



COVERS  
OVER 500 SONGS  
IN-DEPTH, WITH  
MORE THAN 1,000  
SONGS LISTED

# American Hit Radio

---

THOMAS RYAN

---

**A History of Popular Singles  
From 1955 to the Present**

# **AMERICAN HIT RADIO**

A History of Popular Singles from 1955 to the Present

**THOMAS RYAN**

**Prima Publishing**

© 1996 Thomas Ryan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from Prima Publishing, except for the inclusion of quotations in a review.

PRIMA PUBLISHING and colophon are trademarks  
of Prima Communications, Inc.

Photographs appearing on pages 1, 53, 111, 201, 297, 371, and 455 are printed  
by permission of Archive Photos.

Image copyright © 1995 by Archive Photos.  
All rights reserved.

Photographs appearing on pages 509 and 577 are printed by permission of  
Richard E. Aaron.  
All rights reserved.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ryan, Thomas, 1958–  
American hit radio: a history of popular singles from 1955  
to the present/Thomas Ryan.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7615-0230-0

1. Popular music—United States—History and criticism.
2. Popular music—United States—Chronology.
3. Popular music—United States—Texts. I. Title.

ML3477.R93 1995

781'.64'0973'09049—dc20

95-24020

CIP

96 97 98 99 AA 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

#### HOW TO ORDER

Single copies may be ordered from Prima Publishing, P.O. Box 1260BK, Rocklin, CA 95677; telephone (916) 632-4400. Quantity discounts are also available. On your letterhead, include information concerning the intended use of the books and the number of books you wish to purchase.

*This is dedicated to the one I love...*

*thanks a lot...*



# CONTENTS



<b>Acknowledgments</b>	ix
<b>Introduction</b>	xi
<b>About the Text</b>	xxii
<b>Chapter One: 1955–1959</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: 1960–1963</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter Three: 1964–1965</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Chapter Four: 1966–1967</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Chapter Five: 1968–1969</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>Chapter Six: 1970–1972</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: 1973–1979</b>	<b>455</b>
<b>Chapter Eight: 1980–1989</b>	<b>509</b>
<b>Chapter Nine: 1990–1994</b>	<b>577</b>
<b>Afterword</b>	<b>617</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>621</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

**T**hank-you pages are notoriously boring because nobody except the people mentioned knows who you're talking about, so by way of explanation...

I have a close friend named Greg Galluccio who was also a co-bandmember. Through subtle intimidation, he has inspired me to write this book, for which I will be eternally grateful.

Another friend and co-bandmember named Phil Seville was kind enough to allow me to subject him to rough drafts. It takes a good friend to let you know when you're being stupid, and Phil never hesitated. In fact, he may have enjoyed it. Thanks for keeping me on track, Phil.

Rich Umbach is my lifelong friend, my partner in crime, and another co-bandmember, who has accompanied me through virtually every single musical project of my life. Through our band, Philo's Airmen, he and songwriter Nelson Torres have displayed an insane level of creativity that ten years later is still ten years ahead of its time (or maybe just totally removed from it). Anyway, Rich has been a kindred spirit with an amazing capacity to listen. Thanks for remaining my friend while I hibernated.

Speaking of Nelson Torres, he and another friend, Ari Taub, have done some pretty amazing and generous things to help me promote this project with their filmmaking abilities. Thanks for helping me help other people understand what I was doing.

Nobody talks on the phone as much (or as well) as my friend Mike Versaci—except maybe me. Here's to all the times we drove up AT&T's stock, Mike. See if you can recognize some of our conversations.

I'd like to thank Dave Marsh, too, for making me realize that I should just shut up and do it.

Pat Canole is a professional writer who has expressed enthusiasm for my project from day one and has become a good friend in the process. Thanks for the faith and the encouragement, Pat.

As for the Prima people, where do I begin? It has been nothing but a pleasure working with such a progressive organization and the positive-minded people who make it tick so well. In particular, I'm grateful to Roger Stewart for taking the risk, Juliana Aldous for keeping me informed and sane, and Jennifer Fox for working her brains out for me.

It is rare these days to find a talented and well-connected agent who is willing to take a risk on a new author. Richard Curtis was quick to acknowledge the commercial potential of this work and then had the patience to stick with it through thick and thin. Thank you, Richard, for convincing me that I ought to throw caution to the wind and for sticking it out while my manuscript expanded to file-bulging proportions.

Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad (no explanation needed). Extra thanks and love need to be extended to my father, who is also my boss, for cutting me the slack that I needed to finish this project.



Hi, Sue. Hi, Eddie. (That's my sister and my nephew.)

Hi, Lindsay. Hi, Jordan. (They're my godchildren.) Also, Kerri, Ryan, and Dominick. (They are my godchildren's siblings. God forbid I don't mention them all.)

I'd also like to thank my mother-in-law, Nancy, for being nothing at all like the invented, stereotypical nemesis. Both loving and supportive, she's been a positive influence and a true friend—as have been my other in-laws, Matt, Gretchen, and Wendy.

I have (or, correction, I had) a secretary named Louise Lindner who spent nearly every moment of our time together a) trying to convince me that I would one day be famous or b) trying to convince me that "Born Too Late" by the Pony-Tails was one of the best singles of all time. Taken together, that should tell you something about her judgment. I miss you, Louise.

If you're ever in Farmingdale, New York, pay a visit to Whirlin' Disc Records. They have almost all of the stuff that appears in this book.

As for my friends Tom, Donna, Howie, Margaret, Ben, Jenna, Bruce, Beth, Robyn, John, Neal, Rich, Peter, Jim, Chris, Dave, Meredith, Jock, Steve, Rob (and you know who), Kevin, Dierdre, Harry, Reva, Dawn...this is what I've been doing for the past two years. I'm done now. Maybe we can get together like old times, have a beer or two, and play music all night long like we used to. I miss you all.

I have two young sons named Dare and Kyle. Right now, they are barely old enough to recognize their names in print. Hopefully, my life's ambition will be fulfilled when, some time in the future, they come to me, tell me that they read my book...and say that I got it all wrong. May one of them one day write an overlapping sequel.

Finally, there's my wife. Imagine what it would be like if you were locked in a jail cell with an obsessed lunatic who refused to discuss anything but life insurance for two mind-numbing years. Now, imagine that this lunatic salesman constantly denies any responsibility for the upkeep of the cell, claiming that he is too busy writing policies. Replace insurance with music, and you might better sympathize with my wife's predicament. Thank you, Robin, for trying to wipe that glazed look off your face, and thank you for forgiving me when I forgot to do so myself. You and I both know that half of the ideas in this book (or half of the funny ones, anyway) are yours.



# INTRODUCTION

---

**W**hat a long, strange trip it's been. At the end of 1994, the Top 40 completed forty years of documenting the continuing history of our country's pop heritage. How in the world did we manage to survive the never-ending series of contortions that took place in such a short period of time? We should congratulate ourselves, since hardly anything else so explicitly shows our innate ability to accept change. Year after year, musical trends burst out and subsequently fade away, only to be replaced by another short-lived trend. The music charts are designed to render popular songs obsolete after they have completed their shelf lives, and most pop songs behave accordingly and fade away on cue. Still, some display a remarkable ability to linger. Despite the fact that a song might not have been "popular" for as long as forty years, there are instances in which they retain their ability to surprise and please us. Why else would an obscure recording from 1959 that never reached any higher than #35 (such as "C'mon Everybody" by Eddie Cochran) have greater relevance today than a record that reached #1 in the same year ("Why" by Frankie Avalon)?

*American Hit Radio* attempts to encapsulate the changes that have taken place in popular music by telling the story of a series of important songs, in chronological order, that have impacted our collective consciousness since 1955. While dispensing information and impressions of the various artists and their songs, this book becomes, in effect, a sociological history of the modern age as told through the development of popular music. Remember R&B and the days of early rock and roll? Remember the British Invasion? Remember psychedelia? Remember disco? Do you know what is happening on the contemporary charts? Why do some songs linger while others disappear? How have they influenced those that followed? What causes specific trends to become so popular, only to be replaced in a short time by something else that is completely different? A sense of history and nostalgia is inevitable, for the times as well as for the songs themselves, but what is more interesting is how some songs become old while remaining very contemporary.

Although we continue to hear these songs throughout our lives, they are sometimes mistakenly heard as a part of our past rather than as an active representation of who we are and what our collective tastes are like. A sample browsing through the titles ought to display just how many of these songs have become signposts in most of our lives and have retained their relevance into the present. Most everybody has at least a passing interest in popular music, and everybody can name a handful of favorite songs. Almost without fail, these songs are Top 40 hits from the past four decades. Despite changing times, we continue to love the favorites from our past.

**How in the world did we manage to survive the never-ending series of contortions that have taken place in such a short period of time?**



The fact that they never went away proves that a good song will always be a good song, despite trends or fashion.



This book contains 500 critical essays on songs that appeared on *Billboard's* Top 40 singles chart between January 1955 and December 1994. Technical information regarding dates and chart position have been extracted from Joel Whitburn's wonderful and informative collection of books, which compile the information originally documented by *Billboard*. They were chosen not for their chart positions but for their ability to remain timeless. This book doesn't list the top 500 selling singles. Instead, it contains what I believe to be the most artistically successful popular songs of the past forty years. They could have been accurate mirrors of society at the time of their popularity, or they could have been fresh and innovative, or they could have nothing more than a great melody with the strength to defy the passage of time. Quite simply, these are my favorite 500 songs that made the Top 40, looked at from today's perspective. No two people would pick the same 500 songs, but the ultimate purpose of this book isn't to dictate what the 500 best songs were. It is less important to dwell upon the 500 choices than to recognize the relationship between the titles and our popular culture during the past forty years. There is quite a history behind the music that we have made popular, and that is what I hope to have captured.

Choices were, by necessity, subjective. Some songs might have been extremely relevant and interesting at the time of their release, but today they sound like old warhorses. ("I Am a Rock" by Simon and Garfunkel, "She Loves You" by the Beatles, and "Hound Dog" by Elvis Presley come to mind.) Songs such as these have suffered from age or overexposure, so I felt it necessary to avoid covering them in detail. Others, in my opinion, maintain a freshness and relevance that transcend their age. Some have even survived being played to death ("Maybelline" by Chuck Berry and "Jumping Jack Flash" by the Rolling Stones). Of course, you might not agree with my choices, but it is my hope to convince you otherwise. In some cases, you might even find it more interesting (and amusing, at my expense) to read about something that you despise and smirk while I do a song and dance in an attempt to convince you why you ought to like it.



Picking the bad songs was also a challenge, and a few disclaimers apply. First, there are probably plenty of songs that are much worse than many of the tunes on this list, but time has already given them the treatment they deserve. Since history has ignored them (and because the task of familiarizing myself with ev-



ery bad song that made the Top 40 seemed like self-induced torture of the worst kind), I figured that I might as well let sleeping dogs lie. Second, some artists have entire catalogs that can cause spontaneous retching, so I usually decided that it was unnecessary to belabor the point and limited myself to the one or two titles that were most representative of their “unique artistry.” Last and probably most important is the simple fact that “badness” is even more relative than goodness. I would prefer to think that these songs are utterly indefensible, but I can’t deny that enough people disagreed with me to launch some of these losers to the top of the country’s most prestigious music chart. Ah well, nobody’s perfect. All too often, the records that sold the most copies were either trendy or formulaic, giving them little relevance today. For example, the following are #1 hits whose shortcomings are now quite apparent (or at least I hope they are):

**“Disco Duck,” by Rick Dees and His Cast of Idiots**

**“Convoy,” by C.W. McCall**

**“The Streak,” by Ray Stevens**

**“Half-Breed,” by Cher**

**“The Yellow Rose of Texas,” by Mitch Miller**

Must I elaborate? Well, they were all #1, so either a family member of the artist bought a heck of a lot of copies or we all went collectively and temporarily insane. I trust that your memory of these titles more than adequately confirms my point that any list of the top 500 selling singles would be terribly inconsistent and justifies another means of gauging a song’s intrinsic value. Sometimes the best way to realize the quality of a song is to compare it with the contemporary competition, so I have interspersed 250 of the most objectionable titles in their appropriate locations throughout the text, hoping that they will help put the times in perspective.

A lot of very popular music is made up of immaculate production techniques and technical displays of vocal virtuosity but contains little emotional investment. Like a beautifully designed building that serves no purpose, its shallowness becomes more apparent with the passage of time. I have deliberately attempted to avoid classifying songs that fall into this category. Much more offensive, though, are the tactless remakes of classic recordings that have recently experienced a resurgence. Allow me to make another architectural analogy. If somebody were to build a papier-mâché duplication of a Frank Lloyd Wright design and display it in the center of Times Square, it could be considered cute or entertaining, but it would be hard to consider it architecture, or even art. If, for reasons of advertisement and promotion, it suddenly attracted more attention and received more adulation than the original that inspired it, intelligent observers of culture would most likely be horrified. Wright had the vision, the intellect,

**Sometimes  
the best way  
to realize the  
quality of a  
song is to  
compare  
it with the  
contemporary  
competition.**





the instinct, the patience, the talent, and the tremendous good taste to realize his design. The copyist who built the papier-mâché model only had to mimic the construction with lesser (albeit newer) materials. For the same reason, intelligent music critics are right to be upset when somebody plunders the classic songs and constructs papier-mâché models from our musical legacy. A song like "When a Man Loves a Woman" was already perfected and belonged squarely in its time and its place. To toy with the original is to steal a piece of something glorious from subsequent generations, who may not ever be able to hear the greatness of the original through the artlessness of the modernized copy. To move it elsewhere lessens the impact. To use cheaper materials is demeaning. To pilfer the design, i.e., the structure, is immoral. It is one thing to pay homage, it is another thing entirely to plagiarize. This book most certainly does not avoid pointing fingers at those "artists" who have crossed this boundary.



**T**he Top 40 was chosen as a cutoff point to prevent me from inserting obscure personal favorites. My tastes can run to absurd distances, and I didn't want to load the book with unknown or unpopular songs that most people wouldn't care to hear. For example, if anything could qualify, I'd be inclined to include field recordings from the Ituri rainforest, the Bulgarian Women's Choir, and early recordings of Enrico Caruso. This would be completely ridiculous, so I'll limit myself to Western culture. OK, then, that would include Brahms's Requiem, the field recordings of the Lomax family, and almost everything recorded by Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines. This is still much too vague, so let's impose a time limit, say 1955, since that is generally acknowledged as the birth date of rock and roll and is also the first year in which accurate and comprehensive chart information became available. This then, could include the work of Brazilian artists Caetano Veloso and Milton Nascimento, jazz innovators John Coltrane and Miles Davis, the blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, and relatively unknown modern bands such as XTC and the American Music Club. As you can see, the criteria still need to be filed down radically before I have anything that could be considered more than personal. By limiting myself to chart entries, particularly Top 40 singles, I can tell the history of the nation's popular music through some of the most popular recordings of our age.

**Absolutely none  
of Elvis's Sun  
recordings,  
arguably the best  
work he ever did,  
made the  
Top 40.**

Sometimes, though, limitations can be frustrating. Because songs that were released prior to the cutoff do not qualify, this eliminates the best portion of the hit catalog of Nat "King" Cole ("Unforgettable," "Mona Lisa") and doo-wop innovators such as the Orioles. Some of the most well-written songs of all time, such as "Stardust," "Night and Day," and hundreds of others have either failed to chart in



the past forty years or have charted only in versions that are reprehensible. Since his popularity was at first basically regional and later releases never charted in the Top 40, Hank Williams has no place in this book. How could a song as majestic as "River Deep, Mountain High" by Ike and Tina Turner have failed to reach the Top 40? Absolutely none of Elvis's Sun recordings, arguably the best work he ever did, made the Top 40. Why did the Who have such trouble charting their best material? How in the world could a band as popular and talented as Pearl Jam fail to be adequately recognized by the Top 40? All of these exceptions frustrated me, but by sticking to my self-imposed limitations, I've managed to keep on track and remain within the scope of my intentions.



**B**efore pop music became a national phenomenon, most music was regional in its appeal. The Northeast, the South, the Midwest, and the Southwest all had indigenous music styles that didn't always interact. Big band music may have been the rage in cities throughout the Northeast, but hillbilly music dominated popular tastes in the South. Because urban areas had the largest population densities, city dwellers' tastes were usually reflected more often on popular charts. By 1955, this began to change.

Consider that in 1945, big band music was all the rage, completely dominating popular music charts. In ten years' time, it was an afterthought, and by 1965 it was nearly nonexistent. Despite the intrinsic beauty of much of this music, it only lasted for maybe ten years and is now all but forgotten. Of course, the aging process will render certain styles obsolete as a generation grows older and is replaced by another, but the transition that took place in the mid-'50s was both too sudden and too absolute for that explanation to suffice. Consider that the rock-and-roll songs that were popular in 1965 still enjoy regular rotation on easy-listening radio, hit radio, oldies radio, etc. After nearly three decades, they're still on the airwaves. If it wasn't for the disco remix of big band classics that many deejays feel compelled to play at weddings, we might never hear this music at all. What happened to make music before 1955 seem obsolete while music that was released afterward retains more than a modicum of popularity? Nineteen fifty-five saw not only the introduction of more comprehensive music charts and the birth of rock and roll, but it also saw the 45 RPM, seven-inch single begin to overtake the heavier, easily breakable, and more awkward 78 RPM, ten-inch disk. The sudden popularity of the 45 RPM disk hastened the rise of Top 40 music. Before the popularity of records, most music income was generated through the sales of sheet music. Music publishers had little concern for radio airplay, since most radio programs featured either drama, comedy, or live music. Without much exposure from radio, sales of prerecorded music were minimal. Technology changed all of this almost overnight. First, television became a common fixture in American homes, causing radio to abandon its previous format





and quickly turn to prerecorded music. Not so coincidentally, the music that was being played on the radio had become available in seven-inch singles. The new format was cheap, it was small, and it sounded better than the 78s. It didn't break as easily or wear out as quickly. It even increased the length of playing time, however nominally. It was also the perfect format for the new breed of popular music.

Rock and roll in particular benefited from the 45 RPM single. Because of its disposable nature, the single suited a form of music whose lasting impact was considered to be negligible. Simultaneously, the country began to experience an age of casual wealth for the first time in years, maybe for the first time ever. Teenagers found themselves with plenty of pocket money, thus giving rise to youthful trends in popular music.

Another important factor that may have prompted a sudden change in the style of popular music was the emergence and subsequent rise of Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI). In the early part of the twentieth century, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) handled all publishing income for its members by collecting tariffs from sources that relied on their songs for income. As I said earlier, this had been mostly derived from sheet music sales with secondary funds from variety shows, dance band programs, etc., that aired on the radio. Once radio stations began playing prerecorded music, however, they became the single biggest source of income to ASCAP. The radio stations were less than pleased at being forced to pay ASCAP for what they considered to be free advertisement for their product, so they began to look elsewhere for material. ASCAP, meanwhile, became haughty, likening themselves to the guardians at the gate and the arbiters of good taste. Enter BMI. Created by the National Association of Broadcasters, Broadcast Music Inc. was their means of fighting back. While ASCAP could be personified as the man with tails and a top hat, BMI was the guy with the straw hat and blue jeans. BMI picked up virtually anything that ASCAP refused to touch. By grabbing the leftovers and the rejects, it found itself with quite a few "hillbilly" and "race" artists as members. In 1950, ASCAP brought the issue to a head when it demanded a 100 percent increase in publishing fees. Radio stations balked, and many issued a ban on all ASCAP recordings. By default, BMI songs got all of that "free publicity." By the time ASCAP settled (for less money than it was originally earning), BMI was a full-fledged competitor. "Hillbilly" and "race" records might not have completely infiltrated middle-class society, but they were certainly less foreign than they had been previously. Resentment was intense at ASCAP once rock and roll began to flourish. Suddenly, BMI members were responsible for the lion's share of material that popular artists were recording, and ASCAP members were horrified by the subsequent state of the music scene. With the intent of damaging BMI's reputa-

**Once radio stations began playing prerecorded music, however, they became the single biggest source of income to ASCAP.**



tion, ASCAP competitors accused BMI and its members of various illegalities, and it was no coincidence that the payola scandals in rock and roll's early days came to light just as it became obvious that this new music was most certainly a force to be reckoned with.

By the end of the next decade, the ideological differences between the publishers had become negligible. ASCAP by necessity pursued and nurtured new talent, and BMI continued along the same lines. Their behind-the-scenes bickering did serve one useful purpose, however: it led to the emergence of roots-style recordings and the increased popularity of indigenous regional music, which became the basis for most popular music in the 1950s and subsequently influenced virtually all songs to follow.



Unless they were clairvoyant, artists at the inception of the Top 40 could not have known that their songs would enjoy such longevity. Mostly, songs were considered confections, something to be consumed and digested over the course of a couple of weeks, then passed over and forgotten. Once a song fell from the charts, it entered oldie oblivion. The most an artist could hope for was a few years of stardom, after which they would open up a hairdresser's salon or some such thing (this was Ringo Starr's stated ambition when asked what he hoped to do after the Beatles fell from favor). But why didn't this music just go away? Why do we hold onto it like an heirloom? Is it unique to our time and our generation(s), or does it have a palpable though previously overlooked quality that makes it as timeless as a Duke Ellington composition or a Gershwin tune? Is it possible that pop music from the past forty years might linger as long as a Louis Armstrong solo, even a nineteenth-century symphony?

The early bands and singers of the Top 40 were lucky in the sense that they weren't conscious of any lingering importance being placed on what they did. They sang to make money, get girls, or whatever, but no one really thought that it would last. They were free to have fun and make money for as long as they could, then hope that they had saved enough for a decent condo far away from the elephant's graveyard. Some, like Frankie Lymon and Little Willie John, didn't make it and got stuck in the tar, while others, like Paul McCartney and Michael Jackson, became corporate giants unto themselves. Either way, today's artists are aware that popular music is a potential key to immortality. They are also intrinsically aware of the heritage that has preceded them. How could they not be, with the tireless ability of the baby-boom generation to constantly recycle its own culture and history for the generations that follow? This hurts today's creative artists because they must carry the baggage of their own self-importance. Their ideas are usually taken partly as a reaction to what they have been forced by history, instead of as independent creations that can stand on their own ground. This is much too complicated to last, much too cynical to propagate, and



it explains why I feel certain that we are probably well overdue for another major overhaul in popular styles. If this does come to pass, it is more than likely that it will be unlike anything we have previously heard.



In recent years, the Top 40 has become something of a pariah, which is a curious contradiction since it supposedly gauges popular tastes. Still, aberrations have always abounded. As I had mentioned, “River Deep, Mountain High” was a masterpiece, yet it never made the grade and caused Phil Spector to walk away from the music industry. “Gloria,” by Van Morrison and Them, was somehow overlooked and replaced by an obviously inferior cover version by the Shadows of Knight. Pearl Jam, although one of the most popular modern-day bands, has not pursued general popularity through conventional means, so a song as ubiquitous as “Jeremy” has never qualified as a Top 40 hit. The faults are admittedly numerous.

By its nature, the Top 40 is beholden to the societal disposition of the nation, so when a cultural backlash occurs, the Top 40 suffers. For example, in 1967 the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The earth-shattering effect of this long-playing album was so absolute that singles subsequently were looked down upon, viewed as less worthy of critical attention than albums. As a result, singles became almost irrelevant in the ’70s. In the ’90s, music has splintered into so many subgroupings that the very idea of a general chart that crosses all boundaries of taste has become questionable. Today, a song that tries to become something to everyone means almost nothing to anybody.

At times, however, the pop charts have been on the cutting edge. Before *Billboard* magazine amended its method of compiling chart information in 1955, it was documenting mile after mile of forgettable tripe. Then rock and roll infiltrated the lists and challenged the boring status quo by establishing itself as the new popular music. This was nothing short of revolutionary. Ten years later, almost any musical trend that was worth noting took place on the popular music charts. From the English invasion to the establishment of American soul music, from the decline of pure pop to the formative stages of psychedelia, all took place right under our noses and right on the pop charts.

The point is that despite the era, popular music is always popular music. Sometimes we acknowledge what we love, and at other times we sublimate it. If the country is in a state of denial, then the Top 40 suffers. If we are open-minded, then it flourishes. You can read the mood of the nation simply by observing the quality of what we call popular music.



The vinyl single has suffered recently and is now, for all intents and purposes, extinct. With the ideal format no longer readily available, the whole idea of a “single” can be brought into question. The technology that has given us the compact disc and the compact cassette may have destroyed twelve-inch album sales, but it totally annihilated the seven-inch single. Outside of specialty shops, seven-inch singles have become nearly impossible to find. As a result, individual songs cannot be marketed properly. New “single” releases are readily available on cassettes as “cassingles,” and on CDs as “CD singles,” but neither format adequately replaces the seven-inch single. First of all, since space limitations are not a problem, both formats are often padded with an unbearably dull series of alternate mixes. Worse, these “single” formats are identical in appearance to their full-length counterparts, making them seem like a bad deal when compared to the collection they are extracted from. Most buyers would surely opt for the whole Magilla instead of settling for the less satisfying single. Besides, you can’t stack ‘em. The most harmful aspect of this, though, is the resultant unavailability of individual classic songs.

This marks a serious change in the way pop music is marketed. In the past, it wasn’t unusual for a song to appear solely as a single with no album appearance whatsoever. For example, many of the Beatles’ songs were originally marketed strictly as singles. Today, it is rare indeed for a hit song not to be imbedded into a full-length “album.” But what are music fans who want a copy of “My Love Is Alive” or “To Sir with Love” supposed to do, particularly if they are reasonably certain they don’t want to purchase a heavily padded, “greatest hits” collection of either Gary Wright or Lulu on CD or cassette (provided that one is even available)? Although we hear this music every day, we can’t even figure out how to buy it. What’s the deal here? Has this music become the exclusive property of radio? It is something of a paradox that radio has become the last stronghold of classic pop while it is simultaneously murdering it. Modern radio can no longer do justice to these songs. In fact, sometimes it can kill a song outright.

For a long while, radio had a tendency to play mostly what was current. Anything, say, four or five years old was considered to be an oldie...until lately. The past decade has given us an ever-growing number of “lite” and “classic rock” stations, which rely on very tired and unbearably predictable formatting. Both enforce strict playlist restrictions that make fun and exciting radio a thing of the past. Unless you happen to be lucky enough to live within the broadcasting range of a progressive station, the only way to hear diverse and stimulating radio is to channel-surf through the dozens of restricted formats that now control the airwaves. A song like “Words Get in the Way” by Miami Sound Machine or “Drive” by the Cars is latched onto by lite-format radio and played every day, nonstop, until any feeling that we once felt for the song is sucked out of us. Some songs, like “Sometimes

**The past decade has given us an ever-growing number of “lite” and “classic rock” stations, which rely on very tired and unbearably predictable formatting.**





When We Touch” by Dan Hill, won’t die because radio programmers refuse to let it, and it then becomes even more despicable than it otherwise would be. This is even worse if you are in a work environment that keeps a radio on the same station (inevitably a “lite” station) all day. Since these stations play songs with no concept at all of their original time frames, everything gets blurred. Michael Bolton’s execrable version of “When a Man Loves a Woman” becomes interchangeable with Percy Sledge’s original version, and subconsciously we let it happen. Simply because the radio is on and we hear what it plays, we become comfortably numb. Great music becomes homogenized with the forgettable and the trite, and radio makes it easy not to notice.



The dictionary defines “synergism” as “a cooperative action of discrete agencies such that the total effect is greater than the sum of the effects taken independently.” Simply put, synergy explains how seemingly disparate things can come together to produce almost magical results. Because of the way he was exposed to both country and “race” music, it was synergy that caused Elvis Presley to sing the way he did. Because of the way they idolized their American songwriting heroes, it was synergy that caused Lennon and McCartney to write their first song.

At other times, things seem to take forever to happen and are a lot more complicated than they have to be. A candle burns a rope that is wrapped around a pulley and tied to an anvil that dangles over a fulcrum that is set to strike a latch that will release a ball to roll down a circuitous track until it falls into a cup that pulls a string and trips a lever that strikes a match...you get the idea. R.H. Harris left the Soul Stirrers, making room for Sam Cooke to take his place, bringing him to the attention of producer Bumps Blackwell, who convinced him to make a pop record, which inspired Aretha Franklin to make a pop record, which inspired an entire generation of female vocalists to sing with gospel stylizations, which eventually led four like-minded girls from different cities to form a group called En Vogue, who then teamed up with a trio of hip-hop girls from Queens called Salt ‘n’ Pepa and recorded one of the smartest and sexiest singles in years: that’s complicated. These things are exactly what I hope this book will convey to the reader. Sometimes it’s synergy, sometimes it’s complicated. It’s important to understand the relationship between songs if you care to know how and why popular music developed as it did. Either subliminally or directly, each song has a subsequent effect on those that follow. Most books on the subject of popular music fail to capture the synergy or complexity of this relationship. At worst, they ignore it completely and alphabetize by artist, or they base a recording’s importance

**It’s important  
to understand  
the relationship  
between songs  
if you care to  
know how and  
why popular  
music devel-  
oped as it did.**



solely on its sales figures. At best, they concentrate on groups of artists that are indicative of a particular trend or period in time. This by itself fails to acknowledge that concurrent trends can overlap, form subgroups, etc. Who would guess that members of the English punk-rock band the Clash would have nothing but respect for the music of Swedish pop stars Abba? How else can you readily come to terms with the postmodern, wry, and bitter humor of U2's Vegas persona, particularly after the group carved an image as painfully sincere *artistes*? How else except in the context of its time can the immediacy of "I Want to Hold Your Hand" be conveyed? In the real world, anything can happen. In the world of popular music, anything often does happen...

Which raises the ultimately frustrating point that writing about songs and their history is all well and good, but it can never take the place of hearing them. I wish that I could enclose copies of these songs but that would probably make the artists and publishers a bit litigious (just a hunch), so this book will have to suffice until the CD-ROM is ready. Ultimately, the music speaks for itself. Whatever I can say is possible only because the songs have lent themselves to my interpretations. My only intention is to make the reader want to hear them again. If you don't recognize a title, I hope that you'll be inspired to seek it out. None of these songs deserves to languish, and familiarity is the best protection from obscurity. I'm willing to bet that all of the songs on this list will experience enough longevity to carry them well into the twenty-first century.



**M**usic is the great equalizer. It is something that all of us, as a nation, experience together. Whether you live on the East Coast or the West, are rich or poor, black or white, you name it, one thing that transcends all boundaries is music, and for years the Top 40 has been our country's means of gauging what we like. Whether it was Aretha Franklin or the Beatles, common ground could always be found somewhere on the music charts.

Lying in bed as a child with an AM transistor radio pressed between the pillow and your ear; driving down a two-lane highway on a cool fall day with the radio on; spending a nervous evening at a popular nightspot with a new date as the deejay plays great dance music all night long; sitting on the front porch with old friends, listening to familiar songs—these are simple, irreplaceable pleasures that are a part of our lives. I hope that this book will trigger similar memories, as well as inspire you to listen to something that you may not have heard before.

Here's to the next forty years. May they be as interesting, crazy, and all-consuming as the past forty.

## ABOUT THE TEXT

---

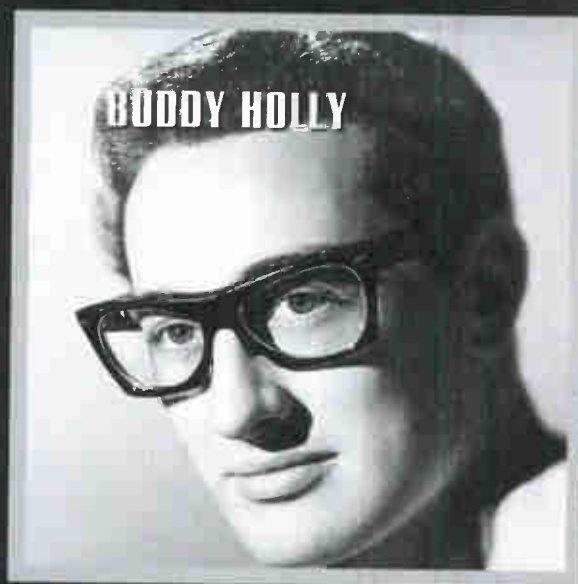
**A***merican Hit Radio* contains a total of 1,250 song titles arranged in chronological order, based upon the month in which they first appeared on the country's Top 40 charts. Five hundred titles are accompanied by text and are meant to signify my choices for the best and/or most significant Top 40 singles of the forty-year period between January 1955 and December 1994. An additional five hundred titles (Great Hits) are scattered throughout as references (they could be considered as my choices for #501-1,000) to help the reader recognize other music that was relevant at that particular time. The remaining 250 titles (Great Misses) are included to put the other songs in their proper perspective. They signify my choices for the worst titles that reached the Top 40 during the past forty years.

The titles are arranged by the date they entered the Top 40 list. This date best represents the time when most listeners first became familiar with the title. Songs that appear in the same month are listed in descending order from #1 to #40.



**Chapter  
One**

**1955-1959**







## JULY 1955 #10 AIN'T THAT A SHAME—FATS DOMINO

The year 1955 began ordinarily enough, with the standard musical trends of the time firmly entrenched and no particular reason for change. Major music labels were selling product that appealed to the masses, with little regard for artistic or cultural relevance. Songs that the labels deemed popular were often released in as many as three or four competing versions. When a song like “Unchained Melody” caught the interest of record buyers, other labels would find a singer from their own stable of artists, who would in turn record a new interpretation of the same song. Trends played a large part in determining what songs should be recorded. When coonskin caps and popguns were all the rage, *four* competing singers reached the Top 40 with differing versions of “The Ballad of Davy Crockett.” All in all, music was predictable, safe, and expendable.

Rumblings could be heard on the horizon, though. Rhythm-and-blues artists were beginning to pull at the reins that confined them to the “race” charts. More importantly, parts of the white middle class began to pay attention. Many mainstream record buyers became attracted to the comparatively raw, urgent sound of rhythm and blues, but these songs rarely were recognized by the pop music charts, for various political and prejudicial reasons. When an original rhythm-and-blues record was released, it often had to compete against a Milquetoast cover version that received significantly more exposure and airplay. Because of the way the rating system worked, the bland remake would often chart higher than the original version, even if it sold fewer copies. How else could it be explained that “Ain’t That a Shame” by Fats Domino reached #10 for one week while the same song (hardly, if talent counts) by Pat Boone reached #1 for two weeks? Actually, there is another reason. White audiences were not yet comfortable with the untamed rhythms and lyrics of black rhythm and blues, and needed singers like Pat Boone to interpret the songs in a less intimidating manner. In 1955, minorities accounted for less than 10 percent of record sales. In other

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1954 #8

EARTH ANGEL—THE PENGUINS

FEBRUARY 1955 #17

PLEDGING MY LOVE—JOHNNY ACE

MARCH 1955 #20

SINCERELY—THE MOONGLOWS

MAY 1955 #1

ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK—  
BILL HALEY AND THE COMETS

### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1955 #3

EARTH ANGEL—THE CREW CUTS

JANUARY 1955 #3

MELODY OF LOVE—THE FOUR ACES

FEBRUARY 1955 #1

THE BALLAD OF DAVY CROCKETT—  
BILL HAYES

MARCH 1955 #5

THE BALLAD OF DAVY CROCKETT—  
TENNESSEE ERNIE FORD

MARCH 1955 #5

THE BALLAD OF DAVY CROCKETT—  
FESS PARKER

APRIL 1955 #14

THE BALLAD OF DAVY CROCKETT—  
THE VOICES OF WALTER SCHUMANN

JULY 1955 #1

AIN'T THAT A SHAME—PAT BOONE



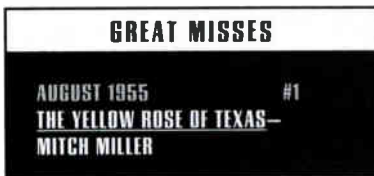
words, most buyers were white, and most of them preferred to buy what was familiar (i.e., white). A teenage-based counterculture was taking root, though, with musical tastes far more adventurous than its mainstream counterpart. It was this audience that finally put Fats Domino squarely at the center of popular music.

“Ain’t That a Shame” wasn’t Fats Domino’s first hit recording, but it was the first to substantially dent the popular music charts. He had been recording for years and, by 1955, already had a sizable number of hit records on the rhythm-and-blues charts. It could be argued (in fact, it is likely) that the exposure the song obtained from Pat Boone’s version actually helped Fats Domino’s original to be recognized by Middle America. After all, Fats Domino’s style was straightforward enough to be taken at face value. The lyrics did not have any “vulgar” connotation, and his delivery was unthreatening to suspicious white record buyers. Little Richard and Chuck Berry had the responsibility of confronting those barriers. It is more than likely, then, that the burgeoning youth counterculture combined with a number of mainstream record buyers to finally put rhythm and blues (or “rock and roll”) on the popular music charts.

## AUGUST 1955 #5 MAYBELLINE—CHUCK BERRY

**M**aybelline” is to rock and roll what Adam and Eve are to the Bible. Sure, rock-and-roll-style songs predate it, but they were all hybrids. For example, the only song on this list that predates “Maybelline,” “Ain’t That a Shame,” by Fats Domino, is really a rhythm-and-blues song disguised as a rock-and-roll song. What “Maybelline” says, essentially, is “accept no imitations, it all starts here.”

It is hard to overestimate just how influential Chuck Berry was. He was the first guitarist/singer to reach the charts. He was also a songwriter/performer, something relatively uncommon in 1955. He was the first rock-and-roll artist to write words that were relevant and entertaining to his young, white audience without alienating his core black audience. Finally, he achieved all of this with a driving rock-and-roll rhythm that was, if not brand new, certainly unique enough to be instantly recognizable. For these reasons he, more than any other artist, is responsible for the direction of the popular music that followed. “Maybelline” was his first single, and from then on, the pop charts



were permanently altered.

The recording of “Maybelline” wasn’t an accident at all, but a deliberate attempt at musical alchemy. While Sam Phillips of Sun Records was busy trying to find a white singer who sounded like a black man, Chuck Berry, a black man, was endeavoring to write music that would appeal to the white kids who preferred Pat Boone to Fats Domino. While playing at nightclubs around his hometown of St. Louis, Berry intended to make an impression on his predominantly black au-



dience. The most popular music in the area among whites was hillbilly music (now country-western), and he thought it would be clever to incorporate some hillbilly material into the usual set of blues standards. The crowd reaction was generally favorable, and it wasn't long before the white crowd got word of the "black hillbilly" and started coming to shows. When performing this material, Berry made sure to enunciate carefully, singing outside the standard blues realm, and he improvised lyrics that caused the audience to pay closer attention to the budding star.

One night the great Muddy Waters was playing in Chicago and Berry went to the show. Afterward, he tentatively stated his admiration and mentioned that he hoped to make a record of his own. Waters responded that he should see Leonard Chess at Chess Records. Contrary to popular legend, Berry did not play guitar with Muddy Waters that night. The next business day, he was at Chess Records making arrangements for a recording session. The first song he recorded was "Ida May," which was changed to "Maybelline" at the suggestion of Leonard Chess. The session was full of stops and starts—they must have known they were on to something, but they didn't know what it was. The music was so new that "Maybelline" took thirty-six takes before it was considered finished.

To help the song get airplay, two-thirds of the writing credits were given to promoter/disc jockey Alan Freed and his associate Russ Fratto, something Berry was unaware of until the song was published and released. The ethics were perhaps suspect, but this surely gave Freed incentive to push "Maybelline." It became a national hit, reaching #5. It was then, in the summer of 1955, that the rock-and-roll revolution began.

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1955 <u>ONLY YOU</u> —THE PLATTERS	#5
OCTOBER 1955 <u>AT MY FRONT DOOR</u> — THE EL DORADOS	#17
DECEMBER 1955 <u>THE GREAT PRETENDER</u> — THE PLATTERS	#1

## JANUARY 1956 #17 TUTTI FRUTTI—LITTLE RICHARD

**W**op-bop-a-loo-bop, a-lop-bam-boom." Is this onomatopoeia for "Wham, bam, "thank you, ma'am"? I dunno. If it is, then it's a "dirty" song. If it isn't, then it's insane nonsense. In the '50s, inquiring minds wanted to know. Either way, it's raw rock and roll at its finest. No holds barred, just let loose and scream. I wish I could have a dollar for every button that kids popped off their pajamas while jumping up and down on their beds singing along with Little Richard.

Richard Penniman grew up on a dirt street in an impoverished section of Macon, Georgia. Music was everywhere. Street vendors and evangelists who paraded down his block would sing as loud as they could, whether selling vegetables or religion, to get the attention of the folks inside. All the neighborhood sang freely, as well, improvising on spiritual songs to keep them company while they worked. Some gospel singers, particularly Marion Williams of the Clara Ward Singers,



Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Mahalia Jackson also had a profound influence on “little” Richard.

While growing up, Little Richard was close to impossible to control. He had an infectious, hyperactive personality that was contagious and made him popular, but it also got him into trouble. His homosexuality didn't help matters, so one night he left home with a traveling minstrel show. With his crazy antics and wild style, he constantly drew attention to himself. Soon he was offered a contract with RCA and recorded a minor local hit called “Every Hour.” A local musician named Esquerita took an interest in Little Richard and taught him some piano technique and maybe a thing or two about style. Then suddenly, in the winter of 1952, Little Richard's father was murdered. He felt compelled to help support his family, and took a job washing dishes at the local Greyhound bus station.

RCA lost interest in its protégé, but Little Richard remained musically active and formed a band called the Tempo Toppers. He was subsequently signed to Don Robey's Peacock Records, but the group recorded little of note. His next band, the Upsetters, recorded a demo and sent it off to Art Rupe of Specialty Records. Because the demo was anything but spectacular, Rupe let a few months pass. Little Richard called the label relentlessly, though, and eventually Rupe decided to take a chance. He arranged a recording session at New Orleans' J&M Studios, owned by Cosimo Matassa and the home studio of Fats Domino and Lloyd Price. Bumps Blackwell was, for lack of a better title, the artistic supervisor at Specialty Records, and it was his responsibility to meet Little Richard and record the session.

Initially, Blackwell was no more successful than his predecessors. The songs that Little Richard chose were generally slow blues, and Blackwell felt that none of them were particularly good. He called for a break, so Richard and

the band retired to the Dew Drop Inn. With a few people inside and an old upright piano, Richard's effusive personality got the best of him. He started playing like crazy, singing loud, lewd, and hamming it up. Blackwell was stunned—why couldn't he record *this*? He got a local lyricist named Dorothy LaBostrie to clean up the lyric, and they went back to J&M with only fifteen minutes remaining to their session. “Tutti frutti, good booty” became “Tutti frutti, aw-rootie.” Three takes later, it was in the bag.

“Tutti Frutti” became a big hit on the R&B charts. Once again, though, the opportunistic white media took advantage, and once again, Pat Boone was enlisted to sing a cover version. To hear Boone's version today is simultaneously hysterical and sobering. Little Richard generously credits Boone with inadvert-

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1956 <u>WHY DO FOOLS FALL IN LOVE—</u> FRANKIE LYMON AND THE TEENAGERS	#6
FEBRUARY 1956 <u>MAK THE KNIFE—</u> LOUIS ARMSTRONG	#7
FEBRUARY 1956 <u>SPEED—</u> THE CADILLACS	#17

GREAT MISSES	
JANUARY 1956 <u>NO, NOT MUCH—</u> THE FOUR LADS	#2
FEBRUARY 1956 <u>TUTTI FRUTTI—</u> PAT BOONE	#12





ently helping his own version cross over to the pop charts, and this is probably true. A lot of kids never would have heard “Tutti Frutti” if Pat Boone hadn’t covered it, but one thing is for sure: when they were popping the buttons on their pj’s, Little Richard’s version was on the record player.

## MARCH 1956 #1 HEARTBREAK HOTEL—ELVIS PRESLEY

Unless you were a big fan of country music in 1955, chances are you had no idea who Elvis Presley was. While at Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee, Elvis recorded just under a score of songs that today are among the most seminal recordings of all time; but none of the Sun recordings ever made the Top 40 pop charts. In retrospect, this seems amazing considering the widespread effect these seventeen or so songs had on music. But at the time, Elvis’s success on local radio seemed sufficient, and for a country boy it would have been foolish to think that anything more than regional fame was within his grasp. No major label was signing rock-and-roll or rhythm-and-blues artists, black or white, so independent labels were picking up the slack. In this way, rock-and-roll music, in the beginning, was more or less kept to a cottage industry.



It is impossible to overemphasize the important role Sam Phillips played in developing Elvis Presley’s original style and artistry. When Phillips started Sun Records, his intention was to record the local blues artists who could not get a fair deal at the other southern recording studios. After a time, Phillips began recording white country artists who were interested in trying something new. By combining their country sound with a steady beat and adding the unrestrained qualities of rhythm and blues, a new, accessible style resulted. If you doubt the success of Phillips’s formula, here are just some of the artists whose careers he launched within a year’s time: Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, and, of course, Elvis Presley. Phillips knew what he was doing, and the new style he and these country boys developed was dubbed “rockabilly.” The rockabilly sound eventually became nothing more than a stylization of double-time beats with hiccup vocals drenched in echo, but in its original form it was much more powerful. It was “blacker” than contemporary rockabilly with a definite feel for the lyrics.

The legacy of Elvis’s Sun recordings will probably last as long as the recorded evidence exists. Unfortunately, though, his fame outgrew the label that spawned him, and his new manager, Colonel Tom Parker, lured him into a contract with RCA Records. RCA bought Elvis’s contract from Phillips for a total of \$40,000, with the intention of making Elvis Presley a pop star. His first single, “Heartbreak Hotel,” was released in early 1956, and suddenly Elvis Presley became the embodiment of rock and roll. The song went to #1 on the national pop charts and

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1956	#2
<u>BLUE SUEDE SHOES</u> —CARL PERKINS	
MARCH 1956	#4
<u>(YOU’VE GOT) THE MAGIC TOUCH</u> —THE PLATTERS	



stayed there for eight weeks. As far as Middle America was concerned, Elvis could have come from Mars because nobody, especially a white nobody, had ever made music like that. *And that...that...“dancing” that he does, if you could call it dancing, to that niggra jungle music...he’s a pervert...* and on and on and blah, blah, blah. Teenagers who were starving for a means of expression and suffocating at the hands of an outdated morality were sensing liberation, and Elvis Presley personified their sense of freedom.

GREAT MISSES	
MARCH 1956	#1
HOT DIGGITY (DOG DIGGITY BOOM)—PERRY COMO	

“Heartbreak Hotel” was written by Mae Axton (Hoyt Axton’s mother) with Tommy Dunden and featured a rare songwriting credit to Elvis himself. It had a dark, somber, bluesy mood that Elvis was able to capitalize on by singing with a dramatic flair, using a full range of dynamics to get the point across. The atmosphere on this song is so thick you could cut it with a knife. It really

does sound as though Elvis is singing in front of a blinking, neon Vacancy sign. His voice is so far out front in the mix that if his talent was anything less than extraordinary, the record would be a disaster. As it is, his vocal performance is something to behold, and he flaunts the fact that he has no precedent. The record sounds great as much for what it’s missing as for what it contains. A modern studio could try for days, but the sound of records like this is simply not reproducible. The sound and lyrical content seem, in retrospect, to be quite mature for a teenage anthem. It is great not just because it was Elvis’s first national hit, but because it was a landmark performance. It established rock and roll (and everything rock and roll stood for) as a force to be reckoned with.

### APRIL 1956 #6 LONG TALL SALLY—LITTLE RICHARD

After Little Richard heard Pat Boone’s pale imitation of “Tutti Frutti,” he got mad. When Boone’s version charted higher than his own, he decided to get even. He and producer Bumps Blackwell determined to record a song so raucous, so wild, so *black*, that Pat Boone wouldn’t be able to wrap his mouth around it. A

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1956	#3
I’M IN LOVE AGAIN—FATS DOMINO	

teenage fan from Mississippi named Enortis Johnson supplied the lyrical idea. Writing about catching her Uncle John running around behind her sick Aunt Mary’s back, Johnson submitted a few lines of lyric, hoping that Little Richard would be able to do the rest. If anybody was capable of completing a song about backdoor sexual promiscuity, it was Little Richard. The song became

a lyrical masterpiece, but it was sung so fast that nobody understood it. Even the Beatles, nearly a decade later, had to bluff their way through a line or two. While most listeners assumed “Long Tall Sally” was another nonsense rhyme, the lyrics were no such thing. They quite blatantly tell the tale of Uncle John



messin' with bald-head Sally ("she's built for speed"), and seeing "Aunt Mary comin' so he ducked back in the alley."

The song was sung at such a breakneck pace it should have discouraged imitations. Yet, with the will of a man attempting to deny the forces of his own nature, Pat Boone *did* record "Long Tall Sally"—or, more accurately, something resembling it, with the same title and chord changes. This time, though, Little Richard had the edge, reaching #6 while Boone's version nipped at his heels, holding at #8.

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1956	#3
STANDING ON THE CORNER— THE FOUR LADS	
APRIL 1956	#8
LONG TALL SALLY—PAT BOONE	

## JUNE 1956 #31 MY BABY LEFT ME—ELVIS PRESLEY

Elvis Presley was an interpretive singer, and as such, he relied on songwriters for virtually all of his material. But he had no shortage of songs from which to choose. He picked from rhythm and blues, country-western, Tin Pan Alley, and the emerging rock-and-roll writers. He was capable of putting his mark on each style by making them all, unmistakably, Elvis Presley songs. Elvis's first-ever single, "That's All Right, Mama," was an imaginative reworking of a song written by Arthur Crudup, an R&B artist who happened to be a particular favorite of Presley's. "My Baby Left Me" was also written by Crudup. Presley taped his version during the second recording session for his new label, RCA Records, and saw it relegated to the B side of his second RCA release. The A side, "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," was a very good song but seems awkward and stiff when compared to the frisky energy of "My Baby Left Me." Still, promotional efforts were concentrated on the safer "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," and it easily reached #1 while "My Baby Left Me" was lucky, as a B side, to chart at all—it reached #31. Such was his popularity that double-sided hits became the rule and not the exception. Soon overshadowed by Elvis's next double-sided smash, "Don't Be Cruel"/"Hound Dog," "My Baby Left Me" became an obscurity and was almost completely forgotten.

Although it was Elvis's most popular song, I hesitate to include "Hound Dog" among his best work, but not for the usual reasons that have been cited by uninformed purists of blues and R&B. I am referring to the charge that Elvis stole "Hound Dog" from Big Mama Thornton and was out of his league. First of all, the song was written by Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller, two East Coast Jewish kids, so it wasn't exactly traditional Negro blues or spiritual music. Secondly, Elvis's version is so far removed from Big Mama Thornton's that they might as well have different titles.



GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1956	#7
BE BOP A LULA—GENE VINCENT	
JUNE 1956	#18
ROLL OVER BEETHOVEN— CHUCK BERRY	



Her version is frightening, loaded with blue notes and anger, while Elvis's version is goofy and playful. I happen to think that Thornton's recording is better because it sounds more real, perhaps even dangerous; but that doesn't mean that Elvis should get saddled with a reputation for pilfering recordings from black

artists. It was always his intention to give credit where it was due, and he never hesitated to mention the creators who were responsible for supplying his material.

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1956	#8
<u>TRANSFUSION</u> —NERVOUS NORVUS	

"My Baby Left Me" would have fit in comfortably among Elvis's early Sun material. It has all of the classic stylings that make those songs so crucial—from the confident, exaggerated vocals

to the rock-solid backing of band members Scotty Moore and Bill Black, augmented by D.J. Fontana on drums. Since none of the earlier Sun records ever hit the Top 40, there is no better example of the birth of rockabilly on the pop charts than "My Baby Left Me." It displays all of the inventiveness those remarkable Sun recordings had and should be recognized as a part of Elvis's most innovative work.

## JULY 1956 #24 FEVER—LITTLE WILLIE JOHN

**W**hen James Brown was scuffling around looking for a recording contract with King Records, Little Willie John was the label's resident star. Brown was struggling for recognition, and he hoped that one day he could be as famous as John. Fate played its role and gave James Brown all he asked for and then some, but Little Willie John had a much bleaker destiny.

When he was a child growing up in Detroit, Little Willie John used to sneak out of his house at night to sing for money on street corners. When his daddy found out, he gave Willie a good thrashing, figuring it was for his own good. Dizzy Gillespie (*the* Dizzy Gillespie) had heard Willie John sing at a talent contest and was impressed enough to talk to his parents, convincing them to support his talent. Willie's father must have had a change of heart bordering on an epiphany, because he resigned from his job on the assembly line and started driving his son to talent contests and

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1956	#1
<u>MY PRAYER</u> —THE PLATTERS	
JULY 1956	#15
<u>STRANDED IN THE JUNGLE</u> —THE CADETS	

other engagements. Although he was originally rejected by King Records, Little Willie John's popularity grew steadily until 1955, when King reconsidered and signed him to a recording contract.

Still in his teens, Willie John became a rhythm-and-blues star with his first release, "All Around the World." "Fever" was his third single, and it rose to #1 on the R&B charts and remained there for six months! That type of popularity was so overwhelming that the pop charts had to make a concession, and the song





eventually reached #24. In 1956, the pop charts were alien territory to the likes of Little Willie John. His music was usually intense and bluesy. It spoke directly of the black experience (read “plight”), and the pop charts were not typically accommodating to that style...yet.

Publishing was not an exact science in the '50s, and some half a dozen people have claimed authorship of “Fever.” Also, Willie John was not the most responsible performer, and his business and artistic interests were often neglected. This trait worsened with the passage of time. Whether because of insecurity over his diminutive stature (he was five feet, four inches tall) or a genuine need to protect himself, he carried a knife. One day in 1966 he used it, killing a railroad employee in Seattle during an argument. In prison, his health worsened, and he passed away on May 28, 1968.

“Fever” has since been revived a number of times, most memorably as a pop song by Peggy Lee; but in 1956 it was considered to be “dangerous” race music, pure and simple. In his short life, Little Willie John had a profound influence on his contemporaries and lives on in memory as a catalyst who inspired some vital changes in popular music.

