

The Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll

Week 2, February 26, 2018

Song Structure, Chord Progressions; 1954 and 1955: Vocal Groups

Assignment:

Rolling Stone: *The '50s*

<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/the-50s-19900419>

Written in 1990 by Robert Palmer, a rock journalist, to try to evoke for a generation far removed from the '50s what it was like to be there. The most important observation is that, for the first time, teenagers embraced music which was not only not the music of their parents but was music their parents actively scorned.

Carl Belz, "The Beginnings of Rock", chapter 2 of *The Story of Rock*.

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/BelzStoryOfRockChp2.pdf>

Excellent discussion of the preceding status quo and very adept descriptions of the relevant events of 1954-1957.

Charlie Gillett, "The Five Styles of Rock 'n' Roll", from *Sound of the City: the Rise of Rock and Roll*.

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/GillettFiveStylesRnR.pdf>

Gillett argues that RnR was not just one style but five distinct styles! If you didn't get a chance to read this for last week's class, please read it now!

Listen to:

Honey Love, The Drifters (lead: Clyde McPhatter), 1954

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCwWCAVXGe8>

lots of Caribbean flavor; the Memphis police prohibit The Drifters' "Honey Love" from being loaded into jukeboxes, due to what they considered "suggestive lyrics."

Sh-Boom, Chords, 1954 (covered by The Crewcuts which went to #1)

Compare the two:

Chords: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTL59_kHfCk

Crewcuts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9G0-4TWwew>

Stan Freeberg's parody of both (mentioned in Belz)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TFJhZa4V7o

Prof Covach: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfckHfQjpyM>

We'll discuss the concept of a "cover" record.

To understand the phenomenon of "covers", compare these three versions:

Hearts (Made) of Stone, The Jewels, 1954 (original; did not chart)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_LG34UCdcY

covered by The Charms, 1954 (#1 R&B)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTr4ObolvYc>

covered by The Fontaine Sisters, 1954 (#1 Pop)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwbw8IFskSM>

Earth Angel, The Penguins (Cleveland Duncan), 1954 (covered by Crew Cuts)

With lyrics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3z11LIL6AA>

Origins of the song: <http://www.electricearl.com/dws/earth-origin.html>

Gloria, The Cadillacs (Earl Carroll, lead), 1954

<https://youtu.be/U28e4EEC2j4>

Holy grail for doo-wop groups; great performance by Manhattan Transfer:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4pmz_G_CfU

Original: Mills Brothers (1948):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDM_uQ6P880

Only You, The Platters (Tony Williams), 1955

From Rock Around the Clock: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FygIKsnkCw>

Speedo, The Cadillacs (Earl Carroll, lead), 1955

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3OXUpmrbKU>

Earl Carroll obit: <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/music-arts/earl-speedo-carroll-dies-75-article-1.1207962>

The Great Pretender, The Platters (Tony Williams), 1955

From movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyM8NV14yBY>

In the Still of the Night, The Five Satins, 1955 (often voted #1 of all time)

<https://youtu.be/fBT3oDMCWpI>

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Some notes on The Major Provocations for Rock 'n' Roll (to be discussed in class):

- Emergence of the Teenager as a distinctive entity
- Postwar Economic Boom begins 1950-51
- Parents begin to offer allowances for discretionary spending.
- The automobile provided more privacy for kids outside parental supervision.
- This had been true since the 1920's, but greatly expanded with the new prosperity.
- Along with teen independence comes parental worry about juvenile delinquency.
- White teens drawn to the forbidden fruit of black music.
- Civil Rights change in the air
 - 1948 Truman integrates the armed forces
 - 1954 Brown v. Board revitalized the civil rights movement, engendering
 - 1955 Murder of 14-year-old Emmet Till
 - 1955-56 Montgomery bus boycott
 - 1957 Eisenhower sends National Guard to enforce integration of Little Rock school system
- Starting in the teens the Great Migration had begun, placing large Black audiences in the North, who "nationalized the market for Black music.

