Santana, 113, 201, 240, 347  
 Santana, Carlos, 201  
 Santana Blues Band, 201  
*Santana III*, 201  
 Santiago, Maria Elena, 54  
 “Sara,” 143  
 SAR Records, 160  
 Sasha, 299  
 “Satisfaction,” 148, 163  
*Saturday Night Fever (Soundtrack)*, 350  
*Saturday Night Live* (TV show), 274, 281, 301  
 Saunders, Kevin, 297  
 Scepter Records, 71  
 Schaffner, Nicholas, 88  
 Schecter, Jon, 270

- Scherer, John, 295
- Scholz, Tom, 239–240
- Schon, Neal, 201, 240
- “School Days,” 34, 123
- Schwichtenberg, Cathy, 258
- S.C.I.E.N.C.E.*, 305
- Scorsese, Martin, 154
- Scream, 256
- The Screaming End: The Best of Gene Vincent*, 343
- Scruggs, Earl, 52, 236
- Searchers, 120
- “Searchin’,” 64, 80
- Seatrain, 154
- Seattle Sound, 280
- Sebastian, John, 146, 148, 153
- Sedaka, Neil, 71
- Seeger, Bob, 258
- Seeger, Charles, 133
- Seeger, Pete, 133, 134, 147, 236, 345
- “See You Later, Alligator,” 32
- Seeger, Bob, 304
- Self-Portrait*, 143, 345
- Sellers, Peter, 80
- Sell Out*, 345
- Sellouts, 280
- Sentimental Journey*, 96
- September 11 terrorist attack, 309
- Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 85, 88–89, 92, 95, 109, 163, 197, 219, 344
- 7 Seconds, 256
- Sex (clothing store), 247
- “Sexie Sadie,” 91
- Sex Pistols, 123, 244, 246, 248, 249–251, 252–253, 348
- drugs use and, 251
- lyrical style of, 249
- musical style of, 249, 250
- record contracts and, 249–250
- in U.S., 251
- violence against, 251
- Shady Records, 288
- “Shake, Rattle, and Roll,” 32
- Shakur, Afeni, 285, 287
- Shakur, Assata, 285
- Shakur, Tupac, 284, 285–287, 349
- assassination attempt against, 286–287
- death of, 287
- film career of, 286
- gangsta lifestyle of, 286
- imprisonment of, 287
- Sham 69, 252
- “Sham-poo,” 58
- “Shanghai Noodle Factory,” 316
- Shangri-Las, 71, 72
- Shankar, Ravi, 88, 97, 197
- “Shape of Things,” 210
- “Shave and a haircut,” 58
- “Sh-Boom,” 22, 65
- “The Sheik of Araby,” 80
- “She Loves You,” 84
- Shelton, Robert, 136
- Sherer, John, 294, 295
- Sheridan, Tony, 79
- “She Said She Said,” 86, 87
- She’s a Queen: A Collection of Hits of Queen Latifah*, 349
- “She’s Leaving Home,” 88
- Shirelles, 71, 152, 344
- Sholes, Steve, 45
- “Shop Around,” 171
- Shotten, Pete, 92
- Showco, 238
- Shrieve, Mike, 201
- Sid and Nancy* (film), 251
- Signed, Sealed, and Delivered*, 182
- “Silent Lucidity,” 303
- Silver Beatles, 78
- Silver Bullet Band, 258
- Simmons, Gene, 267
- Simon, Carly, 58
- Simon, Paul, 152, 154, 228, 317–318, 350
- Simon and Garfunkel, 58, 196, 317, 350
- Simonon, Paul, 246, 251
- “A Simple Twist of Fate,” 143
- Simpson, Valerie, 180
- Sims, Dick, 215
- Sinatra, Frank, 26, 33, 47, 82, 95
- “Sincerely,” 62
- “Sin City,” 150
- Singles of Nirvana*, 349
- Singles of the Clash*, 348
- Singles of the Pretenders*, 348
- Singleton, John, 284
- Sings My Generation*, 345
- Siouxsie and the Banshees, 248
- Siouxsie Sue, 246
- Sisters of Mercy, 289
- “(Sittin’ on) The Dock of the Bay,” 160, 163
- Situation, music and, 7
- 60s Beat* (radio show), 341
- Skid Row, 280
- Skinheads, 252
- Skull and Bones*, 305
- Skynyrd, Lynyrd, 309
- “Sky Pilot,” 315
- Slayer, 303, 305
- Sledge, Percy, 165
- Slick, Grace, 189, 190, 195–196, 198
- Slim, Fat Boy, 299
- Slim, Sunnyland, 49
- The Slim Shady LP*, 349
- Slipknot, 304
- “Sloop John B,” 134
- Slow Train Coming*, 144, 346
- Sly and the Family Stone, 126, 349
- S&M, Symphony & Metallica*, 303
- Small, Millie, 72
- Small Faces, 120
- Smalls, Biggie, 284, 287
- Smash Hits of Jimi Hendrix*, 347
- Smashing Pumpkins, 256
- Smash Records, 50
- “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” 281
- and Rock Window, example of, 326–328
- Smith, Bessie, 16, 136
- Smith, Chad, 278
- Smith, Huey “Piano,” 29
- “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” 63
- “Smokestack Lightning,” 210
- “Smokey Joe’s Cafe,” 64
- Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, 346
- The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (TV show), 124
- Snider, Dee, 301
- Sniffin’ Glue* fanzine, 248
- Snyder, Gary, 195
- Societal context, Rock Window and, 5, 319, 322, 325, 327, 330
- “Somebody to Love,” 187–188, 195
- “Someday We’ll Be Together,” 177
- Some Kind of Monster* (film), 304
- “Somethin’ Else,” 59
- Somethin’ Else: The Fine Lookin’ Hits of Eddie Cochran*, 343
- “Something,” 95
- “Something So Right,” 318