## AUGUST 1956 #1 DON'T BE CRUEL—ELVIS PRESLEY

The story of Elvis Presley's youth has been told so often by both casual historians and dedicated fans that his past now exists somewhere between legend and myth. Like Paul Revere's midnight ride, George Washington's cherry tree incident, Daniel Boone's exploits with the Indians, and Johnny Appleseed's legendary wanderings, Elvis's early years have been portrayed with a uniquely American blend of fact and fiction. In the mid-'50s, America existed on two distinctly different planes, with the white middle-class majority determining what truths would be embraced in its quasi-historical tales, and the black (and every other nonwhite) minority finding their roles minimized in these occasionally misinformed and highly edited stories.

In 1956, Elvis was certainly not the stuff white legends were made of. With its tight, moralistic structure and rigid behavioral code, Middle America appeared to be comfortably smug and self-righteous, but its children weren't quite as convinced. Sam Phillips at Sun Records sensed this discontent and deliberately set out to bring rhythm and blues to this audience. After all, the wild abandon and uninhibited expressiveness that defined R&B were so fundamentally appealing that it *had* to cross the color barrier—provided that the conduit was young, white, handsome, and respectable. Although he might maintain otherwise, Phillips could never have predicted the extent to which his foresight



### GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1956 #1

HOUND DOG—ELVIS PRESLEY

AUGUST 1956 #2

HONKY TONK—BILL BOGGETT

SEPTEMBER 1956 #24

IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT—  
FIVE SATINS



**Allen toned  
Elvis down by  
asking him to  
sing "Hound  
Dog" to an  
actual droopy-  
eyed mutt.**

**I**would be correct. For example, I think it is no exaggeration to say unequivocally that every single rock-and-roll record that was released after "Don't Be Cruel"/"Hound Dog" was touched by Elvis's influence in some way, shape, or form. Through him, the black experience went mainstream. Being a popular white singer who deliberately co-opts African-American styles without condescension is, in itself, no great achievement, but doing it well and without pretense certainly is. The most amazing thing about Elvis was the ease with which he incorporated R&B into his act. His moves were R&B, and the sound that emanated from his mouth was R&B, and yet he never sounded derivative. His stylization may have been taken from the black artists he was familiar with, but his singing resembles no particular black performer of that period. He was, pure and simple, Elvis.

Can any of us ever forget the first time we heard Elvis speak? The morally righteous types who feigned disgust at the very sight of him must have been just as aghast to discover that he was a soft-spoken, polite Southerner who respected the opinions of his elders. My God, he was one of them! With his roots firmly entrenched in white (albeit poor) culture, he became the embodiment of black culture as perceived by whites. African-Americans, on the other hand, knew that Elvis was a thinned-out version of the real thing, and they simultaneously resented and applauded him for his efforts. The fact that it took a white man to achieve superstardom with black-inspired material says less about Elvis than it does about America at that time. With a major conglomerate supporting this "new" sound, white America was unwittingly seduced into incorporating the black experience into their own mythology. "Don't Be Cruel"/"Hound Dog" became the single most popular record of the entire rock-and-roll era, and popular music was never the same again.

Elvis Aron Presley was born in East Tupelo, Mississippi, to parents Gladys and Vernon on January 8, 1935. His twin brother, Jesse Garon, was stillborn, destining Elvis to be raised as an only child. His father struggled to support the family, and they moved constantly, eventually settling in Memphis. In his teens, he got a job driving a truck and displayed an inclination to sing, initially with no apparent professional ambitions. Then an advertisement caught his eye about a recording studio in Memphis that would record nonprofessionals at a reasonable rate and give them an acetate (a test pressing of a record) as a souvenir. Although he was scared to death, Elvis eventually mustered up the courage to enter the Memphis Recording Service and sing a couple of songs, with studio receptionist Marion Keisker manning the controls (though some informed historians are certain it was Phillips himself). She told Phillips of her encounter, and the rest is history, or myth, or legend.

After leaving Sun and gaining access to the national distribution and advertising power of RCA, Elvis proceeded to reinvent America's image of itself. First, and ferociously effective, were his television appearances, particularly those on



the Steve Allen and Ed Sullivan shows. Sullivan received so many complaints about Elvis's hip thrusting that on his third TV appearance, he filmed him only from the waist up. Allen toned Elvis down by making him sing "Hound Dog" to an actual droopy-eyed mutt. Elvis soon became the stuff of legend and—considering the plethora of posthumous Elvis sightings, alien babies he allegedly fathered, miracles caused by his spirit, etc.—he's even more a part of our mythology today. While alive, Elvis Presley was the most famous face in pop music. In death, his likeness is easily among the most recognized of any human being that has ever graced the planet Earth.

## OCTOBER 1956 #1 I WALK THE LINE—JOHNNY CASH

In his autobiography, *The Man in Black*, Johnny Cash said, "I never did a concert that I didn't sing 'I Walk the Line.' And I never sang it that I didn't mean it, or that I didn't *want* to mean it." It shows, and if you listen to his performance on the single, you can tell that he is singing from the heart about something that is important to him. Cash recorded "I Walk the Line" for Sun Records in 1956, and it was his first national hit, reaching #17.

Johnny Cash has a talent that is hard to figure. He possesses a voice with very little range, yet it conveys strength and vulnerability simultaneously and effortlessly. And he always sounds honest. Yet he lacks animation and in many ways was the polar opposite of his pelvis-thrusting label mate, Elvis Presley. The limited talents of his band, who barely knew how to play their instruments, kept musicianship to a minimum, as well. But Sun Records' Sam Phillips could turn a shortcoming into a virtue better than just about anybody, and his use of slap-back echo made the lack of musical ability and showmanship irrelevant by emphasizing the vocals. This methodology caused the character of the singer to come into focus, and Johnny Cash was thus destined to succeed. He would use this simple but effective formula for his entire career, with little change.

"I Walk the Line" has a chord progression that was inspired by a backward recording on a home tape recorder. Cash was haunted by the sound of the tape and wrote chords to emulate the upside-down progression. The song has an essentially repetitive structure, just verse after verse, with key changes introducing each new round. It's so simple that it's strange, particularly the way Cash hums the root note before each verse, presumably to be sure he finds the new key.

Johnny Cash ultimately had a more profound effect on country music than rock and roll. But "I Walk the Line," his heartfelt love song, had enough emotional power to cross the Mason-Dixon line, and it made him a national star.

### GREAT HITS

OCTOBER 1956 #1  
LOVE ME TENDER—ELVIS PRESLEY

OCTOBER 1956 #2  
BLUEBERRY HILL—FATS DOMINO

**NOVEMBER 1956 #1 SINGING THE BLUES—GUY MITCHELL**

In 1979, the Clash released its classic punk-rock anthem “London Calling.” As the song crashes to a grinding halt, vocalist Joe Strummer sputters, “I never felt so much like a...” and that’s it. I recognized that shard of a phrase somehow, and for a long while it haunted me until one day it suddenly came to me. He was paraphrasing the lyric from “Singing the Blues”!

Guy Mitchell was the resident crooner at Columbia Records, which was then controlled by A&R (artist-and-repertoire) man Mitch Miller. Miller’s primary expectations of Mitchell were twofold: one, he was expected to fill the shoes of the recently departed Frank Sinatra, and two, he was expected to follow orders. In 1956, the job of the A&R man was self-explanatory. Miller would match a song with an artist, and it was expected that the artist would record it, regardless of his own personal misgivings. Miller had a disdain for rock and roll that was boundless, and he intended to have absolutely nothing to do with it. His stable of artists, which included Rosemary Clooney, Tony Bennett, and Jo Stafford, not to mention Miller’s own sing-along records, seemed to be ample insurance against the noisy faddishness of rock and roll. Miller’s stubborn resistance meant that Columbia would continue in the time-tested styles of traditional pop music.

Guy Mitchell was a talented singer, which gave Miller the raw material he needed to work with, but the simple-minded, one-dimensional songs he was handed kept him from reaching his potential. “Singing the Blues” was originally sung by Marty Robbins (who later scored big with “El Paso”), and it was a #1 hit on the country music charts. Better than most of his other song choices, Miller thought “Singing the Blues” could be a big pop hit if Mitchell sung it, and boy was he ever right. It held the #1 position for ten straight weeks.

The instrumental backing on the song sounds corny by today’s standards, with a ukulele accompaniment and a whistling refrain, but Mitchell’s singing holds up very well. His delivery sounds casual and comfortable, like someone who would prefer blue jeans to dress slacks. The lack of formality makes the song endearing and is the most likely reason that it still enjoys a modicum of popularity.

**JANUARY 1957 #5 BANANA BOAT (DAY-O)—HARRY BELAFONTE**

If you felt too old to tolerate rock and roll, but still wanted to be modern enough to appreciate new sounds, ethnic music provided a viable option. Middle-class couples bought Harry Belafonte records by the millions to play for their neighbors on their new hi-fi record players, which they proudly displayed in living rooms and finished basements across the country. The sophistication shown by appreciating Harry Belafonte was impressive, considering the narrow tolerance of the time, but Belafonte’s vocal talents and exoticism were not the only reasons for his popularity. His striking good looks and smooth sensuality added to his appeal, particularly with women.





Before he was established as a successful actor, starring in the film *Carmen Jones*, Belafonte began his music career singing folk songs in the nightclubs of New York's Greenwich Village. His native West Indian background brought him, naturally enough, in contact with indigenous folk songs, and RCA Records, upon signing him, intended to present Belafonte as a bona fide calypso artist. An album of Caribbean-based material, called *Calypso*, was released in 1956 and was wildly successful, holding the #1 position for a whopping thirty-one weeks. The companion singles released from the album were the brooding "Jamaica Farewell" and the startlingly original "Banana Boat (Day-o)."

A folk band called the Tarriers, featuring future actor Alan Arkin, was presumably inspired by the album *Calypso* and released its version of "Banana Boat" just weeks before Belafonte's own version charted. Both recordings reached the Top 10. Later, another four versions (by Stan Freberg, The Fontane Sisters, Steve Lawrence, and Sarah Vaughan) reached the Top 40, providing a clear indication of just how influential Harry Belafonte had become. On his own version, Belafonte made full use of his thespian skills as well as his singing talent, thus capitalizing on his exotic accent to make the song sound authentic. He made "Banana Boat" his own, and throughout the years his version has been occasionally resurrected, most memorably when it was used for a show-stopping scene in the movie *Beetlejuice*.

Belafonte's career continues to this day, with sporadic television and concert appearances. He has been and remains an active supporter of civil rights, and performed at the 1963 March on Washington, where Martin Luther King told the world, "I have a dream." "We Are the World," recorded for African famine relief, was Belafonte's brainchild.

## JANUARY 1957 #20 AIN'T GOT NO HOME—CLARENCE FROGMAN HENRY

**B**y 1956, Chess Records had long been established as an innovative label, with blues artists as reputable as Muddy Waters and rock and rollers as unique as Chuck Berry. All over the country, novelty records were beginning to interrupt rock and roll's sovereignty, diluting its spirit with method taking the place of inspiration as the essential ingredient. Nevertheless, it sold records. Clarence "Frogman" Henry didn't need to use gimmickry to reach the Top 40, as was proven by his 1961 Top 10 hit "(I Don't Know Why I Love You) But I Do," but they didn't call him Frogman for nothing. His lower register was

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1956	#12
<u>SINCE I MET YOU BABY</u> — IVORY JOE HUNTER	
DECEMBER 1956	#17
<u>JIM DANDY</u> —LAVERN BAKER	

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1957	#5
<u>BLUE MONDAY</u> —FATS DOMINO	
FEBRUARY 1957	#19
<u>WITHOUT LOVE [THERE IS NOTHING]</u> — CLYDE McPHATTER	



so ridiculously guttural that his nickname was utterly appropriate. He also sang in a falsetto that was two octaves above his froggy voice. Henry wrote and recorded "Ain't Got No Home" to display this unique talent, but it's not his range that makes the song appealing. The complete inanity of the lyrics, when sung over the driving New Orleans rhythm, is so wacky that it becomes irresistible. Chess released "Ain't Got No Home" on its subsidiary label, Argo, thus successfully cashing in on the novelty trend without damaging the spirit or the reputation of the parent label.

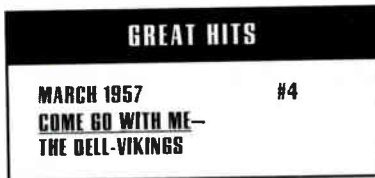


No other city in the world embraces its indigenous musicians with the vigor of New Orleans. In many cases, the embrace is so tight that they cannot escape its grasp, destining them to a lifetime of local recognition with little acclaim elsewhere.

Artists as diverse and talented as Professor Longhair (a New Orleans deity), Allen Toussaint, Irma Thomas, the Meters, Lee Dorsey, and Clarence "Frogman" Henry all suffered from this to some extent. Henry disappeared from the national scene for five years, only to reappear for a short while in 1961 (sans froggy voice) with the hit songs "But I Do" and "You Always Hurt the One You Love."

### MARCH 1957 #4 I'M WALKIN'—FATS DOMINO

Fats Domino was the only successful rhythm-and-blues artist who went on to become a rock-and-roll star without any real change in his style. By 1963, he'd reached the Top 40 thirty-six times (!), and he eventually racked up more gold records than any artist besides Elvis or the Beatles. His consistency was something to behold. In many ways, "I'm Walkin'" was very much like most of his other recordings. As usual, it was written with and produced by Dave Bartholomew. It featured the same crack band members, including drummer Earl Palmer and guitarist (and



brother-in-law) Harrison Verrett. "I'm Walkin'" stands out as one of Fats Domino's best performances mainly because of Palmer's rollicking, double-time drum beat, which propels the song from its opening right on through to the fade-out two minutes later. The band's performance is seamless and is a perfect representation of what makes New Orleans musicians special.

Antoine Domino was born in New Orleans in 1928, one of nine children. His brother-in-law, Harrison Verrett, who was twenty years his senior, taught young Antoine the basics of piano playing, which he learned eagerly. His interest was strong enough for him to leave school at fourteen and work days in a factory so he could perform at local nightclubs. One night, bandleader and arranger Dave Bartholomew caught his act at a local juke joint called the Hideaway Club and was impressed. He presented young Fats to Imperial Records, where he was signed to a recording contract in 1949.



His first single, “The Fat Man,” became a huge rhythm-and-blues hit and went on to sell more than a million copies. Other R&B hits followed, and in 1955 he was the first R&B artist to cross over to the mostly white pop Top 40, with “Ain’t That a Shame.” Subsequent hits—such as “I’m in Love Again,” “Blueberry Hill” (his biggest), “Blue Monday,” and “I’m Walkin’”—were all cut from the same mold and established Fats Domino as the most consistent artist of the early rock-and-roll era.

## MARCH 1957 #12 WALKIN’ AFTER MIDNIGHT—PATSY CLINE

**P**atsy Cline had one of the most pleasant singing voices in all of popular music. Free of affectation and airs, her natural talent just flowed whenever she sang. Her style of dress and her songs were Nashville, but her singing style was universal. Before Cline, country music was strictly regional in its appeal. Hank Williams made a minor dent in the pop charts but ultimately had little impact outside the South and Southwest. A few singers, including Tony Bennett (“Cold, Cold Heart”) and Patti Page (“Tennessee Waltz”), had hits with country songs, but they were pop artists, not country singers. It took Patsy Cline to make country music broadly appealing on a national level.

Virginia Patterson Hensley was born on September 8, 1932. As a sign of things to come, she was a talented and precocious child. While barely in her teens, she approached her local radio station, WINC, and bluntly requested to sing. Her unabashed personality got her the job. Young Virginia listened religiously to radio stations that broadcast the Grand Ole Opry. When a star from the Opry named Wally Fowler came to town, she once again asserted herself by requesting an audition, which earned her a place in his show. She hadn’t performed at the Grand Ole Opry yet, but she was developing a professionalism that matched her forthright confidence.

In 1953, she married, thus becoming Virginia Cline. At the behest of her manager, she soon changed her name to Patsy. In September 1954, an executive from Four Star Records, a small, regional company, heard Cline and hurriedly signed her to a contract. The terms were harsh, though, as she could record only material that was approved by the label, and the contract would be renewable in two years’ time if Four Star cared to pick up the option.

When Cline met legendary Nashville producer Owen Bradley, she began recording at his recently constructed and thoroughly modern facilities. Limited by Four Star’s choice of material, Bradley experienced a great deal of difficulty in establishing an identifiable sound for his spunky and impulsive charge. For nearly two years, they labored unsuccessfully for a hit. Four Star probably would have let Cline’s contract expire, if it weren’t for her and Bradley’s final attempt to record a pop song, “Walkin’ After Mid-

**In September 1954, an executive from Four Star Records, a small, regional company, heard Cline and hurriedly signed her to a contract.**



night,” by Don Hecht. Preferring upbeat country-western swing, Cline hated it, calling it “nothin’ but a li’l ole pop song.” The terms of her contract gave her little choice, though, and Bradley managed to work wonders with the song, making Cline sound every bit of a pop singer without betraying her country instincts. Cline’s voice had a full tone and none of the nasal twang to which Northerners objected. Convinced of her impending success, Four Star renewed its option, and Cline became bound to another two years. She subsequently appeared on *The Arthur Godfrey Show* and was such a success that she became a cast member. Spurred by her TV appearances, “Walkin’ after Midnight” hit the charts, and Cline finally got her invitation to appear at the Grand Ole Opry.

Unfortunately, Four Star became convinced by her crossover that she should record only popular material, so they studiously avoided country trappings such as the fiddle and steel guitar. Instead, they smothered her songs with strings, choruses, and, in Owen Bradley’s words, “anything that stuck.” Also, Four Star would not relent and insisted that she record only songs that it licensed, which were generally inferior. As a result, Cline’s popularity nose-dived. It would be two long years before she could escape her contract and begin her career anew.

### APRIL 1957 #3 SCHOOL DAY—CHUCK BERRY

It’s strange to think that Chuck Berry, a man in his thirties, was capable of writing succinctly and accurately about the concerns and interests of teenagers. His lyric writing and vocal delivery were as rhythmic as any other writer’s has been before or since; and the subject matter—usually cars, girls, school, and music—voiced the concerns and preoccupations of most teenagers. Since he incorporated their manner of speech into his lyrics, he seemed to be a sympathetic friend who was cool enough to know what they were thinking about. “School Day” is the ultimate teenage anthem (at least when school is in session), dealing with the frustration of a typical school day and the relief experienced when it finally ends.

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1957 <u>ALL SHOOK UP</u> —ELVIS PRESLEY	#1
APRIL 1957 <u>LUCILLE</u> —LITTLE RICHARD	#21

Essentially, the song is a one-man show. A guitar chord played in triplets announces it. Berry sings a measure with no accompaniment, and the band kicks in on the next measure. But mostly what we hear is a guitar lick that mimics the vocal line. This pattern continues throughout the entire song, except for a few brief bars that feature a guitar solo. The job of the band is simply to give the song a steady beat while Berry’s vocal rhythms and guitar work carry it through. Somehow it never seems to sound redundant, probably because Berry varies his delivery each time he sings a new line. (Listen to how he accents the line “drop the coin right into the slot.”) By the time he reaches the last verse, singing “Hail, hail, rock and roll,” it is apparent that the song is more than just a “school sucks” song, but a full-blown rock-and-roll anthem.





Unfortunately, Berry didn't seem to think that his records had any longevity, and he treated them like perishable products. It was only a matter of time before he dropped his band (allegedly because of excessive drinking) and started to play live with unrehearsed backing musicians. His standard procedure was to have the promoter make all arrangements, with different players in every town to avoid the expense of traveling with a steady band. More often than not, he would show up at a club or concert hall minutes before show time, get paid, then meet the band if time allowed. If not, he'd go out on stage, tune his guitar, and then tell the band to watch his leg for cues. The shows were usually disappointing to his fans, and he has since developed a reputation for being more concerned with saving a buck or two than pleasing his audience. Say what you will, he defined what classic rock-and-roll guitar is, and through his songs he gave a voice to a generation that was desperately in need of an outlet for expression.

## MAY 1957 #2 BYE BYE LOVE—THE EVERLY BROTHERS

**B**y the late '50s, rock and roll had begun to move away from the raw immediacy of its early stars and became a vehicle for the banal contrivances of camera-friendly faces singing songs about teenage romance. It had barely established itself, yet rock and roll was losing its rebellious edge and drifting into the abyss, becoming nothing more than a catchphrase for corporate-sponsored teen music with a beat. Another unfortunate development was the resegregation that began to take place. Previously, rock and roll made tremendous headway in breaking down the barriers between the races, as exemplified by white artists. By the end of the decade, this would become a memory, and the industry would regress to business as usual. Pat Boone, Debby Reynolds, and Tab Hunter all had #1 hit records in 1957 with no crossover appeal, while only "safe" black acts like Johnny Mathis and Sam Cooke also had #1 hits, with tame, lukewarm performances. More disturbingly, the influence that R&B had on rock and roll and doo-wop all but disappeared, with Tin Pan Alley and country music becoming the major sources for new material. All was not lost, however, and even the most die-hard rock-and-roll fan had to admit that the music charts were improved from the sorry state of 1955. It was just disheartening to see rock and roll inevitably fall prey to the corporate machinations that manipulated anarchy into formula.

Every rule has an exception, though, and in this case there were two. Buddy Holly and the Everly Brothers, although less explosive than their rock-and-roll predecessors, both brought something new and innovative to their music. What they lacked in chaotic energy was more than compensated for with their thoughtful lyrics that spoke to the hearts and minds of teenagers, helping them come to terms with the confusing contradictions of adolescence.

The beautiful singularity of their crystal-clear harmonies gave their songs an innocence that made their themes universally appealing.



The Everly Brothers in particular seemed to understand the frustrations of being a teenager. Songs like "Problems," "Bird Dog," "Wake Up, Little Susie," "Bye Bye Love," and a host of others all capture a segment of teenage life. The beautiful singularity of their crystal-clear harmonies gave their songs an innocence that made their themes universally appealing.

The Everly Brothers were the first act to introduce lead-vocal harmony to rock and roll. The unearthly combination of Don and Phil Everly's voices was so perfect, so pure, that it seemed to emanate from a single source. "Bye Bye Love" was their first single on the Top 40, reaching #2 in May 1957. Like nearly a dozen other hits by the Everlys, the songwriting credits belonged to the husband-and-wife team of Boudleaux and Felice Bryant. The roots for their songs were traceable to country music and had no discernible R&B influences, but this did not handicap their appeal. "Bye Bye Love" was considered to be as much of a rock-and-roll record as anything by Elvis Presley or even Chuck Berry. Before "Bye Bye Love," most rock-and-roll lyrics were either moody ("Heartbreak Hotel," "My Baby Left Me"), nonsensical ("Tutti Frutti," "Shake, Rattle, and Roll"), or blatant statements of love or lust ("Don't Be Cruel," "Great Balls of Fire"). The country roots of "Bye Bye Love" were certainly not unique, but only Chuck Berry shared the narrative lyric structure that the Bryants utilized. With less energy and more introspection, the Everly Brothers were the first rock and rollers to give their teenage fans food for thought.

### MAY 1957 # 14 WONDERFUL! WONDERFUL!—JOHNNY MATHIS

In 1957, Columbia Records was still smarting from the recent resurgence in Frank Sinatra's popularity, who was all but washed up a few years earlier when he was under contract with Columbia. Simply put, the company needed to reestablish itself as a leader in the music industry and Johnny Mathis proved to be the key to their success. Older fans who appreciated the more traditional jazz vocal

stylings were appalled by his singing, but young audiences flocked to him. Paradoxically, Columbia filled a void in the youth market by giving teenagers their own thoroughly modern version of Frank Sinatra.

Johnny Mathis was born on September 30, 1935, in San Francisco. His father was a vaudeville musician who instilled an interest in music in his son, but young Johnny was also interested in sports. He simultaneously sang in nightclubs and followed athletic pursuits. His athletic prowess was considerable, and Mathis soon became eligible for the Olympic trials. At the same time, club owner Helen Noga became impressed with his singing and signed on as his manager. After George Avakian, who worked at Columbia, heard him sing, he offered Mathis a recording contract, which presented a dilemma as much as an opportunity. If he went to the

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1957 SEARCHIN'— THE COASTERS	#3
MAY 1957 YOUNG BLOOD— THE COASTERS	#3



Olympic trials, he would miss his chance to sing professionally, and vice versa. After some long, hard thinking, he decided to sing.

Columbia immediately set about recording Mathis in a jazz style without immediate success. Although the title suggests otherwise, the song "Wonderful! Wonderful!" did not appear on his first hit album, which finally painted Mathis as a pop-style vocalist. Still the album yielded no hit singles and was not initially successful. Mitch Miller, Columbia's head of A&R, finally intervened and linked him to the more popular style of mellow ballads. His first productive pop session consisted of four songs: "Warm and Tender," "When Sunny Gets Blue," "It's Not for Me to Say," and his first single release, "Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Written by Ben Raleigh and Sherman Edwards, "Wonderful! Wonderful!" became Mathis's first million-seller. Of course, the sudden success of the single prompted many record buyers to purchase the album of the same name, and the album *Wonderful Wonderful* was thrust into position #4 on the strength of a title song that did not appear on it.

### MAY 1957 #5 IT'S NOT FOR ME TO SAY—JOHNNY MATHIS

Johnny Mathis's second single, "It's Not for Me to Say," was recorded with the Ray Conniff Orchestra at the same sessions as his first hit-single release, "Wonderful! Wonderful!" It hit the Top 40 charts a scant two weeks after "Wonderful! Wonderful!," rising to position #5 and giving Mathis two concurrent hit singles. "It's Not for Me to Say" was written by Al Stillman and Robert Allen, the same pair who wrote Mathis's biggest hit single, "Chances Are." The piano tinkling that frames the song is simply beautiful, and it sounds as though it may have had a significant role in suggesting the piano played by Ralph Sharon in "I Left My Heart in San Francisco."

The next year yielded seven additional hit records for Mathis. As a result, his popularity became so great that his many obligations to perform in concert and appear on television caused scheduling difficulties. Because time was scarce, he found it impossible to record new material. Mitch Miller decided to fill the gap by assembling the various hit records on one disk and releasing them together on an album aptly titled *Johnny's Greatest Hits*. This established the precedent for subsequent greatest-hits packages. It moved onto the album charts in April 1958, where it remained for an unprecedented and quite remarkable 490 weeks. This record seemed unbeatable and remained untouched until Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon" took up permanent residence on the charts, lingering for 741 weeks.

### JULY 1957 #3 WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN' GOIN' ON—JERRY LEE LEWIS

Before artists like Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard became legends in their own time, it was adequate for most rock and rollers to simply appear rebellious. The image that artists presented was more important than their true dis-



position, and usually the two were quite different. Jerry Lee Lewis, though, was the real thing, and he had the temerity to prove it. With his long, blond hair combed back, he would strut onstage, approach the piano with a swagger, then pound out eighth notes while he attempted to seduce your daughter with his arrogant sneer and suggestive lyrics. If his talent was anything less than absolute, he would have been torn apart by the male contingent of the audience. Such was the confidence of Jerry Lee Lewis that he never thought twice about it.

“Whole Lot of Shakin’ Goin’ On” was written by Dave Williams and Roy Hall, a piano player who once hired Lewis to play in his after-hours juke joint. Hall released his version on Decca Records in 1955 after it was recorded by Big Maybelle. Other folks recorded it also, but it never went anywhere until it fell into the hands of Lewis.

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1957	#27
<u>SUZIE Q—DALE HAWKINS</u>	

The opening measures sound as though he might tear the keys off the piano. The song has no bass player, just rollicking drums, an under-recorded guitar, Lewis’s voice, and p-i-a-n-o. He gets full muscle power from the song by breaking it down nice and low (“easy now”) in the bridge. He then exhorts the girl(s) to “wiggle it around just a little bit, that’s when you’ve got somethin’. Yeea-yah.” (My God, just try to imagine how lascivious and perverted this must have sounded in 1957.) Then Lewis lets it rip. When he says “We ain’t fakin’,” it’s not only because it happens to rhyme with “shakin’.” He means business. Fathers, lock up your daughters. America and rock and roll did not and has not since seen the likes of Jerry Lee Lewis.

## AUGUST 1957 #1 THAT’LL BE THE DAY—THE CRICKETS

For somebody who had only three Top 10 hits in his lifetime, Buddy Holly has had a profound influence on popular music that by far exceeds his chart presence. He arrived on the music scene at a time when most rock and rollers were beginning to sound predictable and formulaic. The major artists (Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Fats Domino) had lost their ability to surprise their audience, and their formats became contrived. “That’ll Be the Day,” released in the summer of 1957, was a breath of fresh air for a music scene that had begun to grow stale. The solid-body Fender Telecaster guitar, which Holly played, and a new instrument, the electric bass guitar, gave the Crickets a thoroughly modern, unique look and sound that eventually were used by virtually

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1957	#6
<u>MR. LEE—THE BOBETTES</u>	

every rock-and-roll band that followed.

Born September 7, 1936, in Lubbock, Texas, Buddy Holly learned to play the guitar at a young age. At fifteen, he teamed up with his friend Bob Montgomery, playing local shows as “Buddy and Bob,” and soon they had their own radio show.



Decca Records, looking for a singer who could compete with Elvis Presley, offered Holly a contract as a solo artist. At first he balked, but the supportive persuasion of his partner, Bob, and his parents led him to accept the offer. At Decca's insistence, Holly traveled to Nashville for his first recording session. Unfortunately, he soon learned that rock and roll was not what the Decca A&R people wanted. Eager to please, Holly did as he was told, changing his playing and singing style, but to no avail. The resultant single bombed, and Decca subsequently refused to release anything else. One good thing that resulted from the Decca debacle was that it cemented the relationship between Holly and his drummer, Jerry Allison. The rest of the band departed, so Holly and Allison returned to Texas and played local dances with their drums and guitar as the only instrumentation.

**Holly never gave up believing in his own abilities, and he decided to recut "That'll Be the Day," one of the songs that Decca originally waylaid.**

Holly never gave up believing in his own abilities, and he decided to recut "That'll Be the Day," one of the songs that Decca originally waylaid. He completed his band by adding bass and rhythm guitar, then drove to Norman Petty's recording studio in Clovis, New Mexico. The atmosphere Petty provided was light-years away from the manipulations Holly had suffered at the hands of Decca. Petty allowed the group to record at a leisurely pace, taking as payment a share of the resultant publishing royalties. Although Petty probably had some creative input, this arrangement is most likely the reason so many Buddy Holly songs have writing credits attributed to him.

Because Decca had the original "That'll Be the Day," it was determined to be unwise to use Holly's name in the credits. Grabbing a dictionary, they searched for an appropriate group name and decided to release the song as the Crickets. The tape fell into the hands of Bob Thiele at Coral Records, who loved the song, but the label heads at Coral had no interest in rock and roll. Thiele then arranged for Coral's subsidiary label, Brunswick, to release "That'll Be the Day." By sheer coincidence, both Coral and Brunswick were subsidiaries of Decca, so when the song became a huge hit and Decca learned the true identity of the Crickets, a lawsuit would have been ludicrous, since they would essentially be suing themselves. "That'll Be the Day" eventually reached #1 on the pop charts, the only #1 hit of Buddy Holly's abruptly truncated career.

## OCTOBER 1957 #1 YOU SEND ME—SAM COOKE

**S**am Cooke was one of eight children raised in a religious family and influenced by his father, a Baptist preacher. He grew up singing in his father's church and, with his brother and sisters, formed the Singing Children. In his teens, he formed a gospel group with his brother, and they toured the gospel circuit with groups like the Soul Stirrers and the Pilgrim Travelers, who eventually featured





Lou Rawls. In 1951, the lead singer of the Soul Stirrers, R.H. Harris, decided to retire, and Cooke was given the opportunity to replace him. Recording for Specialty Records, Sam Cooke became the new “face” in gospel music.

You might expect these early religious songs to display a germinating singer with a style that required polishing, but Sam Cooke’s singing with the Soul Stirrers was nothing less than magnificent. Already, he was a confident, graceful singer with a full-blown talent. Cooke displayed a flair for writing music as well, judging from such songs as “Touch the Hem of His Garment.” He attracted a much younger audience than was usual for gospel shows, and it became obvious to most concerned parties, including Specialty’s artistic director, Bumps Blackwell, that he could quite easily cross over to pop music, simply by changing his inspiration and the topic of his songs. Ambitious and willing,

Cooke tested the waters cautiously. His first pop release, “Lovable,” was credited to Dale Cook, but with Cooke’s instantly recognizable voice, he fooled no one. Meanwhile, Rupe was incensed that his gospel star was dabbling in pop music, convinced that he would alienate his core gospel audience. When he heard “You Send Me,” Rupe flatly refused to release it. Blackwell was convinced of its salability, so he bought Cooke’s contract from Specialty and placed “You Send Me” with Keen

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1957 WAKE UP, LITTLE SUSIE— THE EVERLY BROTHERS	#1
SEPTEMBER 1957 CHANCES ARE—JOHNNY MATHIS	#1

Records. The song became a hit almost instantaneously, rising to the #1 position, where it remained for three weeks.

“You Send Me,” written by his brother, L.C. Cooke, contains much of the nuance found in Sam Cooke’s best gospel performances, giving him plenty of freedom to soar all around the notes. The understated accompaniment puts all the emphasis on his remarkable voice as he repeats key phrases (“I know, I know, I know...”) over a lilting rhythm and an angelic female chorus. His pop material can only suggest the talent he displayed in his gospel work, and it was mostly his gospel singing that influenced the next generation of singers. It would be a mistake, though, to underappreciate Cooke’s crossover to pop music, because it paved the way for other gospel singers, such as Aretha Franklin, to justify their own transitions. Melding the expressiveness of gospel within the gentle melody of a pop song, Cooke became the most obvious progenitor of what would soon be referred to as soul music.

## OCTOBER 1957 #1 JAILHOUSE ROCK—ELVIS PRESLEY

No sooner had Elvis Presley become the center of attention for all youth culture than he began to get involved with that bastion of cultural mediocrity, Hollywood. RCA had released only three of his singles—“Heartbreak Hotel,” “I Want You, I Need You, I Love You,” and “Don’t Be Cruel”/“Hound Dog”—when his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, set up a





three-picture deal with Paramount Studios. The effect on Elvis's music was almost immediate.

More often than not, the songs that appeared in these motion pictures were picked indiscriminately, with no relation at all to the story line. Usually, they were inserted into the film for no better reason than to prove that Elvis could sing better than he could act. Unfortunately, Hollywood requirements were not sympathetic to his artistic abilities (neither were his agreements with Hill and Range, the publishers of this nonsense), and the songs used in the films were sometimes so awful that they were laughable. Every rule has one or two exceptions, though, and "Jailhouse Rock" certainly stands out among a sea of mediocre material. Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the song is a real rave-up rocker with nonsensical lyrics about a coed prison dance party. How Elvis could sing the words with conviction is a testament to the talent of the man. His singing has a powerful, raspy edge, which is the textbook standard used by later rockers as diverse as John Lennon and Bruce Springsteen. This alone would be enough to earn the song a place in this book, but the muscularity of his vocal is equaled by the energy of the music. The band rocks.

Compared to the pulp that Elvis's soundtracks contained, "Jailhouse Rock" was not only captivating but addictive. By the time it was released, Elvis was no longer the figurehead of youthful rebellion, but a player in the entertainment business establishment. Nevertheless, on "Jailhouse Rock" he certainly proved that he was capable of rocking better than anybody else.

## OCTOBER 1957 #2 ALL THE WAY—FRANK SINATRA

Nineteen fifty-two was a year that Frank Sinatra would most likely prefer to forget. His marriage to Ava Gardner was in shambles, he lost his movie contract, television ignored him, he was let go by his record company, and as the final insult, his agency dropped him. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of artists before and since have experienced similar fates; falling into the dark void of has-beendom. Once caught in its clutches, it isn't an easy destiny to escape. That Frank Sinatra did come back, not only with a stronger voice but with a reinvented persona to match, is a testament to his strength of will and self-determination.

While Sinatra was at rock bottom, he managed to land the non-singing role of Private Maggio in *From Here to Eternity*. It gave him the one opportunity he needed to prove himself to a doubting public, and he played the role as though his very life depended upon it, which, in a sense, it did. If Sinatra wanted to continue his career as a vocalist, however, he desperately needed to affiliate himself with a record company. After his disastrous parting with Co-

**Linking Sinatra with conductor/arranger Nelson Riddle proved to be one of the most productive pairings in modern music history, but it almost didn't happen.**



**There is nothing disposable about this performance, and it certainly ranks among the best of his recorded oeuvre.**

Columbia Records, companies were not exactly waiting in line to sign him. Capitol Records, in Los Angeles, had grown from a small independent in 1942, into a company fully capable of competing with major labels like Columbia and RCA. Although Sinatra was considered to be a major risk, Capitol signed him, with unusually strict contract terms. He was to receive no advance for recording fees, and if he was unproductive, his contract would expire in twelve months.

Linking Sinatra with conductor/arranger Nelson Riddle proved to be one of the most productive pairings in modern music history, but it almost didn't happen. Sinatra wanted to continue working with Axel Stordahl, the man responsible for his frothy, somewhat dated Columbia sessions, but he was unavailable. Billy May, Sinatra's second choice, was also bound by previous obligations, so the task of handling what was hoped to be Sinatra's musical comeback fell into the hands of Riddle. Perhaps because he wanted to please Sinatra, Riddle wrote four arrangements, two of which were identifiable as his own and another two ("South of the Border" and "I Love You") that deliberately aped Billy May's brassy, upbeat style. On the record, they were even credited to May. Sinatra's single release, "Young at Heart," became a best-seller, and by March 1954, with a hit record and an Academy award for best supporting actor, Sinatra once again was on top of the world.

Sinatra usually saved his best material for album releases, and his singles tended to be paper-thin, disposable concoctions that would not stand up to repeated scrutiny if placed on a long-playing album. Hit singles like "Love and Marriage," "(Love Is) the Tender Trap," and "Hey, Jealous Lover" all sold well but became tiresome after repeated listening. "All the Way" was written by Jimmy Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn for the film *The Joker's Wild*. It won an Oscar for best film song in 1957, and it happened to be miles away from the disposable froth that usually defined a Sinatra 45. As was common with their thematic work together, Nelson Riddle's sympathetic arrangement linked perfectly with Sinatra's voice. It is an older, more self-assured Sinatra who sings "All the Way." There is nothing disposable about this performance, and it certainly ranks among the best of his recorded oeuvre. Sinatra championed himself with a stunning return to the limelight. After churning out a seemingly endless amount of magnificent material and performances of the same caliber as "All the Way," he staked out a position whereby he would reign permanently as *the* godfather of popular vocal music.

## NOVEMBER 1957 #3 PEGGY SUE—BUDDY HOLLY

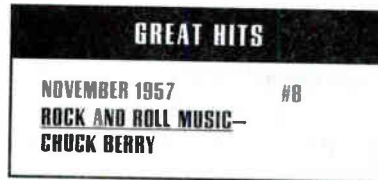
**B**uddy Holly and the Crickets had an unusual arrangement with their record labels. Songs that required vocal backing were credited to the Crickets and released on Brunswick, while solo vocal recordings were credited to Buddy Holly



and released on Brunswick's parent label, Coral. This was even more ridiculous than it sounds, since the Crickets did not sing any of the backing vocals (except on "That'll Be the Day"), leaving that task to professional singing groups.

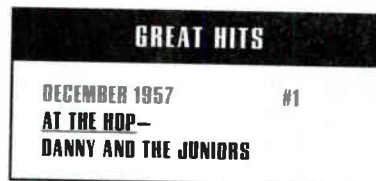
"Peggy Sue" was originally called "Cindy Lou" until drummer Jerry Allison convinced Holly that it would sound better if he sang the name of Allison's girlfriend, Peggy Sue. The rollicking rhythm reflected the interplay that had developed between Holly and Allison when they played as a duo for local dances. Rather than play typical rock-and-roll rhythms, Allison had many original ideas and always seemed to find a drum part that was sympathetic to Holly's intentions. His rolling sixteenth-note paradiddles (a standard drum exercise) are drenched in a rhythmic echo that propels the song while Holly sings about Peggy Sue, invoking her name over and over with dozens of varying inflections.

As a result of his untimely death, the image of the twenty-two-year-old rocker with the horn-rimmed glasses and the Fender guitar has become frozen in time. In "American Pie," Don McLean implies that February 3, 1959, was "the day the music died." Although future events proved this to be untrue, at the time it really did seem that the plane crash that took the lives of Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper), and pilot Roger Peterson took the spirit of rock and roll with it. With Elvis Presley in the Army, Little Richard in sudden retirement, and Jerry Lee Lewis banished for marrying his cousin, it already looked (and sounded) like the beginning of the end for rock and roll. The plane crash sounded the death knell, and for a while, the supposedly clairvoyant naysayers who had predicted a quick death for rock and roll seemed to be correct. The first tidal wave definitely ended, and the following ripple brought in the timid styles of Frankie Avalon, Paul Anka, Fabian, Bobby Rydell, and Bobby Vee. The once wild stallion that was rock and roll had become a tame, obedient plow horse.



## DECEMBER 1957 #2 GREAT BALLS OF FIRE—JERRY LEE LEWIS

Jerry Lee Lewis's life has been and continues to be a never-ending saga, so it would be ludicrous to attempt to summarize his biography here. You probably already know the lurid, sensational details of his life, but if you don't, it warrants the attention of a book, and I can only suggest that you read Nick Tosches's fine biography, *Hellfire*. Actually, Tosches' book is probably about due for a revised edition, since it was published in 1982, and Lewis's story rolls on unabated. But I cannot completely overlook the motherlode of interesting stuff that makes up the life of Jerry Lee, so here is a snapshot synopsis: He was born September 29, 1935, in Ferriday, Louisiana. His older brother was killed by a drunk driver while







his father was in prison. He grew up poor. His family was Pentecostal. He learned to play piano alongside his cousins, Jimmy Swaggart and Mickey Gilley. He quit school in the eighth grade and made money playing the piano. He got married at sixteen. He became a preacher. He got married again at eighteen (no divorce, though). He disowned his wife's second child. He auditioned at Sun Records and got signed. He recorded "Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On" and "Great Balls of Fire." He divorced his second wife and married his thirteen-year-old cousin, Myra Gale, his bass player's daughter. He traveled the world. The press found out about his marriage(s) and ruthlessly discredited him. His first son with Myra drowned. He became a country music star. He became addicted to alcohol and pills. He divorced Myra. His son Jerry Lee Lewis Jr. was killed in an auto accident. He shot his bass player in the chest. He was badly hurt in a car accident. He married and divorced twice more. He was accused of murdering his wife. On and on. If you read Lewis's biography, you may decide that you don't like the man, but there is little doubt that he is the greatest living legend that rock and roll has to offer.

After a successful appearance on *The Steve Allen Show*, Lewis's fame exploded. He went into the studio two weeks later, in August 1957, and recorded "Great Balls of Fire." As previously noted, Lewis was raised a member of the Pentecostal church and at one time, in an earlier incarnation, he was even a preacher. He knew his God, or what his God wanted from him, and "Great Balls of Fire" most certainly did not fit into the equation. Lewis had to choose between good and evil, between God and the devil, and when he recorded "Great Balls of Fire," he felt sure that the devil had won the battle for his soul.

Otis Blackwell wrote the song around a title provided by a songwriter named Jack Hammer. It had the same energy as Lewis's previous hit, "Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," and more importantly, it almost surpassed it for lascivious content. The piano break is *the* defining moment of rock-and-roll piano, from the double-time bass riff to the four repeated flourishes (glissandi, to purists) and the three full measures of the same few pounded notes. Whew. He plays with energy and conviction what has since been copied so often that to modern ears it can sound clichéd. Listen closely, though, and you'll hear that this is no hackneyed performance, but a revelation. It is only too bad for Lewis that it wasn't the revelation he was looking for.

## JANUARY 1958 # 1 GET A JOB- THE SILHOUETTES

Sha nanana, sha nana nana (baa-doo) [REPEAT 4 X]  
Dip dip dip dip dip dip dip dip bm-m-m-m-m-m, get a job.

**S**o goes the chorus to the best sing-along song of the entire doo-wop era. You don't need to know how to sing harmony, and you don't have to remember the words, just *nanana* along for maximum effect. I warn you now, though, that despite the infectiousness of the chorus, beware of the words to the verse. Besides being nearly impossible to sing, they also are nearly impossible to understand





unless, like me, you play the record two billion times. Then, horror of horrors, lyrics that are both quite literate and more than a little subversive reveal themselves, detailing not only the trials and tribulations of being unemployed, but also a nagging woman who's always "preachin' and a-cryin', tellin' me that I'm lyin' 'bout a job that I never could find." Pretty heady stuff; then it's back to the irresistible chorus. With songs like this and the Coasters' "Yakkety Yak," which charted in June, you'd be led to believe that young males had a hard time getting a word in edgewise (except, of course, when they're singing).

There's not too much to say about the Silhouettes themselves, other than that they came from Philadelphia, wrote a hit, and disappeared. Like so many other vocal groups, they started as gospel singers and then changed to rhythm and blues. "Get a Job" broke nationally when it was played on Dick Clark's hit TV program, *American Bandstand*. It went to #1 for two weeks and inspired a copycat response called "Got a Job," which was recorded by a very young Smokey Robinson with the Miracles. Robinson's answer record initiated a career that would continue through four decades. While the Silhouettes vanished without a trace, their one hit record lives on, as lively and entertaining today as it was intended to be almost forty years ago.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1958	#15
<u>MAYBE</u> —THE CHANTELS	

## JANUARY 1958 #6 WITCHCRAFT—FRANK SINATRA

Fans of modern music are well aware of what constitutes a theme album, but most aren't aware that Frank Sinatra pioneered the form. In the late '40s, when Sinatra was with Columbia, he—and for that matter all artists—was limited to the three minutes allowed by a ten-inch 78 RPM disk. Technology changed, and the 45 RPM single became the format of choice for rock and roll, championed by RCA Records. Meanwhile the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  RPM, long-playing album was favored by the more "mature" artists and their labels, such as Frank Sinatra at Capitol and Johnny Mathis at Columbia. In the early '50s, the development of the long-playing record coincided with Sinatra's signing to Capitol, his home for the duration of the decade. His first long-playing release was a ten-inch long player called *Songs for Young Lovers*, an intelligent collection of classic songs that were thematically suggestive of the album title. Barring greatest-hits collections and compilation albums, virtually every album Sinatra released with Capitol was a theme album, the most acclaimed being *In the Wee Small Hours*, a collection of lonely, introspective songs, and *Songs for Swingin' Lovers*, a collection of upbeat, danceable love songs. The latter album contains Nelson Riddle's simply unbeatable original arrangement of "I've Got You under My Skin," which was revived note for note in 1993 for Sinatra's

**Because of the huge success of his albums, singles became of secondary concern to Sinatra.**



nightmarishly bad duet with U2's Bono (don't blame Sinatra).

Because of the huge success of his albums, singles became of secondary concern to Sinatra. Occasionally, though, a gem did come up on a 45. "Witchcraft" was the follow-up single to his luxurious version of "All the Way," and together these songs re-established Sinatra as a reputable singles artist. Although it was released three months after "All the Way," "Witchcraft" was actually recorded three months earlier. Written by Cy Coleman and Carolyn Leigh, it represents Sinatra at his confident, swinging best. Coleman and Leigh supply some of the most sophisticated, clever lyrics Sinatra ever tackled, and he makes it sound like a piece of cake. Don't be fooled, though, because nobody else could sing this song like Sinatra. Nobody else could sing the word "taboo" like Sinatra. It's his show all the way, although Riddle's punchy arrangement gives him a run for his money.

They don't make 'em like they used to. An imitator like Harry Connick Jr. may attempt to make a career out of trying, but he sings more like Frank Sinatra Jr. than the real McCoy. Music fans all over the world, please heed my advice: accept no imitations. Hearing "Witchcraft" is all the convincing you'll need.

## FEBRUARY 1958 #10 GOOD GOLLY MISS MOLLY—LITTLE RICHARD

With "Good Golly Miss Molly," Little Richard apparently decided to take off the kid gloves. Although most of his previous hits made reference to sex, it was always well-disguised. When Pat Boone covered "Long Tall Sally," singing about how she was "built for speed, she's got everything that Uncle John needs," he probably didn't even know what the song was about. "Good Golly Miss Molly" gets right to the point with the first line: "Good Golly, Miss Molly sure likes to ball. With your rocking and rolling, you can't hear your mama call." How in the world could he have gotten away with this, considering the stifling morals of the '50s? Simple. White audiences didn't know what "balling" was. They probably figured, "you know, like 'having a ball,' a good time." Uh-huh. Maybe the lyrics went over their heads, but the music hit them dead on. Wherever Little Richard and the Upsetters played live, they were showered with panties thrown by girls in the audience. Perhaps the moralists had good reason to flip out, but Little Richard made himself out to be so outrageous that he appeared to be as harmless as a cartoon.

He may have been an animated character, but make no mistake, Little Richard was quite genuine and immeasurably influential. Elvis picked

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1958	#2
<u>SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN</u> — CHUCK BERRY	
MARCH 1958	#1
<u>TEQUILA</u> —THE CHAMPS	
MARCH 1958	#17
<u>MAYBE BABY</u> —THE CRICKETS	

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1958	#3
<u>SHORT SHORTS</u> —THE ROYAL TEENS	
FEBRUARY 1958	#14
<u>BALLAD OF A TEENAGE QUEEN</u> — JOHNNY CASH	



up on the current, and Chuck Berry supplied the juice, but it was Little Richard who plugged it in. The entire country became energized (or shocked) by the first wild man of rock and roll. If rock and roll, as an art form, stands for pure expression, then Little Richard can be singled out as being its most important progenitor.

## APRIL 1958 #1 TWILIGHT TIME—THE PLATTERS

The golden years of doo-wop, or vocal harmony groups, occurred between 1948 and 1958, so a large percentage of songs that fall into this category predate the 1955 starting point of the Top 40. Songs like “Crying in the Chapel” by Sonny Til and the Orioles (1953) or “One Mint Julep” by the Clovers (1952) are great, but they are simply too old to be considered here. Most doo-wop material can be traced as far back as the ’30s, to groups like the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers. By the ’50s, black male vocal groups were multiplying like rabbits. Such a plethora of groups with bird names, animal names, car names, and royalty names were proliferating that fans of this genre could (and do) stay busy for the rest of their lives searching for specific 45s.

Although their name didn’t fall into one of the above categories, the Platters were very much a part of the black vocal group tradition, and they carried their style well into the first half of the ’60s. One characteristic that made them unique was Zola Taylor, a rare female group member in a very male-dominated genre. Mostly, though, they are remembered for the talents of lead tenor Tony Williams. Their hits—such as “Only You,” “The Great Pretender,” “My Prayer,” “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” and “Twilight Time”—have a smoothness that most of the other doo-wop groups could only dream of. Although by anybody’s definition they fit into the doo-wop category, that smoothness caused them to stand apart from the rest of the pack. Whereas other bands sounded coarse or silly, singing *shu-bop-a-doo-dah*, *rama-lama-ding-dong* or some such drivel, the Platters had a dignity about them that made their songs classic. The verbal gymnastics that so many other bands used were more of a novelty than a genuine musical breakthrough, and I think this is the primary reason why so many people who were not around at that time have difficulty appreciating doo-wop. By singing these phrases, most doo-wop bands dated themselves, which is something the Platters managed to avoid. It is also interesting that bands of this era that recorded up-tempo material tended to be one-hit wonders (of course with a few exceptions, notably the Coasters). Ballad performers usually had longer shelf lives. Classy ballads were certainly the Platters’ mainstay, and this contributed to their longevity.

The emergence of beat-heavy rock and roll effectively snuffed out most of the doo-wop groups, but Tony Williams and the Platters—under the aegis of their

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1958	#1
<u>ALL I HAVE TO DO IS DREAM—</u> THE EVERLY BROTHERS	
APRIL 1958	#20
<u>TALK TO ME, TALK TO ME—</u> LITTLE WILLIE JOHN	



producer/manager/songwriter Buck Ram—continued to have hits beyond the end of the decade. With songs as good as “Twilight Time,” it’s hard to imagine that they would ever have been concerned about their future. “Twilight Time” seems to represent a lifestyle that is out of reach (for me, anyway), except perhaps on some elaborate vacation. It invokes images of women in backless gowns with tuxedo-clad men sipping cocktails on the veranda at sunset. Aaaahh. Close your eyes and dream. If we can’t live like this on a daily basis, then at least “Twilight Time” reminds us of what it would feel like if we could.

## MAY 1958 #8 JOHNNY B. GOODE—CHUCK BERRY

Ask the early rock and rollers who their favorite artist is, and you’ll usually get the same reply. Elvis, Little Richard, and even Jerry Lee Lewis have all agreed that Chuck Berry is the standard bearer. In the movie *Hail, Hail, Rock and Roll*, Lewis tells the story of when his mother told him, “You may be good, but you’re no Chuck Berry.” She was probably the only person on the planet who could have said those words to Jerry Lee without getting a black eye, but deep down he knew that his mama was right.

“Johnny B. Goode” is timeless in the sense that it is difficult to imagine a time when it didn’t exist. There aren’t many songs that have more universal acclaim. The guitar intro has become a classic part of our musical heritage, and the lyrics (“Go! Go, Johnny, Go!”) are permanently etched into our collective brains. Most of us have heard this song so often that it is almost impossible to listen with fresh ears, but if you do manage to escape it for a while (avoid wedding bands and bars with overaged deejays), it will sound as good as new the next time you hear it.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1958	#22
I WONDER WHY— DION AND THE BELMONTS	

In the late ’70s NASA launched a pair of space vehicles to explore the outer reaches of our solar system. Known as the Voyager program, these technical wonders sailed away from earth

with the explicit purpose of sending back information and photographs of the planets, as well as anything else that might be encountered along this intriguing journey. As the Voyager spacecrafts complete their primary mission (and they have done admirably well), an interesting possibility remains. With no practical means of propelling the spacecrafts back toward earth, they will continue to travel on a blind path to the ends of the universe (theoretically). On the outside chance that other life forms might some day discover these odd space travelers, a two-hour recording was placed on board to convey what life on earth was like at the time these vehicles were launched. Included on the recording was a greeting in nearly four dozen languages, something by J.S. Bach, and a recording of “Johnny B. Goode.” Perhaps in seven or eight thousand years, an alien culture will intercept the Voyager and examine the contents. Once they finish laughing at the ridiculously obsolete technology of our planet, the word “hello” will probably sink





in, and perhaps they will be impressed by the thoughtful artistry of J.S. Bach. “Johnny B. Goode,” however, ought to be the surprise hit of the package. Imagine, a rock and roll revolution on Alpha Centauri; “Go, Johnny Go!” indeed.

