

The Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll

Week 1, February 12, 2018

The Musical Context Before Rock 'n' Roll

Assignment:

For our first meeting, we'll focus on what came before rock 'n' roll. The assignment is entirely listening: a representative song from each of the genres which influenced RnR and a series of candidates for "the first rock 'n' roll song."

[You can listen via these links which go to YouTube or you can find the song on Spotify, Apple Music, etc. More about listening options during our first class.]

The Genres:

Gospel : *Feel Like My Time Ain't Long*, The Soul Stirrers, 1950

<https://youtu.be/jKHeieh-WqY>

-Think about the relationship between the lead singer and the background response to the lyric.

-Notice the following: -Emotional delivery

-Use of back-up ensemble to mimic a horn section. -Use of call and response structure.

-Leader makes a statement, answered by chorus.

Black Country Blues: *Rollin' Blues*, Lightnin' Hopkins, 1947

<https://youtu.be/jT17eCKZHJM>

-Notice the following:

-Sparse arrangement. Self-accompaniment on single instrument is common in this form.

-16 bar structure (or 12 bar)

-Typical blues lyric form -Statement in line 1

-Repeat statement in line 2

-Expand on statement and complete the thought. -Use of instrumental break between verses.

Hillbilly : *Move It On Over* , Hank Williams, 1947

<https://youtu.be/-Lza3NVH6Ig>

-Notice the following:

-12 bar structure

-Modified blues bass line with greater emphasis on “boom- chuk” rhythm

-Use of humor in lyric

-Use of steel guitar and fiddle

Big Band Swing Jazz : *Sent For You Yesterday* , Count Basie, 1938

<https://youtu.be/MKIVmWIKHOI>

-Notice the following:

-Full orchestra arrangement

-Heavy emphasis on bass and drums

-This is, above all, dance music.

-Traditional Blues structure.

-Typically single vocalist with instrumental backing.

Tin Pan Alley Pop : *If I Didn't Care*, The Ink Spots, 1939

<https://youtu.be/rvwfLe6sLis>

-Notice the following:

-More complex harmonic structure, employing major/minor chord changes.

-More elaborate song structure

-Lyrics often more sophisticated.

-Vocal contrast of basso profundo and high tenor lead.

Country Swing : *Ida Red* , Bob Wills & The Texas Playboys, 1951

<https://youtu.be/ZFef08YZ6qk>

-Notice the following:

-Adaptation of Big Band to country instrumentation and rhythm.

-Like big band it has an insistent, dance beat.

Electric Urban Blues : *Mean Old World* , T-Bone Walker, 1942

https://youtu.be/y1x0-AjX__M

-Notice the following:

-Greater emphasis on guitar virtuosity. -Rhythmically more insistent than country blues. -Emphasis on backbeat.

-Yet still retaining traditional lyric structure. -More typically played in small ensemble.

Jump Blues : *Let The Good Times Roll* , Louis Jordan, 1946

<https://youtu.be/YdQJ3Q0uhYE>

-Notice the following:

-This is a form of Big Band swing jazz

-After WWII many bands down-scaled to smaller ensembles as a money-saving measure.

-Like big band swing, insistent bass and drum are designed for dancing.

-Backbeat pronounced.

Rhythm & Blues : *Ting-a-Ling* , The Clovers, 1952

https://youtu.be/4Jlrac_-j9g

Notice the following: -Vocal ensemble

-Relatively spare orchestration.

-Emphasis on use of background vocals in place of orchestra. -Use of nonsense syllables in background (PROTO DOO WOP) -Emphasis on rhythmic urgency.

Backbeat strongly pronounced.

Candidates for the first rock 'n' roll record:

Try to identify some aspect of the performance which would qualify the record as a candidate. We'll discuss this question at length in class!

That's All Right, Mama, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup (1946); cf Elvis

<https://youtu.be/uxHQUvCkV20>

Let the Good Times Roll, Louis Jordan & The Tympany Five (1946)

<https://youtu.be/YdQJ3Q0uhYE>

Good Rockin' Tonight, Wynonie Harris (1948)

https://youtu.be/_7IFrGZMzYU

Rock This Joint, Jimmy Preston and his Prestonians (1949)

<https://youtu.be/WLKIF7TX2BI>

Rock a While, Goree Carter (1949)

<https://youtu.be/H3FNLnFg6Ck>

Rocket 88, Jackie Brenston and his Delta Cats (1951) (Ike Turner)

<https://youtu.be/Gbfnh1oVTk0>

BBC Documentary: at 7:00 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYcadYXsTyM)

[v=tYcadYXsTyM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYcadYXsTyM)

Lawdy Miss Clawdy, Lloyd Price (Fats Domino on piano) (1952); cf Elvis

<https://youtu.be/vre2POdgJbs>

Money Honey, Drifters (McPhatter) (1953); cf Elvis

<https://youtu.be/N8oNHMNCSjQ>

Shake Rattle and Roll, Joe Turner (1954)

<https://youtu.be/YhELpSeeipg>