- Songfellows, 43  
 “The Song Is Over,” 127  
*The Song Remains the Same* (film), 238  
*Songs in the Key of Life*, 182  
 Son House, 17  
 Sonic Youth, 278, 280, 297  
*Son of Saturday Gold* (radio show), 341  
 Sons of Champlin, 204  
 Sony, 260, 308  
 Sony/BMG, 308  
 Sony/Columbia Records, 260  
*The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*, 180  
 “Souljah’s Story,” 286  
 “Soul Man,” 164, 166  
 Soul music, 68, 72, 73, 156–167  
     cultural influence of, 166–167  
 “Soul Sacrifice,” 201  
 Soul Stirrers, 18, 160, 164, 342  
 “Soul train,” 72  
 Soundgarden, 256, 280, 296  
*The Sounds of Science: Anthology of*  
     *Beastie Boys*, 349  
 “The Sounds of Silence,” 317  
*Sounds of Summer: Very Best of the Beach*  
     *Boys*, 344  
 Souther, J. D., 151  
 Southern Georgia, 46  
 Souvignier, Todd, 297–298  
 “Spanish Bombs,” 253  
 “Spanish Castle Magic,” 221  
 “Spanish Harlem,” 71, 165  
 Spark Records, 64  
 Sparrows, 62  
 Specials, 254  
 Specialty Records, 37, 38, 160  
 Spector, Phil, 70, 71, 73, 80, 85, 95,  
     96, 105, 173, 344  
 Speed garage, 298  
 Speed metal, 268, 302  
 “Speedo,” 65  
 Spence, Skip, 189  
 Spencer Davis Group, 214, 316  
 Spin Doctors, 295  
*The Spirit of Radio: Greatest Hits,*  
     *1974–87, Rush*, 347  
 Spirituality, music and, 9–10  
 Spooky Tooth, 110  
 “Spoonful,” 17, 212  
 Springsteen, Bruce, 56, 136, 154,  
     253, 262, 263–264, 348  
 Spungen, Nancy, 251  
 SSD, 256  
 SST, 256, 278  
*St. Anger*, 304  
*St. Dominic’s Preview*, 316  
 “Stairway to Heaven,” 127, 232,  
     236–237  
 Stamp, Chris, 121, 122  
 “Stan,” 288  
 Stance, Rock Window and, 5, 319,  
     323, 325, 328, 331  
 “Stand by Me,” 64, 71  
*Stand by Your Van*, 284  
 “Standing in the Shadows of  
     Love,” 177  
 Stanley, Augustus Owsley, III, 191  
 Starkey, Elsie, 77  
 Starkey, Richard, Jr. *See* Starr,  
     Ringo  
 Starkey, Richard, Sr., 77  
 Starr, Edwin, 179–180  
 Starr, Maureen, 90  
 Starr, Ringo (Richard Starkey Jr.),  
     80, 81, 83, 85–86, 143, 149, 218,  
     261, 344  
     drumming styles of, 92–93  
     drum solo of, 96  
     early years of, 77  
     post-Beatles career of, 97, 98  
     solo album of, 96  
 “Star Spangled Banner,” 222  
 Stax Records, 161–162  
 Stax/Volt Records, 72, 156, 163,  
     164–165  
 Stax/Volt Revue tour, 163  
 “Steady Rollin’ Man,” 216  
 Steel Pulse, 261  
 Steely Dan, 350  
 Steinberg, Lewis, 162  
 Step Brothers, 158  
 Step Forward, 248  
 Stern, Howard, 310  
 Steve Miller Band, 347  
 Stevens, Cat, 309  
 Stevenson, Mickey, 172, 174,  
     175  
 Steve Winwood and Traffic,  
     316–317  
 Stewart, Ian, 104  
 Stewart, Rod, 225, 233, 258  
*Sticky Fingers*, 110, 114, 345  
 Stiff, 248  
 Stiff Woodies, 280  
 Stigwood, Robert, 214  
*Still Crazy After All These Years*, 318  
 Stills, Manassas, and CSN, 150  
 Stills, Stephen, 146, 147–148,  
     149–150, 215  
 Stimela, 318  
 Sting, 262, 263  
 Stipe, Michael, 276, 277  
 Stokes, Niall, 276  
 Stoller, Mike, 46, 64, 73, 81  
 Stone, Sly, 179  
 Stooges, 239, 245, 280, 348  
 “Stop in the Name of Love,” 176  
 “Stormy Monday,” 207  
*Straight Outta Compton*, 270–271  
 “Stranded in the Jungle,” 63  
 “Strange Brew,” 213  
 Stratocaster guitar, 56  
 “Strawberry Fields,” 88, 89, 219, 259  
     and Rock Window, example of,  
     323–326  
*Strays*, 296–297  
 “Street Fighting Man,” 111  
*Street Jams*, 270  
*Strictly Commercial: Best of Frank Zappa*,  
     350  
 String Cheese Incident, 297  
 “Strollin’ with the Blues,” 208  
 Strong, Barrett, 171, 179, 180  
 Strummer, Joe, 246, 247, 251  
 “Stubborn Kinda Fellow,” 180  
 Stubbs, Levi, 177  
 “Stupid Girl,” 108  
 Styx, 240, 258  
 Sublime, 283–284, 349  
*Sublime*, 283  
 Sub Pop, 278, 280  
 “Substitute,” 123  
 “Subterranean Homesick Blues,”  
     138, 276  
 Sugar Hill Gang, 270, 289  
 Sugar Hill Records, 270  
 “Suite: Judy Blue Eyes,” 148  
 Sullivan, Ed, 83, 108  
 Sullivan, Niki, 53, 54  
 Summer, Donna, 349  
 “Summer in the City,” 153  
 Summer of Love, 194, 196, 197, 213  
 “Summer of Love,” 298  
 “Summertime,” 203  
 “Summertime Blues,” 59, 127, 216  
 “Summertime Rolls,” 279  
 Sumner, J. D., 43