As a postscript, honorable mention should be made of the many great songs that Chuck Berry (and subsequently hundreds of others) recorded but that never reached the Top 40. Here are a few: “Little Queenie,” “Brown-Eyed Handsome Man,” “Around and Around,” “You Can’t Catch Me,” and so many more. Somebody ought to make a movie that includes these songs. I’m sure that at least the soundtrack would be a hit.

## JUNE 1958 #1 YAKKETY-YAK—THE COASTERS

**B**efore their involvement with the Coasters, songwriters Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller already had a history of writing successful rhythm-and-blues material, with songs such as “Hound Dog” and “Kansas City” (back then it was called “K.C. Loving”). To broaden their interests, they decided to start their own company, Spark Records, in 1953 with third partner Lester Sill. One of their first signings was a vocal group called the Robins. Leiber and Stoller took over all the responsibilities for the group, from writing their material to producing their records. Their songs usually took the form of humorous, four-part narratives, and 1955 successively yielded R&B hits like “Riot in Cell Block #9,” “Framed,” and “Smoky Joe’s Cafe.”

Duly impressed, another, albeit larger, independent label, Atlantic Records, bought out Spark Records lock, stock, and barrel. Uncertain of their future, the Robins were torn in half by the buyout. The two members who remained in Los Angeles (and in the group) recruited two others, and Lester Sill became their manager. Meanwhile, Atlantic had hired Leiber and Stoller, making them the first independent producers of rock and roll. The label change brought a name change, as well. Since the Robins came from the West Coast (Los Angeles) but worked for an East Coast label, they dubbed themselves the Coasters.

Wasting no time, Leiber and Stoller wrote a double-sided hit for the Coasters (“Searchin’”/“Youngblood”), which maintained the formula the group had refined at Spark. This time, Atlantic’s distribution aided the record’s exposure, and both sides reached the pop charts simultaneously. Soon afterward, the Coasters changed coasts, relocating to New York. This was significant because, besides another personnel change, sax player King Curtis became a member of the recording team. “Yakkety-Yak” was the first and most successful hit the Coasters yielded with Curtis. His sax became like a fifth voice, passing a musical commentary on the comedic underpinnings of the lyric.

Like most Coasters hits, the lyrics portray a short story or “playlet.” Most of the words are sung from the perspective of a frazzled mother giving orders to her child. All the

**Most of the words are sung from the perspective of a frazzled mother giving orders to her child.**





kid can manage to do is taunt her by saying, “Yakkety-Yak.” Here, the father enters (played by the bass voice) saying, “Don’t talk back.” The mother then picks up her rant and on and on. Since the kid can’t say much, the saxophone says it for him. Curtis does the rest of the teasing with his riffing, adding another humorous (or annoying, if you’re the parent) touch.

The Coasters’ follow-up release, “Charlie Brown,” was essentially a musical carbon of “Yakkety-Yak” with a different script. Leiber and Stoller’s “sketches” continued successfully into the ’60s, with songs like “Shopping for Clothes” and “Along Came Jones.” They also developed more serious romantic ballads that were usually recorded (with a full string section) by the Drifters. Their success ratio was phenomenal, and their work with the Coasters is, if not their best, then certainly their most identifiable.

## JUNE 1958 #11 FOR YOUR PRECIOUS LOVE—JERRY BUTLER

**S**ongs about longing and desire are probably the most common genre on the Top 40, but rarely if ever are they as powerful as “For Your Precious Love.” The song is obsessive and blindly passionate. The consequences of love are not mentioned because it is only the love itself that matters. When a love is all-consuming and the song that expresses it is at your fingertips, the result is spine-tingling

bliss. I don’t know if Jerry Butler was actually experiencing a situation like this when he sang “For Your Precious Love,” but he certainly makes it sound real. With Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions supporting his lead like a trio of pinning angels, Butler sounds unearthly, as though his love has disembodied his voice. It comes from a place so deep inside, so personal, that it is fascinating to hear. It’s strange, then, to discover that Butler wrote “For Your Precious Love” as an English composition assignment.

The Impressions (with Jerry Butler) formed in 1957 when Butler met Curtis Mayfield singing at the Traveling Songs Spiritualistic Church in Chicago. They were signed to Vee-Jay’s subsidiary label, Falcon Records, and promptly recorded “For Your Precious Love.” Dissension developed almost immediately, however, when the record was credited “Jerry Butler (and the Impressions).” Butler left to pursue a solo career,

and the Impressions carried on with Mayfield. Mayfield and Butler remained close, however, with Mayfield occasionally producing and cowriting songs with Butler. The Impressions went on to a career highlighted by socially conscious and relevant songs while Butler mostly stuck to soulful balladeering.

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1958 <u>WILLY AND THE HAND JIVE</u> — THE JOHNNY OTIS SHOW	#9
JUNE 1958 <u>DOH MY SOUL</u> —LITTLE RICHARD	#31
JUNE 1958 <u>RAVE ON</u> —BUDDY HOLLY	#37

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1958 <u>PURPLE PEOPLE EATER</u> — SHEB WOOLEY/BEN COLDER	#1



Butler originally was going to start a career as a restaurateur until he became involved with music. Restaurant management and, strangely enough, ice sculpture, were among his talents. This ability, coupled with his easygoing, cool style, earned him the nickname of “the ice man.” Peculiarly, although most of his later recordings make the nomenclature appropriate, “For Your Precious Love” captures him at full heat. Only a handful of singers have allowed so much of their own emotion to figure in a popular recording (Edith Piaf and Billie Holiday come to mind), and Butler himself quickly cooled down the intensity of his passionate style. Nevertheless, a good deal of the music audience found it fascinating to hear such a powerful display of emotion. Soon confessional expression would be commonplace, and the vulnerable style of later soul songs could be traced back to the powerful reading of Jerry Butler when he sang “For Your Precious Love.”

## JUNE 1958 #11 I GUESS THINGS HAPPEN THAT WAY—JOHNNY CASH

Poor Sam Phillips. After working patiently to develop budding talents and then tirelessly recording and promoting their efforts, everything started to fall apart. Major labels with a seemingly unlimited cash flow began to woo his coterie of stars away, and the few who remained managed to self-destruct. Because of a shortage of funds, Phillips sold Elvis Presley to RCA Records. Two years later, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins made clandestine agreements to sign with Columbia Records when their Sun Records contracts expired. Jerry Lee Lewis, Phillips’s other major star, had no intention of leaving Sun, but once he married his adolescent cousin, his career took a nosedive. Phillips pressed on and eventually moved Sun to a new location with comparatively spacious, modern surroundings and equipment. Hindsight being 20/20, this only added to the company’s demise, since the studio made famous by Presley, Cash, and Perkins was abandoned and the new building lacked the aura of the original site.

Long before the move, Phillips hired Jack Clement to assist him as producer/engineer. By 1957, Clement had the responsibility of recording most sessions at Sun, particularly those of Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis. But since Columbia had offered Cash more money for publishing royalties, he wanted to avoid recording his own songs at Sun and opted to save them for his Columbia contract. Clement intended to sweeten Cash’s somewhat dour sound anyway and met little resistance when he suggested Cash record other material, including some songs that Clement himself had written. One was “Ballad of a Teenage Queen,” which has to be one of the dumbest songs I’ve ever heard, with lyrics that could make you gag and a soprano voice that sounds as out

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1958 #1  
**POOR LITTLE FOOL—RICKY NELSON**

JULY 1958 #6  
**REBEL ROUSER—DUANE EDDY**

### GREAT MISSES

JULY 1958 #9  
**GINGER BREAD—FRANKIE AVALON**



of place on a Johnny Cash record as a sitar. Another was “I Guess Things Happen That Way,” which is everything that “Teenage Queen” is not. Although the song has backing vocals that evoke images of cowboys wearing hula skirts, Cash’s transparent singing style makes it work. The lyrics are a bit of folk wisdom about facing up to lost love, but Cash’s boomy, quavering voice makes the song sound positively existential. The record doesn’t rely on riffs, repeated motifs, or any other unnecessary device. Cash and Clement hit upon something that could cut to the bone, and a minute and forty-seven seconds is all it takes.

## AUGUST 1958 #1 IT’S ALL IN THE GAME—TOMMY EDWARDS

**A**nd now, ladies and gentlemen, a hit rock-and-roll recording by the vice president of the United States....”

Strange, but true. “It’s All in the Game” was written by Charles Dawes, vice president during the Calvin Coolidge administration (1925-1929). Tommy Edwards’s professional music career also predates rock and roll, beginning in the early ’40s with a radio program in his hometown of Richmond, Virginia. In the early ’50s, he was signed to MGM Records, where he recorded popular versions of “The Morning Side of the Mountain,” “It’s All in the Game,” and “You Win Again.” The advent of rock and roll made Edwards appear somewhat anachronistic, and his moderate popularity waned. In a last-ditch attempt to reach the charts, he rerecorded a version of “It’s All in the Game,” with slightly modernized instrumental backing and support vocals. Voilà, a #1 hit record for six weeks running. Stumbling onto what seemed to be a lucrative formula, Edwards rerecorded almost all of his previous hit songs with a modernized treatment, but none of them had the effect of “It’s All in the Game.” Its qualifications as a true rock-and-roll record are suspect at best, but that does nothing to diminish the ongoing universal appeal that it has earned.

Today, “It’s All in the Game” is seen not only as a previous #1 hit, but as a definitive pop masterpiece. It has a sound that is instantly nostalgic. Everybody who hears it seems to be taken back to a more innocent age. Even more so than most other songs from this period, it is easy to imagine it playing from a jukebox at a malt shop, or at a drive-in juke joint with girls in poodle skirts and saddle shoes, or from a PA system at a senior prom in a gymnasium with papier-mâché decorations. By capturing a moment in time with dreamily romantic lyrics, “It’s All in the Game” automatically generates that anticipatory feeling of life slipping away right before your eyes.

## AUGUST 1958 #1 NEL BLU DIPINTO DI BLU [VOLARE]— DOMENICO MODUGNO

**F**irst of all, I’m not gonna call it “Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu.” Who Does? It’s “Volare.” How could a song this silly have gotten into the Top 40, and what in the world is



it doing on a list of the best 500 songs? C'mon, admit it to yourself. Every time you hear it, it makes you smile or even laugh out loud. Sometimes you try to sing along in some make-believe language. The song is irresistible. How else can you explain a song sung in a foreign tongue (you do know it's Italian, don't you?) reaching #1 on the Top 40? For five weeks? I know, there was a scramble among the non-rock-and-rollers to find "exotic" material to call their own (remember the Singing Nun?), but this isn't exotic, it's ridiculous. Ridiculous is OK, though. In fact, it's fun. Dammit, I *like* "Volare." There, I've said it.

It starts like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. By the time Mr. Modugno opens his mouth and the Hammond organ makes its presence felt, it becomes painfully obvious that the song is hopelessly European, shamelessly romantic, and downright schmaltzy. The song is so alien, so...wrong, that it's dead on. By the time the chorus rolls around, millions of silly Americans (like me) are singing along, reaching for their wallets, and saying, "Where can I buy this?" Forget the bastardized American covers by Dean Martin and Al Martino. Forget even Bobby Rydell's pseudo-hipster version. You can't outcamp authenticity.

"Volare" was the biggest seller of 1958. It won Grammy awards for song of the year and record of the year. I'm not making this up. Apparently the Grammys were as inane and out of touch in their debut year as they are today. Sometimes, though, Modugno's version of "Volare" doesn't seem campy at all. It can be just plain charming. Whether you are a hopeless romantic suffering from a lapse in taste or simply enjoying a chuckle at a song that you think is silly, "Volare" is unforgettable. Cantare.

Trivia question: What does "Volare" mean?

To fly.

## AUGUST 1958 #8 SUMMERTIME BLUES—EDDIE COCHRAN

**E**ddie Cochran was born October 3, 1938, in Oklahoma City, after which his family relocated to Minnesota, then Los Angeles. He had a passing interest in music and learned to play drums, the clarinet, and guitar. He met another singing guitar player called Hank Cochran (almost unbelievably, they were not related), and they formed a duo called the Cochran Brothers. Together, they recorded country and rockabilly songs for Ekko Records. After performing as an opening act for Elvis Presley on the *Big D Jamboree*, a traveling radio program similar to the Grand Ole Opry broadcasts, Cochran's life was changed. He was so impressed with Presley that he insisted on auditioning for Sun Records, where he was summarily shown the door. Hank and Eddie soon split, and Hank went on to become a songwriter of some note,

### GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1958 #4  
TEARS ON MY PILLOW—  
LITTLE ANTHONY

AUGUST 1958 #6  
CHANTILLY LACE—THE BIG BOPPER

AUGUST 1958 #10  
DEVOTED TO YOU—  
THE EVERLY BROTHERS

SEPTEMBER 1958 #18  
CAROL—CHUCK BERRY





with "A Little Bitty Tear" (Burl Ives), "Make the World Go Away" (Eddy Arnold), and "I Fall to Pieces" (Patsy Cline). Eddie Cochran, meanwhile, got a deal recording with Crest Records, which released his first single, "Skinny Jim," cowritten by Cochran and his friend and associate Jerry Capehart. Using "Skinny Jim" for leverage, Cochran and Capehart approached Liberty Records and got an additional recording deal. Almost simultaneously and fortuitously, Cochran was asked to appear in one of the better rock-and-roll exploitation movies, *The Girl Can't Help It*, singing "Twenty Flight Rock." All the while, he was doing session work, which helped him to master his recording and guitar technique, and he quickly became a very multifaceted talent.

GREAT MISSES	
AUGUST 1958 <u>STUPID CUPID</u> —CONNIE FRANCIS	#14
AUGUST 1958 <u>THE FREEZE</u> —TONY AND JOE	#33
SEPTEMBER 1958 (RE-CHARTED AUGUST 1962) <u>SUMMERTIME, SUMMERTIME</u> — THE JAMIES	#26

Overdubbing was a relatively new phenomenon, developed and perfected by artists and experimenters like Les Paul. Cochran was fascinated with the possibilities of layering sounds and began to utilize his ideas on "Summertime Blues." In this sense, Cochran was a bit of a pioneer. This is apparent on "Summertime Blues," judging by the multitracked percussion and guitar sounds that he used.

Teenage rebellion, with rock and roll as a stimulus, frightened Middle America. In the film *The Wild One*, Marlon Brando portrays a hoodlum biker who torments a small town. When

asked what he was rebelling against, Brando replies, "Waddya got?" Cochran took a less radical stance. When he imitates the voice of authority, mimicking his boss ("no dice, son, you gotta work late"), his father ("you can't use the car 'cause you didn't work a lick"), and even his congressman ("I'd like to help you, son, but you're too young to vote"), he manages to be disrespectful without being overtly rebellious.

In June, "Summertime Blues" is guaranteed to lift the spirits of schoolkids until the end of time. While the song's lyrics address the downside of summer vacation, the music says, "HEY, NO SCHOOL, LET'S PARTY!" His next single, "C'mon Everybody," was the invitation.

## OCTOBER 1958 #6 A LOVER'S QUESTION—CLYDE McPHATTER

Clyde McPhatter is usually credited as the singer most responsible for bringing black gospel music styles to popular music. Other artists, such as Sam Cooke and Ray Charles, did it later (and perhaps better), but McPhatter was the first to display his gospel-based style, which he developed with the Mount Lebanon Gospel Singers. In 1950, he joined Billy Ward's Dominoes and sang tenor in what was, at least originally, a bass-oriented vocal group, with songs like "Sixty Minute Man." Inexplicably, "Sixty Minute Man" managed to cross over to the popular music charts and did not get banned, despite not-very-well-





concealed references to the sexual prowess of the singer. Most likely, the white record buyers simply didn't have a clue concerning the lyrical content. When the Dominoes required a lead tenor, taskmaster Billy Ward gave McPhatter the job. Popular music fans were shocked to hear McPhatter wailing, swooping, sobbing (literally sobbing), reaching for unreachable notes, and generally sounding like a man who has lost control. The most bizarre and overwrought of these early sides is "The Bells," in which McPhatter sounds completely beside himself as he tells of witnessing his girlfriend's funeral. White audiences were at a complete loss in coming to terms with this hysterical style, but they were not alone in having difficulty warming up to him. A good segment of the black audience took offense at McPhatter because they believed emotive singing was intended for God, not secular matters. Vocal contortions represented a form of rapture, which was a pure, religious experience. Applying this as a popular style was often viewed as sacrilegious. White audiences, as was typical for the time, found a safe substitute, and the overemotive shrieks of Johnny Ray soon became popular. Black audiences were quicker to accept the change, and gospel-style influences soon became commonplace on the R&B charts. Gradually, popular music in general succumbed, and today virtually all popular music has some gospel influence.

Billy Ward ran the Dominoes with a military toughness, and he soon felt that the independent-minded McPhatter was out of step. McPhatter was sacked and replaced by a fledgling Jackie Wilson. Ahmet Ertegun of Atlantic Records wasted no time in locating McPhatter, and after one false start, signed him and his new group, the Drifters. With his histrionic vocals firmly in place, he recorded "Money Honey," "Such a Night," "Honey Love," and "White Christmas" within one year's time. McPhatter's place in pop music history was thus secured, but in 1954 he entered the U.S. Air Force, Special Services Division. While on leave, he continued to record both as a Drifter and as a solo act. In a wise business move, Atlantic Records restructured the Drifters without McPhatter (the start of a trend, considering the hundreds of "Drifters" who came and went since), and McPhatter became exclusively a solo artist.

As a soloist, his basic style remained fundamentally unchanged, with hits like "Treasure of Love" and "Without Love (There Is Nothing)." A slight change in style came in 1958, with "A Lover's Question." The song was structured similarly to most vocal-group songs, however, with a strong bass rhythm and rhythmic support from the harmonies. Yet the song is different, and it is the most timeless of McPhatter's songs because, for the first time, his singing does not push the threshold. The a cappella intro lasts two bars into the verse, and then rhythm guitars and harmonies join in. As written, the lyrics simply wonder how anyone can be certain of a partner's love. McPhatter doesn't sound excited, just curious and tentative, which is exactly how he should sound, given the subject matter. He displays confidence and restraint, yet he was still capable of display-





ing emotion as well. With his broad vocal range intact, he never strays far from the underlying melody. On “A Lover’s Question,” he discovered the relaxed formula that gave him the biggest hit of his lifetime.

## NOVEMBER 1958 #4 ONE NIGHT—ELVIS PRESLEY

**O**n March 24, 1958, Elvis was inducted into the Army. RCA Records and Elvis’s manager, Colonel Tom Parker, had plenty of advance notice, so they kept him busy in the recording studio before he left, giving the label plenty of material to release while he was overseas. Although Elvis was gone for one-and-a-half years, the hits kept coming as RCA released song after song from its stockpile, which a hungry public ate up as though he had never left. “One Night” is easily the best of the songs released in his absence.



Smiley Lewis, a rhythm and blues artist, wrote and recorded the original version, which had slightly different lyrics, but that minor difference completely altered the subject matter. The original line was “One night of sin is what I’m now paying for.” Hmm. Change “of sin” to “with you” and “paying” to “praying,” and you’ve got yourself a love song. It was a nifty thing for Elvis to do because it not only made the lyrics more palatable, but also made them identifiable to the average listener.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1958	#2
<u>SIXTEEN CANDLES</u> —THE CRESTS	
NOVEMBER 1958	#2
<u>PROBLEMS</u> —THE EVERLY BROTHERS	

GREAT MISSES	
NOVEMBER 1958	#4
<u>BEEP BEEP</u> —THE PLAYMATES	
NOVEMBER 1958	#33
<u>THE BLOB</u> —THE FIVE BLOBS	

“One Night” is a modified blues song in triplet time with emotional substance—which is no big deal, really, unless you compare it with the balance of material that Elvis was recording. Of course, Elvis fans (a motley blend of character types if there ever was one) loved anything this man did, so it became rare for him to bother to invest any real passion into his music, since his core audience was undemanding to a fault. Every now and then, Elvis couldn’t help himself and put everything he could into his performance.

In his 1968 television special, he played before a small, live audience for the first time in years and sang as though his very life depended upon it. If you are an Elvis fan, or even if you are not an Elvis fan, you really ought to see this show (it was released by HBO Video, titled *One Night with You*). The entire show is fascinating, but the highlight of the set is the title song. Elvis fidgets, fools around (perhaps nervously) with the crowd, and even has one or two false starts. At one point his guitar plug gets pulled out, so they stop while he plugs himself back in. I know that it sounds like a mess, but Elvis never looked better or seemed more natural than he does here. At one point, he slips into the Smiley Lewis lyrics



and then catches himself. All of this taken together makes Elvis appear vulnerable, and for a while it seems doubtful that he will bother to play the song to its conclusion. Instead, he goes on, and the song builds until it becomes obvious that this is a life-defining moment—the performance of a lifetime.

The 45 version isn't as overwhelming as the TV special performance, but it is still quite good and, for me, always conjures up the image of Elvis dressed in leather, singing before an intimate crowd with more passion and intensity than he would ever again prove himself to be capable of.

## DECEMBER 1958 #1 SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES—THE PLATTERS

In 1958, it became obvious to most observers of music trends that the tide had turned and black vocal groups were being washed up by rock and roll. The Platters, however, survived, mostly because of the quality of their material but also because of the smooth vocals of lead tenor Tony Williams. “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” reached #1 in 1958. Hits continued for the Platters until 1961, when Williams left to pursue a solo career. His replacement, Sonny Turner, sang lead on two hits in the mid-'60s, but by then their best material was obviously behind them.

“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” stands out among the Platters' recordings for two reasons. First of all, a casual perusal of their hits reveals that the majority are in a  $\frac{6}{8}$  time signature. The loping rhythms of “Twilight Time,” “The Magic Touch,” “The Great Pretender,” and “Only You” are forsaken for a very deliberate  $\frac{4}{4}$  time, which gives “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” a strict cadence very different from the group's other hits. Secondly, the orchestration, which the Platters usually used sparingly, is perhaps more integral to the mood of this recording than the vocal harmonies. It is possible, even likely, that the lush arrangement served as an inspirational prototype for budding record producer Phil Spector.

“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” was written in 1933 by Jerome Kern and was a big hit for Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. Even more so than his younger contemporaries Ira Gershwin and Cole Porter, Kern's lyrics were aimed directly at the New York upper-class smart set. Some of the best ideas in music are hybrids, combining two seemingly incompatible styles. Hearing Williams soulfully deliver such stiffly formal lyrics as “Now, laughing friends deride tears I cannot hide, so I smile and say, when a lovely flame dies, smoke gets in your eyes” is a great example of such a hybrid. Simply put, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” is a classy song with a classy arrangement sung by a classy band.

## DECEMBER 1958 #7 LONELY TEARDROPS—JACKIE WILSON

Jackie Wilson is a tough performer to get a grip on. His talent is obvious, but his style is disconcerting. He did so much so well that he often confused his audience. In his recordings, his less-than-sympathetic producers almost always stymied his attempts at soulful expression, so he wound up being misperceived and



**Wilson's voice  
dips and swirls  
all over the  
place,  
rebounding off  
the walls of the  
arrangement  
and sounding  
as though he  
were  
celebrating  
some newfound  
freedom.**

pigeonholed as a pop singer when he had a voice that could have done anything. Technically, Wilson could outsing them all.

Jackie Wilson was born June 9, 1934, in Detroit. He was interested in boxing and won an amateur Golden Gloves title but backed away from it before he got very involved. Like virtually every other black pop vocalist from the '50s, he started by singing gospel. Wilson had formidable vocal chops that were simply undeniable, so once he began to sing secular material, he got noticed very quickly. His vocal hero was Clyde McPhatter of the Dominoes, and when he heard rumor of McPhatter's departure, he brashly approached the group's leader, Billy Ward, to apply for the position. He was hired and remained with the Dominoes for the better part of four years. Unfortunately, the group had run out of steam commercially, and very little of Wilson's material with them achieved any kind of commercial success.

Wilson left the Dominoes for a solo career on Brunswick Records. His first release, "Reet Petite," was a near-perfect single, but it never managed to cross over to the pop charts, despite a blatantly commercial arrangement. In the early '80s, it became a huge hit in Europe as a rerelease, but the American pop charts once again missed their cue. "Reet Petite" was written by Wilson's cousin, Billy Davis (aka Tyran Carlo), and a fledgling hustler by the name of Berry Gordy Jr., later of Motown fame. The Dick Jacobs Orchestra (and, unfortunately, his chorus) were the house band at Brunswick, and it fell into their hands to accompany Wilson.

"To Be Loved," a pretty but maudlin song drastically overarranged by Jacobs, became Wilson's first single to reach the Top 40. The follow-up, "Lonely Tears," reached #7 in December 1958. Thankfully, the arrangement was comparatively modest and did not tamper with Wilson's vocal talent to the point of ruination. To be fair, the quasi-big band arrangements didn't hurt nearly so much as the hopelessly white-sounding backup singers. If only these early monophonic recordings could be remixed...ah, well. The song featured a muted and arpeggiated (strummed one note at a time) guitar riff that sounded much more modern than the heavy brass of his previous singles. Wilson's voice dips and swirls all over the place, rebounding off the walls of the arrangement and sounding as though he were celebrating some newfound freedom. It seemed as though Wilson and his accompanists were finally on the right track. Unfortunately, most of his later releases would prove that this was far from the truth.

## **JANUARY 1959 #22 LA BAMBA—RICHIE VALENS**

**R**ichard Valenzuela was born of Mexican and American Indian descent on May 1941, in Los Angeles. Growing up a minority in this city meant that Valenzuela





was less privy to the host of amenities that surrounded him, but he found enough strength in his heritage to succeed anyway and proved himself equal to the task of being famous. Bob Keene, the owner of the Keen record label that recorded Sam Cooke, heard in Valens a marketable talent, and in March 1958 Valens recorded “Come On, Let’s Go,” which peaked on the charts in November at #42. His follow-up single, “Donna,” peaked at #2, which suddenly gave Valens national exposure and earned him cameo appearances on television and in movies. The B side of “Donna” was “La Bamba,” a knockoff performance of a slightly bowdlerized traditional Mexican folk song, which nonetheless charted at #22 in February 1959. To say that “La Bamba” lacked the ingredients of the standard pop-hit formula is an understatement, but its infectious rhythm and carefree delivery made it not only a hit, but a rock-and-roll staple.

Valens’s sudden fame made him a likely prospect for an album release. It also earned him a place on the “Winter Dance Party” tour with Buddy Holly, Dion and the Belmonts, and the Big Bopper. In one of rock and roll’s most publicized and tragic accidents, Valens was killed on February 3, 1959, when the single-engine plane he shared with Buddy Holly and J.P. Richardson (the Big Bopper) crashed near Fargo, North Dakota. He was seventeen years old. Holly had chartered the plane so he could arrive with enough time before the next show to do his laundry. The two remaining seats went to Valens and Richardson, who wanted to avoid the grueling bus ride and had to convince Holly’s bass player, Waylon Jennings, to surrender his seat on the plane.

As corny as it may sound, it is also very true to say that Valens’s career could be likened to a shooting star on a summer night. If you blinked, you missed it, but his immortality has far outlasted his own short life span.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1959	#1
STAGGER LEE—LLOYD PRICE	

## JANUARY 1959 #35 C’MON EVERYBODY—EDDIE COCHRAN

**E**ddie Cochran’s last hit singles, “Summertime Blues” and “C’mon Everybody,” have an overall sound and attitude so similar that unless you are a fan, they can easily be mistaken for one another. This is the most likely reason that “C’mon Everybody” only reached #35, which is unfortunate, because it lives on as one of the best party records of the rock-and-roll era. Both songs were written by Cochran with his musical collaborator, Jerry Capehart.

When the opportunity to play live in Europe arose, Cochran jumped at the chance to affirm his popularity overseas. He signed on to a thirteen-week tour of Great Britain with fellow rocker Gene Vincent, and the English rock-and-roll fans went wild. This was the first genuine American rock-and-roll tour since Jerry Lee Lewis was sent packing, and its impact on the English kids cannot be overstated. Most English bands from the British Invasion—and even a healthy number from later on—always credit Cochran and Vincent as major influences.





Sometime in the middle of touring, Cochran, his girlfriend Sharon Sheeley (with whom he wrote "Somethin' Else"), and Vincent were riding in a limousine when a tire blew and the driver lost control of the car. The other passengers sustained various injuries, but Cochran never regained consciousness. He passed away on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1959.

## FEBRUARY 1959 #3 IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME—BROOK BENTON

**W**hen Brook Benton was growing up in South Carolina, he gained singing experience by...guess what? Singing gospel music? Good guess. Separation of church and state might be a part of America's governmental constitution, but it certainly does not apply to our music.

Once Benton had developed enough confidence in his talent, he moved to New York and took odd jobs while striving for a career as a singer and/or songwriter. He did get some of his songs placed with singers as established as Nat "King" Cole and Clyde McPhatter (Benton wrote "A Lover's Question"), and he was thus encouraged to continue with his efforts. Vik Records offered him his own recording contract, but Benton's records didn't get noticed. In 1959, Mercury signed him, and almost immediately his luck changed. Three #1 R&B songs and five Top 40 songs charted in 1959 alone. His first, "It's Just a Matter of Time," reached #3 on the pop charts.

Benton's deep baritone crooning was reminiscent of Nat "King" Cole's, but it was less jazz-inflected and more soulful. Unlike Cole, Benton's smooth, laid-back style was not particularly innovative, but effective. By design, his songwriting suited his voice like a glove. The orchestration and accompaniment are never overdone and play a significant role in the song's appeal.

In 1960, Benton teamed up with Dinah Washington for a pair of duets, both of which reached the Top 10. "Baby (You've Got What It Takes)" and "A Rockin' Good Way" were pleasant enough songs, but Benton and Washington were certainly not up to their usual standards as solo artists. Washington in particular seemed to be somewhat compromised by the material, yet their popularity as a duet was undeniable. Benton remained a top artist for Mercury, and by 1964 he could claim twenty-one Top 40 recordings. By then, though, his popularity had evaporated. It would not be until 1970 that he would briefly reappear on the Top 40.

## MARCH 1959 #12 SINCE I DON'T HAVE YOU—THE SKYLINERS

**I**'ve already mentioned the proclivity of white singers to cover black artists' material with uninspired, workaday recordings, and I don't mean to belabor the point, but unless you were from the Northeast, white doo-wop was about as unnatural as green hair. It was a style that could be adopted, but it sure wasn't in the roots. The Crewcuts ("Sh-boom") and the Diamonds ("Little Darlin'," "The Stroll") both hailed from Canada, that swingin' doo-wop mecca, and became the



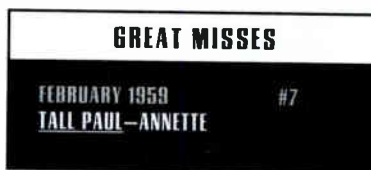
most successful vocal groups of the genre with no discernible talent except the ability to harmonize like a barbershop quartet on songs originated by black groups such as the Chords (the original “Sh-Boom”) and the Gladiolas (the original “Little Darlin”). Bill Randle, a Cleveland disc jockey and the nemesis of Alan Freed, intended to further the cause of white rock and roll, and he actively promoted the Crewcuts and the Diamonds as his discoveries. Because of his connections, Randle was able to get access to new, original doo-wop songs instantly, which were then rush-recorded by one of his “discoveries.” It was a simple and profitable procedure, since the lame cover version usually got the most exposure and raced up the charts before the original even had a chance. This disgraceful practice of blatantly stealing songs became aptly known as “sham rock.” I mention this only to highlight the contrast between the vocal music of the Skyliners and the white doo-wop of the Crewcuts and the Diamonds.

The Skyliners were also a white vocal group, but they had absolutely nothing in common with their Canadian counterparts.

Hailing from Pittsburgh, they were a totally original act capable of writing and arranging their own material. Their lineup consisted of four backing vocalists (three guys and a girl) and lead singer Jimmy Beaumont. Together, they and their manager wrote “Since I Don’t Have You,” and Calico Records, also based in

Pittsburgh, recorded the song with full orchestration. The group’s lush harmonies combined with the classy addition of strings to support Beaumont’s magnificent lead vocal. The overall effect of the finished product suggested the best material of the Platters, without being even remotely derivative.

A few other hits followed (“This I Swear,” “It Happened Today,” and “Pennies from Heaven”), but they lacked the magical inventiveness of “Since I Don’t Have You.” Other white vocal groups—such as the Duprees, the Earls, the Elegants, the Four Lads, the Four Aces, the Four Coins, and the Four Preps (actually, with the exception of the Four Seasons and the Four Tops, the Four *anything* is usually highly suspect musically)—made records ranging from excellent to absurd throughout the doo-wop years, but on “Since I Don’t Have You,” the Skyliners’ gorgeous originality transcended the expectations of their competition.



## MARCH 1959 #14 SEA CRUISE—FRANKIE FORD

New Orleans musicians knew something better than anybody else. Rock and roll was not simply melding R&B to country—it had to be youthful, lively...fun! The blues were intense and appealed to an older crowd, while rock and roll was meant for the teenagers. In New Orleans, songs became rock and roll simply by making the subject matter less serious.

Huey “Piano” Smith was a chief arranger at Cosimo Matassa’s J&M Studios, and he saw quite a few characters pass through the doors, including Clarence “Frog-



**GREAT HITS**

- MARCH 1959 #13  
**IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE—**  
**BUDDY HOLLY**
- APRIL 1959 #1  
**KANSAS CITY—WILBERT HARRISON**
- APRIL 1959 #13  
**THAT'S WHY I LOVE YOU SO—**  
**JACKIE WILSON**
- APRIL 1959 #32  
**ALMOST GROWN—CHUCK BERRY**
- MAY 1959 #1  
**THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS—**  
**JOHNNY HORTON**
- JUNE 1959 #2  
**THERE GOES MY BABY—THE DRIFTERS**

**GREAT MISSES**

- APRIL 1959 #9  
**TURN ME LOOSE—FABIAN**

man” Henry and Little Richard. Guitar Slim (“The Things I Used to Do”) was an early partner of Smith who often dyed his hair outrageous colors to match his equally outrageous clothing. In 1957, a cross-dressing vocalist named Bobby Marchan became the lead vocalist for Huey “Piano” Smith and the Clowns. Together they had one Top 40 hit in 1958 with the rollicking “Don’t You Just Know It,” but Smith grew tired of traveling and performing live. The band continued to perform with a replacement while Smith dedicated most of his energy to songwriting and studio sessions. Smith knew firsthand that humorous material was money in the bank so he continued to write in that style. This was the best thing that could have happened to Frankie Ford.

Ford was an Italian kid (born Frank Guzzo) who the local impresarios thought could compete with Elvis. They had recently attempted a similar experiment with Jimmy Clanton and had a #4 hit in 1958 with “Just a Dream.” Ace Records chief Johnny Vincent heard Ford and brought him to J&M, although he had no material. Smith had written “Sea Cruise” and wanted to keep it for himself, but Vincent somehow finagled it from him. He took the recording by Huey “Piano” Smith and the Clowns and

dubbed Frankie Ford over Smith’s vocal. Ford had a good voice for rock and roll, and he sang the song well, but the fog horns, bells, rockin’ beat, and infectious New Orleans rhythm virtually guaranteed the song hit status. “Sea Cruise” is fun from beginning to end, and Frankie Ford sings it for all he’s worth. Pure Crescent City lunacy. Hoo-wee, baby.

**JUNE 1959 #8 WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES—DINAH WASHINGTON**

**D**inah Washington was called “the queen of the blues,” but this is something of a misnomer. Sure, she was a great blues singer, but she was talented enough to sing almost anything and make it sound fresh. It would be more appropriate to consider her the spiritual link that connects Billie Holiday and Aretha Franklin. Ballads and R&B, as well as the blues, were the standard fare of these vocalists, and each of them dominated the music scene for at least a decade. Washington may not have had the same impact, commercially or musically, but her talent was certainly comparable.



Dinah Washington was born Ruth Jones in Chicago in 1924. She sang gospel in a duo with her mother, who was also her music instructor, and she occasionally performed secular songs in nightclubs. While working as a washroom attendant, she was brought to the attention of Lionel Hampton, an alumnus of the Benny Goodman Orchestra and a popular bandleader in his own right. He auditioned her and hired her on the spot. After changing her name to Dinah Washington, she toured with Hampton for two years. Strangely, though, she recorded almost nothing during her tenure with him. It was jazz impresario Leonard Feather who finally arranged a recording session. Washington subsequently recorded blues tracks as a solo artist for Keynote and Apollo Records, but with only limited success. In 1948, Mercury Records signed her to a recording contract that began her domination of the the R&B charts for the next decade (she barely dented the popular charts however; “I Wanna Be Loved” was #22 in 1950 and “Teach Me Tonight” was #23 in 1954). Washington proved her ability to handle everything from barrelhouse blues to straight pop, all sung with a voice that combined the best qualities of blues and gospel. She could sing even banal material with overwhelming feeling and personal involvement, but she was marketed exclusively for an R&B audience. It took the standard “What a Difference a Day Made” (she recorded it as “What a Difference a Day Makes”) to break “the queen of the blues” onto the pop charts.

Although it is hardly a blues song, Washington sings “What a Difference a Day Makes” with so much expression and personal vitality that it almost qualifies. Blues and R&B purists often bemoan the “crass” commercialization of Washington and hold her pop songs in disdain, but frankly, I think they completely miss the point. She handles her pop songs in such a manner that they *are* blues of a sort, and her singing certainly qualifies them as redoubtable R&B. Her emotional pauses, sultry intonation, and gentle bends bring them to a much higher level of sophistication. It was as though she had combined Billie Holiday’s world-weary genius with Frank Sinatra’s smooth professionalism. Subsequent hits, such as “This Bitter Earth” and “Unforgettable” (the only version I’ve heard that stands up to Nat “King” Cole’s), continued in a similar vein until her untimely death.

Washington’s personal life belied the vulnerability of her voice and gave her plenty of real-life experience to draw from. With seven marriages under her belt, a reputation for hard drinking, and an explosive personality, she made quite sure that she would be nobody’s fool. One night, finding it difficult to sleep, she allegedly swallowed some sleeping pills after an evening of serious drinking. She never woke up. She passed away December 14, 1963.

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1959	#2
THERE GOES MY BABY—THE DRIFTERS	

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1959	#3
TIGER—FABIAN	
JUNE 1959	#5
LIPSTICK ON YOUR COLLAR— CONNIE FRANCIS	



**JUNE 1959 #11 I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR YOU—THE FLAMINGOS**

**O**K, let's see now...there were the Ravens, the Jayhawks, the Orioles, the Penguins, the Robins, the Cardinals, the Falcons, and the Flamingos. Doo-woppers loved bird names for their groups. Most doo-wop fanatics could easily name another half dozen without hesitation, and most would also agree that the Flamingos were among the best. Other groups had a looser, laid-back approach to harmony, an attitude that worked just fine within the broad musical confines of pop and R&B, but the Flamingos were sharp as a razor. Their harmonies were literally note perfect, and they had a reputation for exceptional showmanship that was abetted by their instrumental talents (they were one of very few vocal groups that actually played their own instruments). Their stage show provided inspiration for future Motown greats the Temptations. Their talents were most visible on ballads, particularly those that required stop-on-a-dime phrasing.

"Doo-bop-sh-bop. Sing this as fast as you can. No, faster. C'mon, you can sing it even faster than that. That's not bad, but now I can't understand the syllables...you've got to enunciate." The poor Flamingos must have gone through something like this while rehearsing the background vocal to "I Only Have Eyes for You." "Doo-bop-sh-bop" is squeezed into the space of a single 1/8 note in triplet time. That translates to about one-half of a nanosecond per syllable. And they say it over and over throughout the verses, in precise syncopation and perfect harmony.

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1959 <u>BONGO ROCK</u> —PRESTON EPPS	#14
JUNE 1959 <u>THE LITTLE SPACE GIRL</u> — JESSE LEE TURNER	#20

"I Only Have Eyes for You" dates back to 1934, when it was the last big hit for bandleader Ben Selvin (he was on the charts more than a hundred

times in the early third of the century). In the hands of the Flamingos, it sounds like mood music from Mars—which perfectly suits the lyrics, actually. If you are so lost in love that you don't know whether you're "in a garden or on a crowded avenue," then you're pretty far out there. The Platters, the Ravens, and the Orioles had already combined Tin Pan Alley and doo-wop with classy results. The Flamingos went one step further and made their songs sound ethereal. After existing for years solely on the R&B charts, it took a brilliant reinvention of a tired classic to finally bring them on to the Top 40 and to the attention of the sanitized pop audience. In the process, they changed the pop audience's impression of what could be accomplished with a little imagination. The Flamingos took doo-wop so far that by the time they got to where they were going, it was barely recognizable as doo-wop. Mars must be a pretty romantic place.

**JULY 1959 #2 SEA OF LOVE—PHIL PHILLIPS**

**A**ll I can say is, I'm glad this guy never fell in love with me. This has got to be one of the spookiest love songs I've ever heard. Where the hell is the "Sea of





Love” anyway? Would *you* want to go there with this guy? It sounds like he’s trying to hypnotize his victim into submission. You’re getting sleepy...veeee-rry sleepy. “Come with me to the Sea of Love.” AAAAAAHH! The chorus of monsters who sing the menacing “mmmmm”s barely pause to breathe while the “bum-bum-bum”-ing bass singer definitely sounds as though he harbors an uncontrollable (and unspeakable) predilection for flesh. I don’t know what Phillips and his cronies had in mind after he and his intended reached the “Sea of Love,” but maybe it’s best not to ask. If this is seduction, then bring on the saltpeter.

Perhaps the moody atmosphere is accidental. The vocals go off-key, but nobody so much as blinks an eye, while the piano endlessly drones on and on. I’m afraid this is beginning to sound as though I despise “Sea of Love,” but that is certainly not my intention. All of these odd ingredients combine for a song that is both original and moving (if you happen to think that Lon Chaney is cute), and it works. Memorable covers were recorded by Del Shannon, Robert Plant (as the Honeydrippers), and Tom Waits (for the movie of the same name), but Phil Phillips’s version beats them all on ambiance alone. Plant prettified it with strings and made it into a conventional love song. Waits took the Bela Lugosi aspect and ran with it, but as scary as he can be, it is nowhere near as wig-liftingly weird as Phil Phillips’s original.

## JULY 1959 #6 WHAT’D I SAY—RAY CHARLES

**A**s the United States began the second half of the twentieth century, there was an inherent sense that the country was in a period of transition. Both economically and socially, change was on the horizon. With the end of World War II, the conflict that had bound all Americans together, regardless of race, had been resolved, and individual citizens were suddenly free to resume personal interests without guilt. More introspective members of our society took this opportunity to question the moral direction of our nation, but unfortunately, a polarization of the races and social classes once again overwhelmed the country. The arts, particularly music, held up a mirror to our society and reflected the current state of affairs.

Big band music, which had been so popular during the war with both “uptown” black society and “midtown” white society, had lost its sense of direction. Attention was suddenly being placed on the vocalists, and as a result, the accompaniment often softened to mush. White middle-class fears of communism and a new, independent-minded black society simultaneously emerged. Since they both threatened the status quo, any cross-cultural performance took on the appearance of being subversive. Thus totally segregated (and unhampered) by Middle American restrictions and xenophobia, black music was free to flourish while white popular music languished in the “safety” of its

**The arts, particularly music, held up a mirror to our society and reflected the current state of affairs.**



own self-imposed limitations. With a few exceptions, the pop music charts ignored the innovative trends of black music and instead reflected a propensity for such superficial nonsense as “(How Much is That) Doggie in the Window” and “Music! Music! Music!”

Meanwhile, in the hands of black innovators, all sorts of developments were taking place. Country blues became citified and electric. Gospel music begat doo-wop. Most of the big bands broke up and splintered into smaller groups. Some pursued highly personal visions and concentrated on the free form, soloing aspect of band music which led to the emergence of a brand new type of jazz called be bop that was almost unrecognizable when compared with its roots. Other groups concentrated on the rhythm and blues progressions of the big bands and were called, appropriately enough, rhythm-and-blues groups. The black experience was the impetus for all of these musical forms, and since they were all rooted in the same culture, they cross-pollinated and resulted in dozens of musical hybrids.

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1959 <b>ONLY SIXTEEN—SAM COOKE</b>	#28
JULY 1959 <b>BACK IN THE USA—CHUCK BERRY</b>	#37

Ray Charles is the personification of the place where blues-meets-gospel-meets-jazz-meets-R&B. In his voice, all the major movements of black musical culture were brought together. His songs were the embodiment of them all. No better example of this blend exists on the pop charts than “What’d I Say.” The result of a jam session during a show in Pittsburgh, “What’d I Say” was

more than five minutes long, so it was cut in half and spread out on both sides of a single. Virtually every ingredient of this record was innovative, from the rollicking, funky rhythm to the churchy call-and-response vocals to the use of the electric piano, which heretofore had never appeared on a pop song. Charles neatly summarized where music was headed, and he did it instinctively. By encapsulating the multitudinous black styles, he somehow made them more palatable to a broad audience. The societal splintering that had steadily taken place since the end of World War II slowly began to reverse, thanks in part to the instinctive genius of Ray Charles. For years, the piano riff of “What’d I Say” would be a staple in the repertoire of rock-and-roll bands and would be used in different variations on dozens of later recordings. Without ever deliberately conceding to the youth market or pop culture in general, Ray Charles almost single-handedly rediscovered and salvaged pop music’s means of expression and identification.

## SEPTEMBER 1959 #7 MACK THE KNIFE—BOBBY DARIN

**W**alden Roberto Cassotto was born and raised in a tough part of the Bronx, New York. His father died a few months before he was born, so he was raised by his mother and older sister. Although he was a very sickly child, he developed a toughness and a will to succeed. He harbored a desire to get into show business and taught himself to play a variety of musical instruments. When he



was old enough, he played for a while with a dance band in the Catskill Mountains resort area, and he took the stage name of Bobby Darin. For a short while, Darin teamed up with future impresario Don Kirshner, and they cut a few demo recordings together. Eventually, Decca Records took an interest in Darin and signed him to a solo contract. Kirshner, meanwhile, wished him luck and went on to start the groundwork for what would soon become a multimillion-dollar publishing empire.

Decca had no luck with Darin and released him in 1957. Then his old friend Kirshner approached Atlantic Records chief Ahmet Ertegun on his behalf, and Darin was signed to their subsidiary label, Atco Records. His first three releases fared miserably, however, and Darin became something of a pariah, since nobody at Atlantic was willing to put their reputation in jeopardy and produce him. Undaunted, he sold one of his recordings to his old label, Decca, under an alias and then went directly to Ertegun, asking for another opportunity. Ertegun consented, named himself as producer, and allotted ninety minutes of studio time for Darin to prove himself. The deliberately juvenile “Splish Splash” and “Queen of the Hop” were recorded, and both became Top 10 hits. Novelty rock-and-roll-style songs were the rage, and Darin found a niche. But he preferred to sing more substantial fare, so in 1959 he wrote and recorded “Dream Lover,” which reached #2. This was an important hit for Darin because it moved him away from the mold of being just another teen idol who sang novelty records. How and why he made the weird decision to record “Mack the Knife” as the follow-up to “Dream Lover” is anyone’s guess, but it proved to be a very inspired choice.

Kurt Weill could never have known just how popular his character study for Bertolt Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* would become. Weill wrote the song in 1928 with the original German title, “Moritat.” Translated into English and taken out of context, the obscure references to real and fictional characters are rendered meaningless, yet the song was revived and reached the charts six times in 1956 alone. Louis Armstrong’s memorable interpretation served as Darin’s blueprint. Darin sticks very close to Armstrong’s vocal line, but he adds a sophisticated, finger-snapping cool that was perfect for the pseudo-hipster-cum-gangster lyrics. The steady crescendo and key changes of the orchestra build and build until the near-riotous swinging collapses, while the all-too-cool Darin adds the line, “Look out, ol’ Mack is back!” Nine weeks at #1 and a record that crossed generational lines was the result. Bobby Darin was no longer the singer of silly rock-and-roll songs, but the purveyor of modern pop swing.



## OCTOBER 1959 #12 MISTY—JOHNNY MATHIS

**A**lthough the jazz-derived style of Johnny Mathis’s early years was long forgotten in 1959, he brought it back to the foreground to sing “Misty,” a beautiful ballad that was written by West Coast pianist Erroll Garner, with words by Johnny



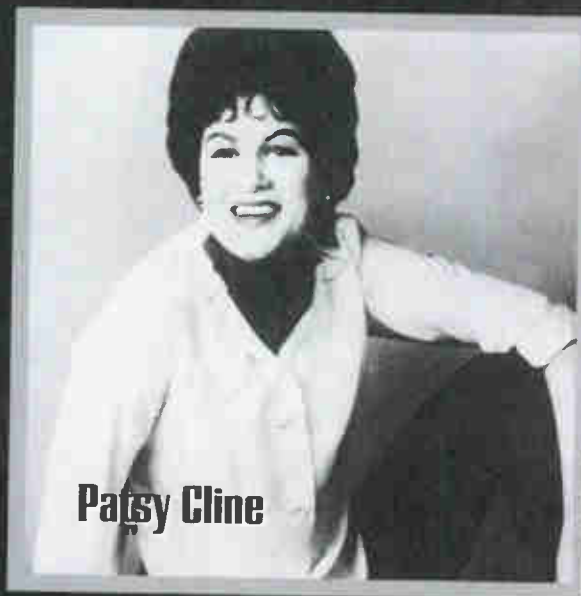
Burke. Despite the moans and groans of conservative-minded critics, the technical quality of Mathis's voice is beyond reproach, and the only legitimate gripe they might have would be his overt stylization. More staid listeners objected to his lack of subtlety and his gliding, ethereal sound, but it perfectly suited the romantic material that he usually favored. Besides, his adolescent fans found it "dreamy." Teenage parties would not be complete without some time dedicated to the "make-out music" of Johnny Mathis.

Depending on your view, "Misty" contains either the best or the worst elements of Mathis's singing. The phrase "On my own" displays some of the most pyrotechnical styling that he ever devised, plunging from the floating whisper of a high note to almost three octaves down within the space of a heartbeat. Through five decades, Mathis's distinct voice remains instantly recognizable. His longevity proves the popularity (or at least the marketability) of his sound, but "Misty" has more than a touch of the jazz singer that Mathis almost became.



**Chapter  
Two**

**1960-1963**



**Patsy Cline**









## JANUARY 1960 #1 THEME FROM A SUMMER PLACE—PERCY FAITH

Finally, my family is going on summer vacation. It feels like it has been centuries waiting for this day, but it's finally here. School is out, I passed with OK grades, and I've got the entire summer ahead of me. Three whole months. It seems like a lifetime, and I'm so excited that I'm giddy. The car is packed up, and I've even got my own suitcase, which is filled with the clothes my mom made me pack plus all the cool stuff I'm gonna need, like my comic book collection, my baseball mitt, and a water pistol that I snuck in after my mom closed the suitcase. I climb into the back seat of the Chevy Impala, dutifully carrying the book from my summer reading assignment. As we back out of the driveway, my dad, as always, says, "Are you suuu-ure you didn't forget anything? If you remember it later, it will be too late." Duh, Dad. Don't worry about it. There will be plenty of stores that sell cool junk if I need anything. We pull onto the highway, and our three-hour journey to the shore begins.

An hour into the drive, I start getting restless. My mom senses it so she turns on the radio, 77 WABC (ding). They play that jingle before every song, but it's cool. "Summer in the City" comes on, and I try to sing along but I don't know all the words. "Hot time, summer in the city, backin' my wreck da da dee dee dee." I think how lucky I am to be going to the Jersey shore for the summer instead of being stuck in some hot apartment building with my boring aunt, like last year. The next song that comes on is some kind of waltzy instrumental song, a really schmaltzy kind of thing that I'd heard a million times, but I can't remember the name. I don't know why, but the anticipation of arriving suddenly comes over me like a wave. "I gotta go to the bathroom," I say truthfully. Unwillingly, my Dad agrees to pull into the next rest area on the parkway.

The deejay comes on (Harry Harrison sounds like a cool guy) and says the song is called "Theme from *A Summer Place*." Two hours later, we get off the parkway, cross the bridge, and WAMMO, here we are! Ocean City, New Jersey. I lower my window and feel the breeze hit me in the face. Check out that smell! It's a summer smell all the way. I wanna do everything all at once. I wanna get a char-broiled hamburger. I want a Philly cheese steak from the hoagie shop. I want a lemonade and french fries on the boardwalk. I want to play miniature golf. More important than anything, though, is talking my parents out of a few bucks so I can rent a bike and be mobile.

We pull up to the beach house and unpack the car. The place is kinda cozy with rinky-dink furniture, but I got my own room on the top floor. It's hot as hell, but at least I'll have some privacy. I run downstairs and talk my par-

### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1960 #1  
TEEN ANGEL—MARK DINNING

**The D.J. comes on (Harry Harrison sounds like a cool guy) and says the song is called "Theme From *A Summer Place*."**



It's dark at the ocean and nobody's on the beach, but the boardwalk is like another world.

ents into giving me three bucks. I take off like the Flash for the boards and the bike-rental place.

Later, after dinner, I walk along the boardwalk with my parents, but I'm completely mortified, 'cause there's a lot of other kids around and I look like a real doofus. I kinda sorta hint that I want to go the other way, and my dad does the coolest thing. He gives me another two bucks and says, "Be back by nine." See you later, and I'm off.

I'm excited so I walk fast, passing the noisy arcades with the pinball machines and air hockey tables. It's so loud in there that it's unbelievable. I figure I need change anyway, so I buy a vanilla-chocolate swirl ice cream at the booth next to the store that sells peanuts. It's dark at the ocean and nobody's on the beach, but the boardwalk is like another world. It seems to go on forever, and there's millions of people. I look out at the waves for a minute or two and decide to walk down to the amusement park at the end of the boardwalk.

