

The Story of Rock and Roll, 1951-1966

Lecturer: Keith McCuaig

Lecturer Biography:

Short lecturer biography (3-5 sentences)

Series Description:

This series explores the explosion of creativity in American and British popular music, starting with the birth of rock and roll through to the British Invasion. Styles to be discussed include rockabilly, Brill Building pop, surf rock, folk, and more. The social and historical context of this music – including a growing youth culture and changing race relations – will also be examined. From Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan, to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the music of the 1950s and early 1960s exerted a cultural influence that lives on to the present.

Schedule of Topics:

1. Pre- and Early-Rock and Roll Period

Week 1 will cover the pre-rock and roll period, including the socio-cultural context for the emergence of rock and roll, and some major figures (Big Joe Turner, Big Mama Thornton). The focus this week will be on early rock and roll, including DJ Alan Freed; Northern rockers Bill Haley and His Comets; and New Orleans artists like Little Richard and Fats Domino.

2. Early Rock and Roll Period

Continuing in the early rock and roll period, we'll look at the rockabilly scene in Memphis, Tennessee. Early rockabilly artists such as Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Wanda Jackson will be covered. The Chicago R&B scene will also be covered, including important early rock and roll figures Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley.

3. Rock and Roll Transition Period

This week will be spent discussing the so-called "Transition Period," 1958-1963. Some highlights include Brill Building Pop, Girl Groups, Phil Spector, Roy Orbison, the Everly Brothers, and Surf Rock (the Beach Boys, Dick Dale).

4. Folk Revival

After finishing up the “Transition Period,” we’ll start on the folk section. We’ll look at the context for the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, and discuss artists like Woodie Guthrie, Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan and more.

5. Folk Rock

Continuing in the Folk section, we’ll look at Folk Rock (the Byrds, Bob Dylan) and the Singer-Songwriter genre (Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen). We’ll also start on the British Invasion section.

6. The British Invasion

The British Invasion will be covered, including the context for the emergence of UK acts in the US. Focus will be on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, but other groups like the Who and the Kinks will also be covered.

Recommended Readings:

Robert Palmer – *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History*

John Covach and Andrew Flory – *What’s That Sound?: An Introduction to Rock and Its History*

Larry Starr and Christopher Waterman – *American Popular Music*