- Sun City*, 262  
 "Sunday Bloody Sunday," 276  
*Sunday Night at the Palladium* (TV show), 82  
 "The Sun King," 96  
 "Sunny Afternoon," 315  
 Sun Records, 20, 44, 45, 48, 50, 314  
 Sun Records/Memphis Home Recording Service, 44  
*Sunrise*, 343  
 Sun Sessions, 209  
*Sunshine, Lollipops and Rainbows: Best of Leslie Gore*, 343  
 Sunshine Boys, 43  
 "Sunshine of Your Love," 213  
 "Sunshine Superman," 88  
 Sun-Sound Records, 53  
 "Superfly," 289  
 Supergroup, 111  
 Supremes, 106, 174, 176, 178, 346  
 Surfaris, 72  
 "Surf City," 72  
 "Surfer Girl," 73  
*Surfer Rosa*, 278  
 "Surfin' USA," 73  
 Surf music, 68, 72–73  
*Surrealistic Pillow*, 195  
 Sutcliffe, Stu, 78, 79  
 "Suzie Q," 199, 200, 209  
 "Suzy Is a Headbanger," 289  
 Swaggart, Jimmy, 49  
 Swallows, 62  
 Swankers, 247–248  
 Swan Records, 69, 82  
 Swans, 62  
 Swan Silvertones, 18, 342  
*Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, 150  
 "Sweet Little Sixteen," 34, 73  
*Sweet Relief II*, 348  
 "SWLABR," 213  
 "Sympathy for the Devil," 110, 112, 115  
 System of a Down, 304  
     political activism and, 305  
 Szymczyk, Bill, 151  
  