When I get there, the place is full of stuff to do. There's the roller coaster, but the line's too long, and the Ferris wheel (but that's for kids). Maybe I can just walk around for a while. "Light My Fire" is blaring over the sound system. The blinking lights and noisy rides all combine and I feel heady. A bunch of kids, four guys and two girls about my age, walk past and climb into the bumper cars. They seem to know each other pretty well. My body kind of freezes. I feel funny and embarrassed at being by myself. I turn around and pretend to look the other way until the ride starts up. I watch them ride around for a while, but I still feel funny so I throw out what's left of my ice cream and walk out to the boardwalk. I lean on the rail and stare at the moon hovering over the waves. The warm sea breezes hit my face, and the salty brine fills my senses. The lights and the noise from the amusement park blare away behind me, but the ocean looks so peaceful. The sound system starts playing "Theme from *A Summer Place*." Staring out at the dark sea, my eyes begin to well up with tears. Inexplicably and uncontrollably, I start to cry.

## JANUARY 1960 #6 BEYOND THE SEA—BOBBY DARIN

"Mack the Knife" redefined Bobby Darin's image from a smarmy kid singing about bathtubs to a smarmy adult singing about hoodlums. To keep the momentum going, "Beyond the Sea" was an excellent choice for a follow-up. Like "Mack the Knife," it was also a foreign recording, originally a French hit in 1945 for songwriter Charles Trenet. Modified and translated into English, "La Mer" became "Beyond the Sea." Also like "Mack the Knife," the orchestra plays a crucial role in propelling the song with key changes, and the excellent drum breaks help energize the proceedings.

Darin continued to have hits with Atlantic Records, including "Artificial Flowers" and "You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby," but he had his eye on the West Coast. In the early '60s, every singer worth his weight was expected to pursue an



acting career, and Darin was no exception. He changed record labels from East Coast Atlantic to West Coast Capitol, married actress Sandra Dee, and moved to California to follow offers for various acting roles. His acting wasn't too bad, but it wasn't too good either. Also, the distraction of acting sometimes caused his music to suffer. Once Capitol signed the Beach Boys and the Beatles, Darin quickly found himself overlooked and outdated. The radical changes taking place in the music industry alienated Darin somewhat, so he slackened his style and his pace. In 1966, he returned to Atlantic and the Top 10 with "If I Were a Carpenter." He grew a mustache and became a protest singer. Later, he returned to nightclub performing and started singing in Las Vegas. His performances and intelligent investments made him a wealthy man, but his poor health interfered. As a child he had suffered from rheumatic fever, and presumably this left him with a weak heart. On December 10, 1973, while undergoing open-heart surgery to repair a faulty valve, Darin passed away. He was 38 years old.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1960 <b>WHERE OR WHEN— DION AND THE BELMONTS</b>	#3
MARCH 1960 <b>MONEY—BARRETT STRONG</b>	#23

## MARCH 1960 #16 THIS MAGIC MOMENT—THE DRIFTERS

The Drifters are the most appropriately named group in rock-and-roll history. So many members have drifted in and out of the band that you'd need a diagram to keep track of their various comings and goings. In 1953, the group was formed as a vehicle to showcase the talents of Clyde McPhatter, who had recently left Billy Ward and the Dominoes. McPhatter was the Dominoes' lead tenor so, naturally enough, most fans assumed he was Billy Ward. Actually, Ward was the non-singing director of the group, and one day he saw fit to fire McPhatter. Sensing a potential hitmaker, Ahmet Ertegun of Atlantic Records tracked McPhatter down. Happy to be given the chance to form his own group, McPhatter signed with Atlantic. He called his group the Drifters and scheduled their first recording session. When things didn't go as planned, he sacked everyone and replaced them with four new members. This was the start of a trend for the Drifters that occurred so often it became something of a ritual. New members Andrew Thrasher, his brother Gerhart Thrasher, Bill Pinkney, and Willie Ferbie supported McPhatter's lead on "Money Honey," and together they yielded a #1 R&B hit. "Such a Night," "Honey Love," and the holiday standard "White Christmas" followed (as did various personnel changes) and firmly entrenched the Drifters in the R&B market. When McPhatter was drafted, he discovered just how vulnerable he was when the group's manager, George Treadwell, enlisted Johnny Moore as the new lead singer. McPhatter, however, had plans to become a solo artist.

GREAT MISSES	
MARCH 1960 <b>PUPPY LOVE—PAUL ANKA</b>	#2



Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, whom Atlantic had acquired with the Coasters, were put to work writing and producing material for the Drifters. Their first hit with Johnny Moore, "Ruby Baby," became an influential hit on the R&B charts and was later covered by Dion, Billy "Crash" Craddock, and Donald Fagen. At this point, the only remaining member from McPhatter's days was Gerhart Thrasher, who had developed a reputation for drinking. The increasing unreliability of Thrasher and the other Drifters' penchant for complaining about their wages caused such stress for Treadwell that in June 1958 he fired all of them. Right here is where the story of the Drifters ought to end, but instead it became more of a beginning.

Jerry Wexler, a producer and A&R person at Atlantic, saw no need to lose such valuable property as the name "The Drifters," so he convinced Treadwell to simply apply the name to a brand new group. Their contractual obligations for live performances could then be met, and no money would be forfeited. So Treadwell hired Benjamin Nelson (later Ben E. King) and the Crowns (known as the Five Crowns until 1958) and redubbed them the Drifters. With input from their original manager, Lover Patterson, along with Treadwell, Leiber, Stoller, and a string section, their first record was a bit of a mess. The kitchen-sink approach used on "There Goes My Baby" makes the band seem unsure of whether it was a doo-wop vocal group, an R&B group, or a pop-oriented outfit. No matter, because the public ate it up. It went straight to #2 on the pop charts and was the first Top 40 record by a group using the name "The Drifters."

A precedent was set that would be indicative of the group's future output. "Dance with Me," backed with "True Love, True Love," both charted in November 1959 and featured orchestral arrangements over otherwise conventional ballads. Legendary songwriters Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman were adept at writing in a variety of styles and were responsible for the Drifters' next release. They wrote "This Magic Moment" specifically for the group, and it became the perfect showcase for the blend of styles that the band had been utilizing. "This Magic Moment" had a melody and lyrics that perfectly suited the pop market, while allowing plenty of room for Ben E. King's stylistic impressions. For the first time, King's soulful voice meshed perfectly with the string arrangement. As a result, "This Magic Moment" became the magic moment in which the Drifters' classic sound snapped beautifully into place.

## APRIL 1960 #15 DOGGIN' AROUND—JACKIE WILSON

**D**oggin' Around" is a perfect example of a B side that totally outclasses the hit on the other side. The A side was "Night," which featured an operatic performance based on an aria from *Samson and Delilah* that was so overdone it was laughable. Nevertheless, it reached #4 on the charts while "Doggin' Around" reached #15 in spite of (not because of) the success of the A side. With its bending notes and tonsil-banging delivery, "Doggin' Around" could have been one of the best soul records of the decade. Instead, it is a great performance with cloying accompaniment. The person responsible for the dah-dahing female chorus should be arrested and tried





for treason. It is a testament to Jackie Wilson's vocal talent that the song conveys any emotion at all.

Wilson's records had little in common with his live shows. On vinyl, he was manipulated and categorized into recording songs that served no particular purpose other than to show off his voice and satisfy his publishing company. His fans usually need to wade through a sea of lousy productions—or explain away the trappings of the recording—to get other potential fans to concentrate solely on his voice. On stage, though, it was Wilson who did the manipulating, working the audience into a screaming, clawing frenzy. Like Sam Cooke, he knew his voice's power. When he unleashed it onstage, he rarely held back, and his performances often climaxed into near riots. The hardcore acts of the '80s and '90s, with their stage-diving antics and audience manipulation, had nothing on Wilson. When the level of hysteria seemed to be at its peak, Wilson would not relent. Instead, he would push harder, sometimes jumping off the stage into the flailing arms that longed to tear him to pieces.

In 1961, a confused female fan confronted Wilson with a gun, threatening suicide. Instead, she somehow shot him in the abdomen. It didn't kill him, but it did put him out of commission for the better part of a year. When he returned to making records, his hit comeback recording, "Baby Workout," sounded forced and anachronistic. In his absence, pop music had changed considerably, and he subsequently fell from popularity until his surprise comeback in 1967.

**In 1961, a confused female fan confronted Wilson with a gun, threatening suicide. Instead, she somehow shot him in the abdomen.**

## **MAY 1960 #1 CATHY'S CLOWN—THE EVERLY BROTHERS**

Isaac Donald Everly was born February 1, 1937, and his brother Philip followed on January 19, 1939. Their parents had a radio program that could be heard in several midwestern states, and as soon as the senior Everlys were able to discern musical abilities in their children, Donald and Phil were brought onto the program to sing country and gospel songs, in the process getting an invaluable musical education. In 1955, the brothers moved to Nashville in search of a recording contract. After a seemingly endless series of rejections, Cadence Records signed them in 1956. Their manager, Wesley Rose, was the son of the founder of the Acuff-Rose Publishing Company, so they had access to quite a few songwriters. The husband-and-wife team of Felice and Boudleaux Bryant was signed to Acuff-Rose, and the Everlys recorded their song "Bye Bye Love" for their first single. Family friend Chet Atkins arranged the session and played guitar on the recording. It was an instant smash hit, reaching #2 on the pop charts, #1 on the country charts, and even #5 on the R&B charts. Their following singles for Cadence were a steady stream of hits, usually written by the Bryant team, and by the end of 1959, they had reached the Top 40 thirteen times.



In early 1960, problems and confusion arose among Cadence Records, Acuff-Rose Publishing, and the Everlys concerning artistic freedom, publishing nepotism, and the like. Based on their status as reliable hit makers, Warner Brothers offered the Everlys an unheard of ten-year contract, which they accepted in February 1960. Their first single was the self-penned “Cathy’s Clown,” with lyrics based on Don’s ex-girlfriend from high school and a chorus that was allegedly derived from Grofé’s “Grand Canyon Suite.” Because of its intricate vocal harmonies and melodic structure, “Cathy’s Clown” was the Everlys’ most imaginative outing yet and became their all-time biggest hit, holding the #1 position for five consecutive weeks.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1960	#28
OOH POO PAH OOH—JESSIE HILL	
MAY 1960	#33
THINK—JAMES BROWN	

GREAT MISSES	
MAY 1960	#5
PAPER ROSES—ANITA BRYANT	

More hits followed, including a few Cadence releases that were previously withheld and some successful album releases. The brothers’ careers were disrupted, though, when both of them joined the Marines. Upon their release, they attempted to continue their singing, but personal problems, including divorces and drug dependencies, interfered. The resultant pressures caused Don to have a nervous breakdown while touring England in 1963.

Although they haltingly continued their musical relationship for another ten years, their familial vocal harmony belied the underlying friction and acrimony that existed between the brothers. Their frustration and bitterness came to a head in the summer of 1973 while onstage at Knott’s Berry Farm, a large California amuse-

ment park. Phil, disgusted by Don’s well-below-par performance, smashed his guitar and stalked off the stage, leaving his dazed sibling alone to deal with the crowd’s catcalls. In response to the question “Where’s Phil?”, Don replied, “The Everly Brothers died ten years ago.”

Stunned, most definitely, but dead, no, not really. Ten years later, the Everlys were coaxed into reconciling their differences and performing at a reunion concert at London’s Royal Albert Hall, which was a critical and commercial success. With the assistance of Paul McCartney, the Everlys recorded an album of new material and a companion single, “On the Wings of a Nightingale,” which displayed them at their full creative strength.

## MAY 1960 #12 WONDERFUL WORLD—SAM COOKE

Like Clyde McPhatter before him, Sam Cooke’s background in gospel singing was evident in his secular songs. But unlike McPhatter, Cooke maintained a gentle intimacy in his voice that pulled the audience closer. Possessing perhaps the most gorgeous voice of his generation and with handsome looks to match,



Cooke held an audience in the palm of his hand. He knew how to manipulate and excite a crowd, and he never hesitated to do so. His highly personal style contained all of the expressiveness common to gospel singers. This lent his voice a vulnerable, sincere quality that seduced listeners, particularly when his material was a simple, plaintive love song. Gospel singing is a powerful form of expression; a singer is expected to reach into the hearts and souls of the congregation, emotionally captivating them as they become caught up in the singer's emotional purity. Various methods are used to pull the listener in, including repeating phrases, building intensity and to induce something resembling a trance state, and melisma (floating your voice around the root note without necessarily changing syllables). As a member of the Soul Stirrers, Cooke was quite adept at these styles, and it was only natural for him to sing the same way for secular material.

Cooke wrote "Wonderful World" with Herb Alpert and Lou Adler, his label mates at Keen Records, and it is perhaps one of the most beautifully crafted pop songs of its time. His mellifluous phrasing combines elements of his gospel upbringing with a very keen sense of commerciality. Although the lyrics are directly aimed at school-age teenagers, the quality of Cooke's singing gives the song a much broader appeal, and its dozens of cover versions attest to its continuing popularity.

## JUNE 1960 #2 ONLY THE LONELY—ROY ORBISON

Although Roy Orbison is frequently associated with Sun Records, the truth is that he never reached the Top 40 until two-and-a-half years after he left that label. His one minor hit for Sun was a trite rockabilly number called "Ooby Dooby," which was later covered by Creedence Clearwater Revival. Part of the problem at Sun was that Orbison recorded halfhearted rock-and-roll and novelty songs. His writing potential and extraordinary voice were grossly underutilized, and Orbison's frustration at being unable to record anything other than silly rockers like "Devil Doll," "I Like Love," and "Chicken Hearted" led to his departure. After a brief and unsuccessful year with RCA, he signed with Monument Records, a small independent label based in Washington, D.C.

Orbison started a songwriting partnership with fellow Texan Joe Melson, and their first collaboration, "Uptown," gave Orbison his biggest hit since "Ooby Dooby." Encouraged by their newfound success, they carefully constructed their follow-up single. "Only the Lonely" was truly a well-crafted song, and it stood apart from the standard rock and roll of its time. The melody was adventurous, and Orbison's voice caused it to soar. On his previous recordings, he usually sang timidly. When high notes were required, he would switch to a breathy falsetto that made his singing voice seem quite ordinary. When he needs to reach a note on "Only the Lonely," he belts it out effortlessly. Suddenly, Orbison became a singer with a powerful voice and an extended range. The strength of his voice was





further exaggerated by the background vocalists, who quietly supported the rhythmic melody, singing the remarkably “dum” but effective phrase, “Dum dum dum dooby doo-wah, oh yay yay yeah,” etc. Then again, maybe it isn’t so terribly dumb to offer a wordless commentary on the state of sublime solitude. Nobody had previously been capable of embodying such a morose state in song and still retain his sense of dignity. Orbison had arrived, bringing his newfound style of classy rock and roll with him.

## JULY 1960 #6 WALKIN’ TO NEW ORLEANS—FATS DOMINO

In 1989, the poster for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival (in its twentieth anniversary year) was made up exclusively of four colored prints of Fats Domino. When I saw the poster, I realized just how much of a deity he had become in his hometown. No city in the world celebrates its indigenous talent with more vigor than New Orleans, and Fats Domino was the most celebrated of them all. All this praise was aimed at a man who hadn’t had a Top 40 hit in nearly twenty years, but at home he remained as famous as ever.

Before 1989, I thought of “Walkin’ to New Orleans” as a kind of sappy tune with a nice, soulful feel, but compromised by the string section, which Domino had adamantly resisted for his previous releases. The song didn’t seem to fit the classic formula of most of his repertoire, but in light of the Jazz Festival, it began to take on a new significance for me. In “Walkin’ to New Orleans,” Domino was singing with love and reverence about the city that, in turn, loved and revered him.

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1960 <u>WALK—DON’T RUN</u> —THE VENTURES	#2
JULY 1960 <u>THIS BITTER EARTH</u> — DINAH WASHINGTON	#24

GREAT MISSES	
JULY 1960 <u>ITSY BITSY TEENY WEENY YELLOW</u> <u>POLKADOT BIKINI</u> —BRIAN HYLAND	#1

Domino recorded almost all of his hits at Cosimo Matassa’s legendary J&M Studios, and in his heyday he was seen as a hometown hero of sorts. After the hits stopped coming, he spent a number of years playing in the resorts of Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe, but his home (his sprawling mansion, actually) was always in New Orleans. Although he had never really left, his Jazz Festival performance was viewed as a sort of homecoming, and “Walkin’

to New Orleans” provided the perfect soundtrack. It became an emotional anthem for an immensely proud city, and local radio stations played it constantly.

The song took on new life as it further romanticized a city already drenched in romanticism. Almost twenty years after its release, Domino fans could hear “Walkin’ to New Orleans” and find it more moving than it had ever been. Unlike his other hits, which were mostly famous for their rhythms, “Walkin’ to New Orleans” added heartfelt lyrics to the equation, and Domino forever consummated his ties to the Crescent City.





## SEPTEMBER 1960 #1 SAVE THE LAST DANCE FOR ME—THE DRIFTERS

Atlantic Records had assigned the songwriting team Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller to be the Drifters' producers, and, as usual, they preferred to continue writing their own material for their sessions. After all, they had tremendous success writing and producing humorous songs for the Coasters and anticipated no difficulty with ballads. The near-ridiculous number of personnel changes the Drifters had experienced made them completely malleable, so they adapted well enough to Leiber and Stoller's more serious songs, such as "Dance with Me." In time, though, Leiber and Stoller had to admit that they were more comfortable writing in the entertaining style of their Coasters hits, so they searched actively for outside input. Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman had written the Drifters single "This Magic Moment," and although it wasn't their biggest hit, it was certainly their most realized recording to date. Pomus and Shuman had earned a well-deserved reputation as songwriters par excellence with hits such as "Teenager in Love" (Dion), "Young Blood" (The Coasters; written with Leiber and Stoller), and "Mess of Blues" (Elvis Presley). They could write angst-ridden, sentimental ballads as well as anybody and better than most, so Leiber and Stoller welcomed their input. Because the Drifters were intended to be ballad singers, the Pomus-Shuman songs perfectly fit the formula, and none more so than "Save the Last Dance for Me."

The group had introduced its trademark combination of string arrangements over a baion beat with a soulful ballad on "There Goes My Baby," and "Dance with Me" and "This Magic Moment" furthered the experiment. "Save the Last Dance for Me" is the masterpiece of this style. The Brazilian baion rhythm is featured prominently here, and it became a feature of virtually every Drifters recording since. This rhythm quietly bubbles under Ben E. King's near-whispery vocals, gently pushing and pulling the melody as it moves along; he captures the generous and vulnerable spirit of the words and raises the song to an unexpected emotional level. The instrumental break of orchestrated strings is about as moving as rock-and-roll-style string arrangements can be. String sections eventually became overused on some later soul records, but here they were still new and made King's emotional singing seem even more poignant.

Nearly everybody has fretted at one time or another about whether their mate would humiliate them publicly. Any insecure teenager (and, really, who was *not* an insecure teenager?) who ever went to a high-school dance could relate to the song. It went to #1 for two weeks and became the Drifters' biggest hit.

### GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1960 #1  
(ALSO NOVEMBER 1961 #1)  
THE TWIST—CHUBBY CHECKER

AUGUST 1960 #2  
CHAIN GANG—SAM COOKE

AUGUST 1960 #32  
MESS OF BLUES—ELVIS PRESLEY

### GREAT MISSES

AUGUST 1960 #8  
YOGI—THE IVY THREE



**OCTOBER 1960 #1 GEORGIA ON MY MIND—RAY CHARLES**

**R**ay Charles Robinson was born September 23, 1930, in Albany, Georgia, and raised in Greenville, Florida. He was born to a woman who was having an affair with his father, but his father soon abandoned his wife and his mistress, leaving the two women to band together and raise young Ray by themselves. Music became an obsession, and he learned to play some piano from a neighbor who happened to own an old upright. Living in a backwoods rural area that was thoroughly isolated from urban amenities, life was often very harsh and could sometimes be cruel. At age five, he witnessed the drowning of his younger brother. Soon after, his eyesight began to slip away. Without proper medical care, his illness progressed irreversibly, and within two years he was completely blind.

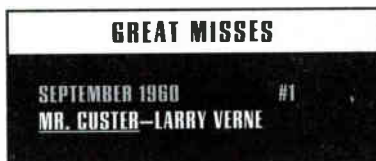
To assure that he'd learn to read and write, Charles was sent to the State School for the Blind in St. Augustine. His mother instilled a sense of independence in him, and despite his blindness, he managed to get by quite well, even learning to ride a bicycle. He continued to pursue music, particularly the piano, and his instructors taught him light classics as well as the popular songs of the day. When he was fifteen, his mother died. Despondent and alone, he moved to Jacksonville and played boogie-woogie and hillbilly songs in local union halls. He also learned to write arrangements.

At this time in his life, Charles was barely scraping by. He worked in Orlando and Tampa but needed a change. Deciding that Seattle was about as far from Florida as you can get without leaving the country, he packed up and headed northwest.

Work came fast in Seattle, and Charles soon formed the McSon trio. To avoid any confusion between himself and Sugar Ray Robinson, he dropped his last name and became Ray Charles. Famous boxers, though, posed less of a threat than did other famous singers. His early style betrayed his emulation of Nat "King" Cole and Charles Brown, as can be heard on his recordings

from this time on Swingtime Records. His talent was obvious, but he had yet to find his own voice. Meanwhile, Ahmet Ertegun and Herb Abramson with Atlantic Records were actively expanding their roster of artists and offered Swingtime the not inconsiderable sum of \$2,500 to buy Ray Charles from his contract.

Initial attempts at fitting Charles into the same mold as the other Atlantic artists were less than successful. He was uncomfortable with the tight control Ertegun and Abramson held, supplying all the material and arrangements for his sessions, and he expressed a desire to operate with more independence. Atlantic trusted his instinct and took a calculated risk in giving Charles a wide berth. He immediately formed his own band and then took responsibility for his arrangements. Soon enough, a definite style emerged.





Part of Charles's style proved to be controversial. His combination of sanctified gospel and wailing sexual blues caused him problems with a segment of the R&B market because they took offense to God's music serving the devil's purpose. To Charles, it was a natural extension of his abilities, but it didn't help when he had the audacity to rewrite gospel standards with updated secular words. He was not only using gospel stylization (which Clyde McPhatter was also using), but he was using their sacred songs to sing about sexual relationships! Numerous R&B hits were the result, and it was only a matter of time before Charles found the right song and reached the pop Top 10 with "What'd I Say."

Charles had always harbored a desire to combine his R&B sound with strings. Since he had achieved more than a measure of success, he was able to do this. Jazz records, big band recordings, and string arrangements all entered his repertoire. The ballads in particular had a timeless quality that made his versions definitive, no matter how shopworn the song may have been.

At the end of 1959, Charles signed with ABC Paramount, which swayed him away from Atlantic with a better deal and the promise of the same artistic freedom. Picking up exactly where he left off with Atlantic, he recorded "Georgia on My Mind," which quickly became his first #1 record. "Georgia on My Mind" was written by Hoagy Carmichael ("Stardust") and Stuart Gorrell in 1930 and had already been recorded innumerable times. No matter how many people may have recorded it before Charles, however, the song is now forever his. "Soulful" is not a strong enough word for his performance. It is transcendent. A few recklessly foolish artists have attempted to rerecord "Georgia" since, but they sound like pale imitators. Michael Bolton in particular deserves to be singled out for his bald(ing) attempt to reproduce something that cannot be duplicated. Truly an indigenous icon, Charles left his imprint on practically anything he sang. Despite shoddy attempts by lesser artists to rewrite our musical legacy, Ray Charles continues to outshine them all. No other version holds a candle to his wondrous interpretation.

**He was not only using gospel stylization (which Clyde McPhatter was also using), but he was using their sacred songs to sing about sexual relationships!**

## OCTOBER 1960 #6 NEW ORLEANS—GARY "U.S." BONDS

**W**ith "New Orleans," Gary "U.S." Bonds happened upon a rather unusual formula that would serve him well for most of his career. The artless but lively performance and loose "party" atmosphere combined with the recording's lousy sonic quality to yield a surprise hit record. The sound quality is so poor that it is difficult to discern what instruments, other than the pounding drums and blaring saxophone, appear on the track. What is the rhythm instrument on this record? Is it a guitar? A piano? A zither? Is there any bass instrument? The poor sound shrouds



the proceedings in a veil of mystery. The call-and-response vocals are contagious, though, and the rocking saxophone distracts from whatever shortcomings the muffled sound causes. In fact, it's likely that the lack of clarity is the best thing about "New Orleans." Every note comes rolling at you simultaneously in one gigantic wave of noise. In many ways, it captures the spirit of Cosimo Matassa's early New Orleans recordings, which themselves were not exactly state of the art.

In the lyrics, Bonds gives us a tourist's eye view of the Crescent City, but I somehow doubt that he ever saw New Orleans for himself. (He gives himself away with his mispronunciation. New Or-LEENZ don't cut it in N'Awlins.) But that isn't really relevant. What is relevant is that it captures the spirit of the place. "New Orleans" turns a shortcoming into an advantage because the noisy mud lends it authenticity.

To everybody's surprise, "New Orleans" reached #6, so Bonds put a great deal of thought into what would make an appropriate follow-up. Assuming (rightfully) that a compressed dynamic range helped make "New Orleans" a success, the producers

must have decided to pull out all the stops on the next single, "Quarter to Three." Other than a tape I made in 1978 of the Allman Brothers Band from the last row at the Nassau Coliseum, I don't think a worse recording exists. "Quarter to Three" makes the field recordings of John and Alan Lomax sound like state-of-the-art digital. I'll bet they deliberately replaced microphones with



Dixie cups and string. And to ensure a repeat of the party atmosphere, Bonds and his producer must have advertised FREE BEER outside the recording studio. With all those drunken strangers milling around and pouring beer into the Dixie cups, it's no wonder the song sounds like it was recorded under water. Despite, or rather because of, the fact that you couldn't hear a thing, it went to #1 for two weeks. Like the scene presented in Jim Lowe's hit "The Green Door," it leaves you with the impression that you're on the wrong side of the door at a really great party. Did you ever try to fall asleep while a band of revelers, completely oblivious and inebriated, carried on next door? *That* is the sound and spirit of "Quarter to Three." Ironically, today Bonds runs a recording studio where he must expend a lot of time and energy helping fledgling musicians get a good sound. They should listen to his old records and draw a lesson: it ain't the sound quality, it's the spirit that counts.

## NOVEMBER 1960 #1 ARE YOU LONESOME TONIGHT?—ELVIS PRESLEY

**W**hen Elvis originally appeared on the national music scene in 1956, the industry establishment stood by horrified. The major record labels, publishers, songwriters, etc., wondered just how far this young upstart would go to destroy the basis of their livelihoods. Rock and roll did eventually upset the apple cart, but Elvis most certainly was not leading the charge. A few years after his debut, he more or less changed sides and be-





came a full-fledged member of the music establishment.

The change came in 1958–60 when Elvis was in Germany serving his term with the Army. The inevitable haircut and blending in with the other privates had softened his image. Upon his return to the states, this change in style became apparent in his material, judging from the songs that RCA Records chose to release. His first TV appearance after coming home was on a Frank Sinatra television special, where he sang mostly soft pop tunes while wearing a tuxedo. Elvis had definitely changed. If the Army took the edge off his material, then his stint in Hollywood turned it into mush. “A Fool Such As I,” “Surrender,” and “It’s Now or Never” were miles away from the kid with the sideburns who sang “Blue Suede Shoes.” He was no longer a rebellious rock-and-roll singer, but an actor in an endless series of B-grade films, now known by their very own subgenre as “Elvis Presley films” (not necessarily a complimentary term).

“Are You Lonesome Tonight” is very representative of the new, homogenized Presley style, so to be honest I’m not so sure that this song is critically defensible. It was written in the ’20s, when it was a big hit for Henry Burr. Elvis took Burr’s 1926 version and recorded a note-for-note copy. Although it was plagiarized, nobody remembered the original anyway so that wasn’t an issue. Besides, people were probably still getting used to the fact that Elvis’s last #1 single, “It’s Now or Never,” sounded exactly like “O Sole Mio.”

These are not normal sources of material for rock-and-roll singers, but Elvis was no longer a rock-and-roll singer. His version of “Are You Lonesome Tonight” is so outdated, so out of place, that it exists somewhere outside of time. Ironically, it is also one of the few Elvis records in which his anachronistic backing vocalists, the Jordanaires, sound like they belong. The romantic sadness of the lyrics is exaggerated by the echo-laden vocals, which make Elvis sound as though he is standing alone in the middle of a huge room. Singing from a whisper to a bellow, he manages to squeeze some nuance from the ancient material.

Because of popular demand, Elvis continued to perform the song later in his career, but he was rarely able to keep a straight face, particularly during the narrative portion. The corniness of the speaking part is difficult to overcome, and he usually wasn’t up to it (understandably). On vinyl he does get through it, though I wonder how many takes were necessary. While singing something that was hokey even by his own standards, Elvis created something very much like art. Corny, out of touch, outdated, and yet somehow beautiful and emotionally wrenching, “Are You Lonesome Tonight” fits Elvis (and the Jordanaires) like a glove.

**Because of popular demand, Elvis continued to perform the song later in his career, but he was rarely able to keep a straight face.**

#### GREAT HITS

NOVEMBER 1960 #1  
**WONDERLAND BY NIGHT—**  
**BERT KAEMPFBERT**





## DECEMBER 1960 #1 WILL YOU LOVE ME TOMORROW?—THE SHIRELLES

The Philadelphia pop artists such as Fabian, Frankie Avalon, and Bobby Rydell did more than just render male vocal groups obsolete. They also proved that exposure and image were adequate to achieve more than a measure of success. Any song would do, so long as it had a teenage theme. The overwhelming popularity of these performers did not go unnoticed by music publishers. In New York, Don Kirshner and partner Al Nevins were hard at work building their publishing company, Aldon Music, around a bevy of struggling songwriters. The obvious intent was to have material available for the poster boys to sing, but Kirshner did not want just any song to be distributed through his company. He had (comparably) high standards and wanted his writers to be the industry leaders. He succeeded. Neil Sedaka and Howie Greenfield came first, followed shortly by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry, and eventually Neil Diamond. They all went on to achieve phenomenal success. Aldon Music's first #1 hit was with a song that was given to Scepter Records called "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin.

The Shirelles grew up in Passaic, New Jersey. Inspired by other girl groups, such as the Chantels ("Maybe") and the Bobettes ("Mr. Lee"), they started to write songs and sing together while still in high school. A classmate heard them at a school talent show and offered to introduce them to her mother, Florence Greenburg, who ran a company known as Tiara Records. Greenburg was impressed and signed them to a recording contract. In 1958, the Shirelles recorded their ode to a week-long romance, called "I Met Him on a Sunday," and made the pop charts at #49. Subsequent releases were disappointing, so Greenburg brought in producer Luther Dixon and started a new label called Scepter Records. The next release, written by lead singer Shirley Owens and called "Tonight's the Night," reached #39. "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" followed, and it rose straight to the top of the charts and remained at #1 for two weeks.

**"Will You Love Me Tomorrow" was the salvo shot that signaled the arrival of a feminine perspective in rock-and-roll music.**

It is impossible to imagine a better anthem to kick off what became known as "the girl group" sound. The title poses a universal question endemic to all women, particularly to teenagers. The pre-coital time frame of the lyric is, to say the least, provocative. The song accurately portrays that maddeningly exciting but frighteningly poignant moment. Meat Loaf later made a joke of it by portraying the male (chauvinist) perspective in "Paradise by the Dashboard Light," which managed to be pandering, selfish, and sexually juvenile all at the same time. "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" avoids these shortcomings because of the inherently sincere lyrics and Shirley Owens's vocals. As such, "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" was the salvo shot that signaled the arrival of a feminine perspective in rock-and-roll music.





## DECEMBER 1960 #2 SHOP AROUND—THE MIRACLES

The sound of young America.” “Hitsville, USA.” More than any other label of its time, Motown had a profound affect on the direction of American music. Its tenacity was so indomitable that it remained a potent force in American music, perhaps *the* potent force, throughout the 1960s. Styles came and went, but Motown stood firmly at the forefront of popular culture, absorbing and reflecting the times without flinching. Motown was about assimilation; it seamlessly combined black and white musical styles and tastes while adjusting its sound to fit the decade’s overwhelming societal upheavals. All the while, it remained entertaining and relevant, thanks to president and founder Berry Gordy Jr.

Gordy grew up the second youngest of eight children in a comfortably middle-class family with a proud work ethic. Not because he was lazy but because he simply disliked it, the young Gordy wanted to avoid manual labor. Instead, he sought a career as a boxer. His size notwithstanding (five feet, six inches tall and 112 pounds), he did well but soon found out the hard way that without connections, boxing was a lot of pain with little gain. After a stint in the Army, he returned to his native Detroit and opened a store called the 3-D Record Mart. Gordy’s musical tastes ran toward jazz, so naturally that’s what his shop specialized in, often to the exclusion of other “less desirable” musical styles. When potential customers came in and requested popular blues or R&B songs, the 3-D Record Mart was often less than accommodating. The general public apparently didn’t share Gordy’s elitist musical taste, and by 1955 he was forced to close his doors. By necessity, he found himself working on a Ford assembly line, but not liking it one bit. To pass the time, he hummed songs and discovered a latent talent for songwriting. Anything was better than the assembly line, and the glamour of the music industry was particularly appealing, so with typical verve Gordy shopped his songs tirelessly. Through a combination of effort, coincidence, and sheer luck, an old acquaintance from his boxing days who was now a successful stage performer came to Detroit. Gordy approached this friend, Jackie Wilson, and impressed his management sufficiently enough for Wilson to record one of Gordy’s songs. “Reet Petite” became Wilson’s first solo chart entry and established a relationship between Gordy and Wilson that would last until the end of the fifties. Gordy would become a primary source of material for the talented singer, cowriting some of Wilson’s biggest hits, including “That’s Why I Love You So” and “Lonely Teardrops.”

Eventually, Gordy’s songwriting success made him want to produce his own songs. He would pitch the finished recordings to various record labels, which would then handle distribution and control the financing. This

**Motown was about assimilation; it seamlessly combined black and white musical styles and tastes while adjusting its sound to fit the decade’s overwhelming societal upheavals.**



**The Matadors  
changed their  
name to the  
Miracles and  
recorded "Shop  
Around" under  
Gordy's  
supervision.**

process was often frustrating, however, since payment could be slow or even nonexistent. One of his early productions was for a group called the Matadors, which featured lead singer Smokey Robinson. Robinson suggested to Gordy that he consider forming his own record label. Meanwhile, Gordy's sister Gwen and his songwriting partner, Billy Davis, had teamed up to form Anna Records. With a distribution deal from Chess Records in Chicago, Anna Records was well-positioned for national exposure. Ironically, their biggest hit was a song they leased from Gordy, with the rather unsubtle title "Money (That's What I Want)," by Barrett Strong. After this hit, it became obvious to Gordy that Robinson had the right idea. With some financial assistance from his family, he set about founding Motown. (Gordy has since mythologized that he started Motown on \$700, but exactly when and how much he borrowed from his family varies from source to source.)

In addition to the Motown Record Corporation, Gordy founded Jobete Music Publishing so he could control the rights to his company's recordings. He also established a series of record labels, the most notable of which were Tamla and Motown. He then set about controlling every nuance of his organization, from artist management and development to production, recording, and record pressing. He also continued to write songs, and when Robinson presented "Shop Around," Gordy offered some advice about the song structure and lyrics. Meanwhile, the Matadors changed their name to the Miracles and recorded "Shop Around" under Gordy's supervision. Something about the finished recording bothered Gordy, though. Hours before the song was scheduled for national release, he awoke and realized what was wrong. In the wee hours of the morning, Gordy called Robinson and told him to wake up the band and get everybody down to the studio. They recut the song with a slightly up-tempo beat and a new, forceful vocal by Robinson. This version replaced the initial release, and it reached #2 on the pop charts.

Lawrence Welk kept "Shop Around" out of the #1 spot with his version of "Calcutta." This was symbolic, though, because it marked the end of the staid musical establishment's dominance of the charts. Who remembers Lawrence Welk's "Calcutta"? Who *doesn't* remember "Shop Around"? Motown was off and running, about to prove that it *was* "the sound of young America."

## DECEMBER 1960 #28 RUBY—RAY CHARLES

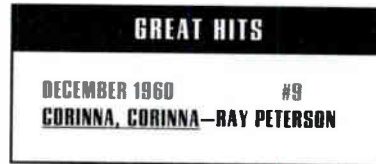
The music that Ray Charles recorded for Atlantic Records was, for the most part, grossly neglected by the pop music charts. "Mess Around," "I Got a Woman," and "Drown in My Own Tears" were all top R&B hits, but being defined as an R&B artist made it difficult to find a pop audience. The pop charts



were forced to pay attention, however, when Atlantic released the joyous smash “What’d I Say.” In 1959, Charles was now working for ABC Paramount and, as a result, he changed more than record labels. The middle-of-the-road tendency of his newfound recording home helped ease him squarely into the middle of popular music. With his relocation, he also came to change the country’s understanding of what the term “popular music” could mean.

One of Charles’s first projects at ABC Paramount was to record a series of hoary standards for album release, which was a giant leap (or a far cry) from his usual repertoire of churchy R&B. Each song on the album made reference to one of the United States. The single “Georgia on My Mind” was a surprise hit and went straight to the top of the charts. His next album consisted of twelve songs with girls’ names. “Ruby” was rush-released and charted just two months after “Georgia.” Although it was a beautiful song, it was forced to compete with its predecessor and reached #28, which was respectable enough, of course, but less successful than it ought to have been.

“Ruby” was the title theme from the movie *Ruby Gentry*, and various versions of it had reached the pop charts six times in 1953 alone! All six were immediately rendered obsolete once Charles recorded his version, however. He had a Midas touch, regardless of the material, and his next project proved it when he recorded a megahit album of country-western standards.



## JANUARY 1961 #10 SPANISH HARLEM—BEN E. KING

**B**enjamin Earl Nelson (aka Ben E. King) was born in North Carolina but moved to New York with his family when he was a boy. His father operated a luncheonette in Harlem, where young Benjamin often manned the counter. Through associations with customers who had grown accustomed to his constant singing, he auditioned for a group called the Five Crowns and was awarded the job. When the original Drifters disbanded, the Five Crowns were asked to replace them as the new, “improved” Drifters. They took advantage of this opportunity and accrued such hits as “There Goes My Baby,” “This Magic Moment,” and “Save the Last Dance for Me.”

Despite the remarkable commercial success of these classics, Nelson was paid only a straight salary. When he was unable to negotiate a better deal, he decided to quit the band and begin a solo career. He changed his name to Ben E. King, but everything else remained much the same. He continued to record for Atlantic Records. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller handled most of the songwriting and production for the Drifters, so they handled the same chores for Ben E.



An ambitious,  
syncopated  
melody  
provides the  
framework for  
this unforget-  
table piece of  
music.

King. And who were those guys singing harmony behind King? That wouldn't be his old bandmates, the Drifters, would it? Simply put, just about the only thing differentiating the Ben E. King record from the previous Drifters records was the artistic credit.

At the time, Phil Spector was serving his apprenticeship under Leiber and Stoller. He cowrote "Spanish Harlem" with Leiber and played a significant role in the song's production. An ambitious, syncopated melody provides the framework for this unforgettable piece of music. It may have been hard to realize it at the time, but "Spanish Harlem," along with the other Drifters and Ben E. King classics, is now as much of a standard as anything written by Alec Wilder or Cole Porter, et al. Admittedly, judging the comparative noteworthiness of songs from different genres can be a frustrating and fruitless task. Suffice to say that "Spanish Harlem" will be around as long as...well, as long as "I'll Be Around."

## MARCH 1961 #1 RUNAWAY—DEL SHANNON

By 1960, teenagers had absolutely and unequivocally taken over the popular music scene. Since 1955, youth-oriented songs were on the rise, and somewhere in the late '50s, the money machine known as the record business figured out how to exploit it. Rather than relying on inspiration for new ideas, contrivance became the norm. It worked, too. Recording artists no longer had to be discovered. They could be invented. All it took was one appearance on *American Bandstand* while they lip-synched to a prefabricated recording. Material was no problem either, since the hits of the '30s and '40s could easily be recycled and modernized. Amid this sea of posturing, Del Shannon stands out head and shoulders above many of his peers. Shannon was not a manufactured product that came in a fancy box called "an image." He quite simply was a singer/songwriter who let his material do the talking. One concession he did make to fabricating an image came when he changed his name, originally Charles Westover, to the much cooler-sounding Del Shannon. Other than that, he seemed content to write and perform some very innovative material.

Shannon's songs usually paired imaginative melodies with a quick-paced, driving beat while he sang about running (he seems to do a lot of running), alienation, and abject fear. On "Runaway," Shannon combines just about every hook in the pop music songbook to cook up what became an instant hit. His tough delivery and effortless falsetto ("I wa-wa-wa-wa-wonder...why, why-why-why-why-why...") combined with instrumentation that included guitar, bass, piano, saxophone, and a musitron-affected keyboard (a now forgotten forerunner of the synthesizer). The brilliant instrumental break, played through the musitron, still sounds innovative in the '90s. Singing about a subject that any teenager



could relate to and romanticize, “Runaway” was state-of-the-art pop music in 1961.

### APRIL 1961 #1 MOTHER-IN-LAW—ERNIE K-DOE

**E**rnie Kador had been knocking around New Orleans since the early '50s, looking for a connection to the big time. His break came when he signed to Joe Banashak's newly formed Minit Records. Unlike many other small, regional labels, Minit had a distribution deal with a larger label (Imperial), which guaranteed national availability of its hits. More importantly, though, Minit had Allen Toussaint as musical director. Toussaint was a songwriter extraordinaire whose talents covered any number of styles. Anyone who studies New Orleans' classic hits will find constant references to the name Allen Toussaint—and to his mother's maiden name, Naomi Neville, which Toussaint used often. A mere *sampling* of Toussaint's hits include “Java” (Al Hirt), “All These Things” (Art Neville), “What Do You Want the Boy to Do” (*everybody* but most notably by Boz Scaggs), “Ruler of My Heart” and “It's Raining” (both by Irma Thomas), “Working in the Coal Mine” and “Ride Your Pony” (both by Lee Dorsey), “Fortune Teller” (Benny Spellman), “Whipped Cream” (best known as *The Dating Game* theme song by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass), and...“Mother-in-Law.” Whew. This guy has been around, and if he didn't write it, then it's highly plausible that he produced it. On “Mother-in-Law,” he did both.

The song is a real hoot. Taking the universally known stereotype of mother-in-law interference as a theme, Toussaint writes some hysterically over-the-top lyrics, such as “Satan should be her name, to me they're about the same.” The blatant obviousness of the joke and the playfully risqué topic are both silly and clever. With credible vocalizing by Ernie K-Doe (a phonetic-style spelling of his actual name) and Benny Spellman (he's the guy who keeps singing “muh-utha-in-law”), this song couldn't miss. Dick Clark refused to air it on *American Bandstand*, but no matter; “Mother-in-Law” was a #1 hit. Although he never again reached the Top 40, Ernie K-Doe remains an active and popular performer in his hometown of New Orleans.

### MAY 1961 #4 STAND BY ME—BEN E. KING

**B**en E. King recorded “Stand by Me” at the same session that produced his previous hit, “Spanish Harlem.” King wrote the words, which were inspired by a spiritual hymn and the music was by someone named Glick (those Leiber and Stoller guys had some sense of humor, huh?). “Stand by Me” suitably demonstrates just how sanctified soul music can be. Hundreds, if not thousands, of songs could take on religious inclinations simply by replacing the words “baby” and “darling” with “Lord” or “Jesus,” but none more so than “Stand by Me.” Except for King's extemporaneous pleading when he starts the chorus (“Darlin', darlin'”), this song consists entirely of spiritual connotations.





A thematic comparison with the Twenty-third Psalm bears this out: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” King nicely paraphrases this

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1961 QUARTER TO THREE— GARY “U.S.” BONDS	#1
JUNE 1961 CUPID—SAM COOKE	#17

as he sings, “If the sky that we look upon should tumble and fall, or the mountains should crumble into the sea, I won’t cry, no I won’t shed a tear, just as long as you stand by me.” The sentiment is essentially the same but with one significant difference. The author of the biblical psalm is certain of his source of comfort. King, on the other hand, is vulnerable. He feels compelled to ask for reassurance, and if that doesn’t adequately highlight the difference between a centuries-old religion and modern religious am-

bivalence, then I don’t know what does. Either way, the message adds up to the same thing: faith will see you through.

## JULY 1961 #12 I FALL TO PIECES—PATSY CLINE

**M**ore than a few years had passed since March 1957, when Patsy Cline’s last hit, “Walkin’ after Midnight,” reached #12 on the pop charts. Despite numerous setbacks, she never thought of quitting. Her restrictive contract with Four Star Records expired in 1960, and like a bad marriage, both parties were relieved to be free of their obligations. Her producer and friend, Owen Bradley, was affiliated with Decca, and since he had recorded her from the beginning, he had a vested interest in Cline’s success. Although they often butted heads when choosing appropriate songs, she trusted Bradley implicitly and accepted his advice by signing with the label.

Bradley heard “I Fall to Pieces,” written by Hank Cochran and Harlan Howard, and he was sure it could be a hit. Yet he couldn’t seem to give it away. He finally got Cline to agree to sing it, but even she was reluctant because she felt that other “more famous” singers had already passed on it. Bradley had some production ideas, and he knew the song’s potential. But Cline felt that up-tempo audience grabbers were her strong point and weepy ballads didn’t suit her. Trusting Bradley, though, she recorded “I Fall to Pieces” at her first session for Decca.

Bradley’s thoughtfully arranged and tastefully rendered recording combines with Cline’s expressive voice for a record that transcends the ingredients from which it is made. It is, quite simply, a pop masterpiece that stands up after hundreds of listenings. Cline may not have known it, but she had a voice perfectly suited to ballads, and with “I Fall to Pieces,” she became the standard-bearer for country singing.

The song was released in January 1961, but at first it didn’t go anywhere chartwise. Then one lone promo man, who doggedly refused to give up on the song, fanned the embers relentlessly until sales finally caught fire. Although it



first charted in July, it took until September (nine months after its release!) for the song to reach its peak position of #12.

## AUGUST 1961 #2 CRYING—ROY ORBISON

The power and range of Roy Orbison's voice are nowhere more apparent than on "Crying." He soars through the octaves with confidence and squeezes every drop of emotion from a song that is drenched in sadness. The market for lonesome love songs was in full force, and Orbison not only filled the demand, but redefined the formula. He gave his sadness the power of an operatic aria. The self-pitying lyrics of songs like "Crying" or "In Dreams" offer the listener the ability to personalize the pain. While Orbison warbled, more than a handful of lovelorn teenagers would lock themselves in their bedrooms with nothing but his records for company.

Orbison looked the part of the loner. Wearing dark, tinted glasses with Coke-bottle lenses, he lacked the obvious sex appeal that was de rigueur for his contemporaries. His jet-black pompadour and mysterious image added to the stark impression he exuded. Fans interpreted his appearance to fit his songwriting style, and with "Crying" he gave voice to millions of lonely hearts.

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1961 <u>HIT THE ROAD JACK</u> —RAY CHARLES	#1
SEPTEMBER 1961 <u>YA YA</u> —LEE DORSEY	#7
SEPTEMBER 1961 <u>TAKE FIVE</u> —DAVE BRUBECK	#25

## OCTOBER 1961 #1 RUNAROUND SUE—DION

While many of Dion's contemporaries had sounds that were evocative of the boardrooms where they were constructed, Dion had a sound that came straight from the street. His first hit single with the Belmonts, "I Wonder Why," was pure street-corner doo-wop and was so complete it made the instrumentation extraneous. The Belmonts were the real thing, not some studio-prepped imitation, but unfortunately their record company often had difficulty supplying them with material that fit their street-corner image. To be fair, Dion and the Belmonts didn't write many of their own songs, so they often were at the mercy of whatever happened to be available. In a sense, they were lucky that the people at Laurie Records at least made a serious effort to find them suitable material. "Teenager in Love," written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, is one good example. Its follow-up, Rodgers and Hart's "Where or When," was perhaps an inappropriate choice for a group of Bronx-born Italian gang members, but the Belmonts recorded the song so beautifully that it hardly mattered. Only when they started to record and release songs like "When You Wish upon a Star" did it become obvious that they were straying way out of line. Dion wanted no part of recycled schmaltz; he began



To settle a bet  
with Del  
Shannon over  
the proper way  
to deal with  
women in song  
lyrics, Dion  
wrote "Run-  
around Sue"  
while Shannon  
wrote "Hats off  
to Larry."

to harbor thoughts of a solo career. The events of the "Winter Dance Party" tour did not help to make him particularly comfortable with the state of affairs, either. If it were not for the fact that he thought thirty-five bucks was a little steep for a seat on an airplane, his name would have been on the casualty list with Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and the Big Bopper. Tired of traipsing around the country and going nowhere, Dion took the incident to be something of an omen and decided to go solo and record material of his own choosing.

Going solo afforded Dion the opportunity to toughen his sound and his image even further. To settle a bet with Del Shannon over the proper way to deal with women in song lyrics, Dion wrote "Runaround Sue" while Shannon wrote "Hats off to Larry." I'd say Dion won by about half a length. Dion was "inspired" to write "Runaround Sue" by Gary "U.S." Bonds's "Quarter to Three." Parts of the melody and progression are pretty much lifted straight from the Bonds record, but "Quarter to Three" was itself lifted from a song called "A Night with Daddy G." In this way, a copy of a bastardization of a copy became something brand new in and of itself.

"Runaround Sue" served as the musical prototype for Dion's follow-up recordings, but lyrically he played both sides of the coin. His next hit, "The Wanderer," is hilarious if played back-to-back with "Runaround Sue." After his lengthy criticism of runaround *Sue*, he brags, "I'm the kind of guy who likes to run around...." Hoo, boy. I don't know what all of you little ladies might think about this, but it's apparently a guy thing anyway. Nod nod, wink wink.

## OCTOBER 1961 #1 PLEASE MR. POSTMAN—THE MARVELETTES

The "girl group" trend continued to develop, and Motown was quick to pick up on its commercial potential. The Marvelettes, featuring Gladys Horton, were Motown's first girl group to hit the charts, which they did with a resounding bang. "Please Mr. Postman" was Motown's first #1 record. It was also one of its most influential, inspiring a rocking cover version by the Beatles and a dance craze called the mashed potato. By today's standards, the backing vocals are hopelessly raw and unrefined, but in 1961 this lent the record a certain charm. A naive, "dumb"-sounding singing style became an essential ingredient to most girl group records, possibly because of "Please Mr. Postman." The Marvelettes continued to have hits at Motown for a few years, including "Beechwood 4-5789," "Don't Mess with Bill," and "The Hunter Gets Captured by the Game," but their popularity began to fade once the Supremes took over the charts.

A few months after the release of "Please Mr. Postman," a singer named Dee Dee Sharp released a record called "Mashed Potato Time," which was nothing



more than a rewrite of "Please Mr. Postman" with lyrics that were presumably inspired by a song called "Do the Mashed Potato," by Nat Kendrick and the Swans (James Brown in disguise). The arrival of the '60s brought with it a number of new trends, but the most prevalent was the dance craze. The mashed potato, the swim, the pony, the hully-gully, the monkey, and the jerk all vied for our attention, but none was more popular than the painful, cramp-inducing twist. For a while, every human being in America threw down their hula hoops and started screwing their torsos back and forth while shuffling in place. Hank Ballard of the Moonlighters wrote the song, but when he failed to show up for a scheduled appearance on *American Bandstand*, local nobody Ernest Evans was called in to learn the song and fill the vacated spot. Dick Clark's wife dubbed Evans Chubby Checker as a playful tribute to Fats Domino. He sang "The Twist" on national television while America collectively lost its mind. It was an instant #1 hit.

**The arrival of the '60s brought with it a number of new trends, but the most prevalent was the dance craze.**

The subsequent demand for new dances became overwhelming. People were contorting their bodies in some of the most ridiculous ways just to insure that they were hip enough to know all the latest dances. Some of these dance songs, like Little Eva's "Do the Locomotion," were legitimately good, but others.... You don't know what suffering is until you hear Tony and Joe gawk their way through "The Freeze" or the Pastel Six plod mindlessly on "Cinnamon Cinder." The fact that these two records were released at all, not to mention that they charted, is proof enough that somewhere in America a screw was loose. Overweight, middle-aged dancers were learning just how out of shape they were during these dance-party marathons. Chubby Checker was luckier than he could ever have imagined. He attempted other dance records, including "The Hucklebuck," "Pony Time," "The Fly," and by the mid-'60s even a pathetic rip-off of a horrible song by Freddie and the Dreamers that he called "Let's Do the Freddie." (Apparently, the word "shame" was not in Chubby Checker's vocabulary.) But the unbridled demand for the twist just would not go away. Marketing people got wise and put the word "twist" on anything that could be sold, and like a pack of dislocated zombies, Americans ate it up. The Marvelettes got caught up in this fever when they released "Twistin' Postman" (was that a ridiculous concept, or what?) as a single. Checker had "Let's Twist Again" and "Slow Twistin'," but the capper was when, one year afterward, a rerelease of "The Twist" went to #1 *again*. Had America no shame either?

## NOVEMBER 1961 #1 THE LION SLEEPS TONIGHT—THE TOKENS

**S**o, you thought Paul Simon was the first artist to popularize South African folk music, eh? "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" is based on a Zulu folk song called



“Wimoweh” and was released by the Tokens in 1961. Ten years before that, however, the folk group the Weavers popularized the tune for our western culture when they learned “Wimoweh” from African singer Miriam Makeba, and incorporated it into their repertoire.

Neil Sedaka was a charter member of the Tokens before he set out on his own for a lifelong career as a singer/songwriter. After Sedaka’s departure, the Tokens continued in earnest and scored a #15 hit with “Tonight I Fell in Love.” They soon proved their capacity for invention with the arrangement of their next single, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.” There aren’t many things in this world

that would be less predictable than a doo-wop version of a South African folk song becoming a popular American hit, but here it is. Despite structured formats, radio occasionally embraced ambitious music and the American public did not back away from innovation—“The Lion Sleeps Tonight” reached #1, where it stayed for three weeks.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1961	#24
<del>JUST OUT OF REACH—</del>	
SOLOMON BURKE	

After the Tokens petered out as a recording entity, three members—Jay Siegal, Mitch Margo, and Philip Margo—formed a band called Cross-Country. In 1973, their eponymously titled album scratched and clawed its way onto the charts, peaking at a rather embarrassing #198. They also enjoyed one hit (#30) with a cover version of “In the Midnight Hour.” Another former Token, Hank Medress, went on to work with Tony Orlando and Dawn.

