

3. 1958-1964 Transitional Period



- Sometimes referred to as the “in between years”
 - Why? In between what and what?
 - Ignores some important developments and innovations in this period
 - Most notably, Soul (especially from Motown and Atlantic Records)
- Main features/styles of this time period:
 - Teen Idols
 - Professional songwriters (especially the Brill Building in NYC)
 - Girl Groups
 - Rise of producers (Phil Spector)
 - Rockabilly/country influenced rock/pop
 - Instrumental rock
 - Surf Music
- Musically: Electric bass and a variety of melodic interest (beyond vocals)

The Downturn of Rock and Roll

1. Several of rock's main figures were out of the picture
 - Elvis (Army); Little Richard (Ministry); Jerry Lee Lewis (cousin-bride scandal); Chuck Berry (jail); Alan Freed (legal trouble); Buddy Holly (dead)
2. Independent radio squeezed out by Top 40 and national chains in the mid-1950s
3. Payola hearings of the late 50s
 - Independent record companies' market dominance was short lived
 - Demonstrated (political) power of the established music business

The Downturn of Rock and Roll (cont.)

4. Cover phenomenon

- Mainstream dilution
- White versions of black tunes

5. Teen Idols

- Major label rock-style pop stars by the late 1950s
- The line between underground and mainstream artists became more blurred
- A youth market for rock and roll was established, and in this phase, the major labels take over

Teen Idols

- Young, cute, “good boy” image
- As much about image as any musical talent
- Usually accompanied by studio musicians rather than their own bands
- Interestingly, they were very often Italian, or otherwise Mediterranean-looking
 - From a marketing perspective, why might this be?
- This music was the start of what was later referred to as “bubblegum pop”

Ex: Frankie Avalon – “Venus” (1959)

- Overlap with rock, targeted to youth market



American Bandstand

- Like the 50s rock and roll radio shows, but for TV
- Filmed in Philadelphia, nationally syndicated as of 1957
- Dick Clark, host
- Focus on dances

Video Ex: American Bandstand, 1950s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnYLnheNu6Q>



Brill Building Pop

Three interrelated meanings:

1. The **building in New York City** where these publishers/companies were located.
2. It refers to a **way of working/approach** (professionalization, overt commercialism, segregation of tasks, volume of production)
3. A **mainstream aesthetic** (formula, universal themes, accessibility, professionalism again).

Brill Building Pop (cont.)

- Brill Building material tended to appeal to both a mainstream pop audience *and* to Rock and Roll/R&B fans
 - And a Soul music audience in the early 1960s
- In the late 1950s, the songwriters working there became associated with a distinct pop music sound
 - Unlike most teen idol music, there were deep and subtle influences from R&B, Rock and Roll, and Latin music
 - Peak around 1959-1964
- Brill Building examples will be discussed in two sub-topics:
Girl Groups and Phil Spector

Girl Groups

- Mostly black teen girls, with little or no professional experience
 - Some white groups too
- Strong association with a “wall of sound” production style, and with Brill Building songs
- Professional songwriters wrote for these groups and the recording sessions were controlled by producers
 - Little say from artists themselves
 - All part of the Brill Building approach to music

Girl Groups (cont.)

- No overt sexuality
 - Romance and love
- Like Teen Idols: very image-driven
- Unlike teen idols, these musicians could actually sing
- Some challenged norms of femininity and 'good behaviour.'
- Lyrics about needing boyfriends, but the visual image and sound sent a strong message of self-reliance and a self-enclosed girl culture which could be seen as empowering to some degree.