- Opened the door to airplay of previously unavailable “Race” records to white teenagers.
- New technology created opportunity to expand dissemination.
- WWII war effort caused a shellac shortage which limited record production, particularly for Black performers. This came on the heels of a two year ban on recording due to a labor dispute from 1942 to 1944, and a second ban of less than a year in 1948.
- Both bans tended to create a pressure which exploded in expanded recording once lifted.
- New vinyl production allowed the market to expand.
- Both 45s and (later) LPs became common.
- Radio networks, which concentrated on live music and drama lost audience to TV.
- Gov’t began issuing more licenses to independent radio stations which found pre-recorded music to be their most cost-effective format.
- Transistors (\$10 battery-powered radio!) + portable hi-fi

Year	Event	Significance
1938	Four out of Five US Homes now contain radios.	Listeners have access to a broader variety of music than was possible when they were mostly limited to live music produced in a small geographic area.
1948	Ampex, funded by Bing Crosby, produces the first commercial reel-to-reel tape recorder.	Reel-to-reel tape recording resulted in higher-fidelity recordings, and allowed recordings to be edited and enhanced prior to being committed to vinyl.
1948	Columbia releases the first 33 RPM long-playing 12 inch vinyl record (LP).	Another step towards higher fidelity, and allowing an artist to showcase a collection of recordings rather than a single recording.
1949	RCA Victor releases the first 7 inch 45 RPM vinyl single.	The new records were more durable and higher fidelity than the older 78 RPM records made from shellac.

1950	Seeburg introduces the first all 45 RPM vinyl record jukebox.	This advance made relatively high-fidelity popular music available in restaurants, bars and other commercial establishments.
1951	Fender Precision Bass created by Leo Fender.	The electric bass became an important instrument for almost all rock music, second in importance only to the electric guitar.
1951	Fender produces the Telecaster, a solid-body electric guitar.	This dual-pickup solid-body electric guitar allows guitarists to play more loudly and allows the guitar to become a lead instrument.
1954	Fender introduces the Stratocaster, a high-end solid-body electric guitar.	This guitar features three pickups and other improved features, and has become one of the most enduring and popular guitars used in rock music.
1955	Most home record players now capable of playing both 33 1/3 and 45 RPM records (LPs and singles).	Listeners can now enjoy at home whatever music is available on record.
1955	Throughout the mid-fifties, high fidelity (hi-fi) playback equipment becomes commercially successful.	Home listeners can now listen to music with a fidelity that rivals that of live music.
1958	Stereo records are released.	Stereo allowed much more natural sound reproduction

1958	Atlantic Records installs the first eight-track tape recorder in its studios; studios outside the US would not catch up until the mid to late sixties.	Multitrack tape recording allowed voices and instruments to be recorded on separate tracks, allowing each to be separately altered, prior to being mixed down into the final two stereo tracks. This allowed the artist to have a greater say in the overall sound of the recording as it was finally released.
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Some notes on Vocal Groups and Doo-Wop (to be discussed in class):

[see <http://www.history-of-rock.com/doowop.htm>]

Five elements of a Doo-Wop song: 1) vocal group harmony, 2) wide range of voice parts (often with falsetto), nonsense syllables, simple beat and light instrumentation, and simple music and lyrics.

Optional examples of vocal group non-rock predecessors:

If I Didn't Care, Ink Spots, 1939

<https://youtu.be/rvwfLe6sLis>

Which led to: **Crying in the Chapel**, The Orioles 1953

<https://youtu.be/eEwcMvcWKgk>

The Rock and Roll classic ballad style emerged as a four or five part I-VI-IV-V slow progression which set the style for the emergence of Doo-Wop (a term which came into being in the early 1960's). Note the use of back up singers to support the lead singer in place of a horn section.

Optional additional material well worth exploring:

This two-hour documentary about Sam Phillips, the Memphis recording engineer and independent label proprietor who first recorded Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash, is well-done and authoritative (written by Peter Guralnick, author of a highly-regarded two-volume biography of Elvis).

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYcadYXsTyM>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dan6idfM6sI&t=65s>

This 1987 two-hour documentary about Elvis contains a lot of terrific photos and footage and important talking-heads.

Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ji9VBqOoYE>

Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR64vnE5kZg>

Optional additional songs:

Gee, The Crows, 1953

https://youtu.be/ZvmGLV_GE0M

Mr Sandman, The Chordettes, 1954

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX45pYvxDiA> (best sound)

Live in 1958: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNUgsbKisp8>

As another example of covers, compare these rather different versions:

Sincerely, The Moonglows (Harvey Fuqua), 1956 (#1 R&B)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsxVKN114M0>

covered by The McGuire Sisters, 1956 (#1 pop)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbK5qULCeEk>

Optional academically-oriented reading:

Belz uses the term “Rock” to cover what we’re calling Rock ‘n’ Roll.

Carl Belz, “Introduction: Rock as Folk Art”, chapter 1 of *The Story of Rock*.

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/BelzStoryOfRockChp2.pdf>

Argues that RnR is a folk idiom which distinguishes it in important ways from popular art.