Once the Tokens’ bizarre but beautiful recording of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” became known, all previous versions were forgotten. Artists as disparate as Brian Eno and Robert John have since covered the song, and each time their arrangement remained true to the Tokens’. In an interview I had with singer Lou Christie, he said the Robert John version was actually his, but because of management problems that plagued Christie’s later career, his voice tracks were removed and replaced with John’s rather lackluster reading of the song. This is unfortunate, considering Christie’s natural flair for multi-octave singing, but I fear that it would have ultimately remained an exercise. Today, John’s version is on the scrap heap of forgotten Top 10 tunes, while the Tokens enjoy continuously renewed popularity.

You know, it wouldn’t be a bad idea for Paul Simon to cover “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”....

## NOVEMBER 1961 #9 CRAZY—PATSY CLINE

**E**ven before the plane crash that took her life, Patsy Cline seemed doomed to become a tragic figure. Consider the events of her life before she recorded “Crazy.” It took years of dedication and conviction before her first hit record, “Walkin’ after Midnight,” hit the charts, and when it finally all came together, her professional and personal lives got in the way. It would be four long years until she properly recovered and hit pay dirt again with “I Fall to Pieces,” her second hit





single. Unfortunately, while the song was climbing the charts, Cline was nearly killed in a head-on automobile collision. Instead of celebrating her renewed success, she was lying in traction in a hospital bed, grateful to be alive. Her whole life seemed to be a series of little steps forward, followed by circumstances that threatened to take everything away.

After she recovered from the accident, Cline became more focused than she had previously been. Perhaps it was because of the close call, or maybe the sudden realization that her voice was suited for ballads, but her post-accident recordings are the high watermark of her career. Nearly every song she put her voice to became magical. Songwriter Willie Nelson was shopping his material around Nashville, and Cline's producer, Owen Bradley, heard "Crazy" and loved it, particularly the lyric. Once again, though, Cline had to be convinced. It is ironic that she resisted recording each of her three biggest hits, but once the songs became popular, she came to enjoy performing them to a rapturous audience.

Cline's life followed a pattern, though, and fate would soon intervene. On March 5, 1963, Cline and some of her entourage boarded a plane piloted by her manager, Randy Hughes, for a quick stopover performance. During the return trip, they crashed just minutes away from their final destination. There were no survivors. Cline was thirty years old. Of course, it is always a tragic thing for a rising star, or anybody for that matter, to be suddenly snuffed out. Cline's death took her away just when the tides had turned in her favor. Now she is forever frozen in time as a feisty young woman with enough life in her for a trainload of people and a voice powerful enough to move millions.

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1961 <u>THE WANDERER</u> —DION	#2
DECEMBER 1961 <u>I KNOW</u> —BARBARA GEORGE	#3

GREAT MISSES	
DECEMBER 1961 <u>ROCK-A-HULA BABY</u> —ELVIS PRESLEY	#23

## JANUARY 1962 #4 BREAK IT TO ME GENTLY—BRENDA LEE

This four-foot, eleven-inch powerhouse certainly earned the name "Little Miss Dynamite." With her pepper-pot phrasing and syncopated singing style perfected before she even qualified as an adolescent, Brenda Lee was as natural a talent as there ever was. She possessed a voice and a style that drastically contradicted her age and size.

Lee was born December 11, 1944. After appearing in a talent contest when she was six years old, she landed her own fifteen-minute television show. By 1956, she was all over national television and had a regional hit with Hank Williams's "Jambalaya." "Dynamite" (which resulted in her nickname) and "Let's Jump the Broomstick" followed and helped establish Little Brenda Lee as a pint-sized rocker. Her recording of "Rockin' around the Christmas Tree" remains one of the best rock-



and-roll Christmas songs of all time. It was written by Johnny Marks, the same man who wrote “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” and was recorded in 1958. Still, it had to wait until December 1960 before it hit the Top 40.

Nineteen sixty was the year that everything broke wide open for Lee. In an attempt to reach the popular charts, producer Owen Bradley rounded up a handful of ballads and toned-down rockabilly numbers for her next releases. In 1960, “Sweet Nothin’s,” “I’m Sorry,” and “I Want to Be Wanted” all combined to keep her at the top of the popular charts for most of the year. “I’m Sorry” is notable not only because it was the biggest hit of Lee’s career, but also because it was the very first Nashville recording to use a full string section. By the end of the decade, Nashville would be swarming with people wearing cowboy hats and carrying violins (“we call ‘em fiddles”) to recording sessions.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1962	#1
DUKE OF EARL—GENE CHANDLER	

A constant run of Top 40 records followed, but amazingly, none of Lee’s singles reached the country charts. While the world considered her to be a Nashville-based country singer, Nashville considered her to be a pop/R&B singer. Perhaps Nashville was judging her harshly, but her phrasing is as bluesy as some of the best R&B performers and had much more in common with Ray Charles than, say, Tex Ritter. “Break It to Me Gently” has all the ingredients of a typical Ray Charles country song, from the lush string arrangement and support vocals to the heartfelt R&B phrasing. Not yet eighteen years old, Lee sang with a sadness and experience that would be more appropriate coming from a thirty year old. The subject matter may have been over her head, but you would never know it by listening to the pain in her voice. Her great range, excellent sense of rhythmic phrasing, and even better ability to emote all combined to make “Break It to Me Gently” her finest recording.

perhaps Nashville was judging her harshly, but her phrasing is as bluesy as some of the best R&B performers and had much more in common with Ray Charles than, say, Tex Ritter. “Break It to Me Gently” has all the ingredients of a typical Ray Charles country song, from the lush string arrangement and support vocals to the heartfelt R&B phrasing. Not yet eighteen years old, Lee sang with a sadness and experience that would be more appropriate coming from a thirty year old. The subject matter may have been over her head, but you would never know it by listening to the pain in her voice. Her great range, excellent sense of rhythmic phrasing, and even better ability to emote all combined to make “Break It to Me Gently” her finest recording.

## JANUARY 1962 #12 SMOKY PLACES—THE CORSAIRS

The Corsairs hailed from North Carolina and had sung together since high school as the Gleems. Like the Beach Boys, the band consisted of three brothers—Jay “Bird,” James, and Moses Uzzell—and their cousin, George Wooten, but the similarity ends there. Unfortunately, none of this matters to anybody today because hardly anybody remembers either the Corsairs or their fabulous hit, “Smoky Places.” A song this good shouldn’t be neglected, though. So at the risk of trying your patience, I’ll make an argument for why I believe that if you knew it, you would love it.

The Corsairs took a quickly dying form of music, doo-wop, and injected it with a driving, R&B-influenced beat. To give it a broad appeal, they added a modern, sophisticated soul sound that was reminiscent of the Drifters. Instead of a mess, the result is a dense collage of styles that never sounds compromised. The Drifters’ influence on the proceedings is fairly obvious, from the string-laden produc-



tion right down to the Latin baion rhythm. The smooth and silky sound of lead singer Jay “Bird” Uzzell is supported by imaginative harmonies and rhythmic chants that play counterpoint to the melody. And could these guys sing! Jay “Bird”’s voice effortlessly soars around the octaves while the rest of the family never lets you forget that they are talented, as well.

“OK,” I hear you saying, “so these guys are talented, but what about the song? Talent is meaningless if the song is lame.” Any song with illicit love for a theme is bound to be fraught with emotion, and the Corsairs lose none of it on “Smoky Places.” They walk the tight-rope, with overemoting on the left and underperforming on the right, without ever looking down or losing their balance. The song transports you to a dark, smoky corner of some exotic watering hole, and you sympathize with the entrapped couple. Simply put, the song works on just about any level.

“Smoky Places” stopped short of the Top 10, reaching #12—not bad at all for a debut effort. At the time, however, the Corsairs might have been perceived as a poor man’s Drifters. I can’t say why they didn’t remain popular, but their next release, “I’ll Take You Home,” stalled at #68, and the Corsairs were not seen again on the popular music charts. It’s a shame that this diverse and talented group will be forever perceived as a one-hit wonder, if it is even perceived at all.

## FEBRUARY 1962 #14 SHE’S GOT YOU—PATSY CLINE

**W**ith the tremendous crossover success of her previous two hit singles (“I Fall to Pieces” and “Crazy”), Patsy Cline had learned her lesson well. Ballads, which she had considered herself unable to sing, had become her bread and butter. With her considerable energy reigned in, she could focus on the lyric and imbue it with autobiographical intimations. Cline’s fans could not help but be moved by her confessional style. Also, her two hits appealed to both country and pop fans alike. To capitalize on this, Cline and producer Owen Bradley set about finding other songs that could work equally well in both markets. Their choices were both clever and appropriate. Cline recorded stunningly beautiful versions of classic songs, such as “San Antonio Rose,” “The Wayward Wind,” “I Love You So Much It Hurts,” and Cole Porter’s “True Love.”

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1962 #8

BABY, IT'S YOU—SHIRELLES

JANUARY 1962 #28

TURN ON YOUR LOVELIGHT—BOBBY BLAND

### GREAT HITS

FEBRUARY 1962 #9

TWISTIN' THE NIGHT AWAY—SAM COOKE

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1962 #10

THE PERCOLATOR TWIST—BILLY JOE AND THE CHECKMATES

FEBRUARY 1962 #31

SORFER'S STOMP—THE MARKETTS



Her last single came from songwriter Hank Cochran, who also cowrote "I Fall to Pieces" with Harlan Howard. "She's Got You" had all the requisite ingredients of their hit formula: it was a ballad, it wasn't too country-ish, and it was previously unrecorded so it was perfect for single release. Once again, Cline sang the song with such heartfelt intensity that a listener would have to be convinced that she was not singing from experience. "She's Got You" hit the popular charts in February 1962 and reached #14.

### MARCH 1962 #24 YOU BETTER MOVE ON—ARTHUR ALEXANDER

Quite frankly, sometimes fate really stinks. After a remarkable flash-in-the-pan career in the early '60s, Arthur Alexander vanished from the charts. For the next three decades, he was considered a spent force, despite the various artists who were constantly interpreting his material. By the '90s, he was working as a school-bus driver with little thought of returning to the music industry. At the behest of his old friend and record producer Rick Hall, Alexander was persuaded to record "Lonely Just Like Me," his first collection of new material in twenty years. Six months before he would have had the satisfaction of seeing "Lonely Just Like Me" all over critics' lists for the best of '93, he died of heart and kidney failure.

In his lifetime, Alexander had only one Top 40 hit, but a handful of his songs entered the mainstream with other artists serving as the conduit. Songs like "Anna" (the Beatles), "Every Day I Have to Cry" (the Bee Gees), and "You Better Move On" (the Rolling Stones) all helped boost the fledgling careers of these British artists who eventually became international superstars.

Sadly, Alexander lost the publishing rights to his songs early on and didn't receive any of the profit that these recordings generated. As a black man from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, Alexander wasn't exactly empowered to negotiate a fair deal for

**In his lifetime, Alexander had only one Top 40 hit, but a handful of his songs entered the mainstream with other artists serving as the conduit.**

himself. Rural southern blacks who could not develop a particular sense of urbanity were usually doomed to a pretty tough life and Alexander's business interests were ignored. Nevertheless, he never betrayed any sense of bitterness in his music. Judging from his singing style and the texture of his voice, Alexander was as much a country artist as a rhythm-and-blues singer. This would make him quite an anomaly in the racist South. When the "Motortown Revue" passed through Alexander's hometown on its first tour, the group members often feared for their lives and were shocked by the mistreatment and insults they faced, but they were only visitors. This was where Alexander lived! Of course, this atmosphere had an impact on his style. If, as many people believe, rock and roll is a cross between hillbilly/country and rhythm and blues, then Alexander surely qualifies as a bona fide rock-and-roll original. Whether or not you subscribe to that rather suspect theory, Alexander cer-





tainly did embody elements of each genre. His voice may have betrayed a country-western influence, but his songwriting was pure soul. He is also credited with introducing the word “girl” as a form of address into the pop music lexicon.

Few songwriters or artists, with the exception of Al Green, have been able to duplicate the gentility that pervaded Alexander’s music. Nearly every song that he wrote portrays a man who is unwilling to fight and who accepts his destiny with a Zen-like discipline. Morality and decency are the subtext in almost all of his songs. “You Better Move On” serves as a prime example of this. In it, Alexander tells the story of a character who is attempting to bird-dog his only true love. Instead of getting excited, he remains cool and resigns himself to fate. He trusts that the girl will stay but exerts no influence whatsoever. Listen to these lyrics: “You ask me to give up the only love I’ve ever had. *Maybe I would*, but I love her so. I’ll never never let her go. You’d better move on.”

There is a certain majesty at work there. Another man would just haul off and punch the daylight out of the guy. The subtle conviction and self-control that Alexander displays in this lyric are typical of his writing style, from “Anna” to “Go Home, Girl.” Overlooked for most of his life, his songs live on after his death. He will be sorely missed.

## MAY 1962 #1 I CAN’T STOP LOVING YOU—RAY CHARLES

Mixing musical styles is a lot like crossbreeding dogs. Every time you add another mix, vital characteristics that defined the purity of the bloodline are lost. Usually, though, mutts make better pets because of their friendly dispositions. The same thing happened when Ray Charles started singing country music classics. R&B purists might complain and country purists might not recognize it, but the mix is undeniably pleasant. Here lies ample evidence, then, that purity of essence is not necessarily better than a mixture of styles.

At first, Charles’s album *Modern Sounds in Country-Western Music* sounded like a pretty bad idea to most people. You don’t mix molasses with vinegar. Well, sometimes you *do* mix molasses and vinegar. “I Can’t Stop Loving You” was written and originally recorded by Don Gibson (“Oh, Lonesome Me”). Charles recorded it, then buried his version near the end of side two. It was not scheduled for release as a single. Then actor and Elvis Presley wannabe Tab Hunter released a version of it that was derived from Charles’s arrangement. In order to head it off on the charts, ABC Paramount rush-released Charles’s version. No contest. It went to #1 and sat there for five weeks. “I Can’t Stop Loving You” became the biggest hit of his long and varied career, while Hunter’s record never even charted. Charles’s B side, “Born to Lose,” was a great single in its own right but failed to crack the Top 40, coming oh so close but stalling at #41.

At first,  
Charles’s album  
*Modern Sounds  
in Country-  
Western Music*  
sounded like a  
pretty bad idea  
to most people.



MAY 1962 #35 NIGHT TRAIN—JAMES BROWN

Before I write even one word about James Brown, I think it should be noted that I lack one very important qualification: I'm not an African-American. Being a white, middle-class kid from the suburbs means that I wasn't exactly a good representative of Brown's target audience, and ninety-eight percent of what he was achieving and what he stood for went completely over my head. Sure, I knew the hits that everybody else knew, and I liked them. I even saw him on TV a few times and became transfixed by his dancing, but for what I understood about his language and style, he might as well have been from China. It wasn't until I got older that I began to scratch the surface and discern the extraordinary significance of this complex man. Brown has meant so much as a sociopolitical phenomenon that his importance as a musician is sometimes considered secondary. For this reason, it would be negligent, if not impossible, to discuss Brown's music without making reference to the effect it had as a stimulus for both unification and change.

White people were on the periphery while Brown exhorted his black audience to know themselves, feel good, and be proud. Any white person with an open mind could see the remarkable talent that this man possessed, and many who did applauded him for it, but race was, by definition, a disqualifier. Songs like "Get Up, Get into It, Get Involved," "Soul Power," "Brother Rapp," and "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" were not addressed to white middle-class America, but they had a cumulative social significance that today is as obvious as their musical quality. While Motown, Atlantic, and other record labels affiliated with black artists made every attempt to appeal to Middle America, Brown made no concessions. If you didn't "get" it, then that's OK, but don't blame Brown, since it is patently unfair to criticize something you don't understand. You can't say "Mother Popcorn" is lyrically dumb if you don't understand it, anymore than you can say the French language is dumb if you don't understand it.

Before any of this had relevance, Brown was a rhythm-and-blues singer with a lot to prove. His own label head, Syd Nathan, had very little faith in Brown's abilities and constantly gave him grief over his material. In one particular instance, he refused to release anything that Brown recorded until he more or less had to because of advance orders caused by radio airplay. The last straw came when Nathan refused to release Brown's first instrumental piece, "(Do the) Mashed Potatoes." Instead, Brown took the song to Dade Records, which overdubbed an additional vocal and released the song credited to Nat Kendrick and the Swans. Brown's next instrumental, "Night Train," which featured him on the drums, was recorded in February 1961 but was withheld from release until March 1962. The song was a hit, but Brown felt that nobody could really understand what he was about without an opportunity to at least *hear* his live show. He approached Nathan, who again, predictably, balked. Using his own money to finance the recording, Brown then recorded what is often considered to be the most influential live album of all time, *James Brown Live at the Apollo*. This album and singles like "Night Train" were essentially the warning shots



for what was soon to follow. At the time, people were not aware of it, but these recordings were defining a new type of music, called “funk.”

## AUGUST 1962 #13 BRING IT ON HOME TO ME—SAM COOKE

One characteristic that Sam Cooke had in good supply was self-confidence. His cocksure manner and business sense did an awful lot to keep him in the public eye for his entire career, and with the help of his partner, J.W. Alexander, he retained control of his music and his money. Cooke was one of the first black artists to handle his own publishing, and when he was made aware of the money his songs generated, he promptly fired his manager, Bumps Blackwell, and sued his record label. Keen Records went bankrupt because of the financial strain of the court settlement, and Cooke moved to RCA Records.

Although the Italian cousins Luigi Creaturo and Hugo Peretti produced Cooke at RCA, he more or less continued in the same vein he had followed at Keen. His first self-penned RCA release was “Chain Gang,” a gimmicky song that became a huge hit. “Cupid,” released in 1961, was a lightweight confection aimed squarely at the pop music audience. In the hands of a lesser talent, these songs would have been, at best, trivial, but somehow Cooke’s voice rises above the insipid commerciality of his lyrics. Nineteen sixty-two brought “Having a Party,” his anthem to good times (as defined by middle-class America and television commercials), which celebrates having plenty of soda in the icebox while “dancing to the music on the radio.” The flip, though, is pure soul, without any of the banal concessions he often made to the marketplace. “Bring It on Home” reunites Cooke with Lou Rawls, his friend from the gospel touring circuit, and together they cross a healthy dose of gospel fire with bluesy soul for a record that shows no sign of compromise. Although it is relegated to the B side, “Bring It on Home” charted and proved that Cooke still had it down and that he would have succeeded quite well without leaping headlong into the quagmire of adolescent pop.

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1962	#17
<u>HAVING A PARTY</u> —SAM COOKE	
JUNE 1962	#17
<u>TWIST AND SHOUT</u> —THE ISLEY BROTHERS	
JUNE 1962	#23
<u>ANY DAY NOW (MY WILD BEAUTIFUL BIRD)</u> —CHUCK JACKSON	
JULY 1962	#1
<u>THE LOCOMOTION</u> —LITTLE EVA	
JULY 1962	#5
<u>PARTY LIGHTS</u> —CLAUDINE CLARK	

## AUGUST 1962 #2 YOU DON'T KNOW ME—RAY CHARLES

The backup singers on Ray Charles’s orchestral songs tend to sound more like the Ray Charles Singers than the Raeletts. Let me explain.



The Ray Charles Singers have no relation to Ray Charles, the R&B performer, but to an older director of easy listening records who happened to share the same name. The R&B/soul/country/jazz artist Ray Charles had backup singers called the Raeletts, which at various times included Margie Hendrix, Clydie King, and Merry Clayton. The Raeletts were actually the original Cookies (not to be confused with the later configuration who recorded “Chains” and “Don’t Say Nothin’ Bad”), but they changed their name when they started to sing for Charles. That wasn’t too confusing, was it? Well, anyway, it is apparent that a studio group was used in lieu of the Raeletts on “You Don’t Know Me” and other of Charles’s orchestrated recordings.

“You Don’t Know Me” was written by Cindy Walker and Eddy Arnold. It was the second single from *Modern Sounds in Country-Western Music*, and although it didn’t achieve the phenomenal success of its predecessor, “I Can’t Stop Loving You,” it remains just as timeless and definitive. For the next few years, Charles would concentrate on applying his personal style to country-western classics in between his steady stream of R&B hits. He would

release *Modern Sounds in Country-Western Music, Volume 2*, and his later releases would usually contain at least a smattering of country-western material.

Charles charted very well on the country charts, but it would be a leap of faith to consider him a country-western artist in the true sense. Charlie Pride, a country singer with no discernible R&B inflections, became the only well-known black country-western star. Pride (“Kiss an Angel Good Morning,” #21 in 1972) played at the Grand Ole Opry in 1967, but Charles was more suited to play Carnegie Hall, as he did in 1959. “Together Again,” “Crying Time,” and “Your Cheatin’ Heart” are all fine examples of Charles’s country sound, but to be sure, that was only one facet of his varied career. Hits continue to come well into the ’90s (“Song for You”), and there is no end in sight for the relevance of his artistry.



## SEPTEMBER 1962 #3 GREEN ONIONS—BOOKER T. AND THE MG'S

At the onset of the '60s, Chess Records in Chicago began to lose its sense of direction. Competition was arising both to the north, with Detroit’s burgeoning Tamla/Motown empire, and to the south, with Memphis’s Stax Records. Since Motown aimed at a broader market than Chess by “whitening” the products of its artists, it wasn’t so much in direct competition with Chess as it was redirecting the market. Stax, though, was just as much of a grits-and-soul label as Chess, but with a new Memphis angle to its sound.

Jim Stewart, a white banker who was greatly impressed by the success of Sam Phillips and Sun Records, was inspired enough to start his own label. With his sister, Estelle Axton, as partner, he began Satellite Records. Initially, Stewart and Axton focused mainly on rockabilly and country music, with the occasional



black vocal group or R&B singer. But it wasn't long before they realized that their soul releases were faring much better commercially than their country counterparts, so they began to dedicate themselves exclusively to R&B.

The headquarters for Stax/Volt (Satellite was dropped as a moniker after someone else claimed name infringement) was an old movie theater in the heart of the black section of Memphis, which inadvertently made it easier to attract local talent. The lobby was converted into a record store that played new releases and, occasionally, the latest studio project. This gave Stewart and Axton the ability to test-market recent recordings before their official releases.

Carla and Rufus Thomas, a father/daughter team, provided the label's first hit and brought Satellite to the attention of Atlantic's jack-of-all-trades, Jerry Wexler. Wexler cut a distribution agreement that gave Stax/Volt much needed access to the national market. The companies' first dual effort was a syrupy love ballad by Carla Thomas called "Gee Whiz," and it became a #10 pop hit. The straight pop tune was hardly representative of the label's future output, but it set off a chain reaction that would soon identify Stax/Volt as the hottest R&B/soul label in the country.

Meanwhile, Axton's son Packy had been playing tenor sax in an all-white band with the unfortunate moniker of the Royal Spades, which included guitarist Steve Cropper and bassist Donald "Duck" Dunn. After a name change to the Mar-Keys, they merged their talents with a few black session musicians to record a rudimentary twelve-bar rhythm called "Last Night," which, at first glance, seemed to have little potential. Seeing as how Axton's son was on the recording, the label released the record, but Stewart was willing to wager \$100 that it would flop. When the racially integrated, horn-driven rhythmic groove reached #3 on the pop charts, everybody involved was pleasantly surprised. Southern soul, or the Memphis sound, had started to take root.

Stax/Volt put together a "house" band by extracting a pair of Mar-Keys and pairing them with two session musicians. Booker T. Jones played keyboards, Lewis Steinberg (later replaced by Duck Dunn) played bass, Steve Cropper handled guitar, and Al Jackson Jr. was the drummer. The band called itself Booker T. and the MG's, for "Memphis Group." The Mar-Keys' horn section eventually splintered off to become the Memphis Horns. The job of the MG's was to provide instrumental support for the various vocal artists who recorded at the label. Once, while waiting for a singer to arrive, the band jammed on a blues progression that Stewart surreptitiously recorded. He wanted to release the song, called "Behave Yourself" and requested a B side. Jones and Cropper submitted a riff they had been practicing and called the finished product "Green Onions." It was



**Time has since proven "Green Onions" to be perhaps the most popular and influential instrumental R&B track ever released.**





a toss-off that, like “Last Night,” seemed of little consequence. Deejays immediately picked up on the B side, and the song shot to #3.

Time has since proven “Green Onions” to be perhaps the most popular and influential instrumental R&B track ever released. Part R&B, part jazz, the groove was as uncluttered as a rhythm section could get without disappearing altogether. The deceptive sophistication of the playing consisted of a distillation of funky ingredients that resulted in a pure, hypnotic track with timeless appeal. All the MG’s musicians would have immeasurable influence on music in general, not only for their pioneering and exceptional work with Wilson Pickett and Otis Redding, but for the hundreds, if not thousands, of sessions that their individual talents made special. They single-handedly become the focal point for an entire genre of music called Memphis soul.

### SEPTEMBER 1962 #3 DO YOU LOVE ME—THE CONTOURS

**T**his is a Motown record? Yep, it sure is. Label founder Berry Gordy Jr. even wrote and produced “Do You Love Me,” so you can’t get much more official than that. But it’s so raunchy, so raucous, so...real. The Motown group of record labels became a master of the smooth and the cool, so in retrospect, the Contours stand out like a sore thumb. Back in 1962, though, hardly anybody knew what Motown was. The Contours had their only Top 10 hit before anybody could possibly know that an entire generation would one day identify itself with the records that emanated from the Motor City. Only Edwin Starr or Jr. Walker and the All-Stars would ever come close to the unbridled energy of the Contours, but even then the similarities are mostly superficial. Lead singer Billy Gordon leaps and belches his way through every dance routine that comes to mind with the passion of a crazed evangelist. The rest of the band sounds like it is conducting a meeting of Hyperactives Anonymous gone haywire. The result is one of the best dance records of the period. “Do You Love Me” might be lacking in melody, but it makes up for it with an unbridled energy that would soak any dance floor with sweat. Best of all, it sounds just as lively today.

Despite the remarkable sales of the Contours’ debut single, the group soon found itself overlooked on Motown’s priorities list.

Despite the remarkable sales of the Contours’ debut single, the group soon found itself overlooked on Motown’s priorities list. An unfortunate but inevitable result was that they never again came anywhere near the Top 10 status of “Do You Love Me.” While they fell down the totem pole, Mary Wells, Martha and the Vandellas, Marvin Gaye, and the Miracles climbed over them, followed by the Four Tops, the Temptations, and even that most hapless of girl groups (at least at first), the Supremes. Soon enough, the Contours were completely buried under the weight of the superstars above them.

By the way, if you care to purchase this song, be certain





to get it in its original full-length form, *not* in the poorly edited rerelease version from the '80s. The original single has a fake fade-out that could charge a dance floor like a jolt of electricity while the rerelease fades away, never to return. To date, it remains one of the most potent and timeless production tricks from the '60s (yes, including the effects-mad psychedelic period).

## SEPTEMBER 1962 #19 I LEFT MY HEART IN SAN FRANCISCO— TONY BENNETT

**S**ome songs follow their interpreters like a shadow, and Tony Bennett will probably never escape from his identification with “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.” Luckily for him, it is a beautiful song, and he claims that singing it has never become a chore.

One characteristic that makes Bennett so special is that he has the talent and confidence to demand the finest musicians and the best songs (meaning emotionally satisfying and tunefully melodic, not necessarily popular or topical), yet he is not an egotist. He always credits the genius of songwriters and musicians while they, in turn, always compliment his interpretive skills and exquisite taste. How can anyone not love a man who has had the humility to publicly acknowledge artists as diverse as Duke Ellington and the Red Hot Chili Peppers? I’m not implying that Bennett is reckless enough to put these artists into the same category; I am merely stating that he always seems to find something pleasant to say about his contemporaries. And his career has been so long and continuously successful that both the Duke and the Chili Peppers qualify as contemporaries. Any artist capable of sustaining a degree of relevance over such a lengthy period of time deserves recognition simply for longevity, but Bennett has earned respect for much more than his durability.

“I Left My Heart in San Francisco” notwithstanding, Bennett is not an artist who needs to *own* a song (that is to say, sing it in a highly stylized manner). His stylization is based, quite simply, on perfection. Bennett is not a great risk taker in the sense that he doesn’t reinvent the intention of the songwriter—he perfects it. His gift is his ability to convey a song at its best for what it is, not for his peculiar interpretation. It’s not that he has rendered his talent invisible, but that the music exists for itself, with its own purpose.

“I Left My Heart in San Francisco” earned three Grammy awards: for best male solo vocal performance, best background arrangement (that’s a pretty weird one, huh?), and record of the year. You’ve heard this song perhaps hundreds of times. I only hope that you’ve *listened*. Bennett’s phrasing is not only impeccable, but unchangeable. Imagine, for a moment, anyone else singing this song. It is beyond the reach of most artists, and the very few who could pull it off wouldn’t

### GREAT MISSES

SEPTEMBER 1962 #6  
PATCHES—DICKEY LEE



dare because it would inevitably invoke comparison. And that piano riff! Music coordinator/arranger Ralph Sharon speaks volumes with a handful of notes and a pregnant pause. Sammy Cahn, while presenting Bennett with a lifetime achievement award, said it best: “The award is a valentine from the writers who are grateful to Tony for making great songs sound even better.” That is all you have to know about Tony Bennett.

## OCTOBER 1962 #1 HE'S A REBEL—THE CRYSTALS

**R**ecord producers come and record producers go, but only a very few have a vision so unique that they become more famous than the artists with whom they work. In the early '60s, Phil Spector stood the recording industry on its head by implementing changes so profound that popular music would never again be the same. For one thing, he proved that with enough capital and a string of successful releases, he could operate with absolutely no assistance from the major labels. This was unprecedented, since virtually every independent label had relied on major labels for, at the very least, distribution. Another factor was his disregard for economy, both financial and artistic.

Spector was born and raised in the Bronx. Following the death of his father, his family relocated to Los Angeles. In high school, he formed the Teddy Bears with schoolmates Marshall Leib and Annette Kleinbard. Based on the inscription on his father's tombstone, Spector wrote a song called “To Know Him Is to Love Him.” The Teddy Bears recorded the song, and it was released on Dore Records, a tiny West Coast label. The record became a surprise #1 hit. Empowered by his newfound fame, Spector lobbied for and won the right to produce an album for his group. In the process, he met Lester Sill and Lee Hazlewood, the producers responsible for the echo-laden sound of Duane Eddy, and he went to work for them. He studied their techniques until there was nothing left to learn and then wanted to take his education a bit further. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller were the hottest songwriting/producing team going, so Spector made arrangements to go to New York and work as their understudy.

**In the early '60s, Phil Spector stood the recording industry on its head by implementing changes so profound that popular music would never again be the same.**

Once there, Spector became enamored with the string arrangements and Latin percussion that were common to most Leiber/Stoller productions. It wasn't long before he began to stand out as a unique and gifted talent who possessed a rather potent Midas touch. He wrote “Spanish Harlem” with Leiber and produced a string of hits, including “Corinna Corinna” by Ray Peterson and “Pretty Little Angel Eyes” by Curtis Lee. On Gene Pitney's “Every Breath I Take,” Spector managed to raise a few eyebrows when his bosses became aware of the \$14,000 re-



ording tab he had accrued, but he couldn't be faulted once the record became a hit. All of his productions yielded hits. Knowing nothing but success, he returned to California and formed a record label with his original mentor, Lester Sill, and they called it Philles Records.

The Crystals were the first "product" Spector hired, and he immediately produced two Top 40 hits for them, "There's No Other (Like My Baby)" and "Up-town." Idiosyncratic (to say the least) and independent, Spector bought out Sill and hired the best talent the West Coast had to offer. Although it cost him a bundle, he was now at a vantage point from which he could conquer the world, and like Napoleon with a recording console, he did just that.

When the profits from their first two hits fell far short of what they had expected, the Crystals grew suspicious of Spector's intentions. They were not in a position to change things, though, since Spector controlled virtually every aspect of their career, including the name "the Crystals." Matters got worse when he insisted that they record the strangely masochistic Goffin-King song called "He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)." The Crystals had become alienated by this pop Svengali who had no regard for their opinion, but Spector apparently could not have cared less. He caught wind of a Gene Pitney composition called "He's a Rebel," which was slated to be Vicki Carr's debut release (something I consider myself blessed to have never heard). When he went into the studio to rush-record his own version, he didn't bother to notify the Crystals. Instead, he called a group named the Blossoms, featuring Darlene Love, into the studio. Since he owned the name, he released it credited to the Crystals. You can imagine the original Crystals' surprise when they learned they had a #1 record on the charts that they had never heard. They needed to learn "He's a Rebel" in a hurry to accommodate fans who were clamoring to hear it at live shows. This wasn't so easy, though, because of the tight, wordy phrasing and Love's gossypily ad libs toward the end.

There is more melody in the chorus of this song than all the other Pitney songs put together. I don't know what spurt of genius overcame him to write this inspired piece of music, but Spector deserves credit as well for realizing its full potential. With "He's a Rebel," Spector became the acknowledged master of girl-group pop.



## NOVEMBER 1962 #1 TELSTAR—THE TORNADOES

**B**esides the dance crazes that were creeping up all over America like dandelions on an unkempt lawn, instrumental rock and roll was breaking out all over as well. The Surfariis ("Wipe Out"), Johnny and the Hurricanes ("Crossfire"), Duane Eddy ("Rebel Rouser"), the Champs ("Tequila"), and the Ventures ("Walk—Don't Run") were but a few of the notable non-singing performers who reached the charts. Some of the weirdest instrumentals by far, though, came from a studio in



England that was run by Joe Meek. His production methods gave his songs a sharp, futuristic sound and a dynamic range that other producers simply could not duplicate.

Although mostly unknown in America, Meek was famous in his native England and was responsible for a batch of English hits. The Tornadoes, who were originally the backing band for English pop star Billy Fury, acted as his house band. Meek had an obsession with all things futuristic and wrote "Telstar" after watching the satellite of the same name launch on television. He gave the song to the Tornadoes and added all sorts of modern sounds and effects to the mix. Considering that it was recorded in an age well before synthesizers and computer-generated sound, "Telstar" is a stunning exercise in inventiveness. Meek shocked the world with his ultramodern recording, and "Telstar" became a #1 hit in America as well as in England.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1962	#6
<b>THE LONELY BULL—HERB ALPERT AND THE TIJUANA BRASS</b>	
NOVEMBER 1962	#8
<b>RELEASE ME—ESTHER PHILLIPS</b>	

A few English hits followed for Meek, but his contrived modernism began to fall from fashion. Known to be moody and insular, he was often depressed and prone to violent outbursts. In 1967, he made all the English tabloids after a horribly violent incident wherein he shot and killed a female neighbor during an argument, then turned the gun on himself.

It is both amusing and charming to hear "Telstar" today. When it was released, it brought to mind visions of space travel and people wearing silver-colored space clothing while floating around the universe. Today, it sounds more like a prototypical theme song for a decades-old science fiction TV show. The optimism of the "brave new world" '60s didn't last, but "Telstar" captures the mood of a planet pretending to be on the brink of scientific perfection. Ironically, instead of futuristic visions, "Telstar" now inspires nostalgia for the good old days.

## DECEMBER 1962 #5 UP ON THE ROOF—THE DRIFTERS

Depending on how and whom you count, the Drifters by now had a half dozen lead vocalists, and the number of backup singers was equivalent to the population of downtown Baltimore. It is no wonder then that the band lacked a specific image. Ben E. King, the previous lead singer, left after a monetary dispute with the Drifters' manager, George Treadwell, and was promptly replaced by Rudy Lewis, previously with the Clara Ward Singers. Several forgettable hits followed, such as "Some Kind of Wonderful," "Please Stay," and "Sweets for My Sweet." None had the impact of King's hit recordings. The group's next few releases fared even worse, barely reaching the

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1962	#4
<b>TELL HIM—THE EXCITERS</b>	
DECEMBER 1962	#29
<b>YOUR CHEATIN' HEART—RAY CHARLES</b>	



charts at all, and once again it appeared as though the Drifters might fade into oblivion. But with a resiliency that was unprecedented, they bounced back from their decline virtually unscathed when they recorded an ode to Tar Beach called “Up on the Roof.” It was written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, and it became the Drifters’ third Top 10 single. Bustling crowds and daily hassles are a part of life for city dwellers, and the thought of the roof as an escape hatch had a therapeutic appeal. With dozens of successful songs to their name, it seemed as though Goffin and King could turn out relevant hit records for just about anybody at the blink of an eye. James Taylor later recorded a pleasant if lackluster cover version and had a hit, but the original recording by the Drifters remains definitive.

## JANUARY 1963 #1 WALK LIKE A MAN—THE FOUR SEASONS

The vocal group tradition that had blanketed the metropolitan Northeast since the '50s was rooted in the African-American and eventually Italian cultures. Francis Castelluccio was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey, and he was nourished on the sounds of doo-wop. In the ethnic neighborhoods where they congregated, groups would often be seen practicing on subway platforms and attempting to “cut” (outsing) each other on street corners. Johnny Mastrangelo was the first acknowledged star of Italian doo-wop. Singing lead with a mixed-heritage group called the Crests as Johnny Maestro, he achieved national fame with “Sixteen Candles” when it reached #2 in February, 1959. “16 Candles” wasn’t necessarily on the cutting edge of vocal music, but it represented one of the first successful attempts by an Italian-American to sound authentic in this R&B-based genre. In 1958, Dion Dimucci furthered the cause with his Bronx-based group, the Belmonts. “I Wonder Why” brought toughness and street smarts to the music. These songs and their progeny were all over the Northeast, and Frankie Castelluccio sprouted right in the thick of it.

He had begun performing as early as 1952, singing with a band called the Varietones, who metamorphosed into the Four Lovers. Castelluccio also changed his own moniker to Frankie Valli. RCA handled the group’s releases, but none of them entered the mainstream. When songwriter Bob Crewe met Valli and they decided to collaborate, things began to change for the better. Just as fortuitous an addition was when Bob Gaudio joined forces with Crewe and Valli. Gaudio was a singer who brought with him a professional sheen, having been the person responsible (in every sense of the word) for “Short Shorts” by the Royal Teens. Crewe and Gaudio became songwriting partners while the group sang at a multitude of recording

**“16 Candles” wasn’t necessarily on the cutting edge of vocal music, but it represented one of the first successful attempts by an Italian-American to sound authentic in this R&B-based genre.**





**Before the British Invasion wiped away everything in its path, many perceived the Four Seasons as the hands-down winners.**

sessions. They performed on more than two dozen singles under a slew of different names, and Gaudio's "Sherry" was simply another record with a casually chosen moniker. It was released on VeeJay Records and just happened to be credited to the Four Seasons. "Sherry" rocketed to #1, where it remained for five weeks, bolstered by the Four Seasons' appearance on *American Bandstand*. Valli's powerful falsetto took over the airwaves. The groundwork that was laid by such falsetto-style tenors as Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs ("Stay"), Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers ("Why Do Fools Fall in Love"—more pre-pubescent than falsetto, really) and Little Anthony and the Imperials ("Tears on My Pillow") came to a uvula-rattling head. "Big Girls Don't Cry" followed and duplicated the remark-

able success of "Sherry" when it also reached #1 for five consecutive weeks.

In late 1962, while the Four Seasons were dominating the American record charts, the Beatles were making similar inroads in the United Kingdom. Gaudio convinced VeeJay to import the music of these British stars for American release. Ironically, this only added to the label's undoing, since they were incapable of handling two superstar acts simultaneously. After both bands departed for other labels, VeeJay released the now very rare *Beatles vs. the Four Seasons* album. Before the British Invasion wiped away everything in its path, many perceived the Four Seasons as the hands-down winners. The long hair, effeminate suits, and girl group songs of the Beatles ("Chains," "Baby, It's You," etc.) made them laughable to the proud Italians. Notwithstanding the fact that Valli could "sing like a girl," "Walk Like a Man" emboldened the machismo of Italian doo-wop, and for a while at least, the Beatles couldn't compare.

"Walk Like a Man" was the Four Seasons' third single and their first for Phillips Records. It also went to #1, this time for three weeks. Within the space of a half-year, the Four Seasons held the #1 position for fully half of that time, a total of thirteen weeks. "Walk Like a Man" brought with it a "band" sound that made it contemporary and innovative. While Valli's voice soared into the nether regions one minute, it growled the next; sometimes it soared and growled simultaneously. Crewe's production was quickly becoming a dominant factor, as well. The band's crisp sound, notably the percussion, broadened the song's appeal well beyond vocal-group aficionados. For the time being, the Four Seasons continued their reign as the most popular band in the world.

## **JANUARY 1963 #8 YOU'VE REALLY GOT A HOLD ON ME—THE MIRACLES**

**W**illiam "Smokey" Robinson grew up in Detroit and formed his first vocal group in junior high school with Pete Moore, Ron White, and brothers Bobby and Sonny Rogers. They called themselves the Matadors and sang at various talent shows and school dances. After high school, Robinson got word of an audition that



Jackie Wilson's management was holding. Sonny Rogers left the group days before they were supposed to play and by necessity was replaced by his sister and future Mrs. Robinson, Claudette. At the time, Berry Gordy Jr. was affiliated with Wilson (he wrote Wilson's "Reet Petite" and "Lonely Teardrops," among others) and was present at the audition. Wilson's manager passed on the group, but Gordy was impressed enough to keep them in mind. When he began to produce his own material, Gordy called on the Matadors. They changed their name to the Miracles and recorded an answer song to the Silhouettes' "Get a Job," called "Got a Job." Some great singles, such as "Bad Girl" and "Way over There" followed, but the Miracles had to wait until 1961 before they broke the national charts wide open with "Shop Around." Emboldened by the success of his compositions, Robinson continued to write his own material, often coproducing the recording sessions as well. Two more Top 40 hits resulted, and in 1963 the Miracles had their second Top 10 hit with "You've Really Got a Hold on Me."

This song establishes the blueprint for the lyrical formula Robinson would often employ. He sets up a situational dichotomy that shows the inherent contradictions of a love relationship. With lines like "I don't like you, but I love you" and later, "I don't want you, but I need you," we hear the words of a man who knows that he must succumb to his desire, whether he wants to or not.

For an early Motown song, "You've Really Got a Hold on Me" is very sophisticated. It neglects the usually blatant teenage themes of most popular music of the time. The vocal performance is awe-inspiring and was itself inspired by another high tenor, Clyde McPhatter. When the Beatles later covered the song, John Lennon gave the lead vocal a muscular edge, but the blue notes and soaring tenor of the original performance were out of Lennon's grasp. In live performance, Robinson's fragile voice often strained, but in the studio nobody could beat his expressive passion and gentle authority.

## JANUARY 1963 #21 DON'T MAKE ME OVER—DIONNE WARWICKE

**D**on't Make Me Over" was the first and most powerful song of Dionne Warwick's career. For a debut, it was hardly indicative of the later work she would produce with Burt Bacharach and Hal David. The unconventional staccato rhythms of those songs are nowhere to be found. Nor is the cool, sophisticated atmosphere.

Warwicke was born and raised in New Jersey to a family steeped in gospel tradition. She received musical training at a young age while singing in the church choir and with various vocal groups. She attended Hartt College of Music and worked occasionally as a backing vocalist. At this time, Bacharach joined a production team

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1963 #8  
WILD WEEKEND—THE REBELS

### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1963 #25  
CINAMMON CINDER  
[IT'S A VERY NICE DANCE]—  
PASTEL SIX



led by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller at Atlantic Records, which at the time was attempting to revive the career of the Drifters. In the early '60s, songwriters often worked out of an office (usually in or around the Brill Building in New York), either for a publishing company or a record label. Their material was presented to the artists on the companies' rosters, who in turn worked with arrangers and producers for a finished product. While working in this capacity at a recording session for the Drifters, Bacharach happened to meet Dionne and Dee Dee Warwicke and was suitably impressed. He was eager to develop his songs from scratch right through to the finished product and thought Dionne would make an excellent solo artist. When a producer attempted to direct Warwicke, she chided him by saying, "Don't make me over." Bacharach felt he had found an ideal voice for his material and set out to write a song for her based on her own comment.

In the song, Warwicke's vocal stands naked and vulnerable against orchestration that plies emotion from every nuance of her delivery. The melody forces her hand dynamically. When she sings, "Accept me for what I am, accept me for the things that I do," her emotional display is so powerful that it is easy to imagine her falling to her knees with clenched fists. Young and ambitious, the singer and the songwriter combined talents for one emotionally wrenching performance.

## FEBRUARY 1963 #1 OUR DAY WILL COME—RUBY AND THE ROMANTICS

**B**efore Ruby Nash joined this male quartet in 1962, the name of the group was the Supremes, but when Nash joined, they changed it to Ruby and the Romantics. I guess the Supremes didn't sound commercial enough. Adding a female lead helped them to stand out among a sea of male-dominated vocal groups, and perhaps it was a coincidence, but the new girl-group boom didn't hurt their chances either. Ironically, between Nash's lead vocal and the Hammond organ that accompanies her, "Our Day Will Come" features such an ambient production that the male voices are entirely expendable. Although these touches veer dangerously close to Lawrence Welk territory, "Our Day Will Come" emerges with enough romanticism intact to validate the overall scheme.

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1963 <u>END OF THE WORLD</u> —SKEETER DAVIS	#2
FEBRUARY 1963 <u>I WANNA BE AROUND</u> —TONY BENNETT	#14
FEBRUARY 1963 <u>CAST YOUR FATE TO THE WIND</u> — THE VINCE GUARALDI TRIO	#22

There's nothing groundbreaking here, just a dreamy soundscape that suits the optimism of the lyrics. Nash's delivery of the lines "Our dreams have magic because we'll always stay in love this way" is enough to set even a war-torn veteran of love's battlefield adrift on memory bliss. The song pushed all the right buttons, and that was enough to yield a #1 record for Nash and the boys. They hung around the charts for a little while longer ("My Summer Love" and "Hey There, Lonely Boy" both made the Top 40 in 1963), but by year's end, they had slipped back into obscurity.



## FEBRUARY 1963 #7 IN DREAMS—ROY ORBISON

In the early '60s, Roy Orbison's popularity had become so great that Elvis, upon his discharge from the Army, told the press that he considered Orbison to be his toughest competition. After "In Dreams" was released, Orbison went to England for a series of performances, where his warm-up band was none other than the Beatles. Orbison was certainly a star, and with Presley's own fame reaching monumental heights and Johnny Cash still reaching the pop charts, Sam Phillips of Sun Records must have wondered how they all managed to get away.

David Lynch used "In Dreams" to chillingly bizarre effect in his chillingly bizarre movie "Blue Velvet." Orbison's otherworldly croon on lyrics like "The candy-colored clown they call the sandman tiptoes in my room most every night" (wha...?) makes the action on the screen seem all too real by comparison, giving the scene a very palpable sense of fear.

It is sadly poignant that the man who sang such melancholy songs as "Crying" and "In Dreams" was destined to experience personal tragedies that by far eclipsed the sadness of his music.

## MARCH 1963 #1 HE'S SO FINE—THE CHIFFONS

The Chiffons enjoyed their first big hit with "He's So Fine." Songwriter Ronnie Mack's lyrics had a conversational lilt that resembled prose more than poetry. Lead singer Judy Craig captures the youthful exuberance of his lyrics about a teenager who is completely dedicated to the one she loves. The doo-lang, doo-lang-ing Chiffons confirm her adolescence. For a more vivid description of what I mean, imagine Dionne Warwick singing this song over a chorus of "doo-lang, doo-lang, doo-lang." The image is ludicrous. "He's So Fine" is a teenage girl's anthem sung by teenage girls. Mack saw the appropriateness of this when he hired the Chiffons. Together, they exemplified some of the best that pop music had to offer in 1963.

Before the girl group era came into its own, women artists accounted for somewhere around fifteen percent of charted singles. In 1963, just before the Beatles and their countrymen attacked our shores, the girl group trend peaked, and females represented a full forty percent of the Top 100. It is ironic that the male-dominated British groups crushed the trend, often with material provided by the American girl groups they displaced. The Beatles covered a number of girl-group songs, including "Chains," "Baby, It's You," "Boys," and "Please Mr. Postman." The Chiffons must have never forgotten how these Brits stole their fire. Ten years later, they would take revenge on the Beatles, particularly George Harrison, when they sued him for plagiarizing "My Sweet Lord" from "He's So Fine."

This had to be one of the most ludicrous court cases in the history of rock and roll, yet they won! Think about this for a moment: hum "He's So Fine." Now, hum "My Sweet Lord." Okay, the melodies of the titles are spot-on, but so what? Harrison's "Hare Hare, Krishna Krishna" chant is certainly not identical to "doo-



**Almost every popular song has been influenced in some shape or form by its predecessors (That's a major point of this book, for cryin' out loud!).**

lang, doo-lang, doo-lang,” and unless I’ve lost my senses, the slide guitar refrain that serves as the fundamental basis for Harrison’s composition (that’s right, Harrison’s composition) is never even suggested on “He’s So Fine.” So what gives? Rock and roll is often nothing more than three chords and an attitude, and although an infinite number of variations can result, similarities and overlaps are bound to occur. Furthermore, almost every popular song has been influenced in some shape or form by its predecessors (That’s a major point of this book, for cryin’ out loud!). In some cases the “inspiration” has been painfully obvious, but that was usually understood to be the nature of the beast. Regardless, the court decided that Harrison would have to surrender all royalties received from “My Sweet Lord” to the publishers of “He’s So Fine,” and the publishers of “He’s So Fine” would retain rights to all future royalties the song generated. The

potential aftermath that could have resulted from this decision is mind-boggling. Taken to its natural conclusion, the guy who holds publishing rights to the first twelve-bar blues song may deserve all the money in the world that was ever earned for any blues song that came afterward. I’ve been counting other instances in which this law could be brought to bear on some poor perpetrator, but I stopped when I ran out of fingers and toes. Just don’t mention any of this to Steve Miller, or the poor guy might go into cardiac arrest.

As a postscript, the Chiffons took an unchallenged first place in the “Don’t We Have Chutzpah” contest when they released their own version of “My Sweet Lord,” thus generating royalties with a song that the court system says is rightfully theirs.

## **MARCH 1963 #2 CAN’T GET USED TO LOSING YOU—ANDY WILLIAMS**

**A**ndy Williams occupies a point in the road that is perfectly equidistant from either of the two yellow lines that run down the middle. He plays it so safe that it is impossible to imagine his style offending anybody, but it is equally impossible to imagine him genuinely moving anybody, either. Since his vocals are about as stimulating as a sleeping pill, the relevance of his recordings can only be determined by the quality of the material that he chooses to sing. When the songwriters are Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, he has already won half the battle. “Can’t Get Used to Losing You” is such an original-sounding composition

that if it doesn’t qualify as high art, it certainly qualifies as first-class entertainment. The entire arrangement is hinged upon the sound of the pizzicato strings

<b>GREAT HITS</b>	
MARCH 1963	#30
HITCH HIKE—MARVIN GAYE	





(plucked, not bowed) and muted strumming. This goes a long way toward giving the song a unique, identifiable sound unlike anything else on the pop charts.

Williams was among the stable of artists whom Columbia Records enlisted to stave off the unruly and unwelcome attack that rock and roll had launched on the music industry in the late '50s. How in the world they got the impression that this could be done by recording syrupy show tunes and moldy Tin Pan Alley fluff is completely beyond me. But this was the mind-set at Columbia, and it survived just fine without jumping onto the youth-market bandwagon. By 1963, rock and roll had lost its bite anyway and was closing ground on the territory that Williams occupied. A steady diet of this stuff would have about the same effect as swallowing a bottle of syrup of ipecac, but occasionally, *and in small doses*, it went down very nicely.

Williams does not get high marks for his hipness quotient (we're talking about the guy responsible for showcasing the Osmonds on national television), but the right song at the right time might fool you. "Can't Get Used to Losing You" was the right song at the right time. It still sounds good more than twenty years later. Either that or I'm becoming my parents, but if I am, I'm not alone. The English Beat recorded a reggae-influenced version of this song in the '80s that retained all the charm of the original. What does this prove? Only that a good song will always be a good song.

## APRIL 1963 #9 ON BROADWAY—THE DRIFTERS

**W**ith so many personnel changes in their history, it is arguable that the Drifters were really not a group at all but a name that various songwriters and producers used to showcase their material. Since the band lacked "star appeal," the song itself was all that mattered to record buyers. This is not to say that the various members of the Drifters were manipulated or untalented; far from it. Some of the best singers of the era passed in and out of this group. But the Drifters were professional singers, not overt stylists, so songs were usually presented exactly the way the writers and producers saw fit.

The songwriting teams Leiber/Stoller, Pomus/Shuman, Goffin/King, Mann/Weil, and even Burt Bacharach all contributed songs at one time or another to the Drifters. With "On Broadway," some of the most remarkable songwriters and producers of the era came together. Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil double-teamed with Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller to write this anthem for all struggling musicians, and they were aided by Phil Spector, who dropped by to record the guitar solo.

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1963 <u>IF YOU WANNA BE HAPPY—</u> JIMMY SOUL	#1
APRIL 1963 <u>PIPELINE—THE CHANTAYS</u>	#4
APRIL 1963 <u>TWO FACES HAVE I—LOU CHRISTIE</u>	#6
APRIL 1963 <u>THE DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES—</u> ANDY WILLIAMS	#26



The city theme that worked so well in “Up on the Roof” was readdressed with “On Broadway.” Like Sinatra’s “New York, New York” (groan), Manhattan is presented as a place that will make you or break you. The New York-based talents who constructed this brilliant song were in the enviable position of being successful in a city that is renowned for its toughness; they must have had daily contact with musicians hoping for a lucky break. The character they created, who has nothing to his name except faith in his talent, was as real as the busker singing for change on the street corner. Before the harsh realities of Manhattan take their toll, there is the dream. “On Broadway” captures the hope that keeps the dream alive.