Ex: The Shirelles – “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (1960)

- Pop and R&B #1
- Brill Building record
 - Produced and written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin
- Uncommon song topic for the time
 - Whether or not a teen girl should have sex
 - Implies pre-marital sex
 - Obvious commercial risk
- African American performers and a mainstream pop style meant lots of crossover hits



The Changing Role of the Producer

- Before the early 1960s, record producers were almost always employees of record labels, and were never celebrities in their own right
- A key to this change was for the industry and market to recognize that it isn't a *song* which becomes a hit, it's a particular *recording*
 - The song is one factor, but equally important are performance and production
 - Producers don't just mechanically record a performance, but help to construct it and also shape the sound through their choices about how to record
- Studio recordings started using new sounds only available in the studio
 - Up to this time a recording was meant to represent a live performance
 - Now the record could be a performance in its own right

Phil Spector

- The first to become famous as this kind of producer
- He also helped innovate a few specific musical styles
- Brill Building philosophy of making high-quality pop
 - “Three-minute symphonies for the kids”
- Would work on one song for months
- Demanded total control at sessions, led to his signature sound...
- He also set a new standard for control
 - In many cases he would scout the talent, write or co-write the material, supervise every aspect of recording, and release the record on his own label



Wall of Sound

- Many instruments in a small space
- Lots of doubling
- Mixed to mono
- Heavy reverb (echo chamber)
- Can hear layers, volume fluctuations, changes in textures, etc.
- The name is a little misleading because another crucial feature of Spector's records was careful pacing
 - Periods of near silence and long dramatic changes in texture and dynamics
 - Made the 'wall of sound' passages even more striking when they did arrive



Ex: The Ronettes – “Be My Baby” (1963)

- Veronica “Ronnie” Bennett, 18 years old
- LA studio musicians known as the Wrecking Crew
- Brian Wilson: “The greatest record ever produced”
- Some of the most ambitious rock and roll/teen pop yet
 - Influences later experiments by George Martin, psychedelic rock, etc.
- Form: Contrasting verses and chorus
 - Drum intro (repeated at 2:07)
 - Song builds throughout – adding instruments, new textures

“Be My Baby” (1963) Instrumentation

- Drummer Hal Blaine: “the beat was an accident”
 - Supposed to be snare on 2 & 4 but he dropped a stick
 - He used this beat on **Frank Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night”**
- Percussion: Castanets, Maracas
- Backup vocals: pre-fame Sonny and Cher
- String section
- Saxophones, Trombone

- Gold Star Studio, LA: Echo Chamber
 - Speaker on one side, microphone on the other

Rockabilly Developments

- Continuing country influence on rock = rockabilly
- New Brill Building influence
 - Professionally written songs and productions
- And Teen Idol influence, but rockabilly artists tended to write their own music
 - Image, and big pop productions