 Taj Mahal, 111  
 "Take a Message to Mary," 58  
 "Take Good Care of My Baby," 71  
 "Take It Easy," 151  
 "Tales of Brave Ulysses," 213  
*Talking Book*, 182  
  
 Talking Heads, 254, 348  
 "Tall Paul," 70  
 Talmy, Shel, 122, 231  
 Tamla label, 171  
 "Tangled Up in Blue," 143  
 Tankian, Serj, 305  
 Tarplin, Marv, 173  
 Tatum, Art, 165  
 Taupin, Bernie, 241  
 Taurus, 182  
*Taxi* (TV show), 277  
 "Taxman," 86, 87, 114  
 Taylor, Dick, 103, 104  
 Taylor, James, 58  
 Taylor, Mick, 112  
     drug use and, 114  
 Taylor, Steve, 282  
 "Teardrops," 65  
 "Tears on My Pillow," 65  
 Techno, 297–298  
 Tech step, 299  
 "Teddy Bear," 46  
 Tedesco, Tommy, 47  
*Ted Mack Amateur Hour* (TV show), 179  
 Teenagers, 54, 63–64, 343  
 Teenchords, 63  
 Teen disillusionment, classic rock and, 20–21  
 Teen idols music, 68, 69–70, 73  
 Teen-Kings, 314  
 Telecom Act. *See*  
     Telecommunications Act of 1996  
 Telecommunications Act of 1996, 308  
 Telecommunications companies, 308  
 Television  
     Beatles and, 82, 83  
     cable, 295  
     *The Ed Sullivan Show* and, 46, 83, 106, 108  
     Hendrix and, 218–219  
     punk rock and, 249  
     radio, and classic rock, 20  
     and Rolling Stones, censorship of, 108  
     Who and, 124  
     *See also* Music video  
 "Tell Me," 105  
 "Tell Me Why," 84  
  
 Temptations, 171, 172, 174, 175–176, 177–179, 183, 346  
*Ten*, 283  
 "The Ten Commandments of Love," 65  
*10 from 6: Best of Bad Company*, 347  
 Ten Years After, 225  
 Terrell, Tammi, 180  
 Terry, George, 215  
 Testa, Jim, 278  
 Tex, Joe, 165, 166, 346  
 Texas Playboys, 19  
 "T for Texas," 19  
 Thatcher, Margaret, 275–276  
 "That Is Why," 171  
 "That'll Be the Day," 53, 55–56  
 "That's Alright (Mama)," 20, 209, 238  
 "That's When Your Heartaches Begin," 44  
*Their Satanic Majesty's Request*, 109  
 Them, 231, 316  
 "Theme from Shaft," 164  
 Themes, music and, 10–11  
 "There Goes My Baby," 64  
*There Goes Rhyming Simon*, 318  
 "These Days," 152  
*These Things* fanzine, 249  
 "Think," 165  
 "Think for Yourself," 86  
 Thin Lizzy, 304  
 "Third Stone from the Sun," 219  
*13 Songs of Fugazi*, 349  
*This Land Is Your Land: The Asch Recordings of Woody Guthrie*, 345  
 Thomas, Dylan, 135  
 Thomas, Rufus, 105, 161  
 Thompson, Dave, 278  
 Thompson, Hank, 53  
 Thornton, Big Mama, 64, 203  
 "Those Oldies but Goodies (Remind Me of You)," 65  
 "A Thousand Miles Away," 65  
 "Three More Days of Peace and Music," 294  
 Three Tunes, 53  
*Thriller*, 183, 264–265  
 "Thriller," 265  
 "Thugz Mansion," 286  
 Thunders, Johnny, 246  
 Tibetan Freedom Festival, 289  
 Ticketmaster, 284