### MAY 1963 #3 **DA DOO RON RON (WHEN HE WALKED ME HOME)**— THE CRYSTALS

**A**fter they had a few hits, Phil Spector abandoned the original Crystals when they had the audacity to question his motives. In turn, they were replaced by a new set of Crystals, namely Darlene Love and the Blossoms. The new Crystals recorded two megahit songs, “He’s a Rebel” and “He’s Sure the Boy I Love,” when it became their turn to question Spector. Apparently, he had neglected to tell them that their songs would be credited to the Crystals. Unperturbed, he simply reacquired the now-complacent original Crystals and had them record a song written by Ellie Greenwich and Jeff Barry called “Da Doo Ron Ron.” Who says the record industry of the ’60’s was sexist? It was devices such as this that made it difficult to discern the burgeoning number of girl groups that were flooding the charts. There was enough confusion already without having to worry about whether there were two completely different sets of Crystals, and most people simply didn’t notice. It was the *sound* of the record that mattered anyway, not the

artist; at least that’s what Spector would have liked for you to believe. Whether it was appropriate or not, he succeeded on his own terms. The names Barbara Alston, Mary Thomas, Pat Wright, Dee Dee Kinnebrew, and Lala Brooks mean nothing except to fanatics, but “the Crystals” and, more importantly, “Phil Spector,” remain instantly recognizable. By 1963, Spector’s



mastery of his domain was complete. He would soon tire of the political jockeying that was required to keep the Crystals active. Once he had begun concentrating on his new group of protégés, the Ronettes, he abandoned the Crystals entirely.

When recording “Da Doo Ron Ron” in the studio, Spector wanted reassurance that the song was “dumb enough” for everybody to get it. This frenetic tune has so many dense layers of instrumentation that it really is a wonder the central riff doesn’t get stomped to death. Instead, it is the listener who gets stomped to death, with the truly dumb repeated motif of “Da doo ron ron ron, da doo ron ron.” Spector’s montage of musicians, particularly drummer Hal Blaine and saxophonist Steve



Douglas, perform superbly, driving the triplets with as much energy as could possibly be expected (or expended). There is no way to escape the song's expansive yet claustrophobic production. Every space is filled. All that a listener can do is succumb. Is it dumb enough? Yes, indeed. Is it clever enough to be universally appealing? Absolutely.

## MAY 1963 #3 HELLO STRANGER—BARBARA LEWIS

**B**arbara Lewis hailed from Michigan and was discovered by Ollie McLaughlin, the same man responsible for pushing the career of Del Shannon. “Hello Stranger” was cut at Chess Studios in Chicago and featured backing vocals by the Dells. Female R&B reached its apogee of smoothness in the personage of Lewis. The churchy inflections, melisma-drenched phrasing, and whisper-to-scream dynamics of early R&B were all pushed aside and replaced with a cool, refined approach. This style of sophisticated aloofness, most recently exemplified by Sade, would not normally be particularly interesting, but in this case it perfectly suits the mood of resignation portrayed in the lyrics.

Lewis wrote “Hello Stranger.” In it, some acquaintance, obviously an ex-lover, suddenly appears from nowhere and approaches her. Now, she hasn’t seen this guy in a long time, and yet she sounds like she’s too tired to even get up out of her chair. Maybe life hasn’t been too good to her. Maybe he’s visiting her in the hospital after getting word that she doesn’t have much time left, and she’s lying there on Demerol while singing to him and...maybe I’m reading a little bit too much into this. Let’s just say that she sounds a step or two away from where the action is.

Like “Our Day Will Come” by Ruby and the Romantics, “Hello Stranger” also features a romantically evocative Hammond organ sound. When coupled with Lewis’s legato phrasing, the song is both moody and gorgeous, a combination that defies repetition. Lewis would stick to her languid—some would say sultry—style, and she would yield four more Top 40 hits, most notably “Baby, I’m Yours” (#11) and “Make Me Your Baby” (#11). Depending on your point of view, she either sounds sexy or like she’s wearing hospital slippers while holding an intravenous stand. Both of these songs were very good, but “Hello Stranger” did the best job of capturing Lewis’s mellow and romantic sound.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1963	#10
<u>ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT</u> — SAM COOKE	
MAY 1963	#37
<u>IF YOU NEED ME</u> —SOLOMON BURKE	

## MAY 1963 #18 PRISONER OF LOVE—JAMES BROWN

**W**ith “Prisoner of Love,” James Brown meets Tin Pan Alley head-on and defeats it on its own terms. Russ Columbo, a crooner and contemporary of Bing



**“Prisoner of Love,” however, shows that not only did Brown have a vision, but he also had the versatility to do whatever he wanted.**

Crosby and Rudy Valee, cowrote and recorded the song in 1932, and it was subsequently covered ad infinitum. By 1963, the very idea of singing “Prisoner of Love” sounded tiresome. It felt like it had been around forever, so one more version should have been no big deal, maybe even a waste of time. Wrong.

If Columbo had lived long enough to hear Brown’s version (he died in 1933), he would have been amazed (or horrified) to learn just how expressive his song was. Brown, of course, must have been familiar with “Prisoner of Love” through one of its interpreters, most likely Billy Eckstine, but he sings it like it was written in his own heart. Unlike his later material, Brown makes the melody tantamount, but that doesn’t mean he imprisons his interpretive skill. He sings the song beautifully, more beautifully than any of his predecessors, but as if that weren’t enough, he instills a passion that renders previous versions impotent. In his hands, the tired, ennui-instilled lyric becomes alive and vibrant.

In his earlier years, Brown recorded a number of popular songs, almost as though he felt compelled to prove that he could handle standards. “Mona Lisa,” “I Want to be Around,” “Bewildered,” and “Come Rain or Come Shine” were all recorded with equal conviction, but he was about to move on to more important things. By 1964, he was well on his way to being the most unique talent of his time, and he would no longer look to the past for material. “Prisoner of Love,” however, shows that not only did Brown have a vision, but he also had the versatility to do whatever he wanted.

## **JUNE 1963 #5 ONE FINE DAY—THE CHIFFONS**

**J**udy Craig, Barbara Lee, Patricia Bennett, and Sylvia Peterson came from New York City and sang in various incarnations all through high school. Songwriter Ronnie Mack heard them and got them to record some of his material for a demo tape. Together, they made some minor noise on the independent scene, but when Mack met the Tokens (of “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” fame), their situation improved. Operating under the name “Bright Tunes,” the Tokens signed Mack and the Chiffons. They recorded “He’s So Fine” with the Tokens providing the musical accompaniment. It was released on Laurie Records and topped the charts for four weeks. Less than two months after his composition’s phenomenal success, Mack collapsed and was diagnosed as suffering from Hodgkin’s Disease. Shortly after receiving a gold record for his efforts (while still in the hospital), he passed away.

Saddened and without a songwriter, the Chiffons’ career fell into the hands of the Tokens, who attempted to keep them on track and introduced them to songwriters Gerry Goffin and Carole King. At the time, Little Eva, juvenile star



and singer of "The Locomotion," was having trouble maintaining her career. Goffin and King had written "One Fine Day" with her in mind, and she recorded it. But they were unsure of whether her version would be welcome on the pop charts. Harboring these doubts, they became convinced that, being another "fine" song, "One Fine Day" would be perfect for the Chiffons. Little Eva's vocals were removed and replaced with the Chiffons'. A #5 hit was the result.

While "He's So Fine" was upbeat, "One Fine Day" was positively ebullient. With a joyous, stuttering piano part played by King, and the Chiffons' chant of "dooby dooby dooby dooby shoo-wop bop," you'd think that lead singer Judy Craig had just won the lottery. According to the lyrics, though, she hadn't even gotten the guy yet. She just feels so good about herself that she knows eventually she will. The power of positive thinking can work wonders and, for the time being, the Chiffons were doing just "fine."

### GREAT HITS

JUNE 1963

#10

PRIDE AND JOY—MARVIN GAYE

## JUNE 1963 #18 THE GOOD LIFE—TONY BENNETT

Louis Armstrong, who is perhaps the single greatest musical genius of the twentieth century, once said, "If Tony Bennett...can't send you, there's a psychiatrist right down the street from you. Dig him." Indeed.

Tony Bennett has managed to be an important stylistic interpreter for his entire professional career (1950- ), and yet he hasn't seen a Top 40 record since 1965. How a singer who can display talent and tastefulness as well as he has for the past three decades and yet never achieve Top 40 status is truly an anomaly. The fact that he has sung definitive renditions of beautiful songs like "Once Upon a Time," "If I Love Again," "This Is All I Ask," "I'll Be Around," "Fly Me to the Moon," "The Shadow of Your Smile," ad infinitum, without popular hit status proves that the Top 40 is not only fallible, but that it requires interpretation, not only for what it contains, but for what it lacks. I cannot explain the reason for these oversights, but I certainly can bemoan them.

"The Good Life" is one of the relatively few examples of Bennett's artistry that charted. It is succinct (the song consists of nothing but two verses sung back to back) while explaining the inherent contradictions of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. "The Good Life" implies "I am aware of what you perceive, but what you see is not what it is cracked up to be." In other words, things (as in "the good life") aren't always as they seem.

One thing that is evident in abundance on the recording is Bennett's vocal talent. Any singer who can claim influences as fundamentally valid as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Art Tatum, Lester Young, or even Bing Crosby had better be good, but for Bennett, these aren't mere claims. As Buddy Rich, the best drummer who ever lived, once said, "He's a Picasso, he's a Rembrandt, and he's pop art, all at the same time."



**AUGUST 1963 #4 HEAT WAVE—MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS**

**M**artha Reeves worked as a secretary at Motown, and although she had ambitions of being a recording star, she patiently toiled at her tasks and waited for the opportunity to present itself. The family atmosphere that had been an integral stimulus for the company's early success often meant that employees were called on to perform tasks that were outside their job descriptions. In just such a situation, Reeves would sometimes find herself singing backup vocals on songs, such as Marvin Gaye's "Hitch Hike" and "Stubborn Kind of Fellow," with her

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1963	#6
<b><u>THEN HE KISSED ME</u>—THE CRYSTALS</b>	
AUGUST 1963	#7
<b><u>SURFER GIRL</u>—THE BEACH BOYS</b>	
AUGUST 1963	#8
<b><u>MONKEY TIME</u>—MAJOR LANCE</b>	

group, the Del-Phis. Their first chance to record for themselves came when Mary Wells missed a scheduled recording date. With the producers at a loss and unwilling to waste the session, they recruited Reeves and her group to sing. The record flopped, but Berry Gordy saw enough potential to sign them, renamed the Vandellas. Writers/producers Lamont Dozier and brothers Eddie and Brian Holland were assigned to the act, and in May 1963 "Come and Get These Memories" became the team's first hit. Work began on their follow-up, and by late in what had been a fortuitously hot summer, "Heat

Wave" was dominating the airwaves.

After the bland pop of "Come and Get These Memories," "Heat Wave" was a revelation. It was a much more appropriate setting for Reeves's hard, gutsy voice. The galloping rhythm of baritone sax, piano, vibes, and most importantly, drums, drove the song home while Reeves belted out her lines with an inspirational energy. The Vandellas do an admirable job of handling the lyrical responses, which rebound all over the background. The song rose quickly to #4, which left Gordy hungry for a follow-up. When "A Love Like Yours" failed to capitalize on the momentum of its predecessor, he ordered Holland-Dozier-Holland to revert to the formula they used on "Heat Wave" for their next release. The inferior copycat song "Quicksand" was the result, and despite—or perhaps because of—its obvious similarity to "Heat Wave," it reached #8.

**SEPTEMBER 1963 #2 BE MY BABY—THE RONETTES**

**P**hil Spector is probably the only man in the world who would claim that the castanets are an integral instrument to rock-and-roll production. They are a ubiquitous part of his production technique, along with string arrangements, horn arrangements, and more echo than the Grand Canyon is capable of. Speaking of echo, listen to the opening drum beat of "Be My Baby," played by Hal Blaine. Can that possibly be an ordinary drum kit, or did Spector bring in various explosive devices and set them to detonate in a rhythmic pattern? Regard-



ing his production techniques, Spector once said, “I imagined a sound—a sound so strong that if the material wasn’t the greatest, the sound would carry the record.” Can you imagine hearing this bombast *in your head*? No wonder he seemed to go off from time to time.

The production technique Spector used was dubbed “the wall of sound,” but that suggests an impenetrable, flat sonority. To my ears, it is more like a gigantic room, an Astrodome of sound. Of course, that doesn’t sound very poetic, and the Astrodome didn’t open until 1965, so “wall of sound” had to suffice. Spector called his constructions “little symphonies for the kids,” which is also a catchy phrase but again not necessarily appropriate. What symphony ever featured a dense, monotonous echo as its mainstay? That isn’t to say Spector didn’t utilize a contingent of musicians large enough to give any symphony orchestra (and corresponding chorale) a sizable run for its money. Spector’s real genius lay in the practical matter of mathematics. How could anybody record so many conflicting sounds, all vying for aural space, with only a three- or four-track recorder? Lesser mortals would invariably end up with mud. But Spector worked out a formula that allowed him to dump the entire rhythm section onto one track, using the remainder for strings, horns, and vocals. He avoided muddying the final product through an intricate alteration of the echo, and through an innate understanding of overdubbing methods.

“Be My Baby” was, in many ways, Spector’s baby. Ever since he first saw the Ronettes, and Veronica in particular, he was determined to have a hit record with them. The group consisted of sisters Veronica and Estelle Bennett and their cousin, Nedra Talley. He originally offered Veronica a solo deal, but her mother—his future mother-in-law—intervened. Spector convinced Mrs. Bennett that he would give her daughter a #1 hit, and she, in turn, convinced him to sign the entire group.

Veronica, or Ronnie, had a voice that was far from classic, but it was instantly identifiable. She had a reedy sound and a unique timbre, which allowed her to project her voice above the din, a necessary feature for a Spector production. It’s funny how things turn out, because the Ronettes’ lasting popularity has since made Ronnie Spector’s voice classic by definition. Phil Spector missed out on his promise when “Be My Baby” stopped at #2,

### GREAT HITS

SEPTEMBER 1963 #2  
SALLY GO 'ROUND THE ROSES—  
THE JAYNETS

SEPTEMBER 1963 #4  
BUSTED—RAY CHARLES

SEPTEMBER 1963 #4  
CRY BABY—GARNET MIMMS  
AND THE ENCHANTERS

### GREAT MISSES

SEPTEMBER 1963 #1  
SUGAR SHACK—JIMMY GILMER  
& THE FIREBALLS

How could anybody record so many conflicting sounds, all vying for aural space, with only a three- or four-track recorder?



but like horseshoes and hand grenades, close counts. The Ronettes became stars, but Phil Spector’s growing obsession with Ronnie soon caused him to make certain that their chart history would be short-lived.

## NOVEMBER 1963 #2 CAN I GET A WITNESS—MARVIN GAYE

**M**arvin Gay was raised in Washington, D.C., where he was a member of a vocal group called the Marquees. They sang the popular doo-wop-style songs of the day and had a few original numbers, as well. In the late '50s, they made some obscure recordings for Columbia’s Okeh label but in essence remained unknown. One day in 1958, the Moonglows, who were famous for their hits “Sincerely” and “The Ten Commandments of Love,” came to Washington for a concert appearance. The Marquees idolized the Moonglows and jockeyed hard to get an audition with their leader, Harvey Fuqua. Gay and his friends sang some songs for Fuqua, including his own “Ten Commandments.” Fuqua was impressed, particularly with Gay, but had no immediate use for them.

A few months later, the Moonglows disbanded. Rather than give up on the group, Fuqua recalled the ambitious teenagers who were so adept at mimicking the Moonglows’ sound. He returned to Washington and made the Marquees an offer. Would they be interested in becoming the new Moonglows? In less time than it takes to say “Where do I sign?”, their bags were packed, and they were off to Chicago and Chess Records. Because of the ingenuity he displayed by resurrecting the Moonglows, Chess awarded Fuqua a salary and a job as a talent scout. The “new” Moonglows, however, were unable to duplicate the success of the original group.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1963 <u>LOUIE LOUIE</u> —THE KINGSMEN	#2
NOVEMBER 1963 <u>SINCE I FELL FOR YOU</u> —LENNY WELCH	#4

GREAT MISSES	
NOVEMBER 1963 <u>BOSSA NOVA BABY</u> —ELVIS PRESLEY	#8

At this time, Gwen Gordy and Billy Davis owned a small record company named after Gwen’s sister Anna. Anna Records was distrib-

uted by Chess and needed professional assistance with developing a catalog of artists. Fuqua hated the idea of reporting to work and punching a clock, so with the blessing of his bosses, he went to Anna Records. In a move that showed just how much faith he had in his newfound protégé, he brought Gay with him. Fuqua worked in artist development and promotion while Gaye (he added the “e” to his name to avoid any sexual connotation) passed the time by playing piano and drums at recording sessions. All the while, Fuqua was romancing Gordy, and Gaye was developing a relationship with her sister Anna. Although she was seventeen years older than Gaye, Anna Gordy was generally considered to be the catch of the town and more than equal to the task of holding her own with any man. By 1961, Harvey Fuqua and Gwen Gordy were married, with Gaye serving as best man. Later that



year, Gaye and Anna Gordy were married. Fuqua naturally agreed to be Gaye's best man, as well.

Gwen and Anna's brother, Berry Gordy Jr., had recently founded the Motown Record Corporation, and it wasn't long before he became acquainted with the various talents of his new brothers-in-law. The Gordys were an unusually close family. As a result, Fuqua and Gaye found themselves not only related, but constantly called upon for all sorts of tasks at Motown, as well as at Anna Records. Fuqua's marriage to Gwen had the effect of sounding the death knell for Anna Records. She became estranged from her business partner and subsequently focused most of her energy and attention on her brother's new project. By osmosis, Fuqua and Gaye found themselves working for their brother-in-law. Gaye harbored a desire to be a crooner along the lines of Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett, but Berry Gordy had other plans. He thought it would be appropriate to continue using Gaye as a session drummer while his performing and songwriting skills developed. Gaye knew he would have to succumb to Gordy's rules (everybody else did), but soon enough, he began cowriting hits, including "Beechwood 4-5789" by the Marvelettes.

By 1962, the Motown hit machine was operating full tilt, and there was little time for experimental studio sessions with untried artists. Still, nepotism had its advantages. Gaye recorded a handful of dismal flops until he finally reached the charts (#46) with "Stubborn Kind of Fellow," although Gaye himself disliked the recording. Gordy and Motown liked to push their vocalists to the threshold of their abilities by raising the key until they strained themselves while singing. Gaye's voice burns out and cracks against the unfriendly key, but the public seemed to like the raw edge in his voice. "Hitch Hike" (#30), "Pride and Joy" (#10), and "Can I Get a Witness" (#27) followed, one after another.

The influence of "Can I Get a Witness" is made obvious by the infinite number of cover versions it inspired. Although Gaye wasn't a gospel singer in the true sense, the song's gospel theme and style sounded appropriate when he sung them. The song has a hypnotic repetitiveness that suits Gaye's somewhat distracted vocal style. This marked his first collaboration with the writing and production team of Lamont Dozier and brothers Eddie and Brian Holland. The double-time beat and layered arrangement made "Can I Get a Witness" one of the best dance records of the year, which, to paraphrase another Motown song, is really saying something. In one inspired performance, Gaye and his producers combined gospel and rock-and-roll influences for a new, polished soul sound.

**By 1962, the Motown hit machine was operating full tilt, and there was little time for experimental studio sessions with untried artists.**

## NOVEMBER 1963 #23 IN MY ROOM—THE BEACH BOYS

**T**he California tract housing that sprang up in the '50s produced a new suburban culture that, for kids and teenagers, seemed a veritable playground. Warm



**The early Beach Boy sound was purely derivative, sounding like nothing more than what would happen if Chuck Berry met the Four Freshmen on the beach at Malibu.**

weather, the surf, girls galore (two for every boy!), movie stars, and Disneyland all spelled fun, fun, fun. In the early '60s, the culture was too new to have any fully developed identity and was looked upon by outsiders as shallow. In reality, suburban California couldn't have been that much different from suburban New York—just newer, prettier, cleaner, and warmer.

In the beginning, the Beach Boys were just a bunch of kids who made a somewhat crude attempt to copy the music they heard on the radio. Consisting of the three Wilson brothers—Brian, Dennis, and Carl—their cousin Mike Love and schoolmate Al Jardine, the Beach Boys began as a decidedly amateur venture that rehearsed rehashed versions of Chuck Berry tunes in their garage. Brian was the brains of the organization from the very beginning, but the full extent of his creative genius would take a few years to surface.

The Wilsons, headed by father and self-appointed group manager Murry Wilson, were a dysfunctional family in which constant beratings and beatings caused fear, anger, and humility to manifest themselves in varying degrees among the brothers. From the discord, Brian sought refuge in harmony. In a reversal of the normal singer/songwriter situation, he wrote songs that, to him, were pure escapist fantasy—but to many of his fans were a documented reality. He was never a surfer, but the perpetually displaced Brian wrote theme songs for the happy-go-lucky beach culture.

In an age when songs were typically provided by East Coast professionals, Brian Wilson was granted creative control of what record company executives perceived as a moronic and temporary teenage fad. From the beginning, though, the Beach Boys exhibited a quality that transcended the feeble expectations of the men in suits. The songs may have been trendy and superficial, but they were exhilarating, and those harmonies! A Beach Boys song was as refreshing as getting hit in the face with a mist of ocean brine. Within a year of their professional debut, Brian Wilson would become the band's sole producer, as well as their principal songwriter.

<b>GREAT HITS</b>	
<b>DECEMBER 1963</b>	<b>#4</b>
<b>SURFIN' BIRD—THE TRASHMEN</b>	

The early Beach Boy sound was purely derivative, sounding like nothing more than what would happen if Chuck Berry met the Four Freshmen on the beach at Malibu. The ridiculously naive surfer and car songs that Brian penned, with occasional input from Mike Love and his friend Gary Usher (his collaborator on "In My Room"), hid a sad vulnerability within the heart of the songwriter. The youthful innocence of songs like "Surfin' Safari," "Surfin' USA," "Surfer Girl," "Little Deuce Coupe," and "Fun, Fun, Fun" were only telling half the story that Brian inwardly felt compelled to express. It wasn't until the B side of "Be True to Your





School,” the latest Beach Boys teen theme, that Brian betrayed the loneliness he had kept hidden away. “In My Room” stood out in marked contrast to his other hits and gave us a personal glimpse inside Brian Wilson’s soul. It neglected the brilliance of California sunshine, instead taking comfort in isolated hibernation. Brian completely avoided the posturing of his early hits and sang quite openly about his moments of self-absorbed introspection. Little did he know at the time just how prophetic these words would become when, later in his life, he disappeared into his bedroom for three years in a serious state of mental instability. The sad feeling of isolation increased in poignancy when America was shattered by the most tumultuous news of the decade, namely that President Kennedy had been assassinated. In the quiet of their own bedrooms, kids all over the country reflected on the tragic event and asked themselves how something this horrible could happen. The Beach Boys’ music provided no answers, but “In My Room” sympathized with their newfound sense of uncertainty for the future while the rest of the group’s songs helped them forget about it entirely.





**Chapter  
Three**

**1964-1965**

**The Beatles**







## JANUARY 1964 # I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND—THE BEATLES

**B**efore the Beatles can be discussed properly, a bit of historical updating is in order. Americans were struck so suddenly and thoroughly by the Beatles that it was as though we were broadsided while waiting at an intersection. And don't think for a second that America was not waiting at an intersection.

The leaps and bounds rock and roll made in the '50s (some would say Neanderthal leaping and moronic bounding) had led nowhere by the '60s. It wasn't that the music was awful, but it had definitely lost its edge and reverted to generic, corporate-sponsored manipulation of the masses as opposed to any real type of musical adventure or rebellion. In a phrase, popular music was once again safe, unthreatening, and predictable. This was perfect for the money handlers because it became that much easier to create *and control* the artists who garnered sales.

In England, it was a completely different matter. Before 1964, English musical culture meant absolutely nothing to Americans, and usually, it was for good reason. The British musical establishment heard American rock and roll and tried to ignore it, so the majority of American music didn't chart in England. Instead the English did the same thing that Americans eventually did: they invented their own plasticized versions of what passed for real rock and roll. Billy Fury, Rory Storm (Ringo Starr's original boss), Cliff Richard, Tommy Steele, Marty Wilde, Adam Faith...all played the role of the definitive rocker, with about as much conviction as Pat Boone.

The English musical establishment was centered in London. While other cities developed musical scenes of their own, the powerful London nucleus viewed them mostly as regional rubes (I believe "hicks from the sticks" is the correct British terminology). The songwriters, producers, and radio and television shows were all based in the capital, so it seemed essential to be a Londoner if you were serious about becoming famous.

While American rock and roll was flourishing in the '50s, a curious musical hybrid called "skiffle" took England by storm. Consisting partly of English music-hall tunes and partly of a romanticized notion of what passed for American Negro folk music, skiffle had to be one of the most bizarre crossbreeds imaginable. Skiffle groups popped up like weeds all over Great Britain, aided by the simplicity of the music and the cheap instrumentation of a guitar, a banjo, a washboard, and a kazoo. But nowhere did skiffle sprout as uncontrollably as it did in Liverpool. Once skiffle groups filled up all the dance halls in this seaport city, they spilled over into coffee bars. Even basements of private residences were utilized and transformed into "jive hives."

By the '60s, skiffle had become more and more beat-influenced. Washboards gave way to drum sets and, because of the resultant increase in volume, acoustic guitars were traded in for electric guitars. Most of the material remained American in origin, but the beat groups brought an ama-

**While American rock and roll was flourishing in the '50s, a curious musical hybrid called "skiffle" took England by storm.**





**A major factor in the Beatles' dominance that is impossible to overemphasize was their songwriting prowess.**

teur charm and energy to their repertoire. In no time, Northern England had an estimated 350 beat groups working the local dances and nightclubs. All the while, London remained scornfully oblivious to the trend, instead opting for either "trad jazz" (another ungodly bastardization of an American music form), blues, or commercialized pop.

The luckier beat groups were booked by agents and sent abroad to Germany, particularly Hamburg, where they played their interpretations of American music for the local Germans and American military personnel. The hours and pay were atrocious, and the conditions worse, but the experience was priceless. This pattern, from Liverpool skiffle to Hamburg rock and roll, was followed by many groups, and the Beatles, of course, were among them. As the music got louder and the scene grew bigger, the bands got better, and London could no longer ignore the beat-crazy Northerners. Through tireless effort, the Beatles rose to the top of their scene, and they became the most popular group in the country.

A major factor in the Beatles' dominance that is impossible to overemphasize was their songwriting prowess. While most of their competitors continued to look toward America for material, the Beatles were becoming self-reliant. They were innately aware that their favorite artists (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Arthur Alexander, Smokey Robinson) broke the mold and wrote their own material, and as a form of emulation, they wrote their own material as well. In America, the idea of a self-contained beat group was fairly new. The groups that America knew of were mostly singing groups, which usually required songwriters, producers, and instrumentalists. The idea that a group with four or five members could handle all of these responsibilities (except production) for themselves was considered extraordinary.

"I Want to Hold Your Hand" brought an energy back to rock and roll that had become heretofore all but dead in America. Since England was somewhat behind America musically, the Beatles still maintained the energy that was part and parcel of '50s American rock and roll. While America lost track, these four guys from Liverpool set us straight. We didn't even know what we were missing until the Beatles helped us rediscover it. "I Want to Hold Your Hand" was not intended to be revolutionary, but considering the status quo here at home, it was. Upon hearing it, America went nuts, and "I Want to Hold Your Hand" became the #1 song for seven weeks running.

## **JANUARY 1964 #14 I SAW HER STANDING THERE—THE BEATLES**

One, two, three, FOUR!

**A**fter Paul McCartney's count-off, the Beatles launched into what was, to paraphrase Chuck Berry, the "rockingest little record" of 1964. Out of England, out



of left field, seemingly out of thin air, the Beatles delivered what was then and still is one of the most straight-out perfect rock-and-roll records ever recorded. And it's a B side! Just how awesome were these long-haired guys from Liverpool? In 1964, we didn't even know the half of it.

Analysts who needed an excuse to explain how the Beatles rocketed to stardom came up with a variety of explanations—some valid, some absurd. From various sources, their success has been attributed to a) their unusual attitude toward fame, b) their haircuts, c) their sharp, quick-witted humor, d) their manager, and e) a combination of their luck and the public's stupidity. Some theorized that American youth had been jolted so badly by the Kennedy assassination that the English Beatles gave them an emotional outlet by inducing a form of societal amnesia. Hindsight being 20/20, there is little doubt today that the Beatles' fame was the natural result of overwhelming talent. Just a casual listen to "I Saw Her Standing There" shows the song as something special and the Beatles as talented writers, singers, and performers. The ultimate irony is that the Beatles' influences were almost exclusively American. Like a mirror in a fun house, the Beatles reflected our own distorted image. All the while, we were sleeping with this beast and never knew it! It took the Beatles to recognize it, wake it up, and unleash it on the world. Once again, as in the mid-'50s, America was caught completely unaware of what lay beneath the inner folds of its own culture.

## JANUARY 1964 #8 ANYONE WHO HAD A HEART—DIONNE WARWICKE

ometimes think Dionne Warwick must have felt that the music industry was conspiring against her. Time after time, songs she recorded had to compete with cover versions by other artists. In England, competition for her material was so fierce that her own singles often never stood a chance. In 1964, it seemed that every English girl (and even a pair of guys) with a recording contract was covering Warwick's records. In quick succession, Cilla Black released "Anyone Who Had a Heart" (February), Dusty Springfield released "Wishin' and Hopin'" (July), and Sandie Shaw released "There's Always Something There to Remind Me" (October). Representing the men, "Message to Michael" was a hit for Adam Faith (with the title "Message to Martha"), and "Trains and Boats and Planes" was a hit for Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. Meanwhile, in the states, Aretha Franklin eventually reinvented "I Say a Little Prayer" and inadvertently claimed the song as her own. Even "Alfie" had to compete for chart space with an alternate version by Cher!

Warwick was understandably miffed by the attention other singers were giving her songs and did not hesitate to say so. One incident that can truly qualify as a conspiracy concerns "Anyone Who Had a Heart." Warwick had just become an international star after the release of her first album and companion single, "Don't

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1964	#4
<u>JAVA</u> —AL HIRT	

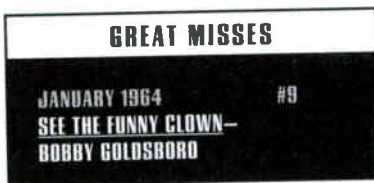


Make Me Over.” Europe in particular was enthralled with her talent (and material), and singers began recording her songs, which were written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, left and right. “Anyone Who Had a Heart” was released in the U.S. and was successful enough to warrant a British release. George Martin, a producer now famous for his work with the Beatles, and Cilla Black were aware of this. With advance notice and a desire to capitalize on the song, they rush-recorded a version and managed to release it just before Warwicke’s original was issued. This gave Black a #1 record in England while Warwicke’s became an also-ran. Of course, Warwicke didn’t have exclusive rights to Bacharach and David’s material, but she was the artist of choice to help them realize their ambitions as songwriters. This, at the least, meant that she usually was given the first opportunity to interpret their songs. If her recordings had been less universal in their appeal, she most likely would not have suffered from such stifling competition.

“Anyone Who Had a Heart” has a constantly shifting time signature that makes the song difficult to tap your foot to, so it has almost no appeal as a dance record. The odd meter works by adding tension to David’s lyrics, which makes the song feel slightly off balance. Since the song is about someone who is feeling uncertain, you can be sure this was no accident. Few songwriters have been more deliberate in their craft than Bacharach, and this song is an excellent example of what he was capable of achieving.

## JANUARY 1964 #24 BABY I LOVE YOU—THE RONETTES

**W**hen made up for a live performance, the Ronettes really were a sight to behold. A unique bloodline that combined African-American, European, and Cherokee extraction gave them a naturally exotic look that made them simultaneously undefinable and desirable. Pink lipstick, eyeliner so heavy it could have been applied with a toothbrush, and high beehive hairdos that probably disoriented the flight patterns at nearby airports all combined to make them ’60s sex symbols.



The Ronettes—consisting of sisters Veronica and Estelle Bennett and their cousin Nedra Talley—were raised in Spanish Harlem and started singing locally as Ronnie and the Relatives, including an amateur night performance at the Apollo Theater. With one of the toughest and most demanding audiences anywhere, they survived their appearance, which in itself was

cause for celebration. They recorded a few minor releases for Colpix Records and became featured performers at the Peppermint Lounge, New York’s home of the twist craze for the hopelessly elite. Rather brazenly (rumor says it was purely accidental—a crossed phone line, no less), Estelle called Phil Spector and arranged for an audition. Spector barely had to listen to them sing. He was thoroughly impressed with lead singer Ronnie and signed the group immediately.



Despite the fact that he was already married, Spector fell head over heels in love. He was determined to make Veronica Bennett a star and lavished his attention on her. Like most other things in his life, Spector's nature toward her was all-consuming. Bennett was flattered to be the focus of a man as worldly as Spector, and the way he authoritatively handled the sessions for their first single, "Be My Baby," only reinforced her impression.

"Baby I Love You" followed four months later and was just as good as its predecessor, but for some reason it stalled at #24. This may have been as much by design as by fate. Spector had become terribly overprotective of Bennett, and he curtailed her public appearances. They released three more singles in 1964—"(The Best Part of) Breakin' Up," "Do I Love You," and "Walking in the Rain"—but by then Spector no longer wanted Bennett in the limelight, and since he had grown tired of the entire girl-group genre anyway, the Ronettes completely vanished from the Top 40. Spector's girl-group days were over. Instead, he would concentrate on his new prospect, the Righteous Brothers. He divorced his first wife to marry Bennett, but not before he very deliberately dismantled her career. It was only a matter of time before her husband's worldly nature became a suffocating vacuum. Ronnie Spector eventually was kept hidden in the bowels of his mansion, locked behind an electrical fence and iron gate. They divorced in 1973.

Both "Be My Baby" and "Baby I Love You" are credited to Spector, Ellie Greenwich, and Jeff Barry. I think it is safe to assume that the songs were essentially complete when they left Aldon Music, the publishing company where Greenwich and Barry worked. Spector most likely added his name to the credits after completing the production chores. Considering the time and energy he put into his productions, this wasn't necessarily inappropriate. After all, only Spector could make "Be My Baby" into "BE MY BABY." The same holds true for "Baby I Love You." Most Spector-related material blurred the line between songwriting and production because his sound was so identifiable. Imagine, for example, if Tony Orlando had sung either of these songs with a different producer. This was actually quite possible since he was a recording artist in his own right and also worked at Aldon Music. Chances are better than even that they would be as forgotten as the balance of Orlando's early output. Iconoclast and visionary, Spector gave his songs an identity that lives well into the present.

**Most Spector-related material blurred the line between songwriting and production because his sound was so identifiable.**

## FEBRUARY 1964 #3 PLEASE PLEASE ME—THE BEATLES

**P**lease Please Me" was the third Beatles single to reach the Top 40 in the U.S. (after "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "She Loves You"), but it had already been released in England thirteen months earlier—a pop music eternity. Americans had missed out on the first stage of the Beatles' career and now were swiftly





playing catch-up. Since it was unprecedented for a foreign act to penetrate the American music charts with any degree of consistency, a brief synopsis of the Beatles' English chart history is in order here.

"Love Me Do," released in October 1962, was their first single. Its quaint simplicity and the rather novel fact that they wrote it themselves helped earn the song a modest place on the British Top 20. Their English label, EMI Parlophone, offered the record to its American branch, Capitol Records, which predictably dismissed it as completely inappropriate for the U.S. market. The Beatles' second English single was the one that defined them as a force to be reckoned with. "Please Please Me"

was released three months after "Love Me Do" and became the Beatles' first U.K. #1 hit. Its success spurred the rush-release of their debut album of the same name, which was recorded from start to finish in half a day. Again, Capitol was offered the single and, once again, they said "no thanks," for much the same reason as before.

Eventually, it was passed to the Vee-Jay label,

which decided to risk it. Released in February 1963, it failed miserably, not even reaching the Top 100.

Back in England, though, each of the Beatles' next three singles ("From Me to You," "She Loves You," "I Want to Hold Your Hand") all reached #1, and the group had become a full-blown sensation, the most popular act in English history (already!). In America, Vee-Jay picked up "From Me to You" and released it in May 1963, but the results were as disastrous as their previous attempt. Del Shannon ("Runaway") also covered it, but he missed the Top 40 as well. "She Loves You" was the fourth single the Beatles offered to Capitol, and it was also their fourth refusal. This time Vee-Jay passed as well, still smarting from its previous two flops. Then Swan Records, a tiny but brave independent label, picked it up, and it sold in a trickle—that is, until Capitol was practically forced to release the Beatles' fifth

U.K. single, "I Want to Hold Your Hand." To say that it became a surprise smash hit would be an understatement. Swan was suddenly facing an overwhelming demand for "She Loves You" from record buyers who were hungry for everything available by this remarkable new group.

Vee-Jay was dumbfounded. Before the explosion of interest, its executives were wiping egg off their faces and considering themselves duped. Now, all of a sudden, this ridiculous group of English weirdos who had cost them two consecutive flops was a national phenomenon, more famous than Elvis Presley! Miffed but alert, they realized that the coal in their vaults had magically alchemized into jewels. They dug through their dusty gems and rereleased "Please Please Me" in February 1964. Riding the crest of the wave, Vee-Jay and the Beatles had the #3 record in the country, blocked from the top by the other Beatles releases. Three

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1964	#1
SHE LOVES YOU—THE BEATLES	

**Riding the crest of the wave, Vee-Jay and the Beatles had the #3 record in the country, blocked from the top by the other Beatles releases.**





times in less than a month, and on three different record labels, the Beatles dominated the charts. Inexplicably and unpredictably, they *owned* American popular music.

How “Please Please Me” didn’t catch on in the first place is beyond me. Pop songs don’t get any more catchy than this. The swirling vocals of John Lennon and Paul McCartney drift all over the place in a nearly demented state of bliss while the musical energy is so infectious as to be stunning. More than thirty years later, this performance can generate almost as much excitement as it did then. Not only was there no American counterpart for the Beatles in wit and appearance, but there was no equivalent for their raw talent and energy either. “Please Please Me” was so good that it probably would have been a hit for *anybody*, but the Beatles’ execution of the tune was so perfect that it rendered any other version, then or now, unthinkable. Today, “I Want to Hold Your Hand” has been overplayed and “She Loves You” is one of the few Beatles tunes that has not aged well, but “Please Please Me,” like most in the Beatles’ catalog, still packs a visceral punch.

## FEBRUARY 1964 #12 I ONLY WANT TO BE WITH YOU— DUSTY SPRINGFIELD

**B**efore the invasion of 1964, British artists were rarely seen on the American charts. One notable exception was “Silver Threads and Golden Needles” by the Springfields, which reached #20 in September 1962. This was more than a year before the Beatles introduced themselves to America, which made the Springfields pioneers of a sort. Mary O’Brien, the group’s female vocalist, soon pursued a solo career as Dusty Springfield, taking a surname from her previous band. In February 1964, she released “I Only Want to Be with You,” a lively dance song inspired by American R&B that had a sound quite apart from the rest of the English bands.

The song features a full orchestra with carefully arranged beat rhythms and background vocals that somehow avoid sounding overarranged, simply because Springfield’s voice sounds so natural on top of everything. Unlike many of her British contemporaries, who usually sounded almost painfully English (Cilla Black, Sandie Shaw, etc.), Springfield has a singing voice and style that fit right in with her American counterparts. Although she can belt out a song with the best of them, she never oversings and sounds like she is enjoying every second of the performance. Considering her self-described penchant for singing “big, ballady things,” none of her later hits would sound as fun as “I Only Want to Be with You.”

Springfield became a host on the English TV series *Ready, Steady, Go*, and she did everything she could to give credit where credit was due. She introduced many black artists to the show’s producer, twenty-one-year-old Vicki Wickham, who in

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1964	#5
<u>FUN, FUN, FUN—THE BEACH BOYS</u>	



turn introduced them to the show's audience. Her love of black music, particularly the Motown sound, led to her hosting the British TV special *The Sounds of Motown* when the Motown Revue toured England in 1965.

## FEBRUARY 1964 #28 I WISH YOU LOVE—GLORIA LYNNE

**G**loria Lynne was born in New York City in 1931. She rose up through the local music scene and, like many pop artists after her, got her big break in 1951 when she won Amateur Night at the Apollo Theater. Since then, she straddled the line between pop and jazz while recording for Everest Records, until she slipped into obscurity. She was a substantial and classy act in her time, but she has since become thoroughly slighted by history. Granted, she only reached the Top 40 once, and even then her appearance was marginal when "I Wish You Love" stalled at #28. Still, her talent deserves better recognition. Music encyclopedias, from the all-inclusive variety to those that specialize in pop, jazz, R&B/soul, or even rock and roll (admittedly a far-fetched possibility) almost without fail neglect to mention her existence.

I have three theories, a combination of which might explain why Lynne seems to have fallen through the cracks. First, she didn't neatly fit into any one category, so historians from each genre essentially disowned her. Jazz critics wouldn't compromise themselves to include such a pop-oriented artist, while pop historians didn't see fit to include such a marginal artist who only once scraped her way onto the Top 40. Second, she wasn't innovative in the sense that later singers would go around claiming her as a major influence. On the contrary, she displayed her own influences quite openly whenever she sang, from Dinah Washington to Ella Fitzgerald to Mahalia Jackson, perhaps even including a touch of Billie Holiday. Third, 1964 was a rather inopportune time for a pop-oriented jazzbo to debut on the popular scene. She could hardly have been more out of touch with contemporary trends, and no amount of subtle classiness could save her from the overwhelming immediacy of the mid-'60s pop scene.

"I Wish You Love" was a timeless song that, paradoxically, was out of time. Today, it sounds as gorgeous and yet as out of place as it must have in 1964. The lyrics bestow a philanthropic blessing upon an ex-beau in a manner that is as beautiful as it is rare; if only all romantic encounters could end with this much goodwill. Lynne's voice and style evoke a smoke-filled nightclub, a spaghetti-strapped evening gown with sequins, heavy eye makeup, and a spotlight that focuses on a woman who stands alone at center stage, pouring her heart out. Silky smooth, compassionate, and generous in spirit, "I Wish You Love" overcomes its sentimentality because of Lynne's first-class interpretation. It may not fit neatly into any specific genre, and today it remains something of an anomaly, but its qualities remain undeniable.



## MARCH 1964 #1 CAN'T BUY ME LOVE—THE BEATLES

One advantage the Beatles had by breaking more than a year later in America than in their native England was that they seemed to grow at an exponential rate almost instantly. Two years of musical growth were crammed into two months, and for Americans, it was more than we could comprehend. The first sign of the group's transition from youthful and energetic charm to ingeniously structured and mature pop came in March with "Can't Buy Me Love."

Like most all of the early Beatles songs, "Can't Buy Me Love" possessed an elusive, ungraspable quality that made it stand out above everything else on the pop charts. Sure, the Beatles looked lovable and sounded different, but these were superficial qualities. I think one of the most important factors—no, the most important factor of their musical appeal—lay in their uncanny ability to imbue well-crafted and imaginative pop melodies with a sense of honesty and emotion. Underneath their shaking, screaming, hairy heads, I sense a combination of English pathos and American blues that gives their rave-ups a depth that transcends the beat or the melody. Even a song as bland and whitewashed as "Love Me Do" has a verse that validates the sweetness of the chorus with minor-key intonations in which McCartney moans the title in a manner that suggests a knowledge of blue notes. John Lennon's singing style, from the very beginning, sounds as though he's expunging the spirit of some unfathomable ghost; his vocal on "Twist and Shout" sounds so uninhibited that it is disarming. Of course, it's easy to philosophize now. At the time, they were just the coolest (if you were a male) or the dreamiest (if you were a female) band around, and even a child could sense musical growth from "Love Me Do" to "Can't Buy Me Love."

A spirit of outright professionalism embodies "Can't Buy Me Love," which made even nonbelievers raise an eyebrow (or two). This was no band of one-trick ponies, that was for sure. The song not only rocks, it swings. The heavy backbeat of the Beatles' previous singles is not at all diminished, but a swinging triplet feel brings a bounce to the song that previously would have seemed unlikely. It was only their second "official" (i.e., Capitol) release in America, but it was completely devoid of any self-conscious deliberation that occasionally hampers sophomore efforts. This was because it was really their sixth release in England, and a handful of others preceded it in America, as well.

Advance orders for "Can't Buy Me Love" topped two million. On April 4, 1964, the Beatles' dominance of the charts was absolute. A glance at the top five songs of this date bears it out:

- #1) "Can't Buy Me Love"—The Beatles (five weeks)
- #2) "Twist and Shout"—The Beatles
- #3) "She Loves You"—The Beatles (previously #1 for two weeks)

**A spirit of outright professionalism embodies "Can't Buy Me Love," which made even nonbelievers raise an eyebrow [or two].**



#4) "I Want to Hold Your Hand"—The Beatles (previously #1 for seven weeks)

#5) "Please Please Me"—The Beatles

Also, seven other singles were on the Top 100, and the group's albums, *Meet the Beatles* and *Introducing the Beatles*, occupied the top two spots on the album chart. What chart hogs they were! The impossible mission of the Beatles was accomplished.

## MARCH 1964 #3 SUSPICION—TERRY STAFFORD

Well, if Elvis wasn't going to do it for himself, then I suppose there was nothing wrong with Terry Stafford doing it for him. By 1964, Elvis had moved so far away from the rock-and-roll image he started out with that you had to squint just to recognize him. His movies came first, and as a result, his music suffered. Nineteen sixty-three saw Elvis reach the Top 10 twice with the completely lame titles, "(You're the) Devil in Disguise" and "Bossa Nova Baby." In 1964, he still maintained enough momentum to reach the Top 40 eight times, but fans were finally catching on to the charade, and none of his singles sold in sufficient quantity to reach the Top 10.

Stafford might qualify as the first convincing Elvis impersonator. Hailing from Amarillo, Texas, he was signed to the independent Crusader label and promptly



began to do what Elvis seemed to be taking a hiatus from: recorded a legitimately good hit record. His first single was a Doc Pomus/Mort Shuman composition called "Suspicion," and it immediately drew attention and whetted the appetite of Elvis fans everywhere. At the time, the similarity to Elvis's singing style was eerie enough to convince most people that it *was* Elvis.

Even today, casual listeners often mistake this for an Elvis Presley recording. From my present perspective, Stafford sounds more like a Chris Isaak prototype than a "King" clone. Perhaps it was his second hit, the ludicrously silly "I'll Touch a Star," that permanently saddled him with the Presley comparison and ended his pop music career. "Suspicion," however, was very good in its own right, possessing a sullen, moody atmosphere drenched in a spooky echo with vocal accompaniment (sounds a little like a description of somebody else's early recordings, doesn't it?). Decidedly American and rootsy in content, it harkens back to the glory days of rock and roll when rural America was supplying inspiration for the rest of the country. Stafford might not have been thoroughly original, but his handling of the Pomus/Shuman composition (which most certainly was original) was simultaneously nostalgic and a breath of fresh air.



## MARCH 1964 #6 GLAD ALL OVER—DAVE CLARK FIVE

In early 1964, the Beatles opened up a sluice across the Atlantic wide enough to fit a small country, and that is pretty much what happened next. Before you could say “Yeah, Yeah, Yeah,” dozens of English bands had washed up on the shores of the United States and infiltrated, then inundated, our pop charts. One of the first and best of these was the Dave Clark Five, with their single “Glad All Over.” Their success was so overwhelming and immediate that the press instantly pitted them against the Beatles as artistic rivals, which they weren’t, but it sold magazines.

Americans were blown away by the English bands’ driving interpretations of American music styles, and none of them was more driving than the Dave Clark Five. On “Glad All Over,” a simple, relentless pounding of eighth notes carries the entire song, with call-and-response verses sung so loudly that the band surely could have won first prize in a screaming contest. Without much of a melody and words that were basically banal, the song’s saving grace was its rawness. Keep in mind that the Rolling Stones would have to wait eight more months for a Top 10 hit in America. Within the next five months, the Dave Clark Five would hit the Top 10 four times!

The band rolled through this song with enough power and volume to scare the heck out of anyone over thirty. In 1964, parents who felt that rock and roll was nothing but noise had this song to help make their point. The only thing to compete with the blaring vocals was Dave Clark’s jackhammer drumbeat: “I’m feeling...*pow!* *pow!*...GLAD ALL OVER...*pow!* *pow!* *pow!* *pow!*...GLAD ALL OVER...”

In England “Glad All Over” replaced “I Want to Hold Your Hand” at #1, allowing Epic Records to brag that it had “the band that knocked the Beatles off the charts.”

## MARCH 1964 #11 THE WAY YOU DO THE THINGS YOU DO— THE TEMPTATIONS

Judging from Motown’s roster, it sometimes seems as if every black kid who grew up around Detroit in the late ’50s was musically talented. Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Marvin Gaye, Mary Wells, the Marvellettes, Martha and the Vandellas, and numerous others were all contributing to the cottage industry that became Motown. When Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. offered Otis Williams and the Distant an audition for his label after hearing them perform live, he was simply delving into the wellspring of local talent. Like so many others, the Distant were looking for a ticket out of a life spent working at a local car factory, and music was the most hopeful and glamorous alternative.

Otis Williams began trying to sing professionally as soon as he was old enough to take it seri-

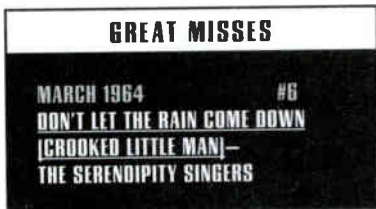






ously. He formed groups whose names and members changed constantly, but he held fast to his original intentions. Once he had established himself somewhat, he wanted to recruit bass singer Melvin Franklin, but when they met on the street, Franklin was afraid of him. Williams had a street-tough air, so when he came walking toward Franklin and called his name, Franklin was worried. Williams's processed hair and leather jacket screamed "gang member," so Franklin discreetly crossed the street to avoid any confrontation. When Williams crossed over to catch up to him, Franklin doubled back, convinced that Williams was

going to rough him up. When they finally came face to face, Franklin was relieved to hear Williams explain why he was chasing him. Franklin replied that he could only join if he got his mother's permission, so Williams agreed to speak with her. While Franklin hid behind a tree, Williams approached his mother's house and soon convinced her that her son Melvin would do just fine in the Distant.



The first two members of what was to become the classic Temptations lineup had come together. Despite their inauspicious beginning, the two became fast friends.

At the same time, another band called the Primes was playing around Detroit. Members Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, and Kell Osborne were making a name for themselves with sophisticated three-part harmonies and clever choreography that greatly impressed the Distant. But managerial problems soon splintered the group, and they faced an uncertain future. The Distant were hardly doing better. Through attrition, they were whittled down to three members just before they were due to audition for Motown. Accepting an invitation from Williams,

Eddie Kendricks and Paul Williams jumped ship and signed on to assist Otis Williams and the Distant for their tryout. Three Distant (Otis Williams, Melvin Franklin, and Al Bryant) combined with two Primes (Eddie Kendricks and Paul Williams), and together they passed the audition. Back then, Paul Williams was usually the lead singer, while Kendricks's falsetto would occasionally be featured. All they needed was a new moniker, and the Temptations sounded about as good as anything.

**Gordy was a gambling man, and he made a bet with Smokey Robinson to see who would finally provide the song that would catapult the Temptations onto the charts.**

The band's first releases were cut in 1961 on Gordy's short-lived Miracle Records, whose slogan was "If it's a hit, it's a Miracle." This proved to be ironically prophetic when none of their records went anywhere, and the label soon folded. Nineteen sixty-two saw them relocated to the main label, but still there were no hits. They even attempted releasing a song as the Pirates, which had no better luck. Nineteen sixty-three wasn't any better, but the Temptations were persistent and, luckily, Gordy didn't give up on them. It soon became a personal challenge for



him to get them their first hit. Gordy was a gambling man, and he made a bet with Smokey Robinson to see who would finally provide the song that would catapult the Temptations onto the charts.

Meanwhile, tensions were developing within the band. Bryant was becoming increasingly difficult and at one point even assaulted Paul Williams with a beer bottle during a backstage argument. The Ruffin brothers, Jimmy and David, were both talented singers who expressed interest in joining the Temptations. Once Bryant's aberrant behavior had become unbearable, the others decided to dismiss him, and his likely replacement was to be Jimmy Ruffin. One night, though, David Ruffin spontaneously jumped onstage with the band during an encore, and the audience went into a frenzy because of his rousing performance. Overnight, David became the newest member, and finally the classic lineup was complete. All they needed was a hit record, and it came when Robinson handily won his bet with Gordy by writing "The Way You Do the Things You Do" in tandem with fellow Miracle Bobby Rogers.

In typical Robinson fashion, the lyrics are a string of metaphors, comparing his girlfriend to a broom, a handle, a cool crook, a schoolbook, and even some perfume. The lyrics were silly but entertaining, and the jaunty melody virtually guaranteed the song hit status. Robinson opted to feature Eddie Kendricks on lead vocals, since he possessed a light tenor that was similar in quality to his own voice. They may have been late getting out of the gate, but the Temptations were finally off and running. It took three years and eight attempts, but the seemingly never-ending string of hits that started with "The Way You Do the Things You Do" would soon enough separate them from the rest of the pack.

## MARCH 1964 #13 NEEDLES AND PINS—THE SEARCHERS

**T**he question remains: what is a "pinza"? Songwriters have since learned that if you want to carry a note, you need a vowel. The solution here is "since we don't have one, make one." That's how it begins.

"Needles and Pins," written by Jack Nietszche and Sonny Bono, was originally a minor hit for Jackie De Shannon. What makes the Searchers' version unique is that it reworks and improves on the original. Most British Invasion bands made a mess of the American songs they attempted to cover. American soul and R&B were usually rendered pointless with overenergized versions devoid of any emotional depth. "Needles and Pins," in the hands of the Searchers, actually became more soulful than the original it emulated. They added a rich guitar sound and full harmonies, both a must for the Brit bands, and also maintained a measured pace that let the song speak for itself.

