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