- Till, Sonny, 18, 62  
 “Till I Kissed You,” 57  
 “Till There Was You,” 80  
*Time Capsule*, 348  
 “Time Is on My Side,” 106  
*Time* magazine, 196, 264  
*Time Out of Mind*, 144  
*Times*, 109  
*The Times They Are a-Changin’*, 137–138, 345  
 Time–Warner, 266  
 Tin Pan Alley, 81  
 Tin Pan Alley/Brill Building method, 174  
 “To Be Loved,” 313  
*Today* (TV magazine show), 249  
*Together*, 199  
 “To Know Her Is to Love Her,” 80  
 “To Know Him Is to Love Him,” 71  
 Tom and Jerry, 317  
 “Tom Dooley,” 72, 134  
*Tommy*, 122, 125–125, 127, 345  
 Tommy Boy, 270  
 “Tomorrow Never Knows,” 86, 87  
 Tool, 304  
 Topical songs, 132–133  
*Top of the Pops* (TV show), 218  
*The Top Ten Hits of Elvis Presley*, 343  
 Tork, Peter, 220  
 “Touch of Gray,” 202  
 Tower of Power, 241  
 Tower Records, 306, 308  
 Townshend, Betty, 119  
 Townshend, Pete, 118, 214, 215, 218, 281, 296, 316  
     and Daltrey, conflict between, 121, 123  
     drug use and, 121, 122, 125  
     early years of, 119–120  
     Eastern mystic and, 125  
     film projects of, 126–128  
     and Jones, death of, 112  
     Lambert and, 121–122  
     songwriting of, 119, 122, 124, 125, 126–128, 129  
 “The Tracks of My Tears,” 173, 174  
 Traffic, 88, 110, 214, 316–317, 349  
 Trance, 297  
*Transformer*, 245  
 Transmission, music and, 12  
 “Trash,” 246  
 Traveling Wilburys, 314  
 “Travelin’ Man,” 59  
 Travis, Merle, 56, 208, 209, 236  
 Tremeloes, 80  
 A Tribe Called Quest (ATCQ), 290, 349  
 “Tribute to Woody,” 135  
 Trice, Obie, 288  
 Tricky, 294  
 Triumph Investment Trust, 93  
 Troggs, 220  
 Trower, Robin, 225  
 “Truckin’”, 202  
*True Blue*, 266  
 Trujillo, Robert, 304  
 Trumbo, Dalton, 303  
*Truth*, 225  
 Tucker, Ken, 238  
 “Tuesday’s Gone,” 309  
 Tull, Jethro, 111, 303, 348  
*Tupelo Honey*, 316  
 “Turn, Turn, Turn,” 134, 147  
 Turner, Big Joe, 32, 343  
 Turner, Ike, 33, 71, 344  
 Turner, Tina, 71, 261, 344  
*Turn It on Again: The Hits of Genesis*, 348  
 “Turn on Your Love Light,” 201  
 “Turn the Page,” 304  
 “Tutti-Frutti,” 38  
*Twang Thang: Anthology of Duane Eddy*, 344  
 Twentieth Century-Fox Records, 172  
*20th Century Masters—The Millennium Collection: Best of Joan Baez*, 345  
*20th Century Masters—The Millennium Collection: Best of Public Enemy*, 349  
*20th Century Masters—The Millennium Collection: Best of the Flying Burrito Brothers*, 346  
*20th Century Masters: Best of Brenda Lee*, 343  
*Twenty All-Time Greatest Hits of James Brown*, 346  
*25 All-Time Greatest Hits of the Shirelles*, 344  
 “Twenty Flight Rock,” 59, 77  
 Twickenham Film Studios, 94  
 “Twilight Time,” 63  
 “The Twist,” 69  
 “Twist and Shout,” 82, 85  
 Twisted Sister, 301  
 2 Live Crew, 272, 349  
 “2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted,” 287  
*2Pacalypse Now*, 285, 286  
 “2000 Light Years from Home,” 107  
 Tyler, Stephen, 239  
 Tympani Five (or Six), 18  
 Tynan, Kenneth, 88  
 Tyner, Rob, 245  
 “Tzena, Tzena, Tzena,” 133  
 UB40, 254, 262  
 Ulrich, Lars, 302, 304, 305–306  
*Ultimate Bobby Darin*, 343  
*Ultimate Collection of Martha and the Vandellas*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of Marvin Gaye*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of Mary Wells*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of Poco*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of the Four Tops*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of the Jackson 5*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of the Supremes*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of the Temptations*, 346  
*Ultimate Collection of the Who*, 345  
*Ultimate Hits: Collection of Ray Charles*, 346  
 Uncle Meat, 317  
 Uncle Tupelo, 256  
 Underground groups, 274–292  
     do-it-yourself method and, 276, 278  
     independent promoters and, 278  
     independent record labels and, 278  
     “zines” and, 278  
 “Under My Thumb,” 107, 108  
 “Under the Bridge,” 279  
*Unfinished Paintings and Objects* (Ono), 88  
*The Unforgettable Fire*, 275  
 “The Unforgiven,” 303  
*Unforgiven* (film), 303  
 “Union Maid,” 133  
 Universal Music Group, 308  
 University of California at Berkeley, 188  
*Unplugged* (MTV), 282  
 “Up on Cripple Creek,” 153