Most of the band, perhaps rightly, thought a good deal of their success was the result of taking a less hard-edged approach than many of their counterparts. Rather than taking risks, their follow-up singles continued to mellow. Bassist Tony Jackson, however, was annoyed by the self-imposed stylistic limitations and left the group, which caused them some identity problems. Keep in mind that in 1964



America was just getting used to rock-and-roll bands as a format. Personnel changes caused potential confusion for an audience that was just beginning to familiarize itself with this new brand of musical expression. As it was, the Searchers continued to recycle their successful formula (“When You Walk in the Room” being the most memorable example) until it began to wear thin. With a faceless image and tired style, the biggest hit of their career came with a pointlessly recycled song from their first album, a cover version of the Clovers’ “Love Potion #9.” Two more uninspiring appearances on the Top 40 followed (“What Have They Done to the Rain” and “Bumble Bee”) before they disappeared from the charts altogether.

### MARCH 1964 #30 AIN’T NOTHIN’ YOU CAN DO—BOBBY “BLUE” BLAND

I still can’t believe this song actually reached the pop music audience. By my own admission, the Top 40 is all too often a haven for the trite and the trendy. To see an artist as authentic and talented (and, unfortunately, as overlooked) as Bobby “Blue” Bland on the popular music charts is enough to warm the heart and restore faith in mankind. His style was more country soul than straight blues, but a vocalist of his caliber was as rare for the early ’60s as it still is today. Regrettably, these charts haven’t seen hide nor hair of him since “Ain’t Nothin’ You Can Do” dropped away in early 1964, but what a way to go. There aren’t many people in the world who can sing like this. Wilson Pickett inherited his trademark scream from Bland, but Pickett usually added a petulant selfishness to his style that often sounded like showboating. Bland could belt out a melody as powerfully as anyone, but there is an amazing sense of restraint about his performance that keeps the song firmly in control at all times. He also displays a sense of phrasing that is instructional to virtually anybody who claims to understand the art of singing.

Bland was raised in Memphis, Tennessee, where he became versed in gospel, blues, and R&B until they all meshed together into his own unique and influential sound. R&B hit records started coming in 1957, and by the early ’60s, his popularity grew enough for him to (miraculously) reach the pop charts four times, with “Turn on Your Lovelight,” “Call on Me” backed with “That’s the Way Love Is,” and “Ain’t Nothin’ You Can Do.” All the while, he remained a constant presence on the R&B charts right up until the mid-’80s. Among his R&B masterworks are such classics as “Farther up the Road” (repopularized by Eric Clapton), “Cry, Cry, Cry,” and “I Pity the Fool.” Today he continues to bring the house down whenever he performs his outstanding catalog of material onstage.

I fear that 96 percent of the music-buying public never heard “Ain’t Nothin’ You Can Do,” and another 3 percent heard only Van Morrison’s live version. I confess that I was originally among the estimated 3 percent and thought the song was one of Morrison’s better compositions. Little did I know. It is my aim in writing this historical overview to pique somebody’s curiosity enough for them to search out something they might otherwise have overlooked. Take my word,



you could do a lot worse than drop a few bucks on a Bobby “Blue” Bland recording. Chances are that if you do, you’ll cherish it forever.

## APRIL 1964 #1 MY GUY—MARY WELLS

**M**ary Wells came to Motown with an R&B-drenched tune called “Bye Bye Baby,” which she had written with Jackie Wilson in mind. Produced by Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr., it featured Wells as a gravelly voiced shouter and bore no resemblance to the cool, soothing tone of her later hits. It took the master of smooth, Smokey Robinson, to remove the edges and find the diamond in the rough. Robinson, who had recently proven himself with the Miracles’ “Shop Around,” had his own ideas for Wells. With newfound confidence in his songwriting talents and the freedom to do as he pleased, he took Wells under his wing and began polishing away at what was to become Motown’s crown jewel. Consecutively, he wrote and produced “The One Who Really Loves You,” “You Beat Me to the Punch,” and “Two Lovers.” The success of these hits and his own recordings with the Miracles made Robinson something of a Renaissance man at Motown. All three songs were released in 1962, and one followed the other into the Top 10. Robinson was hot and, by association, so was Wells.

As was eventually shown to be typical of Robinson’s songwriting, each of these songs used anomaly as its thematic base. “Two Lovers” in particular discusses what seems to be a tale of questionable morals until the last verse reveals that both lovers are the same man with a “split personality.” The next few singles were less successful, but by 1964 patience paid off when Wells had a #1 hit with Robinson’s “My Guy.” The song features a horn phrase that was so obviously lifted from the melody of “Canadian Sunset” that you can see the trace marks. It boasts a simple melody and structure that do nothing to impede the optimistic dedication described by the lyrics. Every girl wanted to find a boy she could feel this way about, and every boy wanted his girl to be this true. “My Guy” capitalized on this without ever patronizing the audience.

To support her international recognition with live appearances, Wells toured England with the Beatles, who couldn’t say enough good things about her. Motown further capitalized on her fame by organizing a set of duets with Marvin Gaye. Wells was growing accustomed to the attention and was tempted when 20th Century Fox began to woo her away with promises of movie stardom, promises they apparently did not intend to keep. Citing her youth as an escape clause from her contract, Wells quit Motown on her twenty-first birthday. Motown fought to retain her but lost. This left a bitter but certainly much wiser Gordy to patch up the damage and concentrate on his new starlets, the Supremes. Meanwhile, all of Motown watched closely and drew lessons while Wells, the apparent vic-

**Citing her youth as an escape clause from her contract, Wells quit Motown on her twenty-first birthday.**





tor, sank deeper and deeper into a sea of oblivion. Without the care and attention of someone as talented as Robinson to guide her and provide material, she was adrift and rudderless. After one Top 40 hit, she soon disappeared altogether, while back at Motown, her heirs, the Supremes, began their string of five consecutive #1 records.

## APRIL 1964 #17 WISH SOMEONE WOULD CARE—IRMA THOMAS

**W**ait! Don't turn the page! I accept the fact that the average person no longer remembers this song and doesn't have a clue who Irma Thomas is. But almost everybody knows the Rolling Stones' "Time Is on My Side" and probably Otis Redding's "Pain in My Heart." Both of these recordings were, generously speaking, inspired by Thomas (or to be less generous, were outright rip-offs of her earlier recordings), and to my taste the loneliness inherent in her well-paced originals surpasses either of these two knockoffs. Lonely songs were a specialty of hers. She had a bawdy humor that surfaced from time to time, but her lonely songs made the deepest impression and earned her the title "the queen of New Orleans soul."

Thomas's first single was written by Dorothy LaBostrie, whom you may recall was the shy songstress who provided "cleaned-up" lyrics for Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti." The song was called "(You Can Have My Husband, but Please) Don't Mess with My Man," which suggested that LaBostrie had rather adeptly overcome her shyness. It had trouble getting airplay because of its suggestive subject matter, but it was still important because it brought Thomas to the attention of New Orleans's premier songwriter, Allen Toussaint. Their compatibility was immediate. Toussaint wrote "Ruler of My Heart" and "It's Raining" specifically for Thomas, flavoring them with an autobiographical feel that suited her singing style. None of these songs touched the national charts, mostly because of the limited distribution offered by Toussaint's Minit Records, but they generated enough local attention to make her a resident New Orleans legend. When the much larger Imperial Records bought Minit, the distribution problem was eliminated. Thomas wrote her own next single, called "I Wish Someone Would Care," while reflecting on her personal misery, her recent success, and the temporary nature of fame. The song was a straight piece of autobiography that had a bone-shivering quality to it. Nationwide, record buyers had their first opportunity to hear her and bought the record in sufficient quantity for it to earn position #17. Thomas's vocals are moving, and the band is great. But mostly it is the pained honesty of her performance that makes the song so engrossing. Hear it once, and it is immediately

**Thomas wrote her own next single, called "I Wish Someone Would Care," while reflecting on her personal misery, her recent success, and the temporary nature of fame.**





obvious why she has been and still is lauded in her musical hometown. She has not written another song since.

## APRIL 1964 #35 THANK YOU GIRL—THE BEATLES

**B**etter late than never, and better to be a B side than no side at all. “Thank You Girl” was, from the very beginning, a victim of compromise. It was originally released in the U.K. in April 1963 as the flip side of “From Me to You.” When the same single was released in the U.S. on Vee-Jay, before American Beatlemania began, it didn’t even chart. Not until all things English exploded onto the scene did Vee-Jay and its sister label, Tollie, vigorously release and rerelease all the Beatles songs that were rightfully theirs. In April 1964, “Thank You Girl” was given a second chance when it backed the juvenile and embarrassing (yet somehow still not bad) “Do You Want to Know a Secret.” The A side climbed to #2, even though lead vocalist George Harrison sounds like he has a clothespin on his nose, and this time the B side squeaked on at #35.

The Beatles considered “Thank You Girl” to be a failed attempt at writing a hit record. The song’s structural simplicity gives an audience the impression that songwriters John Lennon and Paul McCartney were knocking out these songs on demand, which quite literally was true. Not every song could be a gigantic hit (although they came pretty damned close), and the overwhelming triumphs of their other releases made “Thank You Girl” seem like small potatoes. Still, Lennon and McCartney’s vocals were good enough to be compared favorably to the Everly Brothers, and their unquenchable charm shone through effortlessly. When songwriters consider wares like this to be a failure, they are applying painfully high standards for themselves. Of course, Lennon and McCartney achieved their own goals anyway and concurrently surpassed everybody else’s expectations.

When Capitol passed on the rights to the early Beatles’ singles, they also relinquished any exclusive claim to the Beatles’ first U.K. album. Vee-Jay, which had picked up the first few singles, got the album rights and released it in America with the title *Introducing the Beatles*. Their next marketing campaign was to release virtually every song on the album in a 45 RPM format, much to the chagrin of Capitol. Not to be outdone, Capitol was absolutely determined to obtain the Beatles’ second U.K. album, *With the Beatles*, and release it in America. They did. Featuring a cropped version of the now famous photograph taken by Robert Freeman, and more seriously, a cropped and muddled song layout, it was rather cheekily retitled *Meet the Beatles*. Thus, Americans had two choices to become acquainted with their favorite new group.

### GREAT MISSES

APRIL 1964 #39  
WE LOVE YOU BEATLES—  
 THE CAREFREES

**MAY 1964 #6 WALK ON BY—DIONNE WARWICKE**

**W**hat is it about the simple melody and words of this song that make it universally appealing? When “Walk on By” was released, it was not exclusively aimed at the youth market but at the over-thirty crowd as well. The sophisticated sexiness of Dionne Warwicke and the angular songwriting craft of Burt Bacharach and Hal David were miles away from everything else pop culture had to offer.

Unlike Dean Martin and Bobby Vinton songs, which somehow managed to be hits while completely ignoring popular trends, this song wasn’t repulsive. Everybody was attracted by the singer’s sensuality and the unique structure. Maybe the kids weren’t buying it, but they didn’t mind listening while their parents played it, and some adventurous kids probably did buy it. As time passed, the song developed an identity all its own: the staccato horn riff, the guitar that plays a clave rhythm, the background vocal of “Don’t...stop!”

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1964	#1
<u>LOVE ME DO</u> —THE BEATLES	

GREAT MISSES	
MAY 1964	#7
<u>LITTLE CHILDREN</u> —BILLY J. KRAMER	

For the first time, Bacharach and David realized their ambition to create a soundscape. “Walk on By” was not just a song, but a fully developed concept. Warwicke’s cool, understated performance perfectly captures the hidden pain in David’s lyric. After a while, the younger audience that used to accept the song passively began to appreciate it openly. Time has proven “Walk on By” to be, in every sense, a generation-crossing classic.

**JUNE 1964 #4 CAN'T YOU SEE THAT SHE'S MINE—DAVE CLARK FIVE**

**I**f you find yourself at a party that just isn’t happening, try playing this song. I’ve seen rooms erupt during the opening bars.

This isn’t the most famous Dave Clark Five song, but it may be the best. The lyrics are sort of dumb and the melody is a kind of singsong affair, but “Can’t You See That She’s Mine” has an essence that makes it stand out. For one thing, it has an incessant rhythm that just won’t quit. Dave Clark’s simplistic drumming may be the best asset this band had. For another, the sound is as solid as a brick wall, with lead vocalist Mike Smith’s voice recorded layer upon layer upon layer. The result is a purely infectious dance record.

Hailing from Tottenham, England, the Dave Clark Five were originally members of an amateur soccer club known as the Tottenham Hotspurs. To finance a trip to Holland, they decided to form a band to play at local pubs and dances. Four of the Hotspurs had some musical experience: Mike Smith, Rick Huxley, Lenny Davidson, and Dennis Peyton all played reasonably well. But Clark took the initiative and formed the band around himself. He had never played a musical instrument before



in his life so he bought a used drum kit and banged away to his collection of rock-and-roll records. Soon the band had developed a proficiency sufficient to play live. The Dave Clark Five earned some money, and the Hotspurs went to Holland. Upon their return, though, the demand for the Dave Clark Five increased. They played often in the London area, including an unusual early performance at Buckingham Palace for the staff Christmas ball.

Clark, obviously a highly confident and practical young man, assumed all managing responsibility. He also took on the roles of agent, producer, and songwriter, usually because he felt he could do as well as anyone else, and so he could retain control both financially and artistically. If Clark had not had such a hand in all the group's affairs, it is very possible he would have been replaced as drummer. If this had happened, however, the group would have been robbed of its most distinguishing feature. Clark's playing skills were basic, even naive, but they were effective and defined the band's sound.

The Dave Clark Five continued to score gigantic hits through the end of 1965, entering the Top 20 ten times in eighteen months. By then, the group's formula had become utterly predictable, but some songs, such as "Catch Us If You Can," were strong enough to keep their reputation intact. Hits continued for another two years, notably "Over and Over" (and over and over and over and...) and "You Got What It Takes," both of which reached the Top 10, but the band was having trouble keeping up with the changing times. They stuck it out for awhile but finally disbanded in 1970, within weeks of the Beatles' official breakup. Because of a unique leasing agreement that he had with his label, Clark retained the rights to all of his recordings and did not allow the material to be recycled and exploited. As a result, the records were not rereleased (until a 1994 CD compilation) and have become expensive collector's items.

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1964	#1
<u>I GET AROUND—THE BEACH BOYS</u>	
JUNE 1964	#1
<u>BAG DOLL—THE FOUR SEASONS</u>	
JUNE 1964	#2
<u>MEMPHIS—JOHNNY RIVERS</u>	
JUNE 1964	#2
<u>MY BOY LOLLIPOP—MILLIE SMALL</u>	

## **JUNE 1964 #4 DON'T LET THE SUN CATCH YOU CRYING— GERRY AND THE PACEMAKERS**

**W**ith only a few exceptions, the songs produced by the "Mersey sound" bands have since become all but forgotten. Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas, Freddie and the Dreamers, the Swingin' Blue Jeans, etc., all released singles that sold phenomenally well in 1964, but that today sound quaint and decidedly dated. Most of their material was either rearranged skiffle and trad jazz, which had no relevance to the American audience, or sloppy but energized updates of American soul music. Actually, the same is true for the output of Gerry and the Pacemak-



ers, but I would argue that “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying,” as well as “Ferry Cross the Mersey,” are legitimate exceptions that transcend the disposable nature of the genre.

Gerry and the Pacemakers’ first release in the United States, “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying,” was their fifth single back in England and had a sound that was markedly different from their previous releases and from those of the other beat groups. In fact, the words “beat” and “Mersey sound” do not even seem to be relevant to this release. The dominant feature of the song, after Gerry Marsden’s melody, is George Martin’s orchestration. When compared to his work with the Beatles at this time, Martin’s work with the Pacemakers was positively ornate. In 1964, orchestration was hardly playing a pivotal role in the typical beat-group arrangements, but Martin realized the full potential of Marsden’s charming melody by giving it the treatment that it called for. This alone would make it an unusual import, but the song also features a structure that emphasizes the melody instead of the beat. While a good beat can (and usually does) become dated, a good melody lasts indefinitely, and with “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying,” Marsden definitely wrote something memorable.

## JUNE 1964 #5 THE GIRL FROM IPANEMA— STAN GETZ AND ASTRUD GILBERTO

Today, jazz is a form of music that rarely crosses paths with pop. Both highly intellectual and deeply spiritual in nature, it usually requires a much deeper understanding of the music and a more concentrated level of listening than the average pop tune, usually to the point that the two styles remain mutually exclusive. Once a jazz player makes overtures to pop, he is often considered to be either

slumming or selling out, but it wasn’t always this way.

Two of the most important musical geniuses of the twentieth century, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, both recorded jazz that profoundly altered the way we listen to music, and their innovations affected popular stylings as much as they affected jazz. Before the intellectual movement of the postwar bebop players, jazz *was* popular music. It was only when jazz immersed itself in the intellectual and spiritual arena that it became self-contained and exclusive. Players such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Tatum, and Lester Young pushed the envelope of musical theory and personal invention by expanding the scope of jazz to encompass personal expression. That set the stage for later players and further developments, such as “free-form,” “twelve-tone,” and “harmolodic” theories of the ’60s and on. Their music demanded discipline, not only from the player, but from the listener. In the chain of events



that followed, jazz came to spurn the bourgeoisie and separated itself both from other, simpler forms of music and then even from its own populist heritage.

Stan Getz often walked the fine line between jazz and pop. He went solo after playing tenor sax for a few years with Stan Kenton, Benny Goodman, and Woody Herman. With his melodic and understated phrasing, which suggested the influence of his mentor, Lester Young, he was in great demand among jazz fans. In 1961, his popularity broadened when he teamed up with guitarist Charlie Byrd for a recording of the jazz/bossa nova hybrid “Desafinado.” This recording helped instigate the bossa nova craze, and eventually it even reached the Top 40. Translated literally from the Portuguese, bossa nova means “new bump.” It was actually a modified samba, but to most Americans, bossa nova was more than a new bump; it was a wave.

The public’s curiosity was piqued, so Getz’s record label, Verve, decided it would be a worthwhile commercial venture to pair him with the Brazilian guitarist and father of bossa nova, Joao Gilberto. Taking music by Antonio Carlos Jobim and Portuguese words by Vincius de Moraes, they arranged “The Girl from Ipanema” for vocal accompaniment, but they lacked a singer. Despite Joao Gilberto’s objections, Getz asked his wife, Astrud Gilberto, to sing the lyrics in English. Her amateur talk-singing turned out to be the perfect touch. A light, shy, and charming voice gave the song a laid-back sexiness that suited the rhythm and has since become the definitive way to sing bossa nova. Although parts of the jazz world derided or ignored the song, everybody else fell in love with it. “The Girl from Ipanema” became the best-selling jazz-related single of all time and won the 1964 Grammy award for “Record of the Year.” Today it stands as an oft-covered standard.

## **JUNE 1964 #24 DON’T WORRY BABY—THE BEACH BOYS**

**I**n 1962, the Beach Boys released their first single on a tiny local label, Candix. It was a harmless slice of pabulum called “Surfin’,” which nonetheless drew some attention and added to their appeal when they auditioned for Capitol Records. Despite their lack of originality (as yet), they were subsequently awarded a recording contract. Brian Wilson was ecstatic to be part of the extended family that included Frank Sinatra, the Lettermen, and his heroes, the Four Freshmen. The Beach Boys’ first Capitol single, “Surfin’ Safari” backed with “409,” continued the single-minded vision of “Surfin’,” but it was better produced and showed their vocal arrangements to be well-thought-out and cleverly constructed. Capitol never expected anything more than a few novelty-style hits on the surfing trend and wanted to cash in as quickly as possible on the Beach Boys before the public’s interest waned. The widespread success of “Surfin’ Safari” led to a demand for an album’s worth of material and a follow-up single from the group. This was a pattern that would continue with seemingly endless repetition. The need for more material and its subsequent arrangement inevitably fell onto Wilson’s shoulders and the pressure to churn out product instilled him with a self-imposed need to outdo himself.





**Wilson countered the Beatles' sudden popularity with a new double-sided hit single that showed he had a whole new palette of colors with which to paint his production ideas.**

The next single, "Surfin' U.S.A." backed with "Shut-down," performed even better than its predecessor, and both sides reached the Top 40. "Surfer Girl"/"Little Deuce Coupe" followed, then "Be True to Your School"/"In My Room." Whatever they released seemed to yield a double-sided hit. Inside of a year's time, the Beach Boys went from obscurity to the most popular group in America, with a sizable catalog of albums (four) and hit singles (seven). As a band, they didn't have any real competition—that is, until the English Invasion. Suddenly, Wilson's drive to succeed was heightened immeasurably. The intensity of his need was further magnified by the fact that the Beatles had become his label mates at Capitol and in no time had completely dominated the charts. He felt pangs of envy when the next Beach Boys single, "Fun, Fun, Fun," could rise no higher than #5 because the Beatles firmly occupied positions #1-4. Wilson indirectly credited the sudden popularity of the Beatles as his source of inspiration. "When I hear really fabulous material by other groups," he said, "I feel as small as the dot over the 'i' in nit."

Wilson countered the Beatles' sudden popularity with a new double-sided hit single that showed he had a whole new palette of colors with which to paint his production ideas. "I Get Around" was still a typically upbeat teenage anthem, but it went a step further than most of the Beach Boys' earlier material, particularly in lyrical content and musical muscle. The real revelation came on the B side, though. The production on "Don't Worry Baby" is like a pocket-change version of Phil Spector's work, but the song has a melody more sophisticated than the solipsistic records of the self-proclaimed pop genius. The five-part harmonies enliven the melody even further. As on "In My Room," Wilson moved beyond the one-dimensional lyrics that defined most of the Beach Boys' catalog with a song that had something valid to say.

What on the surface seems to be a song about a guy who regrets opening his big mouth about his car in front of a bunch of hot-rodders is actually a song about comforting love. Indeed, if you overlook the opening couplet of the second verse, the song becomes universal in scope, with its focused description of an insecure man-child who finds comfort in the arms and words of his girlfriend. As it is, it could portray a teenage version of the same couple who becomes haunted by their once passionate past in Bruce Springsteen's song of cars and alienation, "Racing in the Streets." Unlike Springsteen's song, "Don't Worry Baby" is less a character study than a description of the combination of love and fear that can afflict a teenager on the brink of adulthood. Compared with what was yet to come, "Don't Worry Baby" was formative, but it marks the first time Wilson's songwriting and production genius came together. In the process, he proved himself capable of putting up a formidable defense against the British invaders.



## JULY 1964 #1 A HARD DAY'S NIGHT—THE BEATLES

America's obsession with the Beatles was so all-encompassing that it was unavoidable. Even if you were unimpressed with their music, you had to be awed by the sociological implications of Beatlemania. Some viewed it as a national virus or a threat to civil society. The press took this rather haughty position in the beginning, but the harder they tried to demean the Beatles' fame with rude questions or cruel observations, the more enriched the group's legacy became. For one thing, their wit was lightning quick, and they were capable of reversing any situation to make the reporters feel as though they were being cross-examined by the Marx Brothers. For another, anybody who didn't "get" the Beatles was, by definition, square.

On Sunday evening, February 9, 1964, teenagers and adolescents across the country laid on the floor in front of their family television sets to watch enraptured while the Beatles appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Their parents probably sat on the couch behind them and watched along, either amused or stupefied. This marked America's formal introduction to the Beatles. Whether you were a screaming fan or a scowling adult, the Beatles were ubiquitous, and either way, you had to be affected.

The film *A Hard Day's Night* was such a work of genius that it appealed instantly to both Beatle-crazy teenagers and less impressed adults. More than a few parents dutifully trundled their children to a matinee, only to be surprised by how enjoyable the movie was. Besides featuring a number of new songs that actually appealed to an older audience, the story line closely paralleled what the Beatles were subjected to on a daily basis. As a result, older, skeptical viewers no longer perceived Beatlemania as a distraction but as entertainment. What a coup. With their music and stage personas established, the group simultaneously broadened and shortened the generation gap. Many parents no longer despised them and even hummed some of their tunes, but the effect the Beatles had on the younger generation wasn't so superficial. Beatle wigs and lunch boxes were just the tip of the iceberg. In 1964, the Beatles dominated the very consciousness of American youth.

Not only was America barraged with all of their older material all at once, but the Beatles were writing and recording new songs at an astoundingly prolific rate. No fewer than nineteen Beatles songs reached the Top 40 in 1964. Nineteen songs! This is not even including the songs that John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote that became hits for others (of which there were many). It defies credibility to think that the Beatles had the time and energy to write and record this material, perform live shows all over Europe and the United States, and star in a feature-length movie. This breakneck pace crammed a lifetime of activity into a few short months and is the very subject of both the movie and the title song "A Hard Day's Night."

**Whether you were a screaming fan or a scowling adult, the Beatles were ubiquitous, and either way, you had to be affected.**



Lennon built the song's verses around a conversational phrase Ringo Starr used after a particularly grueling day. McCartney supplied the bridge, and when the two were welded together, the result was seamless. The opening G major-seventh chord bursts out at you as though it is introducing a pronouncement from kings. Whether you were a true believer or not, it would have been pointless to deny that the Beatles were anything but pop music royalty.

## JULY 1964 #1 WHERE DID OUR LOVE GO—THE SUPREMES

The Brewster-Douglass housing project where Florence Ballard was raised was a low-rent but neat bedroom community for employees who labored on the Detroit assembly lines. Ballard loved to sing and was only in the eighth or ninth grade when a group called the Primes, including future Temptations Eddie Kendricks and Paul Williams, heard her and asked her to join. It was soon decided that she should form a sister group called the Primettes. She convinced her friends Mary Wilson and eventually Diane Ross, both of whom also lived at Brewster-Douglass, to join the group. Then a fourth member named Betty McGlown joined, as well. Lead vocals were shared by Ballard, Wilson, and Ross. They auditioned for Motown, but Berry Gordy diplomatically told them to finish high school, i.e., don't call us, we'll call you. To add insult to injury, Smokey Robinson was so impressed with their guitarist, Marvin Tarplin, that he hired him on the spot. Tarplin remained an active member of the Motown stable for years, but the Primettes meanwhile were out one very talented guitarist.

Undaunted, they continued to hang out at Motown every day after school, whether they were wanted or not. When McGlown decided to forsake the slim hope of fame for marriage, she was replaced by Barbara Martin. Lupine Records, a tiny independent company, used the Primettes for support vocals on recording sessions with future stars Eddie Floyd and Wilson Pickett, and even cut two singles with them, but they went absolutely nowhere.

The Primettes once again returned to the Motown lobby, but this time Gordy gave them something to do. They clapped hands during recording sessions and, on rare occasions, were allowed to open their mouths and sing. Although Ballard was the presumed leader, Ross jockeyed for that position at every opportunity. It was Ross who managed to get Gordy's attention with her relentless flirting. He eventually allowed them to rehearse and record a song called "I Want a Guy." The results were decidedly awful, but lead singer Ross had a whiny, nasally tone that made her sound unusual. Gordy couldn't be sure if it was commercial, but he decided to take a chance. Offering them a list of names from which to choose, Ballard picked the Supremes, over the objections of the other girls. They were signed, and "I Want a Guy" was released, with abysmal sales. Their second release, "Buttered Popcorn," featured

**Gordy decided that the Supremes required one lead voice and, after conferring with Robinson, chose Ross.**



Ballard but was equally disastrous. Meanwhile, Martin had become simultaneously pregnant and disenchanted, so she quit the group, leaving them as a trio. Gordy decided that the Supremes required one lead voice and, after conferring with Robinson, chose Ross. The other girls reluctantly agreed.

Gordy himself produced their next song, "Let Me Go the Right Way," but it stalled at #90 despite a commercial push from the label. The situation was becoming desperate. Since Robinson had recently bolstered the career of Mary Wells, Gordy asked him to try something. He produced "Breath-Taking Guy" and a few others, but still nothing happened. While Mary Wells ("Two Lovers"), the Marvellettes ("Please Mr. Postman"), the Miracles ("You've Really Got a Hold on Me"), the Contours ("Do You Love Me"), and Marvin Gaye ("Hitch Hike") were all over the charts, the Supremes looked like supreme losers. Even their old partners, the Primes, had become active at Motown, recording as the Temptations. Things looked bleak, and it is curious that Gordy didn't just cut his losses and give up. Yet, he pressed on.

The songwriting and production team of Lamont Dozier and brothers Eddie and Brian Holland had not yet tried their hand, and with very few cards left to play, Gordy let them have a shot at it. The cumbersomely titled and awkward-sounding "When the Lovelight Starts Shining Through His Eyes" was the result. When the song managed to reach the Top 40, peaking at #23, everybody breathed a sigh of relief. Their next song was originally rejected by the Marvellettes, who considered it ridiculous. The Supremes hated it, as well, but without veto power, they had no choice. Holland, Dozier, and Holland seriously considered letting Wilson sing lead, but Gordy's dictum had to be obeyed, and Ross once again got the honor.

"Where Did Our Love Go" is simple and repetitive, almost boring, except for Ross's sensuous vocal. The hypnotic melody hardly ever changes, with nothing to distinguish the verse from the chorus except the lyrics. The only instrument that stands out is the slapping percussion that accents literally every downbeat. The Supremes were unsure of the finished product, and Gordy himself expressed doubts for the record's success, but they crossed their fingers and released it.

After some finagling by Gordy, Dick Clark reluctantly added the Supremes to his "Cavalcade of Stars" tour. He paid the group only \$600 a week for their efforts, however, and gave them bottom billing. While the tour was in progress, "Where Did Our Love Go" got increasing airplay and became the country's #1 record for two weeks. By tour's end, the Supremes were headliners. Never again would they get anything less than top billing. Their talent and fame, not to mention Ross's iron will, made sure of it.

## JULY 1964 #4 UNDER THE BOARDWALK—THE DRIFTERS

**W**ith the departure of Ben E. King in 1961, Rudy Lewis became the Drifters' sixth lead vocalist. He was scheduled to sing lead on "Under the Boardwalk," but on the morning of the session, he suddenly died, allegedly from a drug over-





dose. Naturally upset, the band obtained clearance from the musician's union, and the session was rescheduled twenty-four hours later. Johnny Moore had been the lead singer in an earlier incarnation of the Drifters ("Ruby Baby") and became Lewis's replacement. Unable to avoid the sad mood that permeated the



recording studio, he gave "Under the Boardwalk" an emotional reading that completely tore the simple pop lyrics to shreds. Moore's gentle, plaintive singing made the summer beach song seem almost profound as he brought a churchy feel to the material that was reminiscent of Sam Cooke's best pop singing.

In 1963, songwriter/producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller ended their association with Atlantic to launch their own independent record label, called Red Bird. Production chores were then handed to another Atlantic staff producer, Bert Berns. He produced the sessions for "Under the Boardwalk" and held things together for another year, but this would be the Drifters' last Top 10 hit. The group went into a downward slide that no personnel change could salvage. Things were further complicated by the sudden proliferation of bands that toured using the name "The Drifters." For a while it seemed that every one of the forty-some-odd bandmembers who ever sang in the Drifters formed their own splinter group. Today, these groups are irrelevant, but when they were associated with Atlantic Records, the Drifters were an institution.

eration of bands that toured using the name "The Drifters." For a while it seemed that every one of the forty-some-odd bandmembers who ever sang in the Drifters formed their own splinter group. Today, these groups are irrelevant, but when they were associated with Atlantic Records, the Drifters were an institution.

## AUGUST 1964 #1 HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN—THE ANIMALS

"House of the Rising Sun" was originally a traditional African-American song that was first popularized by Josh White, an American folk singer of country blues. Dave Van Ronk, a respected folk artist, heard White's version, rearranged it to his own tastes, and repopularized it. Next, Bob Dylan picked up on it and recorded a cover of Van Ronk's version on his own first album. Meanwhile, somewhere in England, a keyboard player named Alan Price bought Dylan's album and liked it enough to arrange two of the songs for his group, the Animals. The first was "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," which he recorded as "Baby, Let Me Take You Home." The other was, of course, "House of the Rising Sun." In the process, a song that was originally a black female prostitute's lament became something else entirely when it fell into the hands of some white kids from England.

Eric Burdon's vocals are spine-chilling, and the organ's arpeggiated chords invoke images of the *Phantom of the Opera*. The song structure resembles nothing less than a soundtrack to a Santeria ritual. The dark, moody intro builds gradually over four-plus minutes until it eventually breaks up in an orgiastic





frenzy. Nobody gets a very clear picture of what the song is about, but we certainly know that the “House of the Rising Sun” isn’t a happy place to be. Probably for the same reason that people flock to horror movies, the song reached #1. The Animals were the second British group to do so after the Beatles.

With none of the personal appeal or grace of their English counterparts, the Animals redefined what English reinterpretations of American styles could accomplish. The permutations that led to their recording “House of the Rising Sun” resulted in a new type of popular music, electric folk. Bob Dylan, himself a folk artist at the time, certainly took notice and soon after went electric himself.

### AUGUST 1964 #3 BECAUSE—DAVE CLARK FIVE

**B**ecause” is the first ballad the Dave Clark Five released, and it is also the ballad that almost never was. The first four singles the group released in America had beats that would knock dishes off the wall, and since they were so remarkably successful, the American label, Epic, saw no reason to change the formula. Dave Clark wrote “Because” with the intention of making it the fifth single, but the label balked. They refused to release the song, convinced Clark was sabotaging his career (and their profits). Finally, Clark issued an ultimatum: release “Because,” or you will get nothing.

Clark had unusual bargaining power with his label. Besides finagling the highest royalty rate of any artist at the time, including the Beatles, he also negotiated to retain ownership of all his masters that ultimately gave him the rights to the band’s material. He leased the recordings to the label for a three-year period, after which rights reverted to him. So his statement was no idle threat. Epic, realizing this, capitulated. According to Clark, “Because” eventually became their biggest-selling record, and today it receives more airplay than any other Dave Clark Five song.

“Because” had the same appeal that later made “Groovy Kind of Love” by the Mindbenders popular. Both have simple, attractive melodies that express love in an idealistic setting. “Because” can remind you of how it felt to have a mad crush on someone. It was the kind of song that a young girl, alone in her room, would sing to her pillow. She’d sing “give me one kiss, and I’ll be happy, just to be with yoo-oo” and imagine the pillow singing back, “Give me, give me a chance to be near you, because, because I love you.”

With an image like that going through my head, it’s hard to recall why I even like this song. But I do. If only love were so simple.

### AUGUST 1964 #11 BABY, I NEED YOUR LOVING—THE FOUR TOPS

**L**evi Stubbs, Abdul “Duke” Fakir, Lawrence Peyton, and Renaldo “Obie” Benson started singing together in 1954. With nary a single change in their lineup, the same four men have stuck together ever since. How’s that for loyalty and resolve?



**The slow  
crescendo  
before the last  
chorus shows  
just how much  
the Four Tops  
knew about  
assured  
patience.**

Not only has their band remained intact, but over the course of five tumultuous decades, the Four Tops have left an impressive trail of hit records behind them.

They started as the Four Aims, playing their unique brand of gospel R&B and Mills Brothers-style harmonies all over North America, from Canada to Las Vegas. Peyton had a cousin named Billy Davis (aka Tyran Carlo) who had good connections at Chess Records. The Four Aims took advantage of the opportunity and were rechristened the Four Tops after signing to the label. Unfortunately, it was soon obvious that Chess was more interested in Davis than in his cousin's group, so the Four Tops were let go. Davis eventually became chief A&R man at Chess, but the Four Tops still had to pay a few more dues.

They continued their live performances and improved steadily. Affiliations with the record labels Red Top, Columbia, and Riverside resulted in not a ripple of recognition. Then, in 1960, an interesting and propitious coincidence presented itself. An old singing partner of Stubbs named Jackie Wilson had become famous and was recording material that Davis had written with someone named Berry Gordy. When Gordy set out to form his own label, Davis suggested that the Four Tops pay his ex-writing partner a visit. Gordy met them and was impressed enough to sign them up. They recorded a clearly uncommercial album that wrongheadedly accented their supper-club style of singing, which caused Gordy to decide they needed more time on the road before their next release. The band issued a collective sigh but did as they were told. When they returned, they could boast more than six solid years of road and stage experience. Next, Gordy had them ritually contribute to the recordings of other artists until their studio chops began to rival their stage familiarity.

Only then did the Four Tops get assigned to the songwriting and production team of Brian Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Eddie Holland. Their previous success with the Miracles and Marvin Gaye made Holland-Dozier-Holland a prestigious team at Motown, but their more recent success with the Supremes made them seem like outright miracle workers. Dozier knew the Four Tops, and he felt certain that "Baby, I Need Your Loving" would be the perfect vehicle to get their career out of first gear. He told them about it one night at a nightclub. Eager to begin immediately, they started the recording session after midnight and finished before the following morning.

With a vocal line that custom-fit Stubbs's gospel-tinged voice, and smooth harmony lines that simultaneously toned down and contrasted with the gruff edges of Stubbs's raspy vocal, "Baby, I Need Your Loving" suited the band from all angles. The slow crescendo before the last chorus shows just how much the Four Tops knew about assured patience. Ten years of hard-earned experience came together for a truly fine performance that made all of the effort worthwhile when it rose to #11 on the national charts. Unfortunately, the song was released during the time when *Billboard* discontinued its R&B chart, feeling that it had become redun-



dant with the pop chart. (The R&B chart was resumed in 1965.) Regardless, the Four Tops finally had some well-deserved national recognition, and the best was yet to come.

## AUGUST 1964 #12 AND I LOVE HER—THE BEATLES

The film *A Hard Day's Night* featured more than a half-dozen original songs, each of which sufficiently proved that the Beatles had more talent than any mere fad. Relying exclusively on their own material, John Lennon and Paul McCartney cemented their reputation as songwriters extraordinaire. Their straight-out rock-and-roll songs possessed a certain poise and sophistication while the slower, pensive songs were a revelation. “And I Love Her,” in particular, showed a heretofore unseen aspect of their songwriting ability. McCartney’s exquisite voice is featured front and center, without the pounding rock-and-roll backbeat that was an essential ingredient of their previous singles. In its place is a strict tempo version of Brazilian rhythm driven by claves.

When “And I Love Her” came on the radio, parents no longer covered their ears. It sounded as safe and appealing as the latest Andy Williams record. With such across-the-board appeal, it was only a matter of time before the older set recorded its own versions of “And I Love Her,” helping to make it the first in a series of Beatles standards. The last I heard, about 375 cover versions were recorded. Is anybody (besides the publisher) still bothering to count? I could never admit, or want to admit, to having heard each of them, but I feel safe in saying that the Beatles’ original version remains definitive.

## AUGUST 1964 #25 I’LL CRY INSTEAD—THE BEATLES

“I’ll Cry Instead” was intended for the film *A Hard Day's Night* but was cut at the last minute. It remained on the American movie soundtrack anyway, with an extra verse that doesn’t appear on the British album. Sitting squarely on top of one of the most contagious and upbeat songs the Beatles ever wrote are some very autobiographical references that don’t seem quite so contagious or upbeat.

In his writing, John Lennon’s acerbic wit and his rising dissatisfaction with the trappings of his success began to shine through in a not-so-veiled fashion. Negative emotions surfaced, including flashes of misogyny (“You Can’t Do That,” “I’ll Cry Instead”), rage (“Not a Second Time”), revenge (“If I Fell”), and loneliness (“Misery,” “There’s a Place”). These are pretty heavy emotions for pop music, and Lennon would return to them again and again throughout his career. In 1964, though, they were well-disguised by the optimistic music that encased them. “I’ve got a chip on my shoulder that’s bigger than my feet” is a direct reference to the entombed rage he was feeling as the Beatles were becoming more and more manipulated, like marionettes on a string. Later in the song, he vents his misplaced anger at women in general when he sings, “You’d better hide all the girls, ’cause



I'm gonna break their hearts all around the world." Truer words were never sung. With an ever-present supply of "dollie-birds" (today's groupies) at their beck and call, not to mention the adolescent bystanders who never even met the objects of their desire, more than a few hearts were broken. Apparently, it was the Beatles' turn to come to terms with the darker side of Beatlemania.

One of the first things that struck me as I reviewed the list of Beatles songs on the Top 40 was how many great songs were missing. With nineteen singles reaching the Top 40 in 1964, there was hardly room for more, so plenty of deserving songs were overlooked. Here is a partial list of songs, all released before 1965, which are now universally popular but never charted on the Top 40 (they may have charted on the Hot 100): "There's a Place," "From Me to You," "All My Loving," "Please Mr. Postman" (not a Beatles composition, but still a great performance), "I Should Have Known Better," "If I Fell," "Tell Me Why," "Things We Said Today." There is little doubt (in my mind, at least) that any one of these songs could have topped the charts if it weren't for the competition presented by other Beatles songs.

## SEPTEMBER 1964 #1 OH, PRETTY WOMAN—ROY ORBISON

**O**h, Pretty Woman" held the #1 position for three weeks in the summer of 1964 and was the high watermark in Roy Orbison's career. With a simple, straightforward arrangement, it was markedly different from Orbison's previous hits. What it lacked in orchestration was compensated by a driving rock-and-roll rhythm, and where Orbison's voice would previously ascend to angelic heights, it now descended to a lustful growl. The song has him idly watching a pretty woman as she walks past him, while he imagines being able to seduce her. The growl became a trademark of sorts and helped Orbison seem less pathetic than

**The growl became a trademark of sorts and helped Orbison seem less pathetic than his previous material had painted him to be.**

his previous material had painted him to be. He even gives the song an upbeat ending, when the mysterious woman turns around and walks back toward him.

After "Oh, Pretty Woman," Orbison was destined for change, some drastic and some devastating changes. He changed labels, from the small, independent Monument to the corporate monolith of MGM. He, along with just about everybody, was overrun by the British Invasion, and his records became less and less popular. His last entry on the Top 40 was in May 1966, with an incongruous song called "Twinkle Toes." In June 1966, tragedy began to take away what remained of his life when his wife was killed in a motorcycle accident. Then, two years later, two of his three children died when his house caught fire.

After an understandable period of mourning and confusion, Orbison returned to music with his credibility and



talent firmly intact. Before his untimely death by a massive heart attack on December 6, 1988, he became a member of the mega-superstar group “The Traveling Wilburys” and was subsequently inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

## SEPTEMBER 1964 #2 **DANCING IN THE STREET— MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS**

**B**ecause the Eddie Holland-Lamont Dozier-Brian Holland songwriting and production team had proved capable of churning out hits for Martha and the Vandellas, Berry Gordy thought they might be the right team to salvage his floundering pet project, the Supremes. Martha Reeves felt slighted, perhaps rightfully, since she was recording hits while the Supremes couldn’t get themselves arrested. So William “Mickey” Stevenson, head of A&R at Motown and Holland-Dozier-Holland’s boss, took charge of Reeves’s next single. Using a song he had cowritten with Marvin Gaye, Stevenson produced what was destined to become Martha and the Vandellas’ biggest hit and the ultimate rock-and-roll urban anthem, “Dancing in the Street.”

By 1964, the original Vandellas had undergone significant personnel changes and lost any sense of identity. To compensate, Stevenson himself sang backing vocals, along with Marvin Gaye and staff writer Ivy Hunter. Motown songs were usually anything but subtle when it came to establishing a rhythmic base. Gordy wanted to be certain that nobody, not even the fan with two left feet and no sense of time, would miss the downbeat, and this is evident on “Dancing in the Street.” Stevenson used percussion instruments liberally and reportedly even had snow-tire chains repeatedly dropped on the floor on beats two and four. The song held the #2 position for two weeks, blocked from the top spot by Manfred Mann’s “Doo Wah Diddy Diddy.”

In light of the social unrest and urban rioting that followed in the late '60s, this song has since been interpreted as a call to arms, but nothing could have been farther from the truth. After all, we’re talking about Motown, *Berry Gordy’s* Motown, and we’re talking about 1964. At the time of its release, social upheavals were certainly fermenting, but the nonviolent tactics espoused by Martin Luther King Jr. were the norm. Furthermore, the lyrics issue a call to *dance*, not to riot. If music did have the power to influence mass behavior, then “Dancing in the Street” should have served as a pacifier, not an instigator. The meanings that have since been applied might add to the song’s appeal, but unless you are willing to believe that Motown started the protest-music phenomenon a full two years ahead of schedule, then it is plainly not an intentional interpretation. Unfortunately,

**By 1964, the original Vandellas had undergone significant personnel changes and lost any sense of identity.**





once a song is misinterpreted, it can forever be seen as something it most definitely is not.

It seems that every two years, a major artist sees fit to “update” “Dancing in the Street,” but one by one these alternative versions fade into obscurity while the original lingers on. Artists as well-known and diverse as the Kinks, Laura Nyro, the Mamas and the Papas, Van Halen, the Grateful Dead, and even David Bowie and Mick Jagger have each taken stabs at it, but they always fall well short of the majesty of the original by Martha and the Vandellas.

### SEPTEMBER 1964 #5 REMEMBER (WALKIN' IN THE SAND)— THE SHANGRI-LAS

**O**n practically all of their hit records, the Shangri-Las and producer George “Shadow” Morton took the inherent dramas and insecurities of female teenage life and exaggerated them beyond any reasonable proportion. Everything about this record is overdone, from the melodramatic howls of the harmonies to the shifting dynamics of the instrumentation. Even the seagull sound effects are exaggerated to the extreme; if I ever came across that many screaming birds while walking on the beach, I’d run for my life (or at least be very careful where I stepped). The towel-wringing sobbing of the lyrics is a bit over the edge, as well.

The Shangri-Las consisted of two pairs of sisters, Maryann and Margie Ganser and twins Betty and Mary Weiss. Their tough appearance was consistent with their hometown of Queens, which had a tendency for breeding teenagers with thick accents who smoked and/or chewed a lot of gum. Morton produced them and

recorded the original seven-minute demo version of his composition, “Remember (Walkin’ in the Sand).” Songwriters Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich heard the song and loved it, but thought it needed a little editing. The final version was released on Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller’s Red Bird Records and reached #5.

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1964	#5
LET IT BE ME—	
JERRY BUTLER AND BETTY EVERETT	

The blithe innocence portrayed by earlier girl groups was chewed up and spat out by this group of greaser girls. This wasn’t a song about dreaming or unattainable love; it was real life in the form of a teenage soap opera. The other girl groups may have imagined what it was like to date such-and-such a boy, but the Shangri-Las were determined to know firsthand. On “Remember,” lead singer Maryann Ganser finds out the hard way when she is unceremoniously dumped. She is out of her mind with grief, and then those damned birds start attacking her. What is a lovelorn teenager to do? Morton and the Shangri-Las were only getting started. They would soon perfect their combination of camp and drama. Future songs would leave a trail of dead bodies and disaster longer than a late summer hurricane, and somehow it would all be in the name of good, clean fun.



## SEPTEMBER 1964 #24 OUT OF SIGHT—JAMES BROWN

James Brown was stillborn on May 3, 1933, in South Carolina, and if it weren't for the tireless efforts of his Aunt Minnie, who somehow managed to revive him, he never would have known life. His parents split up while he was very young, and his father initially took responsibility for raising him. Times were tough, and young James was soon placed with his life-saving aunt, who lived in a roadhouse brothel, before he was six years old. To make money, he shined shoes, delivered groceries, picked cotton, anything that would help make ends meet. Soon forced by zoning authorities to relocate, he picked up his new life in Augusta, Georgia. With new friends, hustling soon led to hooliganism, but music had developed into an important positive force in his life. By age eleven, he was singing for talent shows at local theaters and often won first place. Because of his poverty, musical instruments were far from plentiful. Nonetheless, Brown managed to learn how to play some drums and organ to add to his already impressive singing ability.

He put together a small band, but before they could get off the ground, Brown was arrested for breaking into automobiles and sentenced to eight to sixteen years. Released in June 1952 for good behavior, he formed a group called the Flames and began to perfect his showmanship. The band's popularity grew enormously in their hometown area, but anything larger seemed out of reach. Before his own international stardom, Little Richard came to town. The Flames played at the same show, and Little Richard was simultaneously impressed and disturbed by the rivalry. He suggested that the Flames use his management, and all at once doors began to open. When Little Richard hit it big and was touring the country, James Brown and the Famous Flames covered his local obligations, taking the stage as Little Richard and the Upsetters, where they even performed "Tutti Frutti."

The Famous Flames recorded a demo of "Please, Please, Please," which attracted the interest of King Records, with the unfortunate exception of label owner Syd Nathan, who despised the record. Convinced that it wouldn't sell, he released it nationally on his subsidiary label, Federal, just to prove that his instincts were correct. "Please, Please, Please" was a slow boiler, but Nathan eventually had to admit he was wrong, particularly when sales crossed the one million mark. Subsequent releases floundered, though, and by 1957, the Flames had broken up. With a new band, Brown recorded "Try Me" and "Bewildered." Despite the fact that he received little, if any, support from Nathan, "Try Me" managed to climb to the #1 spot on the R&B charts.

The live shows got better and better, and soon Brown and the (new) Famous Flames were costarring, then starring, at the Apollo Theater. An appearance on *American Bandstand* and the earth-shattering album *James Brown Live at the*

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1964 <b>MATCHBOX</b> —THE BEATLES	#17
SEPTEMBER 1964 <b>SLOW DOWN</b> —THE BEATLES	#25



*Apollo* cemented his reputation. This newfound fame brought with it some changes. For one, his exposure through the media introduced white audiences to his music. Nineteen sixty-three was a trying time for the civil rights movement, and Brown found himself drawn into the thick of it. When some southern venues insisted on segregated seating, Brown refused to play any show unless the crowd was integrated. Another significant result of his fame was Fair Deal Records, a production company Brown formed with his manager, Ben Bart.

With Fair Deal, Brown got the freedom to do whatever he pleased. Ignoring his contract with King, he solicited other record labels. Smash Records, a subsidiary of Mercury Records, sponsored Fair Deal and allowed Brown to produce sessions and record a veritable grab bag of styles—such as big band arrangements of R&B songs, gospel, pop songs, and soul-based instrumentals. Emboldened by his success and the somewhat surprising lack of interference from King, he began to record some original material for his new label. Brown wanted a different sound for his new songs and found the essence of what he was looking for in musical director Nat Jones and the Parker brothers, Melvin (drums) and Maceo (baritone sax).

“Out of Sight,” the first single this team developed, had no precedent. Even the most innovative of Brown’s previous records did not suggest the daring rhythmic inventions of this song. More amazingly, it only hinted at the revolution that would follow. Almost instantly after its release, “Out of Sight” became a big hit on both the R&B and pop charts. Nathan was quiet no longer. He issued an injunction against Smash Records, preventing it from releasing records with Brown’s voice. After a significant amount of haggling, a new deal was negotiated, and Brown returned to King. What Nathan did know was that “the hardest working man in show business” had gotten a much better deal for himself. What he didn’t know was that Papa had a brand new bag.

## **OCTOBER 1964 #1 LEADER OF THE PACK—THE SHANGRI-LAS**

### **LEADER OF THE PACK**

a comic drama in one act

Characters: Betty—a teenager with a mad crush on Jimmy  
Jimmy—a James Dean-type biker; he’s good-bad, but he’s not evil  
The Parents—authoritative naysayers #1 and #2  
Maryann, Margie, and Mary—nonauthoritative naysayers  
#1, #2, and #3

Scene: a suburban strip-mall parking lot

### **SCENE ONE**

The scene opens with Maryann, Margie, and Mary standing around the parking lot after school, flirting with the boys and dishing the dirt on their classmates.



Suddenly, Betty, the subject of the hottest gossip, appears. She is wearing an ill-fitting motorcycle jacket that is torn and has traces of bloodstains. She carries her books pressed close to her chest, making it easy for her friends to see her hands. She seems bummed out.

MARYANN: Is she really going out with him?

MARGIE: Well, there she is, let's ask her. Betty, is that Jimmy's ring you're wearing?

BETTY: Mm-hmm.

MARGIE: Gee, it must be great riding with him. Is he picking you up after school today?

BETTY: Mm-mm.

A pregnant pause. Apparently, that was a really stupid question. Sensing the gaffe, they all chime in.

MARYANN, MARGIE, AND MARY: By the way, where'dja meet 'im?

BETTY: I met him at the candy store. (She points toward the strip mall.) He turned around and smiled at me. You get the picture?

MARYANN, MARGIE, AND MARY: Yes, we see....

I could go on like this for the entire song, but I'd rather not upset the publisher. Anyway, that's how she fell for "The Leader of the Pack."

Betty just couldn't help falling in love with this doe-eyed loser. Her parents were scandalized by the mere thought that their precious daughter would date this creep, so they insisted that she'd better go and find somebody new. To compound Betty's grief, motorcycles keep driving by while she tells us her sad tale of woe. She tells Jimmy that it's over, and he sorta smiles and runs away, to hide his tears. She *begs* him to go slow, but whether he heard.... The record then features a skid that in reality would have to be a quarter-mile long. Judging from the sound of the crash, poor Jimmy slammed into the side of a glazier's truck while Betty watched horrified, screaming, "LOOK OUT, LOOK OUT, LOOK OUT, LOOK OUT!"

I guess her parents won't have to worry about that bothersome Jimmy anymore. Just in case you didn't get the point the first time, the record then reprises the skidding sound, but this time it's long enough to carry Jimmy into the next county. Who knows, maybe he lives. The Shangri-Las' next hit, "Give Him a Great Big Kiss," sure does sound like it could be about him. It's more likely, though, that Betty never learns her lesson and picks up with another biker. Oh boy, what a prize.

**Just in case you didn't get the point the first time, the record then reprises the skidding sound, but this time it's long enough to carry Jimmy into the next county.**



## OCTOBER 1964 #1 BABY LOVE—THE SUPREMES

The Supremes complained that Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland were giving them what they considered to be “baby songs.” They knew the tougher work the songwriters produced for Martha and the Vandellas and wanted to sing something with a similar bite, such as “Heat Wave” or “Dancing in the Street.” This is ironic, since Martha Reeves eventually complained that the Supremes were getting first pick of available material. The Supremes’ complaint, though, was valid; “Baby Love” is painfully simple. Like “Where Did Our Love Go,” it is nothing more than a round of verses that repeats itself over and over, but Holland-Dozier-Holland knew their starlets well. Diane Ross’s breathy delivery was anything but appropriate for belting out a tune like “Heat Wave,” and they were cautious enough to supply gentle melodies that required a coquettish, flirty charm, something Ross could do even without singing. The simplicity of the song structure would enhance her interpretation, not hamper it.

The success of “Where Did Our Love Go,” forever implanted Ross as the Supremes’ lead singer, which was a stroke of commercial genius. Casual listeners immediately recognized her distinct sound on “Baby Love” and bought it in droves, sending it to #1 for *four* weeks. Holland-Dozier-Holland reportedly wrote “Where Did Our Love Go,” “Baby Love,” and the Supremes’ next single, “Come See About Me,” at one brainstorming session. Three songs, three #1 hits—not a bad day’s work. The Supremes may not have known it, but they were cornering the market on simple, feminine love songs, probably the largest individual segment of popular music that existed at that time.

