

The Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll

Week 3, March 5, 2018

1955: Rock Around the Clock, Maybelline, Tutti Frutti

Assignment:

Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*, p. 57-66.

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/AlschulerAllShookUpRichardBerry.pdf>
Profiles of Little Richard and Chuck Berry.

Bumps Blackwell, "Up Against the Wall with Little Richard"
<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/BlackwellUpAgainst.pdf>

David Hepworth, *Uncommon People: the Rise and Fall of the Rock Stars*, p. 9-12
<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/HepworthUncommonLittleRichard.pdf>
Profile of Little Richard

Chuck Berry, "Got to Be Rock and Roll Music", from Berry's not-ghosted
The Autobiography.
<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/BerryGotToBeRock.pdf>

Lichtenstein and Danker, *Fats*.
<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/LichtensteinFats.pdf>

NYTimes Obit of Fats Domino
<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/FatsDominoObit10-25-17.pdf>

Listen to:

Tweedle Dee, Lavern Baker, 1955 (Atlantic Records)
With lyrics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFpliZ6Aqa4>

Dance With Me Henry, Etta James, 1955

Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wallflower_\(Dance_with_Me,_Henry\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wallflower_(Dance_with_Me,_Henry))

With lyrics:

<http://songmeanings.com/songs/view/3530822107858893951/>

Rock Around the Clock, Bill Haley and the Comets, 1955

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

Ain't That a Shame, Fats Domino, 1955

From movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbfMlk1PwGU>

Maybelline, Chuck Berry, 1955

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RAfxiyMKAk>

Live in 1958 in England: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v124f0i0Xh4>

Inspired/adapted from the Western Swing fiddle tune “Ida Red”, which was recorded in 1938 by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

Tutti Frutti, Little Richard, 1955

lip-synch performance:

audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F13JNjpNW6c>

Wikipedia: He reinforced the new rock rhythm with a two-handed approach, playing patterns with his right hand, with the rhythm typically popping out in the piano's high register.

Financial Times, Michael Hann, Sept 4, 2017

Richard Penniman was part way through another desultory recording session on September 14 1955 when his producer, Robert “Bumps” Blackwell, took the musicians to lunch at the Dew Drop Inn in New Orleans. Penniman, who recorded under the name Little Richard, took to the restaurant’s piano and started hollering along with his own playing. His opening words, Blackwell later recalled, were ““A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-good-God-damn!” and, the producer said, they were the only clean words in the song Richard bashed out.

Richard had been trying and failing to have hits for four years at this point, no studio or producer being able to capture his elemental, pansexual wildness. Everyone wanted to fit him to a template, but Richard fitted no templates. He was himself, or he was nothing. On hearing the nascent “Tutti Frutti”, Blackwell realised the errors that had been made before. Rather than trying to force Richard towards some different song entirely, he decided to focus and sharpen the Richard who had thought it appropriate to sing a song about anal sex (“If it don’t fit, don’t force it /You can grease it, make it easy” ran the original lyric) to a restaurant crowd.

He cajoled a writer called Dorothy LaBostrie into tidying up the lyric. She did so with 15 minutes to go in the afternoon session. In that quarter hour, Blackwell cut three takes of “Tutti Frutti”, now about a girl who “rocks to the east, she rocks to the west / She’s the girl that I love best” and gave the world the 10 much disputed syllables that are item one on the syllabus of rock’n’roll: “Awopbopaloomopalopbom!”

Even now, 62 years on, that Specialty Records recording of “Tutti Frutti” still sounds wild to the point of being unhinged. Richard’s voice is clearly hitting the red, clipping and distorting; the band sound like they’re desperately trying to keep up; his piano sounds like it’s playing itself; and punctuating it all are Richard’s high whoops, copied incessantly by The Beatles on their early recordings. Richard’s voice is clearly hitting the red, clipping and distorting; the band sound like they’re desperately trying to keep up; his piano sounds like it’s playing itself; and punctuating it all are Richard’s high whoops, copied incessantly by The Beatles on their early recordings.

It’s a record so exciting, so primal, that it is both irresistible and insurrectionary. It is the sound of an incomprehensible force. Small wonder then, that despite it being a hit (number 17 in the US), Pat Boone was corralled into recording a version in which any hint of sex was expunged from the performance, which reached number 12 in early 1956. Quite how unsuitable Boone was to record “Tutti Frutti” was shown in 1958, when he published *Twixt Twelve and Twenty*, his book of advice for young people. “Kissing for fun is like playing with a beautiful candle in a room full of dynamite!” he suggested, words Richard would never have uttered, unless he were also demanding an explosion.

“Tutti Frutti” became the Ur-text of rock’n’roll. Although the rise of Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly saw the guitar replace the piano as the driving instrument of rock music, “Tutti Frutti” was the song every aspirant swivel-hipped hero had to try. It was covered by the German Elvis, Peter Kraus; by the Italian Elvis, Adriano Celentano; by the French Elvis, Johnny Hallyday; and by the actual Elvis, on his 1956 debut album. Of those versions, the unfairly maligned Hallyday offers the best, tightening it into coiled R&B.

Even after The Beatles began the process of rendering the first wave of rock’n’roll obsolescent, “Tutti Frutti” lived on. When a band wanted to prove their connection to the founding fathers of rock, “Tutti Frutti” was the song they would turn to. But no one else ever captured the lightning of the song the way Little Richard and Bumps Blackwell did in September 1955. “Tutti Frutti” is more than a song; it’s the thing that rock’n’roll is built on — a record. A record of a moment that could never be recaptured.

