

The Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll

Week 4, March 12, 2018

1956 (part 1): Elvis!

Assignment:

Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*, p. 24-34.

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/AlschulerAllShookUpPresley.pdf>
A profile of Elvis.

Peter Guralnick, "Elvis, Scotty, and Bill" from *Last Train to Memphis*, the first of a two-volume biography of Elvis.

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

David Hepworth, *Uncommon People: the Rise and Fall of the Rock Stars*, p. 13-16

<http://ruml.com/goldenage/pdfs/HepworthUncommonElvis.pdf>
Profile of Elvis.

Listen to:

Heartbreak Hotel, Elvis Presley, Feb 1956

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

Prof Covach: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MYAuE-2GfE>

First RCA release

Blue Suede Shoes, Carl Perkins, Feb 1956

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2f_eSZgp88

On the Perry Como Show (not lip-synched):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRNyvO4QouY>

Compare: Elvis Presley, Mar 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYMfsUgbhN4>

Lip-synching for screen test:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bm5HK1Q6nGM>

Long Tall Sally, Little Richard, Mar 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFFgbc5Vcbw>

The music was a fast **uptempo** number with Little Richard's hammering, boogie piano. Richard plays staccato eighth notes while Palmer plays a fast **shuffle**. The shuffle was the most common rhythm and blues beat; Richard added the eighth notes, much less common in that time, although now standard for rock music. Together this created an ambiguity in the ride rhythm—known to musicians as "playing in the crack" that came to characterize New Orleans rock and roll. In typical Little Richard style, he sang in the **key of F**, in a raw, aggressive, exhilarating style with lyrics being about self-centered fun.

The line in the original recorded version, "Long Tall Sally is built for speed", is a reference to the proverbial African-American distinction in sexual types: "Built for comfort" or "built for speed."

Compare carefully(!): Elvis Presley, 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJBn9hXoWiY>

And then suffer by listening to: Pat Boone, 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovAeqr3jvBA>

Don't Be Cruel, Elvis Presley, July 1956

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_Lv6cHgnjo

This was the highest-value 45rpm record ever pressed because on the flip side was:

Hound Dog, Elvis Presley, July 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eHJ12Vhpyc>

Both went to #1 on the Pop charts.

Blueberry Hill, Fats Domino, Sep 1956

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

My Prayer, Platters, June 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0JYeoJ6GpM>

Why Do Fools Fall in Love, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, 1956

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_p05Zicu0s

True Fine Mama, Little Richard, 1957, intro only (first 25 seconds)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dk8YPGMXZ3w>

Rip It Up, Little Richard, June 1956

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pc_F3PaYgl0

Compare: Elvis Presley, 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ByXVe5HBWQ>

Ready Teddy, Little Richard, June 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpMaCUh569I>

Compare: Elvis Presley, 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC3IP5pjr-M>

Note the piano!

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Some notes to be discussed in class:

Elvis Presley emerged as the first great white rock n roll star.

-His discovery was the fulfillment of Sun Records' Memphis producer and record company owner's dream.

- "I always said," Sam Phillips told everybody, "that if I could find a white boy who could sing like a black man I'd make a million dollars."

-Even so, Phillips initially spent considerable wasted time attempting to find a sound that would work for Presley. As they were about to close down another disappointing session Elvis broke into a version of "That's Alright Now", a blues song written and recorded by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup in 1949.

-Boom!

-Elvis was dirt poor mama's boy who was widely considered weird by his schoolmates.

-He fell into a career when he went to Sun Recording studio to cut a record for his mother's birthday.

Sun Records

An example of how independent record companies operated in the early days of RnR.

-Founded by Sam Phillips in 1950 as The Memphis Recording Service.

-Phillips was a high school dropout who'd been drawn to music related radio work. Was a disk jockey, announcer and sound engineer for a Muscle Shoals radio station which played both black and white music.

-Recorded black blues musicians like B.B. King, Junior Parker and Howlin' Wolf, Ike Turner

-Would sell the recordings to larger record companies.

-Also survived by recording weddings and funerals to pay the bills.

-His recording of "That's Alright Mama", a cover version of Big Boy Crudup's 1948 recording lit up the switchboards on Dewey Phillips' Red, Hot and Blue radio program in Memphis.

-Phillips played it 14 times, and frantically contacted Sam Phillips to find Presley and get him to the studio of a live interview.

-During the interview Dewey asked Presley which high school he attended, as a way of conveying to the audience that ELVIS IS WHITE!!

-The record was released in Memphis and was a regional hit, selling 20,000 copies.

-Phillips later recorded Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash

-By 1956 Elvis had signed a management contract with Tom Parker.

-Parker realized that Presley's burgeoning success required a better funded recording company.

-Convinced RCA to buy out Sun Records' contract for \$40,000 (also reportedly \$35,000)

-Presley's first record with RCA was Heartbreak Hotel.

- Parker determined to expand Presley's brand with TV appearances, marketing campaigns and, eventually, movie acting.
- Although Parker guided Presley into a national, and then an international, star he increasingly took him away from his Rock n Roll roots.

Fun Fact: Colonel Tom Parker was a fugitive from justice in Holland. He was a figure of interest in a murder, and escaped to the U.S. at age 20.

Fun Fact: Elvis dyed his hair black because he thought it made him look like Tony Curtis.

Otis Blackwell

WROTE MANY OF ELVIS' HITS:

All Shook Up

Breathless

Don't Be Cruel

Fever

Great Balls of Fire

Handy Man

Return To Sender

Here's a demo version by Blackwell prior to Elvis' recording:

All Shook Up, Otis Blackwell, 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-rr0PYeR7M&authuser=0>

Optional songs:

Love Me Tender, Elvis Presley, Sept 1956

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5SkY9WHeKg>

From first movie of the same name; immediate #1 Pop

If you're into **Little Richard** and would like to listen to his first LP, *Here's Little Richard* (March 1957), it's all in one place here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aU2mMAc2x7o>

Since it was the first LP I ever purchased, it occupies a soft spot in my heart, but perhaps you'll agree, that's some *amazing* rock 'n' roll.

If you're REALLY into Little Richard, then here's the best collection I've discovered:

Little Richard - The Very Best, Part 1 (1:16): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t702NIRbojM>

Little Richard - The Very Best, Part 2 (53 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlcufnLqgF8>

And here's the best performance: 1972 at Wembley in London (some great shots of the piano keyboard making clear that he's playing on average seven notes at a time!) (10 min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG-8LousEXc>

Finally, here's a short documentary on Little Richard:

Part 1 (9 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG-8LousEXc>

Part 2 (4 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rN4yAbIPjk>

Optional reading:

Excerpt from Peter Guralnick, *Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'n' Roll*:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/elvis-presley-how-sun-records-boss-sam-phillips-discovered-a-star-in-1954-a6713891.html>