

Pop-Styled Rock Music

In general, all rock music is pop music in the sense that it requires no special listening skills to understand and appreciate it. Art music requires some understanding of musical form and harmonic language to understand. Folk music requires an appreciation and some understanding of the cultures creating it. Pop music, on the other hand requires no special skills or appreciation.

It was not the concern of pop music to raise levels of social consciousness or to make political statements. Rock music, on the other hand, made social statements from the very beginning. The roots of blues and rhythm and blues were, by their very nature making social statements. The statements made may have been those of a rebellious teen seeking an identity other than that of the parent's generation or seeking a freedom from authority. Some called for sexual freedom while others affirmed an ethnic identity. Regardless of the philosophical ideal present, the music of Elvis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and others was not truly pop, in the normally accepted sense of the term.

By 1960, the strongest performers of the energetic rock music of the mid-50's had quit performing. Some of them had died. Little Richard had gone into the ministry. Elvis was in the military, and Chuck Berry was on trial for immoral behavior. The absence of the strong rock performers left the stage open for the development of pop-rock music.

Some of the strong rock performers must have sensed a shift in direction because they had begun making changes toward the pop trends. Elvis had moved that direction, as had Buddy Holly. Two rockabilly artists who didn't want to move that direction left the U.S. and went to England and Canada to perform.

The Payola Scandal

In the early days of rock and roll, one way to get airplay on radio stations was to pay the disc jockeys. This practice was common and was called *payola*. Toward the end of the 50's, a conflict developed between the two organizations involved in protecting the interests of musicians. These organizations were **ASCAP** (The American Society of Composers and Publishers) and **BMI** (Broadcast Music, Inc.). ASCAP had been formed in 1914 and collected royalties for its members which included few rock musicians. Most rock musicians belonged to BMI, formed in 1940, which collected royalties for its members. BMI had been formed by the National Association of Broadcasters, who resisted ASCAP's licensing terms and fees for airplay as well as ASCAP's general monopoly on the business. As long as art music retained a significant share of the business, the two organizations competed, but it seemed to be a healthy competition. As rock became more and more popular, ASCAP began losing their share of the market and money. As they looked for ways to fight against BMI, they found one way to discredit the music handled by BMI. That way was to report the practice of *payola*. While this practice wasn't illegal at the time, it was considered to be unethical in the broadcasting business. ASCAP requested that Congress investigate the practice. As a result, the

investigation put many small record companies and many disc jockeys out of business and created legislation that made the practice illegal. The companies and individuals who were ruined tended to be those who promoted music by African-American performers.

Teen-Idol Pop

Some of the pop-styled music of the 50's, then known as *teen idol* pop, grew out of the crooner tradition of Perry Como and Bing Crosby. In 1952, a TV show began in Philadelphia called *Bandstand*. In 1956, the original host, Bob Horn, was replaced by Dick Clark. In 1957, the show changed its name to *American Bandstand*. By that time, the show had syndicated and was broadcast on 67 stations nationwide. American Bandstand did occasionally feature rockabilly and R&B artists, but most often, it spotlighted clean-cut, pop-styled white teen idols such as Pat Boone, Paul Anka, Frankie Avalon, and others like them. There was no place on American Bandstand for the leather jacketed rockabilly singers who performed songs with rebellious messages. While American Bandstand did change its dress code over the years, it always promoted a clean and conservative image. When industry leaders saw rock music as a threat to the moral base of American society, only shows like American Bandstand, with their image of clean-cut kids having fun, were allowed to continue.

Dick Clark was investigated for payola because he had financial interests in many of the groups featured on his show. When his attorneys were able to prove that Clark featured groups he had no financial interests in, he was exonerated. The image the show maintained was another reason courts were reluctant to end the show.

American Bandstand brought rock music and dances to teen fans, but it was an afternoon program. Ed Sullivan was an evening program designed for family entertainment and he realized he would also have to feature rock music in order for his show to continue. By 1965, in addition to occasional rock performances on the Ed Sullivan Show, ABC added a prime-time rock show called *Shindig* and NBC added *Hullabaloo*. In those pre-MTV days, these shows served to bring live rock and roll to eager fans.

Listen to Pat Boone---Tutti Frutti

Listen to Little Richard---Tutti Frutti

Compare the two performances.

Pat Boone covered blues and R&B songs, but he did not speed them up as had rockabilly performers. Rather, he made changes that fit his own clean-cut, boy next door image.

Many would argue that Boone was not a rock singer at all. Yet, when one considers all the different styles considered rock during the 50's, Boone was clearly within that style in his recording of *Tutti Frutti*, at least from an historical perspective. The same can be said of much of the rock coming from this period.

The TV and movie industries supported the clean-cut teen idol image. Boone played in several movies and others were made, keeping this same image with other performers. Among them was Frankie Avalon, who popularized these movies by playing roles in several, such as *Beach Blanket Bingo*, with Annette Funicello (a former Muskateer). Ricky Nelson also was important through appearances on his parents' TV show, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.