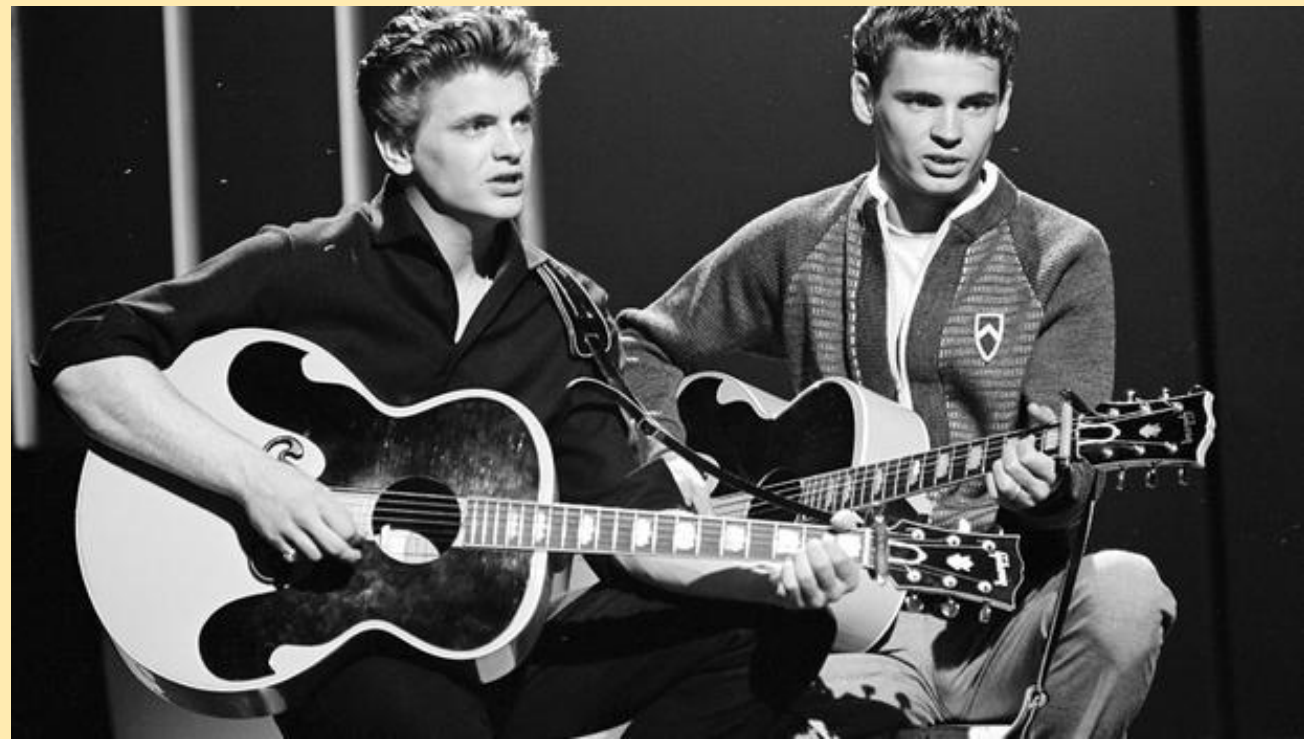
The Everly Brothers

- Brother duo vocal harmonies
 - Influence from bluegrass
 - Influence on later rock singers

Ex: The Everly Brothers

– “Bye Bye Love” (1957)

- First hit song (#2 Pop/#1 Country/#5 R&B)
- Establishes their early sound: unaggressive
- Bass, drum, piano, 2 acoustic guitars, prominent vocal harmonies



The Everly Brothers (cont.)

- Introspective, gentler side of rock and roll
 - Melodic songs with a rock beat

Ex: The Everly Brothers

– “All I Have to Do is Dream” (1958)

- Softer style, more pop elements to rockabilly
- Rock ballad: new dimension to rock and roll
- #1 on all three charts
- Form: AABA (refrain at end of each A section); total is AABA BA



Roy Orbison

- Often associated with rockabilly because of his early hits (including Sun Records), but in reality he performs in a range of styles
- Heavy pop; rock; dramatic operatic vocals, etc.

Ex: Roy Orbison

– **“Only the Lonely (Know How I Feel)” (1961)**

- Stop time falsetto voice
- Doo wop style backup vocals
- Orchestral strings, vibraphone



Roy Orbison (cont.)

Ex: Roy Orbison – “Oh, Pretty Woman” (1964)