- “Up on the Roof,” 65, 71  
 “Uptight,” 182  
 Urban blues, 16, 17  
 U.S. Army, 298  
 U.S. Communications Act of 1934, 308  
 U.S. Congress, 284, 301  
 U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, 298  
 U.S. House of Representatives  
     Legislative Oversight  
     Committee, 69–70  
 U.S. Justice Department, 284  
 Usher, 307  
 Ustinov, Peter, 80  
 U2, 275–276, 278, 289–290, 304, 307, 349  
     political activism and, 275–276  
*U2: Into the Heart* (Stokes), 276  
  
 Valens, Richie, 55, 216  
 Vandellas, 171, 174, 175, 183, 346  
 Van Dyke, Earl, 171  
 Van Eaton, J. M., 51  
 Vanguard Records, 199  
 Van Halen, Eddie, 265, 267, 268  
 Van Heldon, Armand, 299  
 Vanilla Fudge, 232, 233, 238, 349  
 Vanilla Ice, 288  
*Vanity Fair* magazine, 282  
 Van Ronk, Dave, 134  
 Van Zandt, “Little Steven,” 262  
 Varese Saraband label, 342  
 Vasquez, Junior, 299  
*Vault: Greatest Hits of Def Leppard*, 349  
 “Vaya con Dios,” 208  
 Vedder, Eddie, 283  
 Vee, Bobby, 70, 71  
 Vejtables, 190  
 Velvet Underground, 245, 348  
 Ventures, 344  
 Venuti, Joe, 207  
 Verbal Assault, 256  
 Verrett, Harrison, 28, 30  
 “Vertigo,” 307  
*Very Best of Big Joe Turner*, 343  
*Very Best of Booker T. and the M.G.s*, 346  
*Very Best of Deep Purple*, 347  
*Very Best of Elvis Costello*, 348  
*Very Best of Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers*, 343  
*Very Best of Hank Williams*, 342  
  
*Very Best of Harry Belafonte*, 344  
*Very Best of Jackie Wilson*, 350  
*Very Best of Jethro Tull*, 348  
*Very Best of Joe Tex*, 346  
*Very Best of Kiss*, 347  
*Very Best of Linda Ronstadt*, 348  
*Very Best of Otis Redding*, 346  
*Very Best of Prince*, 348  
*Very Best of Sam and Dave*, 346  
*Very Best of Solomon Burke*, 346  
*Very Best of the Swan Silvertones: Do You Believe*, 342  
*Very Best of the Coasters*, 343  
*Very Best of the Doors*, 348  
*Very Best of the Drifters*, 343  
*Very Best of the Eagles*, 346  
*Very Best of the Grateful Dead*, 347  
*Very Best of Wilson Pickett*, 346  
*Very Best of Yes*, 348  
 VH-1, 260  
*Vibe* magazine, 287  
 Vibrators, 248  
 Vicious, Sid (John Beverly), 248, 249  
     drug use and, 251  
     murder charge against, 251  
 Video jukebox, 259  
 Vietnam War, 188, 198, 230, 274  
 Vigoda, Jonathan, 182  
 Village People, 350  
*Village Voice*, 220, 221  
 Vincent, Gene, 58, 59, 343  
 Vinton, Bobby, 70  
 Vinyl LPs  
     collecting, 342  
     compact discs versus, 260, 261  
 Virgin Records, 250  
 Vito and the Salutations, 65  
 V-J, 82  
 VJs, 258  
*Vogue* magazine, 106  
 “Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)”, 221  
 Voorman, Klaus, 96  
  
 WABC radio, 69  
 Waddell, Ray, 305  
 Wakeman, Rick, 240  
*Wake of the Flood*, 202  
 “Wake Up Little Susie,” 57, 58  
 Walden, Phil, 161  
  