Listen to Frankie Avalon---Yellow Polka Dot Bikini, and Oh What a Night

Among popular female vocalists was Connie Francis. She began her singing career at the age of 7 by singing on radio and TV shows in her hometown of Atlanta, GA. She developed a mature contralto voice and sang popular teen theme songs as well as standards from the 20's and 30's. Her style was rockabilly. During the 60's, she sang pop, and later turned to country.

Listen to Connie Francis---Who's Sorry Now and My Boy Friend's Back

Most of the teen-idol singers were popular for their appearance as much as for their abilities. Few of them could play the guitar and generally just sang. In movies, TV appearances, and even in live performances, they frequently performed by *lip-syncing* (to songs they recorded---unlike Milli Vanilli). Seldom were these singers also song writers. Paul Anka, however, was an exception. He wrote songs for himself and for other performers. Among his compositions is the theme music for Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.

Listen to Paul Anka---Diana

Texts of most of the songs sung by the teen-idols were as youthful and dreamy as the image they were trying to project. Songs about love and broken hearts prevailed.

Because it featured teen dancers, American Bandstand started and/or spread the popularity of many of the dance crazes of the late 50's and early 60's. The *Bop* was danced to many songs, including *At the Hop* by Danny and the Juniors.

Listen to Danny and the Juniors---At the Hop

Several variations of the *Bop* included the Pony, the Chicken, and the Monkey.

In 1960, a young singer from Philadelphia covered a song recorded by blues artist, Hank Ballard. Ernest Evans became known as **Chubby Checker** and the song, **The Twist** and its companion dance became a craze that continued for a few years. Songs recorded after that one included, **Let's Twist Again**, **Twist and Shout**, and **Peppermint Twist**.

Listen to Chubby Checker---The Twist and Let's Twist Again

When considering American popular music in the 20th century, it is necessary to consider pop music that comes from Latin rhythms and other Latin musical characteristics. One teen idol who had Latin roots was Ritchie Valens'.

Listen to Ritchie Valens'---La Bamba

This piece was later covered by Los Lobos and has remained popular. The *A* side of Valens' recording of *La Bamba* was really more popular in 1959, when it was made, than was *La Bamba*.

Listen to Ritchie Valens'---Donna

Dion DiMucci grew up singing to friends in the Bronx. He grew up listening to doo-wop and liked the sound of a lead singer backed up by a group. So, he asked three friends to sing backup vocals for him. They lived near Belmont Avenue and took the name *Dion and the Belmonts*. The group went on tour in 1959 with Buddy Holly. But, rather than taking the plane with Buddy Holly, Dion took the bus. Realizing how narrowly he had escaped death only aggravated his drug problem. The group broke up. Dion continued to perform with different groups. He briefly returned to fame in 1968 with what became a popular piece---*Abraham, Martin, and John*.

Listen to Dion and the Belmonts---Abraham, Martin, and John and Our Last Kiss

Listen to Pearl Jam---Last Kiss

The *Four Seasons* had a longer career than most of the other groups of their type. The focal point of the group was the high falsetto voice of their lead singer, Frankie Valli. They had been recording since 1956, but their first big hit was in 1962 with *Sherry*.

Listen to The Four Seasons---Sherry and The Lion Sleeps Tonight

New York Pop

Pop performers have seldom been song writers. The burst of groups on the pop scene meant that a large volume of music was needed. Many pop-style hits between 1959 and 1963 were written and published in **The Brill Building** or at the **Aldon Music Company**, both located in New York City. In all this music, there is evidence of doo-wop, gospel, and teen-idol styles. Some songs included short-story lines, which were unusual for pop music of the time.

Listen to the Shangri-Las---Leader of the Pack

Listen to Twisted Sister---Leader of the Pack

The pop sound of the early 60's gave women a greater chance to perform than had the blues or R&B of the 50's. There was, therefore, a rise of *girl groups*. Many of these groups were trios or quartets. One such group that put 12 top ten hits on the pop charts between 1960 and 1963 was *The Shirelles*. In addition to being popular performers, they

also wrote many of their own songs. One hit of the *Shirelles*, *Will You Love Me Tomorrow* was written by Carole King and her husband, Gerry Goffin. The piece is a good example of the pop sound that came out of **The Brill Building**.

Listen to The Shirelles---Will You Love Me Tomorrow?

Phil Spector's Wall of Sound Productions

Phil Spector was a writer/producer at the Brill Building and contributed much to the popularity of girl groups of the 60's. Few writers had Spector's skill when it came to production. His style became known as the "wall of sound." He used many instruments and overdubbed and mixed them thoroughly. The result was a massive fortification of instrumental colors behind the vocals. His productions were typically thick and full. He didn't like recording in stereo because it separated the instruments. When he did allow an instrument to stand out, the effect was very colorful. He added the natural sound of rain in the background of "Walking in the Rain."