Heartbreak Hotel, Elvis Presley, Feb 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9BLw4W5KU8>

First RCA release

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Some notes on topics to be discussed in class:

“Cover records”

What’s a “cover” version? Prior to 1955, the song was the focus of mainstream popular music and not the performance so that multiple performances of a song were simply alternatives because no performance was considered the “original.” But after 1955, when a white performer recorded a song done earlier by a black performer, the difference in the ability to market to the mainstream white market (e.g., via radio) was so one-sided that the idea of a “cover” which exploited an earlier performance was born. So the issue is: does the term “cover” imply whites “taking (unfair) advantage” of black performances?

Chuck Berry (the greatest songwriter who ever lived)

- Born in St. Louis to a middle class family.
- Largely influenced by T-Bone Walker and Goree Carter.
- By 1953 he was performing with **Johnny Johnson’s** trio.
- Began his recording career with **Chess Records** in Chicago in 1955, and remained with Chess till 1963.
- Chess, founded by the Jewish brothers Leonard and Phil Cxyz (both born in Poland) was at that time arguably the pre-eminent Blues and R&B label in the world.
- Berry served three prison terms.
 1. Armed robbery while still a teen.
 2. Violation of the Mann Act. 1 and a half years-1959
 3. Tax evasion four months. 1979
- Berry was among the first musicians to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on its opening in 1986; he was cited for having "laid the groundwork for **not only a rock and roll sound but a rock and roll stance.**"

- Brought a keen appreciation of Country to his rock and roll.
- Berry contributed three things to rock music: an irresistible swagger, a focus on the guitar riff as the primary melodic element, and an emphasis on songwriting as storytelling.
- The rock critic [Robert Christgau](#) considers Berry "the greatest of the rock and rollers", while [John Lennon](#) said, "if you tried to give rock and roll another name, you might call it 'Chuck Berry'." [Ted Nugent](#) said, "If you don't know every Chuck Berry lick, you can't play rock guitar." Springsteen tweeted, "Chuck Berry was rock's greatest practitioner, guitarist, and the greatest pure rock 'n' roll writer who ever lived."
- The journalist [Chuck Klosterman](#) has argued that in 300 years Berry will still be remembered as the rock musician who most closely captured the essence of rock and roll.
- -Chuck Berry wrote:
 - Back in the U.S.A.
 - Brown Eyed Handsome Man
 - Carol
 - Johnny B. Goode
 - Maybellene
 - Nadine
 - No Particular Place To Go
 - Rock and Roll Music
 - Roll Over Beethoven
 - School Days
 - Sweet Little Sixteen
 - Thirty Days
 - Too Much Monkey Business
 - You Can't Catch Me
 - You Never Can Tell

Record Companies

Importance of the emergence of independent record companies and radio stations

Traditional large radio networks and record companies were married to existing genres of music. They featured almost no recorded music: [radio plays](#), mystery, adventure and detective serials, [soap operas](#), [quiz shows](#), [variety hours](#), [talent shows](#), [situation comedies](#), [children's shows](#), as well as LIVE musical concerts and [play by play sports](#) broadcasts.

Dominated by the Big 3:

- Natl Broadcast Sys Red Network (developed by RCA)-1926
- NBC Blue Network-1927 (Divested under anti-Trust laws in 1945 to become ABC)
- Columbia Broadcast System-1927
- Joined by the Mutual Broadcast System-1934

Big 3 had recording companies which dominated production in the U.S. All major labels and radio networks were aligned with more traditional forms of pop music, and ignored the upsurge of interest in the new RnR. This left the field wide open to independent smaller stations, which found recorded music as their most inexpensive means of programming. This fragmenting into independent stations tended to regionalize hits. Some songs were impactful enough to get notice from other indie stations, but many great recordings remained regional hits.

In 1954 Alan Freed, after emerging as one of the first "star" DJs in Cleveland, was hired away by WINS in NY and began the first nationally syndicated network devoted to Rock N Roll.

Also left the entire field of RnR recording to a burgeoning expansion of independent labels with no self-imposed commitment to existing Pop norms

Between 1955 and 1959, the US market share of the four "majors" dropped from 78% to 44%, while the market share of independent record companies increased from 22% to 56%.

In time the concept of playing standardized Top 40 Format began to drive RnR trends.

Atlantic Records.

Founded in late 1947 by Ahmet Ertegun (son of the Turkish ambassador) and Herb Abramson.

Initially largely concentrated on jazz and R&B.

First major R&B hit was Sticks McGhee's "Drinking Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee" in 1949.

In 1949 signed their first big star, Ruth Brown, who went on to record more than 80 songs for the label.

In 1952 signed Ray Charles.

Also signed the Clovers, The Drifters, Ruth Brown, Solomon Burke, The Coasters, Bobby Darin, Aretha Franklin, Clyde McPhatter, Wilson Pickett, Professor Longhair, Otis Redding, Big Joe Turner, Chuck Willis.

Many of the performers mentioned here straddled the line between R&B and RnR. Significantly Atlantic and Stax influenced the strain of RnR which became known as Soul.

In 1960 formed a cooperative relationship with the young Stax label, beginning an 8 year partnership which placed them at the forefront of the emergence of Soul music.

Remained a major force in Rock music throughout the 1980's.

Were instrumental in the careers of Leiber and Stoller and Phil Spector.

Tom Dowd (special mention.)

Recording engineer and producer.

His recordings for Atlantic and Stax exerted a major influence on the history of popular music and he scored more hits than George Martin and Phil Spector combined.

Atlantic was one of the first independent labels to make recordings in stereo.