*Walk, Don’t Run: Best of the Ventures*, 344  
 Walker, Aaron “T-Bone,” 17, 33, 207–208, 219  
 Walker, Junior, 174  
 “Walkin’ the Dog,” 105  
 “Walk on the Wild Side,” 245  
 “Walk This Way,” 270  
*The Wall*, 240  
 “Wall of sound” production technique, 71  
*Wall Street Journal*, 308  
 Walser, Robert, 267, 268–269  
 Walsh, Joe, 151, 225  
 War, 276  
 “War,” 179–180  
 Ward, Billy, 65, 313, 343  
 Ward, Clara, 165  
 Ward, Tony, 266  
 Warhol, Andy, 114, 245, 299  
 Warlocks, 189, 192  
 “(Warm) San Francisco Nights,” 196, 315  
 Warner Bros. Records, 57, 199, 258  
 Warner Bros./Reprise, 229  
 Warner Music Group, 308  
 Warped Tour, 308  
 “War Pigs,” 303  
 Washington, Dinah, 165  
 Washington Music Industry Coalition, 282  
 “Waterloo Sunset,” 315  
 Waters, Muddy (McKinley Morganfield), 17, 22, 34, 49, 52, 53, 102, 106, 135, 154, 216, 221, 342  
 Waters, Roger, 240  
 Watkins, Glen, 261  
 Watts, Charlie, 102, 115  
     early years of, 104  
*Wave of Mutilation: Best of the Pixies*, 349  
 “Wayne’s World” (*Saturday Night Live* skit), 301  
 “The Way You Do the Things You Do,” 174, 178  
 WDIA radio, 43  
 WEA, 229, 248  
*Weasels Ripped My Flesh*, 317  
 Weavers, 133–134, 199, 345  
*Wednesday Morning, 3 AM*, 317

- “We Gotta Get Out of This Place,” 315  
 “We Had to Tear This Motha—Up,” 284  
 “The Weight,” 153  
 Weil, Cynthia, 71  
 Weir, Bob, 193  
 “Welcome Back,” 153  
*Welcome Back Kotter* (TV series), 153  
 “Well Respected Man,” 315  
 Wells, Mary, 72, 172, 178, 180, 183, 346  
 Wenner, Jann, 197  
*We’re Only in It for the Money*, 317  
 “We Shall Overcome,” 134  
 “We Should Be Together,” 198  
*We Sold Our Souls for Rock ‘n’ Roll*, 347  
 West, Leslie, 225  
 Weston, Kim, 180  
 Westwood, Vivienne, 247  
 Wexler, Jerry, 160, 164, 165  
 “What’d I Say,” 157  
 “What I Got,” 284  
 “What’s Goin’ On,” 180  
*What’s Goin’ On*, 180  
 “What’s Happenin’ Brother,” 180  
*Wheels of Fire*, 212, 213  
 “Wheels of Fire,” 142  
 “When a Man Loves a Woman,” 165  
 “When Will I Be Loved,” 57  
 “Where Did Our Love Go?” 176  
 “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” 134  
 “Where the Streets Have No Name,” 275  
 “While My Guitar Gently Weeps,” 92  
 “Whiskey in a Jar,” 304  
 “Whispers,” 313  
 White, Alan, 96  
 White, Andy, 80–81  
 White, Armond, 285  
 White, Ted, 165  
*White Album*, 92, 94, 95, 114  
 “White America,” 288  
 “White Rabbit,” 179, 195–196  
 “White Riot,” 251  
*White Riot* fanzine, 249  
 “White Room,” 213–214  
 White Stripes, 308  
 White Zombie, 303  
 Whitfield, Norman, 175, 179, 180  
 Whitlock, Bobby, 215  
 Whitten, Danny, 149  
 Who, 93, 111, 118–129, 152, 163, 195, 197, 214, 220, 230, 231, 237, 238, 239, 261, 266, 316, 345  
     Beatles versus, 119  
     concert tours of, 128  
     conflict within, 121, 122–123  
     as Detours, 120  
     drug use and, 121, 122–123, 124–125, 126  
     as High Numbers, 121  
     instrument smashing and, 122, 124  
     live shows of, 123–124  
     management of, 120–121, 121–122  
     at Monterey Pop Festival, 124  
     at Murray the K’s Easter Show, 124  
     musical creativity of, 119  
     musical training of, 120  
     performance style of, 118–119, 124, 128–129  
     recording contracts of, 122  
     Rolling Stones versus, 119  
     success of, 126  
     Tommy tour of, 126  
     TV exposure of, 124  
     in U.S., 124, 127  
     at Woodstock, 126  
*Who Are You*, 128, 345  
 “Whole Lot of Shakin’ Going On,” 50  
 “Whole Lotta Love,” 234  
 “Whole Lotta Loving,” 29  
*Who Made Who*, 347  
*The Who Sell Out*, 124  
*Who’s Next*, 127–128, 345  
*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (TV show), 304  
 “Why Does Love Have to Be So Sad,” 215  
 “Why Do Fools Fall in Love,” 63  
 “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road,” 93  
 “Why Don’t You Write Me,” 63  
 Widespread Panic, 296  
 Wilco, 256, 297  
*The Wild, the Innocent, and the E Street Shuffle*, 263  
 “Wild Horses,” 114, 115  
 “Wild Thing,” 220  
 Williams, Alan, 78  
 Williams, Andy, 56  
 Williams, Hank, 19, 31, 50, 52, 342  
 Williams, Larry, 81  
 Williams, Otis, 178  
 Williams, Paul, 178, 179  
 Williams, Pharrell, 307  
 Williams, Tony, 63  
 Williamson, Sonny Boy, 43  
 “Willie and the Hand Jive,” 216  
 Wills, Bob, 19, 43, 342  
 “Will You Love Me Tomorrow?” 71  
 Wilson, Ann, 240  
 Wilson, B. J., 231  
 Wilson, Brian, 72–73, 152, 173  
 Wilson, Carl, 72  
 Wilson, Dennis, 72, 73  
 Wilson, Devon, 221  
 Wilson, Eric, 283  
 Wilson, Jackie, 160, 171, 217, 313–314, 350  
 Wilson, Mary, 175–176, 177  
 Wilson, Murray, 73  
 Wilson, Nancy, 240  
 Wilson, Tom, 137, 317  
 Wilson, Wes, 191  
 “The Wind Cries Mary,” 219  
 Winfrey, Oprah, 285  
 Wings, 97  
 Wink (Texas) Westerners, 314  
*Winnie the Pooh* (Milne), 111  
 WINS radio, 23  
 Winter, Johnny, 221, 222  
 Winwood, Steve, 211, 214, 215, 221, 316–317  
 “Witchy Woman,” 151  
 “Within You, Without You,” 89  
 “With or Without You,” 275  
 “Without Me,” 300  
*With the Beatles*, 82, 344  
 WJW radio, 23  
 Wolfe, Tom, 90, 191  
 Wonder, Stevie, 183, 228, 262, 264, 346  
     early years of, 181–182  
 “Wonderful World,” 160  
 “Won’t Get Fooled Again,” 127  
 Wood, Chris, 316  
 Wood, Ron, 114, 120, 215, 225  
 Woods, Phil, 318