Listen to The Ronettes---Walking In the Rain

Spector liked classical music, especially the music of Richard Wagner. For Spector, a single drum set wasn't enough. Rather, he used the full spectrum of percussion instruments available to him. His productions did not sound Wagnerian, but they did have a rich fullness that was not present in many pop recordings of the day that had used brass and strings. Spector considered his productions to be symphonies for teens.

Spector wanted to stay on top of recording trends, so when the British Invasion began, Spector traveled to England to take part in some of the early recordings. In 1966, he produced what he considered to be his best work, *River Deep-Mountain High* for Ike and Tina Turner. Because rock tastes had changed, this recording wasn't selling as rapidly as earlier ones and he became depressed, isolating himself.

Listen to Ike and Tina Turner---River Deep-Mountain High

Because his reputation was so good, in terms of quality recordings, Spector was called on by many to record works for them, even after 1966. George Harrison and John Lennon both had Spector produce albums for them after the break-up of the Beatles.

Listen to John Lennon---Imagine

The Surf Sound

Pop music on the East Coast in the early 60's was dominated by songs about puppy love and teen dances. But pop music on the West Coast developed their own style, known as surf rock. This music was much different from the East Coast pop. Its styles were not based on the old crooner styles and surf bands usually played their own instruments. In some ways, surf rock represented a return to the older style of rock and roll, but it still tended to light and pop-oriented so it is usually considered to part of the pop-rock style. Vocals remained important in the surf style, but instrumental hits were more common in this style than in any other style preceding it. While many different instruments were common in surf music, the electric guitar was the most common lead instrument. The guitar style that became the foundation of much surf music was based on the styles of Duane Eddy, the Ventures, and Dick Dale.

Listen to The Ventures---Secret Agent Man and Wipe-out

Wipe-Out was originally done by the surf group, the Sufaris.

Duane Eddy's style of playing was achieved by plucking the guitar strings very close to the bridge. This results in a strong, nasal-sounding attack. He used the tremolo arm on the guitar to bend the pitch. The vibrato that resulted and the echo effects gave the guitar a sound that was constantly wavering. This may have reminded the audience of the motion of water, causing it to be incorporated in much surf music.

The Ventures became one of the earliest groups to receive the label of surf rock. But, they went further by doing sound tracks for Hawaii Five-O in addition to others.

The Beach Boys were formed by three brothers, Brian, Carl, and Dennis (1944-1983) Wilson, their cousin, Mike Love, and a neighbor, Alan Jardine. They used several names as they began, but settled on The Beach Boys by the time they recorded *Surfin'*, their first big hit. Carl Wilson did use Eddy's guitar style, but he also used the riff style made popular by Chuck Berry. Brian Wilson had been a fan of the vocal group, The Four freshmen, and used their vocal styles and harmonies in many Beach Boys hits. Brian also came close to achieving Phil Spector's *wall of sound* as he became more and more familiar with studio production techniques.

An early hit by the Beach Boys, *Surfin' USA* (1963), had the same melody and chord progressions of Chuck Berry's *Sweet Little Sixteen* (1958). Wilson probably believed he had really written the piece, but later gave credit and royalties to Berry.

Listen to Chuck Berry---Sweet Little Sixteen

Listen to Beach Boys---Surfin' USA

By late 1963, Brian Wilson had become an accomplished writer and expanded the Beach Boys to themes about fast cars and school spirit.

By 1966, Brian Wilson experienced a nervous breakdown. As a result, he quit touring. His place was taken first by Glenn Campbell, then by Bruce Johnston. Wilson kept writing and producing music for the Beach Boys and sang on recordings. Without the pressure of touring, however, he was able to focus on songwriting. The Beach Boys' most important album was created in 1966, *Pet Sounds*. The album was not the group's greatest commercial success, but all its songs were connected thematically, and this influenced many other rock albums to come. The standard album to this point was just a collection of songs with no thematic connection. *Pet Sounds* was connected, but it was connected without a clue from the title. The theme slowly emerged as one song led to the next. In general, it is about hopes, dreams, and anxiety about the present and future felt by a young person growing up.

Pet Sounds could be credited for starting a trend of the late 60's. But, it was the Beatles and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* stimulated other groups to create *concept albums*. The Beatles gave credit to the Beach Boys by adding animal sounds on the album, something Brian Wilson had done with *Pet Sounds*.

Good Vibrations followed *Pet Sounds* as the next hit single. This was a complex production that included non-traditional instruments such as sleigh bells and a *theremin*, an electronic instrument.

After 1976, the Beach Boys didn't have a lot of success. There were many personal struggles---Brian battling drugs---and the death of Dennis---drowning in 1983. In 1988, they released their hit, *Kokomo*, on the soundtrack of *Cocktail*.

The Beach Boys carried surf music to new heights and actually left it behind to create a more complex type of music.