- Assertive, signature guitar riff in intro
 - A staple of a lot of later rock

Form

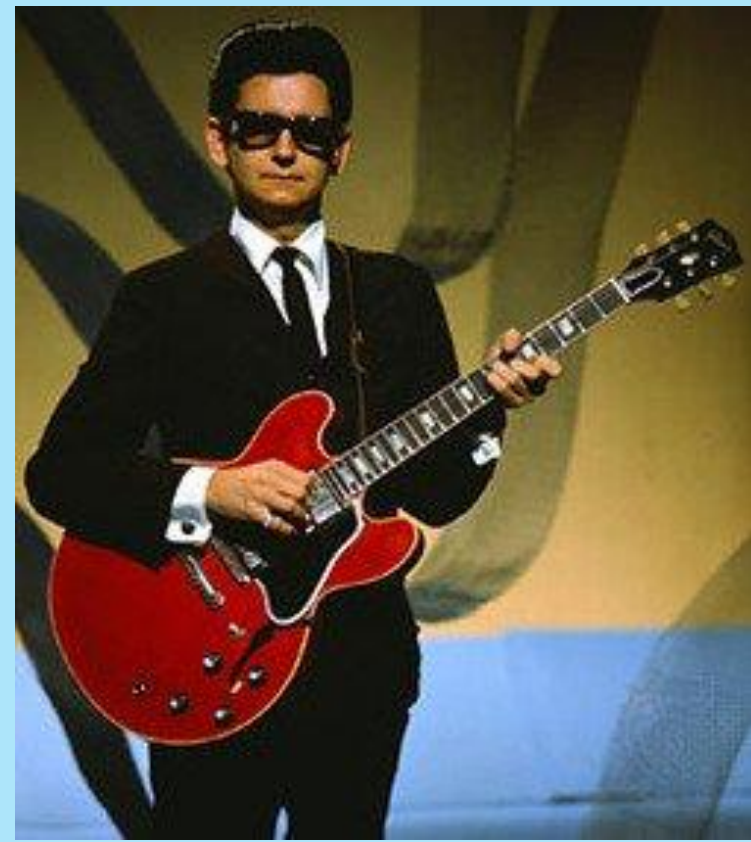
A (ends with guitar riff) x2

B (minor key sound) x2

C (unexpected change – most songs would go back to A section)

A

Extended outro on A section rhythm pattern, return to intro



Instrumental Rock

- Popular rock subgenre in the late 1950s and early 1960s
 - Big band swing groups had instrumental pop hits in the 1920s and 1930s

Ex: Duane Eddy – “Rebel Rouser” (1958)

- One of the earliest instrumental rock hits

Ex: Link Wray – “Rumble” (1958)

Ex: The Ventures – “Walk, Don’t Run” (1960)

- Several hits, influence on later instrumental groups
 - i.e. The Shadows

Instrumental Rock (cont.)

Ex: Booker T and the MGs – “Green Onions”



- Riff based dance music
- Plays with instrumental colour (reverb, esp. the guitar)
 - Note the guitar solo where the reverb is turned on and off
- Why did dance records tend to be instrumental?
- What is happening with the instruments here that we might see as a precursor of later rock developments? And why?
- What else makes this “dance music?”

Echo/Reverb

- “The persistence of sound after a sound is produced”
- Imagine yelling in a large stairway, or a gymnasium

Ex: Booker T & The MGs – “Green Onions” (1962)

- 1:14 little or no reverb, 1:30 lots of reverb

Video Ex: The Wiki Drummer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mY-f68J5PPo>

Surf Music: The Beach Boys

- Eclectic influences
 - black doo wop, white vocal groups, Chuck Berry, Wall of Sound
 - Inspired by Spector's production style: huge influence on Brian Wilson
- Song topics up to 1964: cars, girls, surfing
- The Beach Boys were significant as well because they created another highly distinctive style of pop group vocal sound

Ex: The Beach Boys – “Surfin’ USA” (1963)

- Doo wop style backup vocals
- Solos very “surf”: electric organ and Berry-style guitar, lots of reverb
- Simple verse form: AAAAA; refrain, no chorus
- Subculture-specific lyrics

Ex: Chuck Berry – “Sweet Little Sixteen” (1958) and copyright infringement

Instrumental Surf Music

- Big in the early 60s, Southern California
- Dick Dale and the Del-Tones were one of the first groups

Ex: Dick Dale and the Del-Tones – “Miserlou” (1962)

- Super fast tremolo picking and yelling
- Wet sound – refers to reverb
 - Late 50s/early 60s spring reverb technology
 - Leo Fender developed this for Dick Dale
- Middle Eastern scale: connections with later psychedelic rock
- Sliding pick on strings: sounds like a crashing wave, became very common in surf rock