- “Woodstock,” 152, 295  
*Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*, 349  
 Woodstock festival, 153, 222, 261, 294, 295, 296  
*Woodstock* (film), 295  
 Woodstock II, 294–295, 296  
 Woodstock III, 296  
 “The Word,” 87  
*Workingman’s Dead*, 202  
 “Work with Me, Annie,” 21  
 “Worried Man Blues,” 19  
*Worst of the Jefferson Airplane*, 347  
 Wrens, 62  
 WSM radio, 43  
 Wyman, Bill (née Perks), 102, 115  
     early years of, 104  
  
 X, 254  
 Xerox music, 248  
 X-Ray Spex, 252, 261  
 XTC, 348  
  
 “Yakety Yak,” 64, 216  
 Yanovsky, Zal, 153  
 Yardbirds, 85, 206, 210, 225, 230, 231, 232, 347  
 “Yeah,” 307  
*Yellow Submarine*, 344  
 “Yellow Submarine,” 87  
 “Yer Blues,” 92  
 Yes, 225, 240, 250, 348  
 “Yesterday,” 84, 86, 94  
*Yesterday and Today*, 84–85  
*Yo! MTV Raps* (TV show), 260  
 “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” 112  
 “You Can’t Hurry Love,” 176  
 “You Didn’t Have to Be So Nice,” 153  
 “(You Gotta) Fight for the Right (to Party),” 270  
 “You Keep Me Hanging On,” 176  
 “You Need Love,” 234  
 “You Never Can Tell,” 35  
*Young, Gifted, and Black*, 166  
  
 Young, Neil, 147, 148–149, 154  
 Young, Rusty, 148  
 “Youngblood,” 64  
 Youngbloods, 347  
 “Young Man Blues,” 127  
 “You Really Got a Hold on Me,” 173  
 “You Really Got Me,” 231, 315  
*Your Hit Parade*, 26  
 “(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher,” 313  
 “Your Revolution,” 309  
 “You Send Me,” 160  
 “You Shook Me,” 232  
  
 Zappa, Frank, 141, 189, 301, 317, 350  
 Zimmerman, Abe, 134  
 “Zines,” 278  
 Zombie, Rob, 304  
 Zoo TV tour, 276  
 Zulu Nation, 269