## OCTOBER 1964 #7 YOU REALLY GOT ME—THE KINKS

Most of the English Invasion bands had images that could be summed up in a few choice words, but not the Kinks. How can you summarize a band that dressed like dandies but fought like pro wrestlers? They were a remarkable band, but the fact remains that they were a complete mess. Their early hits sound like they barely managed to happen. “You Really Got Me,” “All the Day and All of the Night,” “Dedicated Follower of Fashion,” etc., are all excellent, but they seem to be on the brink of collapse.

Ray Davies, the chief songwriter and vocalist, was the core of the group. His brother, Dave, played guitar and occasionally wrote and sang.

The other two members were Mick Avory on drums and Pete Quaife on bass. In 1965, the Kinks were billed as the opening act for the Hollies and the Dave Clark Five. Since they had no hit recording, their primary purpose on the tour was to play familiar material so the following bands could adapt their sounds to suit the







buildings' acoustics. Eventually, the Kinks began to “sneak in” one of their own songs, and the audience reaction was positive. They convinced Pye Records to let them record the song, with the understanding that they would also record more commercial material. Shel Talmy acted as producer, and “You Really Got Me” was recorded with four other songs, but Davies wasn’t satisfied. The sound wasn’t right, and he insisted that they have the opportunity to rerecord the song. To appease the band, Pye gave them £200, assuming they would realize they were just wasting time and money. In three hours, the band slammed through the version we know today.

Dave Davies’s guitar part (although it is sometimes rumored to be Jimmy Page’s) was as influential as a guitar part could be. The anarchy of his solo opened up the door for more noisy guitarists than you can shake an out-of-tune stick at. The band’s teetering performance has also left an indelible impression on rock and roll. “You Really Got Me” was an international hit, and the Kinks were so impressed with its success that their next single was a slightly different version of the same song, called “All the Day and All of the Night.”

## DECEMBER 1964 #1 I FEEL FINE—THE BEATLES

It’s amusing today to think how the executives at Capitol Records complained about the feedback at the top of “I Feel Fine,” assuming it was some gross oversight that was never removed from the tape. In light of future events in popular music, these same executives must have experienced a potent dose of culture shock. Granted, in 1964 feedback wasn’t normally induced deliberately, but the Beatles weren’t a normal band, either. They had developed a fascination with the technical aspects of the recording studio and were eager to add new sounds to their palette. The way things turned out, the noisy guitar intro was the Beatles’ first step into the mysterious world of tape effects and electronically generated sound.

The riff that Ray Charles introduced on “What’d I Say” proved to be a pretty useful starting point for a number of rock-and-roll songs. Structurally, it was nothing more than an arpeggiated blues progression, but its very simplicity made it functional to later songwriters. Some variations were parochial while others were so imaginative that it was difficult to trace the source of their inspiration. “I Feel Fine” was among the latter. The notes of the guitar phrase that run throughout the song and the structure of the rhyme are similar to those on “What’d I Say,” but the tone of the guitar and the *arrangement* of the notes combine for the ultimate example of a

### GREAT HITS

NOVEMBER 1964 #1  
COME SEE ABOUT ME—THE SUPREMES

NOVEMBER 1964 #2  
SHE’S NOT THERE—THE ZOMBIES

### GREAT MISSES

NOVEMBER 1964 #9  
I’M GONNA BE STRONG—GENE PITNEY



rock and roll “hook.” It catches you, pulls you in, and holds you until the record is over.

Can you believe it was only eleven months since the Beatles first hit our shores with “I Want to Hold Your Hand”? They were given the impossible task of living up to the expectations generated by the hysteria of Beatlemania, and against all odds, beyond anybody’s wildest expectations, they lived up to, then surpassed, all of it. Measuring musical growth is among the most subjective of topics, but who would deny that we all emerged from 1964 with a completely different perspective than we had going in? There was a brave new world ahead, and Americans had chosen the Beatles to carry the torch. To quote R.E.M., “It’s the end of the world as we know it, but I FEEL FINE.”

## DECEMBER 1964 #4 SHE’S A WOMAN—THE BEATLES

In England, the single “I Feel Fine”/“She’s a Woman” was released dry as a bone (that is to say, without any treatments). For the American release, Capitol Records had such little respect for the Beatles’ artistic vision that they indiscriminately drenched both sides of the single with near-insane levels of reverb. Who did they think they were to disregard the artists’ intent and alter the finished product so drastically? Well, maybe I’m crazy, but I have to admit it; I like it better with the reverb. A lot better. I don’t know, maybe it’s because I grew up with the modified version and have grown accustomed to it, but when I heard the single as it was intended, it sounded naked and flat. The reverb gave these titles an atmosphere—

**The reverb gave these titles an atmosphere—a lot of atmosphere—as though they were recorded in Genghis Khan’s bathroom or at Shea Stadium before anybody showed up.**

—a lot of atmosphere—as though they were recorded in Genghis Khan’s bathroom or at Shea Stadium before anybody showed up. This bigness suited the Beatles, at least from my adolescent American perspective. Admittedly, Paul McCartney’s ingenious bass line becomes inaudible under the extra noise, and the harshness of the guitar strokes becomes exaggerated to a fault, but the overall effect is exciting. Who wasn’t thrown when, after the intro, the band entered and defined the clonk-clonk-clonk rhythm guitar as upbeat strokes played strictly against the rhythm? Usually, accenting the upbeat on a rhythm instrument is an indication of a reggae beat, but here the structure is so strict that it doesn’t apply. There is none of the relaxed elasticity that is typical of reggae (or ska, or bluebeat, or rock steady). Instead, the rhythm relentlessly ticks on, like a grossly amplified clock. The tempo is not the only thing that sounds strict, either. McCartney’s voice displays a wisdom that eclipses his age (and our impression of his personality). When he sings “My love don’t give me presents, I know that she’s no peasant,” there isn’t a trace of humor or youthful playfulness in his voice. This isn’t a



song about holding hands, that's for sure. Long before he ever reduced his creative expression to the level of wimpiness shown on "Silly Love Songs," McCartney was singing a love song that was anything but silly.

## DECEMBER 1964 #1 YOU'VE LOST THAT LOVIN' FEELING— THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

The Righteous Brothers consisted of Bill Medley (the deep voice) and Bobby Hatfield (the high voice). Together, they are credited for inventing what has since been referred to as "blue-eyed soul." They grew up in Southern California and sang for a while in a group called the Paramours. When singing duets, they realized their styles complemented one another, so they soon left the group and continued as a duo. Black members of their audience who appreciated their artistry dubbed them "righteous brothers," and the name stuck. They subsequently recorded a silly rock-and-roll song that Medley wrote called "Little Latin Lupe Lu" for Moonglow Records and were hired as regular performers on the television show *Shindig*. When they came to the attention of Phil Spector, he signed them not only because he saw their potential, but also because he sensed he could finally break away from the sophomoric girl-group songs with which he had become identified. Songwriters Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil were the perfect vehicle for his new direction. With some structural input from Spector, they wrote "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and had it ready for the Righteous Brothers to record.

When the song was finished, Spector feared that its three-minute-and-forty-six-second length would bar it from AM radio playlists. To solve the problem, he simply had "3:05" printed on the record label, and the ruse apparently worked. "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" reached #1, where it remained for two weeks. With a tempo that resembles a funeral dirge and an anthem-like structure that takes nearly four minutes to unfold, the Righteous Brothers hardly seemed to have a typical 45 RPM single. And if you listen to the song all the way through, you'll see that it isn't typical at all; it's extraordinary.

I must admit that when I was younger, I didn't think much of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." Back then, the "has a good beat and you can dance to it" syndrome that was promulgated week by week on *American Bandstand* was a fairly accurate description of what kids wanted. The single sounded too slow, so slow that you had to check the record player to be sure it didn't accidentally switch to 33 RPM, and the lyrics were about something I didn't yet understand. As I got older, I grew into the song. By the time I reached adulthood, "Lovin' Feeling" became a means

**When the song was finished, Spector feared that its three-minute-and-forty-six-second length would bar it from AM radio playlists.**



by which I could tear my heart out if I was feeling particularly vulnerable. Spector finally found a therapeutic value for his wall of sound. Instead of bowling you over with bigness, he burrows his way into your soul and exposes your fear. The sparring vocal that builds to the final climax is one of the most expressive moments in modern music. With Medley's angst-ridden pleading and Hatfield's uninhibited echo, the entire spectrum of anguish and heartbreak is nakedly laid out. For a few seconds, it actually makes the hurt feel good. "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" may have been too much for a kid, but it was a godsend for everybody else.

**DECEMBER 1964 #6 HOW SWEET IT IS (TO BE LOVED BY YOU)—  
MARVIN GAYE**

The hit streak that Marvin Gaye began in 1963 continued unabated throughout 1964 with "You're a Wonderful One" (#17), "Try It Baby" (#15), and "Baby Don't You Do It" (#27). He also had a pair of hits duetting with Mary Wells. Still, his dream of being a popular middle-of-the-road vocalist gnawed at him. Motown boss Berry Gordy failed to see the commerciality of such a project, but he was intrigued by the prestige that would result if it was successful, so he stayed out of Gaye's way. At his own expense, Gaye released two albums of Tin Pan Alley-inspired material, but the public didn't take the bait. In concert, audiences would flock to see the singer of "Pride and Joy" and "Can I Get a Witness." Instead, Gaye would often sing idiosyncratic versions of songs like "Me and My Shadow," (with a top hat and cane, no less) or "I'll Be Around." Almost apologetically, he would then sing his hits in an abbreviated medley that left his audience, at best, confused. Because of serious bouts of stage fright, he would occasionally have difficulty going on stage at all.

When these Tin Pan Alley albums flopped, Gaye reluctantly realized that his fans were more interested in his pop hits. Although he disliked straining and screaming his way through them, he began to sing his hits in concert. This change of heart came just in time for the *Teenage Awards Music International Show* (T.A.M.I), which was broadcast internationally and featured a blistering, classy performance by Gaye.

Gaye's next single was "How Sweet It Is (to Be Loved by You)." More relaxed than his previous outings, it was also his best recording to date. Written and produced by the Eddie Holland-Lamont Dozier-Brian Holland team, the song was finally something that did not run counter to Gaye's personal taste. The gentle, loping rhythm supported lyrics that he could dedicate to his wife (and the boss's sister), Anna. Despite his image as a ladies' man, he was usually shy around women. Of course, this only added to his appeal, but at least superficially, Gaye

**When these  
Tin Pan Alley  
albums  
flopped, Gaye  
reluctantly  
realized that  
his fans were  
more inter-  
ested in his  
pop hits.**



wanted no part of it. Before his marriage was eventually strained to the breaking point, "How Sweet It Is" was a wonderful testament of love.

## JANUARY 1965 #1 DOWNTOWN—PETULA CLARK

As remarkable as it now seems, Petula Clark began her professional career in 1941, when she was nine years old. "Wait a minute!" I can hear you saying. "That would mean that by the time of her first international megahit record, 'Downtown,' she was a seasoned professional entertainer with more than twenty years of experience in the business." Yup, that's correct. This set her apart from other European-based popular entertainers of the '60s, who mostly were young up-and-comers. Clark was in a class all by herself. By the time the beat-group era reached full swing, she had already charted with numerous U.K. Top 10 hits but remained a nonentity in the United States. Two things conspired to change that completely. The first was Clark's uncanny ability to adapt to new trends without compromising her artistry or her integrity and, most importantly, without seeming out of place. The second was the sudden influx of all things English onto the American charts.

In the early '60s, Clark teamed up with a new producer named Tony Hatch who, rather fortuitously, was also a talented songwriter and arranger. Her first recording of a Hatch composition and arrangement was the timely "Downtown," which kicked off their relationship with a resounding bang. The song became immensely popular in the U.K., in an age when American labels would pick the meat off the U.K. charts and save the bones for soup, so of course Warner Brothers picked up on it and was rewarded with a #1 hit. It later earned a Grammy award, along with "I Know a Place," for best single of the year.

"Downtown" featured a gigantic, dynamic arrangement, capturing the feel of swinging nightlife in London, which had recently been catapulted into the spotlight as the fashion and entertainment capital of the world. Although the image of Swinging England was to be relatively short-lived, in the mid-'60s everything that came from the city was imbued with a sense of immediate importance. Clark was certainly talented, but she was also in the right place at the right time, singing the right song. Of course, the lyrics were generic enough to apply to virtually any metropolis, and audiences easily related to the imagery of a city filled with exciting and stylish people.

Although "Downtown" was the first, a number of other songs at this time would pay tribute to city life. These included "The 'In' Crowd" by Dobie Gray. Unlike "The 'In' Crowd," though, "Downtown" seems to lack any sense of exclusivity. Both celebrate the nightlife of the new hip culture, but Clark sounds as though she would be just as happy window-shopping as dancing the night away. While Gray sings almost menacingly about how cool he is, "Downtown" sounds like a musical prototype of *The Mary Tyler Moore*

**"Downtown" featured a gigantic, dynamic arrangement, capturing the feel of swinging nightlife in London.**





Show. "Gee, it sure is great to be in the city. I'm so happy I think I'll throw my hat into the air. I'm gonna make it after all." Just as London and the rest of Great Britain began to lose the last vestiges of greatness, "Downtown" clung to the promise of a new life.

## JANUARY 1965 #1 MY GIRL—THE TEMPTATIONS

The Temptations' ninth single was "The Girl's Alright with Me"/"I'll Be in Trouble," and it was the last single that any of the Temptations would take a hand in writing. At Motown, Berry Gordy liked to make a distinction between the artists, the producers, and the writers. In his mind, writing and production were on one side of the fence, and recording artists were on the other. He did not welcome it when artists attempted to supply their own material, so whatever inclination the Temptations may have had to write their own songs was suppressed. (This would become a point of contention when artists like Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder wanted to flex their creative muscle later in the decade.) Gordy would assign writers and producers to specific artists as rewards for a job well done. With this formula,

artists who got hot usually stayed hot while many, many others floundered on the sidelines. Once the Temptations got their first hit, they were among the elite and got the full star treatment from the label. Gordy may not have been receptive to their own writing efforts, but he made certain they received material that, at least commercially, impressed them and diminished their desire to supply their own songs.

Occasionally, Gordy or Norman Whitfield would produce the band, but usually Smokey Robinson was asked to rework his magic. For the Temptations' eleventh single, he paired up with one of his group mates from the Miracles, Ronnie White, to write a song that would be the male's response to Mary Wells's hit of the previous year, "My Guy," which Robinson also wrote. "My Girl" proved to be a watershed in the Temptations' career and one of the most memorable songs of Motown's golden era.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1965 <u>HOLD WHAT YOU'VE GOT</u> —JOE TEX	#5
JANUARY 1965 <u>TELL HER NO</u> —THE ZOMBIES	#6
JANUARY 1965 <u>SHAKE!</u> —SAM COOKE	#7

GREAT MISSES	
JANUARY 1965 <u>THE NAME GAME</u> —SHIRLEY ELLIS	#3

What an amazing riff this song has. This could very well be the most famous and well-loved musical phrase of the rock and soul era. The middle section, where everything breaks down to the opening bass and guitar line just before the orchestrated instrumental break, is sheer heaven, a perfect moment in pop music. It was so contagious upon first listen that everybody who heard it was immediately smitten. Even thirty years later, "hey, hey, hey" is an instantly identifiable phrase. This song can induce nostalgic thoughts more readily than most anything else, as is testified by its use in numerous movies and television shows.



Most previous Temptations hits featured Eddie Kendricks on lead, but here David Ruffin is featured for the first time on a single. His husky baritone is quite distinct from Kendricks's falsetto-range tenor, but the production and backing vocals helped make it recognizable as a Temptations record. Visually, there was never any doubt who the Temptations were. Their snappy turn-on-a-dime dance routines set them apart from other singing groups. Back when he was a member of the Primes, Paul Williams handled most of the choreography. His original ideas and perfectionism made the group as sharp as any other in the Detroit area, but once Motown enlisted the services of choreographer extraordinaire Cholly Atkins, the Temptations were no longer simply one of the sharpest dancing groups in the business, they were the best. The combination of memorable stage moves and great songs was perfect for television and live appearances. When millions of fans saw them for the first time singing and dancing to "My Girl" on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the Temptations were seen as the most exciting and visceral groups from Motown.

## JANUARY 1965 #13 THE "IN" CROWD—DOBIE GRAY

Coming from a sharecropper's family in Texas, where he was one of eight children, hardly made Dobie Gray a likely candidate to be singing about his status among the paparazzi and the glitterati. But Gray wanted to sing, and he knew he would have to go to the city to do so. His ambition led him to Los Angeles, where he answered an ad placed by Sonny Bono, who was looking for talented singers in his pre-Sonny and Cher days. Gray had a minor hit in 1963 called "Look at Me" (#91), but it was his next record that would make a deep impression in both the U.S. and particularly in the U.K.

In America, "The 'In' Crowd" brought to mind fancy nightclubs with an even fancier clientele. Gray, who cowrote the song, captured how it felt to be on the right side of the right door while hanging with a fast crowd. The record exuded a cool confidence and a slight sense of danger that made Gray and his 'in' crowd seem untouchable. At a time when attitude ruled, few songs were as defiantly cool as "The 'In' Crowd." The Ramsey Lewis Trio would cut a jazzy instrumental version of the song that by summer would chart even higher than Gray's original. Still, he never could have predicted just how relevant his song would be in England.

The English obsession with African-American music had taken on some pretty strange and diverse permutations, from skiffle to trad jazz to electric blues to the beat movement, and finally to the mod movement. By the mid-'60s, England was up to its earlobes in groups that had been inspired mostly by American R&B, and these bands triggered a fashion boom that was so powerful it began to eclipse the music that spawned it. The teenagers who signed on to the fashion trend fancied themselves as the "mods." Before there were mods, there were the "rockers." The English rockers were a product of the early part of the decade. They had been raised on American rock

**The newer and the more obscure the song, the more appealing it was.**



and roll from the '50s and dressed in the simple jeans and leather of their heroes, like Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran, and the king, Elvis Presley. The mods, on the other hand, considered themselves to be the latest, hippest, newest, most modern human beings on the face of the earth. The rockers were their nemesis, and bloody summertime battles between the two factions were regular occurrences at the English resort towns and inspired fear in the rest of the population.

Fashion was king among the mods, and styles were formulated with a nearly insane attention to detail. A difference of one inch on a hemline or a jacket's side vent made all the difference. Despite the uniformity, exclusivity was the key, and when fueled by fistfuls of pills, these hyped-up, dandified teenagers with dilated pupils and no appetite would dance (or hop in place, really) to the latest American disks. The newer and the more obscure the song, the more appealing it was. Released right at the onset of this uniquely English phenomenon, "The 'In' Crowd" inadvertently defined the scene perfectly. Virtually unknown, Gray was automatically considered "hip." The record's American R&B sound also made it a shoo-in among the fanatical purists. The mod movement would eventually spawn its own groups, notably the Who and the Small Faces, but songs like "The 'In' Crowd" provided the impetus to keep the movement inspired.

After releasing "The 'In' Crowd," Gray would have trouble finding an adequate follow-up single. Eventually, he put music aside for acting, including a stint as a cast member of the musical *Hair*. He would not return to the Top 40 until eight years later, with the seminal and transcendent "Drift Away."

## JANUARY 1965 #18 GIVE HIM A GREAT BIG KISS—THE SHANGRI-LAS

**W**hen I say I'm in luv, you best believe I'm in luv, L-U-V." I know the girl-group songs were supposed to sound dumb, but *this* dumb? Producer George "Shadow" Morton dedicated all of his energy to the Shangri-Las, and he lavished them with ideas that were drawn directly from Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller (the story-line song) and Phil Spector (the hugeness of it all). The dumbness of "Give Him a Great Big Kiss" is really nothing less than genius. In fewer than three minutes, it encapsulates what it really must have been like to date in the '60s while still in high school. Relationships weren't just between boyfriend and girlfriend; all of the couple's friends had to know what was going on, as well. While the guys probably wanted to know if he got to third base, the girls were more concerned with aesthetics, and her friends no doubt would have different questions. Since this is a girl-group song, it's the aesthetic questions that we hear:

"What color are his eyes?"

"I dunno, he's always wearin' shades." (Ha!)

"Yeah? Well, I hear he's bad."

"Mmmm, he's good bad, but he's not evil."

Best of all, when asked how he dances, the girl finally condescends to her interrogators and replies, deadpan, "Close. Very...very...close." Bada-boom, crash.

These spoken pieces of dialogue are sprinkled throughout the song and repre-



sent some of the premier moments in rock and roll record-dom. “Give Him a Great Big Kiss” is, on its own terms, perfect. It’s got everything: humor, sass, camp, attitude—and it’s dumb. Very...very...dumb.

## FEBRUARY 1965 #1 EIGHT DAYS A WEEK—THE BEATLES

**B**y 1965, the Beatles were physically exhausted. They moved from place to place as though they were inside a bubble, protected (i.e., isolated) from the outside world, yet constantly on display. The weary faces that stared back at us from the covers of their fourth English album (*Beatles for Sale*) and their fifth American Capitol release (a compilation of songs from their first English album, titled *The Early Beatles*) looked washed out, almost like the face of a president at the losing end of a four-year term. They put everything they physically could into their careers, yet they felt as though they were running (sprinting, actually) in place.

“Eight Days a Week” was intended to be an album cut only, but Capitol extracted it for single release. Like “A Hard Day’s Night,” the title was taken from an expression of Ringo’s, decrying their ungodly work schedule. Although their pace took an emotional toll, they were not artistically spent. On “Eight Days a Week,” the Beatles turned a shortcoming into an opportunity by writing one of the most optimistic love songs of their career. Whatever tenuous ties the Beatles may have had with R&B were broken, as they instead embraced full-tilt pop as their medium of choice. The Beatles seemed to have a sixth sense that perfectly gauged their times. Now that they had given youth culture an identity, they artfully pursued the task of supplying this bright-eyed generation with appropriate music. As “Eight Days a Week” fades in (perhaps the first time anyone used a fade-in), it heralds the arrival of the “new” ’60s—the golden half-decade of popular music. A heady optimism took hold, and the Beatles swept us away on a wave of positive expectations. Like overworked midwives at a difficult birth, their drawn-out faces conveyed the struggle they endured to instigate popular music’s rebirth.

## FEBRUARY 1965 #6 FERRY CROSS THE MERSEY— GERRY AND THE PACEMAKERS

**I**t’s hard to discern if it was a help or a hindrance to Gerry and the Pacemakers to have been so closely associated with the Beatles. Besides being from Liverpool, both shared producer George Martin and manager Brian Epstein. They both played the Cavern and cut their teeth in Hamburg. In the maddening rush of 1964, English groups were popping up like weeds in America. At the risk of using an obvious cliché, the Beatles were the wave, and Gerry and the Pacemakers were part of the wake that followed them here. So perhaps Gerry and the Pacemakers might never have been heard in America if the Beatles hadn’t washed ashore first.

Then again, maybe “Don’t Let the Sun Catch You Crying” was good enough to



**Singing a song about their hometown of Liverpool in "Ferry Cross the Mersey" only heightened comparisons to the Beatles.**

make the transatlantic journey on its own. If that were so, then perhaps Gerry and the Pacemakers could have developed at their own speed. Then they might have been able to linger a while longer on the charts.

Singing a song about their hometown of Liverpool in "Ferry Cross the Mersey" only heightened comparisons to the Beatles. Unfortunately, these comparisons started to take a toll. Gerry Marsden thought of Liverpool as a home base while other bands considered their home to be a launching pad. As the Beatles changed, and as music and trends changed, Gerry and the Pacemakers remained the same. While Marsden mugged it up for the cameras, the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, and others challenged us musically and socially. The worldliness and experience of the other bands slowly made the Pacemakers seem anachronistic. Marsden must have sensed this himself when he sang, "So I'll continue to say, here I always will stay."

Marsden's ingratiating style simultaneously began to detract from the band's legitimacy as rock and rollers while it bolstered their image with an older audience. When record sales began to plummet, the Pacemakers disbanded. Marsden went on to become a successful cabaret performer and made frequent appearances on children's programs.

## **FEBRUARY 1965 #11 RED ROSES FOR A BLUE LADY— BERT KAEMPFERT & HIS ORCHESTRA**

**N**o, I do not have to be kidding you. Okay, so it's not "Green Onions." You're probably thinking that the last time you heard this song, somebody interrupted the Muzak tape and announced, "Cleanup, Aisle Eight." Still, I think its place on the Top 40 is defensible, or maybe it isn't, but I would like to try.

Lush arrangements of syrupy ballads were not exactly considered hip in the mid-'60s (or at any other time, for that matter). Back in 1955, the pop charts were chock full of schlocky instrumentals, but little by little, teen-oriented music began to take over. Successive periods of popularity for R&B, doo-wop, rock and roll, teen idol trash, girl groups, and the British Invasion left less and less room for the old hit parade. Since the average age of record buyers dipped considerably, a smaller market share was left for easy listening. It was strange for an orchestra to share chart space with the Beatles and the Shangri-Las, but it's not too hard to figure out why, above all others, Bert Kaempfert and His Orchestra accomplished this. Most other popular orchestras, like Ray Conniff's and Lawrence Welk's, became hopelessly outdated and boring. Their musical offerings were either so ordinary or so awfully corny that they conjured up images of bingo palaces and soap





bubbles. Kaempfert may not have been hip, but at least he sounded modern. His recordings cleverly employed a healthy dose of echo, and his percussion section supplied what can only be described as the definitive “boom” sound. Usually a wordless chorus hummed suggestively in the background, behind great, bright trumpet solos, played by either Fred Moch or Charles Tabor. All in all, his songs were atmospheric, and they engulfed you in their sound.

Kaempfert was a multi-instrumentalist from Hamburg, who worked as head arranger, producer, and conductor for Polydor Records. As an aside, he played a crucial role in arranging the Beatles’ very first recording session with Tony Sheridan—when they were playing in Hamburg (see, he *is* slightly hip). His own recording career began in post-war Germany, and he was soon one of the most popular recording artists in all of Europe. His compositions include “Moon over Naples” (aka “Spanish Eyes”), “L-O-V-E,” “Danke Schoen,” and “Strangers in the Night.” Kaempfert’s easy-listening style became world-renowned when “Wonderland by Night” became a huge international hit, including #1 in the U.S. The trademark echo and brilliant trumpet sound are in full display in this title and give the melody an engaging and evocative atmosphere, which cleverly suggests a romantic evening in the big city without any need for words.

“Red Roses for a Blue Lady” is even better. All the trademark ingredients are there, from the humming female chorus to the spacious echo that washes over you to the muted mezzo piano trumpets—and that “boom” sound that I was talking about (stop snickering). Best of all is the trumpet solo, which says more than any vocal version could hope to convey, particularly if you are familiar with the corny turn-of-the-century lyrics of writers Sid Tepper and Roy Brodsky. “Red Roses for a Blue Lady” isn’t stylish, but it’s pretty. It proved that not just kids were buying singles, and that a well-arranged orchestral tune could still chart, provided it was recorded effectively and played often at the shopping mall.

**Successive periods of popularity for R&B, doo-wop, rock and roll, teen idol trash, girl groups, and the British Invasion left less and less room for the old hit parade.**

## **FEBRUARY 1965 #31 A CHANGE IS GONNA COME—SAM COOKE**

**O**n December 10, 1964, Sam Cooke found himself at the wrong end of a gun. The alleged circumstances involved Cooke and a twenty-two-year-old woman at a motel in Los Angeles. When he was in the bathroom, the woman ran from the room, taking most of his clothes with her, supposedly to prevent him from following. Cooke, outraged, ran to the motel office wearing only his sport coat and shoes and proceeded to pound on the manager’s door, believing the girl to be inside. Fearing for her life at the sight of a semi-naked man in a fit of rage, Bertha Franklin unloaded three rounds into Cooke’s chest, then beat him on the head with a club. Because of the compromising circumstances of his death, the clean-



cut image of the family man and gospel singer came to a rather ignominious end.

The inappropriate posthumous single “Shake!” charted in January with the transcendent and utterly appropriate “A Change Is Gonna Come” on the B side. Songs this powerful rarely enter the Top 40, but Cooke’s sudden death had a profound effect on his fans, making the autobiographical nature of “A Change Is Gonna Come” all the more moving. Signaling a return to his gospel roots, the song more than hints at the mature material Cooke was capable of and might have pursued, had he lived. The lyrics address the frustration of racial inequities in a highly personal manner and were especially significant given the times.

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1965	#21
<u>YEN YEN—GEORGIE FAME</u>	

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1965	#32
<u>NEW YORK’S A LONELY TOWN— THE TRADEWINDS</u>	

Twenty-five thousand people attempted to attend Cooke’s funeral at Chicago’s Tabernacle Baptist Church. Ray Charles performed, and Muhammad Ali was granted a private viewing of his close friend’s body before the casket was sealed.

Had he lived, it is hard to say how much more Cooke might have achieved. Barely in his thirties and with so much talent at his disposal, the full impact of his untimely death can only be surmised.

### MARCH 1965 #1 STOP! IN THE NAME OF LOVE—THE SUPREMES

**W**ith all of the talk about the “Motown sound” and so many critics and historians chasing their tails attempting to define it, hardly anybody seemed to get it right, but it’s really not difficult to explain. Motown, unlike other labels, was a complex talent organization, with writers, producers, musicians, and artists all mingling freely and working on each other’s products in an infinite variety of combinations. Since the talent was not segregated, a homogeneity resulted which

GREAT MISSES	
MARCH 1965	#1
<u>I’M TELLING YOU NOW— FREDDIE AND THE DREAMERS</u>	

blended the various ingredients into an identifiable “sound.” For example, most Motown tracks featured any one of three drummers and even fewer bass players: usually it was the team of Benny Benjamin and James Jamerson. (Their names sound almost as mellifluous as their rhythms.) The same recording studio was used for almost everything. Producers flitted from

artist to artist at president Berry Gordy’s whim, and the artists themselves often guested on one another’s tracks. With so much familial mingling, it only makes sense that the label’s output had a recognizable aural unity that other companies lacked. It wasn’t just the echo (which they actually created in a bathroom behind the control room), or the heavy backbeat, or the driving bass, or “rats, roaches,



guts, and love,” as Gordy once said. It was everything, all rolled up into a unified mass and distributed where it was most required. *That* was the Motown sound.

But sound was not the only thing under control at Motown. Gordy set up a division called “artistic development,” which served as a finishing school of sorts for performing artists. There was a charm school, run by a certain Maxine Powell, who trained the young girls in how to behave, dress, and move like ladies and the young men in how to behave, period. Deportment mattered to Gordy and it was Maxine Powell’s job to make sure that it mattered to the singers as well. There were also performance classes, in which groups polished their vocal, dancing, and presentation skills. Maurice King handled the musical direction while stage choreography was the responsibility of Cholly Atkins. Through these rigorous rehearsals, the acts developed stamina, confidence, and an identifiable style. It was Atkins who gave the Supremes their limp-wristed, demure routines that became their signature, but it was apparently *not* Atkins who came up with the crossing-guard “Stop!” maneuver. While on tour in Europe, “Stop! In the Name of Love” hit big, and a flustered Diane Ross realized they had never rehearsed the tune with Atkins. One of the Temptations thought up the silly hand gesture that has since become their most memorable pose.

It was around this time when plain old Diane Ross opted to trade her moniker for the more sophisticated Miss Diana Ross. She now possessed a name to match the Supremes’ continually improving image and fame. “Stop! In the Name of Love” further cemented the impression that the Supremes were “supremely” talented, when it became their fourth consecutive #1 record. Although the hand gesture was striking, it never could have salvaged a lousy song. “Stop! In the Name of Love” was their strongest outing yet. Unlike their previous songs, songwriters Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland had penned a full song as opposed to a series of verses. This gave the Supremes something to sink their teeth into, and they did so with relish. For the first time, Ross projected herself willfully, and her confidence shows all over this record. Upon first hearing this song, most people realized one thing: *nothing* was going to stop the Supremes.

## MARCH 1965 #4 SHOTGUN—JR. WALKER & THE ALL STARS

In the '50s, Jr. Walker and the All Stars were a hot bar band that had a reputation for quick adaptation to requests from their usually demanding audiences. Battle Creek, Michigan, was their home base, and they developed a steady following that earned them a sufficient, though not spectacular, living playing music. Besides their own shows, they also worked as backing musicians for a duo known as Johnny Bristol and Jack Beavers. Bristol and Beavers were brought to the attention of Harvey Fuqua, the ex-Moonglow who ran a few small record labels with his wife, Gwen Gordy (Berry Gordy’s sister). Fuqua signed the pair, who promptly convinced him to produce Jr. Walker and the All Stars, as well. The All Stars released a few singles and did well enough locally to satisfy Fuqua of his acquisition’s worth. Soon, though, Berry Gordy came calling. He recruited Harvey



and Gwen to consolidate their energies exclusively on Motown Records and its subsidiaries. At Harvey Fuqua's option, he brought Jr. Walker and the All Stars with him, and they were signed to the offshoot Soul label.

A year passed before the group released its debut single on Soul, the double-sided "Monkey Jump"/"Satan's Blues." It wasn't until their next release, though, that they achieved national recognition. With its opening burst of artillery, "Shotgun" exploded off the turntable with a relentlessly frenetic groove. This juggernaut was mostly instrumental, except for Walker's seemingly off-the-cuff comments and odd exhortations for everybody to get up and dance. He combined the best traits of Boots Randolph, Booker T. and the MG's, and King Curtis, rolled them into a monstrous, riff-driven groove, and released it onto unsuspecting dance floors all over the world. With a sound that crossed barbecue sauce with pigs' knuckles, Jr. Walker and the All Stars were thoroughly unlike their smooth, well-polished label mates at Motown.

"Shotgun" has the kind of drive that causes even twin left-footers to bounce and shake around. Like its follow-up singles "Shake and Fingerpop" and "Road Runner," it infects the listener with a desirable backbone disease that causes them to slip and slither uncontrollably. All those years Jr. Walker and the All Stars had spent entertaining roadhouses and nightclubs were not wasted. Even today, most deejays know that if you have the audience on the dance floor, one of the best ways to keep 'em there is with "Shotgun."

### MARCH 1965 #15 DON'T LET ME BE MISUNDERSTOOD—THE ANIMALS

The Animals were formed when the members of a jazz trio—Alan Price, John Steele, and Chas Chandler—took on new members Eric Burdon and Hilton Valentine. They changed their name from the Alan Price Combo to the Kansas

City Five, as a vague reference to their newfound rhythm-and-blues sound. Because of Burdon's rough nature and the band's sloppy dress, however, audiences ignored their chosen name and dubbed them the Animals. In the same way some people get saddled with unfortunate nicknames, the tag stuck.

The band's first and greatest commercial success was "House of the Rising Sun." Their follow-up singles did well but were not as successful, so Price scoured demos and discovered "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood." Burdon had the perfect personality to sing this song because, actually, nobody did understand him. With his drinking binges, brawls, and obsessions, he managed to alienate most anybody who knew him, not least of all the other bandmembers. When he sings,

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1965 <u>TIRED OF WAITING FOR YOU</u> — THE KINKS	#6
MARCH 1965 <u>NOWHERE TO RUN</u> — MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS	#8
MARCH 1965 <u>PEOPLE GET READY</u> — THE IMPRESSIONS	#14
MARCH 1965 <u>I DON'T WANT TO SPOIL THE PARTY</u> — THE BEATLES	#39





"I'm just a soul whose intentions are good; oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood," it sounds like nothing less than a confession.

The other bandmembers, though, were certainly not convinced. Burdon remained difficult to work with, and it was just a matter of months before the original lineup would completely disintegrate.

### GREAT MISSES

MARCH 1965 #21  
**DO THE CLAM—ELVIS PRESLEY**

## APRIL 1965 #9 THE LAST TIME—THE ROLLING STONES

The Rolling Stones' early history was as colorful and rife with enticingly lurid details as the formative years of any rock-and-roll band could be, rivaling or even surpassing the legendary story of the early Beatles. During most of this time, though, the group was of only marginal interest in America. They were one of the last English Invasion bands and were only reaching their stride as many other groups were already showing signs of irrelevance. Easily the most reputable source for information on the early Stones is bassist Bill Wyman's exhaustive band history, *Stone Alone*. With an almost obsessive eye for detail, Wyman documents events by referencing his diaries, news clippings, and other witness accounts, as well as his own seemingly photographic memory.

To give an indication of just how much history had elapsed before "The Last Time" was released, Wyman's chronologically arranged book makes no mention of it until page 298! Four Rolling Stones singles preceded "The Last Time" onto the Top 40. The first was a lackluster original composition called "Tell Me (You're Coming Back)." The next two were cover versions of (then) obscure American R&B songs called "It's All Over Now" (originally by the Valentinos) and "Time Is on My Side" (originally by Irma Thomas). These were followed by the less than heart-stopping "Heart of Stone." Considering the earlier impact of other bands like Herman's Hermits, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Animals, and of course the Beatles, the Rolling Stones at first seemed to be a bunch of late-starting also-rans. Then "The Last Time" elevated them into a category all their own.

Before this recording, most of the Rolling Stones' material was either lifted directly from or was derivative of American R&B. Technically speaking, "The Last Time" was no exception. The song already existed as a slower, religious-based composition by the Staple Singers. In an astoundingly nervy moment of avaricious plagiarism, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards claimed 100 percent author-

### GREAT HITS

APRIL 1965 #3  
**I KNOW A PLACE—PETULA CLARK**

APRIL 1965 #8  
**I'LL BE DOGGONE—MARVIN GAYE**

### GREAT MISSES

APRIL 1965 #8  
**THE CLAPPING SONG  
 [CLAP PAT CLAP SLAP]—  
 SHIRLEY ELLIS**





ship of their Anglicized and considerably less religious version. After all, who would know the difference? In 1965, not many people did. Even the Staple Singers must have scratched their heads, wondering how their tune could suddenly sound as though it were a paean to evil carnality.

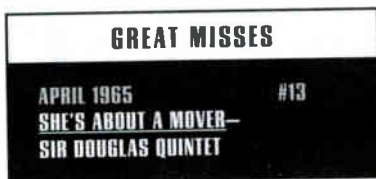
The song consists of a guttural guitar riff that sounds as though it's echoing its way up from the bowels of hell, while Jagger tunelessly issues a dire warning to the listener. What could be done to avoid this incensed lunacy as Jagger and Co. scared and captivated us at the same time? It sounded gleefully evil. The image was only bolstered by the terrifying confirmation offered by the record's B side, "Play with Fire," which sounds as though Satan himself might be issuing the evil warning. Adults worldwide heeded the advice and ran for the hills while kids everywhere were thrilled to hear a band that could so easily intimidate authority figures. The more bad press the Rolling Stones received, the better it was for their image. Unwittingly, the establishment only fueled the group's popularity by constantly insulting their hair, their clothes, and their music. To adults, the Rolling Stones were a pariah, but to the ever more rebellious kids who *wanted* to aggravate their parents, they were the coolest band in town. They were like an evil counterpart to the Beatles, and arguably as popular.

## APRIL 1965 #16 OOO BABY BABY—THE MIRACLES

**W**ith "Ooo Baby Baby," Smokey Robinson gave the world the best making-up song of all time. Probably hundreds, if not thousands, of couples stuck out hard times because somebody played this song and asked for forgiveness. More than a handful of men and women can relate when he sings, "Mistakes, I know I've made a few, but I'm only human. You've made mistakes, too." How could anyone resist the song's heartfelt, decent, and sincere sentiments? Today, they can all thank (or blame) Robinson.

More than any song, "Ooo Baby Baby" highlights Robinson's naturally interpretive talents. His voice sounds like it is floating on a cloud. Despite the various cover versions, this song will always belong exclusively to Smokey. Linda Ronstadt recorded a version (with Top 40 results) but couldn't duplicate Robinson's *natural* melismatic flow and *understated* style, which *subtly* seduce the listener. While Smokey finessed, Ronstadt relied on pyrotechnics. It didn't hurt matters, either, that Robinson had garnered a well-deserved reputation as a suave and soft-spoken gentleman. Who could deny a second chance to somebody who was so fundamentally decent? Robinson was aware of his image and knew full well what would work best for it. "Ooo Baby Baby" bolstered his image as a sincere ladies' man by conveying an attitude that was self-tailored for a fine custom fit.

Dating tip of the week: Ladies, if you meet a man and discover that he has this





song on his answering machine, BEWARE!

Men: Never, ever, put this song on your answering machine.

## MAY 1965 #1 TICKET TO RIDE—THE BEATLES

**R**ock and roll never would have existed without the invention of the electric guitar. Just one listen to “Ticket to Ride” will bear this out. All of the ground-work that was laid by its forebears—such as Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, and a host of others—is utilized and expanded upon. The song is built from the ground up, with the ringing electric guitar line serving as the structural cornerstone. The classic rock-and-roll lineup of two six-string guitars, a bass guitar, and drums (sorry, keyboard players, but it’s the truth) could not have been put to better use. Every sound is integral, just as every sound, excluding the drums, is electric or amplified. The clanging electric guitar gives this song a reason to exist, and anyone who covers this without it (who remembers the Carpenters’ rendition?) has completely missed the point.

By now, the Beatles had become a well-greased machine. They were a unified whole, a single entity. This is beginning to sound like rhetoric, so please allow me to explain. Think of another band from this period (chances are they’ll be British) and focus on one of their hit singles. Odds are that the performance will feature a lead singer who takes a central role, with one or two supportive instruments playing counterpoint, while the rest of the band simply fills in the blanks. Now, think of “Ticket to Ride.” Paul McCartney’s harmonies blend so symbiotically with John Lennon’s lead vocal that they become inseparable. Furthermore, the band’s sound has a unified “oneness” about it that is simply undeniable. What’s more integral? The chiming guitar riff? Ringo’s slamming drum pattern? The rhythmic bass line? It didn’t stay like this for very long, but for a while at least, the Beatles were operating eight arms with one mind.



## MAY 1965 #1 BACK IN MY ARMS AGAIN—THE SUPREMES

**W**here Did Our Love Go,” “Baby Love,” “Come See about Me.” When they achieved three consecutive #1 hits with the Supremes, the songwriting team Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland must have felt that they could do no wrong, and they were right. Berry Gordy pulled them from all their other obligations and made them personally responsible for all the Supremes’ recordings. Their next 45, “Stop! In the Name of Love,” became their fourth #1 hit, and in the spring of 1965 “Back in My Arms Again” became the fifth. In less than one year, the Supremes, with the support of Holland-Dozier-Holland, achieved five #1 records in a row.



**Judging from the early Supremes hits, verses were hardly their strong point, and "Back in My Arms Again" signaled a step in the right direction.**

Whatever they were doing, they were doing it right, but there was no magic formula. Holland-Dozier-Holland's ordinary working procedure was to just wing it. Ideas were thrown against the wall, and if one stuck, well then great, and if it didn't, try the next one. Although their responsibilities intertwined, each of the three had a specialty. Eddie Holland was the lyricist and worked with the singers. His brother, Brian Holland, handled production and the musicians. Lamont Dozier wrote the melodies that served as a guide for each song's construction. For "Back in My Arms Again," the writers returned to the musical structure of "Come See about Me." Essentially, they rewrote their own song and improved on it by adding verses with some melodic content. Judging from the early Supremes hits, verses were hardly their strong point, and "Back in My Arms Again" signaled a step in the right direction. The team can hardly be faulted for

being slow to amend their approach, considering their track record, but they could not stay in the same place either. Signs of uncertainty became visible on their next release, "Nothing but Heartaches." It was even reflected in the sales, as the song broke their streak of #1 hits when it stalled at #11. This would be rectified, though, on their next single, "I Hear a Symphony."

As far as pop music was concerned, the English Invasion and the Motown sound were almost the only games in town. While the Beatles led the overseas charge, the Supremes headed the Motown front line. For all intents and purposes, these were the most consistently interesting years in popular music. One day in 1965, the two bands happened to be in New York at the same time, and their managers arranged a meeting. Unfortunately, the Beatles either forgot or were caught off guard. When the three impeccably dressed women from Motown entered the Beatles' suite, they were lounging in their socks and T-shirts while the pungent aroma of marijuana hung in the air. John Lennon, nonplussed by their sudden appearance, said nothing. Instead, he wound up a toy car and sent it racing across the floor toward them. The Beatles couldn't figure how such great music could come from such apparently naive girls, and the Supremes were less than impressed by the Beatles, as well. After twenty minutes, the meeting was over. So much for any hope of an artistic union. No matter, though, since neither act had very much to offer the other anyway. Considering that in the '60s the Supremes' twelve #1 records were second only to the Beatles' nineteen, they both survived just fine.



## MAY 1965 #1 I CAN'T HELP MYSELF (SUGAR PIE, HONEY BUNCH)— THE FOUR TOPS

**W**as Motown hot or what? Just as the Supremes backed out of the #1 spot on the national charts with “Back in My Arms Again,” the Four Tops stood poised and ready with “I Can’t Help Myself.” Back-to-back #1 hits for Motown made everyone in the organization very pleased, but none more so than Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland, who wrote and produced both records. Speaking of which...is it my imagination, or does this song sound like something that would have fit neatly into the Supremes’ catalog? These three guys had a lot of responsibility, what with being the only producers who were allowed to work with the Supremes. Maybe, just maybe, they penned this with the Supremes in mind and decided, in a pinch, to give it to Levi Stubbs and the boys. If that was the case, then it was a beneficent decision because there is probably no other group in the world who could have done better with this material than the Four Tops. While the Supremes would most likely have sounded sly and sexy, the Four Tops sound exasperated and desperate. It is part of the genius of the song’s composition that it was open to either interpretation without any changes to the lyrics or the rhythm.

The redundancy of the melody is typical of Holland-Dozier-Holland’s work. If any producers were capable of driving home a potent riff, these were the guys. They could yield an undeniably infectious #1 hit record from nothing more than one simple idea repeated endlessly, and “I Can’t Help Myself” is proof. The song is nothing more than a repeated chorus with only the slightest of variations each time it rolls around. The chorus itself is hardly more clever than the same melodic idea, repeated as a round, over a riff that is repeated ad infinitum. There is no verse, no refrain, no bridge, and not even a middle eight (A middle-eight is an eight-bar section of a song that breaks up a monotonous verse-chorus arrangement. This section can also be referred to as a bridge or refrain), unless you count the section where the band sits on the opening chord for an extra bar (“When I call your name, girl, it starts a flame...”) as a “change.” The riff has the insistency and momentum of a train moving at full speed, thanks to the super-talented James Jamerson’s bass line. The Four Tops added enough genuine talent to keep the song interesting, but the power of their performance went beyond being merely interesting. It was captivating. The song develops a hypnotic pull that is inescapable because of its predictability. In 1965, was there a listener anywhere who could resist being taken in by the propulsive melody and powerful vocals? Motown had firmly established its very own “Motown sound” and in answer to the opening question, yes, it most definitely was hot.

## MAY 1965 #10 IT’S NOT UNUSUAL—TOM JONES

**F**or the disenfranchised older fans who were feeling left out by the sudden influx of androgynous-looking, long-haired bands, Tom Jones stood out like a beacon.



**"It's Not Unusual" unapologetically flaunts a Las Vegas-style arrangement that allows Jones to show off the power of his tenor with a confident swagger.**

With so many beat groups featuring vocalists who could barely hold a tune, it was easy for somebody who insisted on "real" talent to appreciate Jones's style and vocal ability. While the groups seemed threatening and rebellious, Jones was quite satisfied to be perceived as a celebrity who was among "the establishment," providing a tonic for those who feared change. Sexy, cool, and hip in a sophisticated way, he was, in a sense, a replacement for the fading Elvis Presley.

Thomas J. Woodward was born and raised in South Wales. At a young age he became a performer, using the pseudonym Tommy Scott, but none of his early musical projects amounted to much. In a move of desperation, he changed his name again, this time to Tom Jones, hoping to capitalize on the popularity of the film with the same name. His career remained at a standstill until his manager, Gordon Mills, wrote a song for the young singer called "It's Not Unusual." It was an instant success in the U.K. and, not too surprisingly, in the U.S., as well.

Without artifice, "It's Not Unusual" unapologetically flaunts a Las Vegas-style arrangement that allows Jones to show off the power of his tenor with a confident swagger. This would come in handy when he later became one of the most in-demand performers on the Las Vegas dinner-club circuit.

A large segment of the population was immediately taken by the sound and appearance of this rough and ready Welshman. His half-open dress shirts and macho demeanor served as a prototype for a host of bewigged imitators wearing gold chains and leisure suits, but Jones was never as laughably ridiculous as many of his clones. His material, though, was another matter. "What's New, Pussycat?" at least seemed to be a knowing farce, aware of its own camp, but the overwrought histrionics of the murderously jealous lover portrayed in "Delilah" cross the line into outright hysterics. Women in particular seemed immune to the absurdity of this material and would often throw themselves at him while he performed. Such was the magnetism of his sex appeal.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1965 <b>WOOLY BULLY— SAM THE SHAM AND THE PHAROONS</b>	#2
MAY 1965 <b>JUST A LITTLE—THE BEAU BRUMMELS</b>	#8

Jones found a comfortable niche for himself that would remain unchallenged until his photocopy with the funny name, Engelbert Humperdinck, would wrangle his way onto the charts. After 1971, his popularity would diminish, but from time to time he would reinvent his persona sufficiently to warrant a reappearance on the pop charts. Jones even scored a hit in 1989 when he teamed up with techno-rockers the Art of Noise for an excellent version of a song written by Prince called "Kiss." It seems unlikely, though, that he will ever be able to duplicate the swooning allegiance that he





elicited, particularly among older, married women, around the time of “It’s Not Unusual.”

## MAY 1965 #39 SUBTERRANEAN HOMESICK BLUES—BOB DYLAN

From 1950, when the Weavers charted with “Goodnight Irene,” until 1958, when the Kingston Trio reached #1 with “Tom Dooley,” folk music had formed a rather uncomfortable alliance with the pop charts. Its major innovators—from Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie on up to the Almanac Singers and the Weavers—had all predated 1955, when the Top 40 was created. By then, it could be argued that Senator Joseph McCarthy and his blind blacklisting of anything even remotely leftist had taken the teeth out of folk music. His reign of terror meant that politics could play no part in folk’s subject matter, at least directly, so the music lost its primary identity and driving force. As a result, later folkies could be more accurately described as traditionalists rather than innovators. Singing groups such as the Highwaymen and the Kingston Trio had hits that were categorized as folk, but many “real” folk enthusiasts criticized the newcomers for failing to uphold their own purist ethic or for being commercial. In other words, folk music was a complete ideological mess. If nothing else, at least the ideas of integrity and honesty of expression remained as key ingredients.

By the early ’60s, the rebellious nature of folk music began to reemerge, most notably in the personage of Bob Dylan. Before Robert Zimmerman set out for the greener pastures of New York’s “Green-witch Village” from his hometown of Hibbing, Minnesota, he changed his name, invented a new persona, and fabricated a past that seemed to change at every telling. The city offered him a chance for fame, glory, and a meeting with his hero, Woody Guthrie. In a surprisingly short space of time, he achieved all three goals. The folk clubs where he played gave him exposure and recognition that his rural past could barely have suggested, yet he accepted his fame as a matter of course. He would occasionally be hired to play harmonica at recording sessions, and it was at one such session that he met Columbia Records’ legendary A&R genius, John Hammond. Hammond had taken an educated gamble when he signed Dylan to Columbia, since he could not have been fully aware of all the latent talent that Dylan possessed. His masterful instincts may have clued him in to the enormous songwriting potential that was simmering below the surface, but Dylan’s first album showed him to be more of an interpreter than an innovator. His early material was steeped in folk tradition, particularly the common-man themes of Guthrie. His individuality was

### GREAT HITS

MAY 1965 #20  
IKO IKO—THE DIXIE CUPS

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1965 #18  
DO THE FREDDIE—  
FREDDIE AND THE DREAMERS

MAY 1965 #40  
LET’S DO THE FREDDIE—  
CHOBBY CHECKER



**If you discern  
some inside  
joke or underly-  
ing meaning,  
that's fine.  
Just remember,  
"You don't need  
a weather man  
to know which  
way the wind  
blows."**

not immediately apparent (at least not on vinyl), but his embracing of the working-class ethic and the plights of the powerless made him nothing if not amenable to folk's many cause célèbres. By his second album, Dylan found his own voice and, by writing what was to become folk's new anthem, "Blowin' in the Wind," had found himself embraced as the great white hope of folk music.

His third album, *The Times They Are a-Changin'* (the title song of which also became a folk anthem), voiced a heavy conscience that unashamedly questioned the correctness of overt liberalism and displayed a sensitivity to more than one viewpoint. Most of this album still holds up today, an astounding feat if you consider the analysis it has been subjected to and the political permutations that have occurred in the interim. Dylan was aligned to become the voice of conscience for the next generation, but just when the folkies thought they had his number, he transformed into something else. It would not be the last time he would alter his image and style.

His fourth album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, addressed more personal politics and demanded interpretation and speculation from his listeners. He was withdrawing into himself and following his own muse instead of what folk music's old guard had expected and almost demanded. His lyrics were dense and wordy, full of surreal and imagistic references that meant little to folk's upper echelon and confused many others. There was no precedent for this type of linguistic word-play in music, and Dylan's fans now began to layer meaning upon meaning into his every utterance. When he heard the English bands playing their refreshing and invigorating brand of rock and roll, he liked it and sensed the need to embrace it. Confirmation came when he heard the Animals' version of "House of the Rising Sun," which he had also recorded, not to mention the Byrds' chiming, twelve-string guitars on "Mr. Tambourine Man," which he wrote. In a move that completely alienated him from his traditional fan base, Dylan plugged in. "Subterranean Homesick Blues" has lyrics that are about as interpretable as the song's title, and boy oh boy, did they ever get up the dander of his previous supporters. The good-timey, sloppy rock-and-roll rhythm ticked them off even more. The show-down occurred on July 25, 1965, when he had the nerve to play at the Newport Folk Festival with a rock-and-roll band in tow. The noisy din horrified the self-righteous old guard, who unwittingly betrayed their own liberal ethics when they released an onslaught of boos and insulting condescension. It was their loss.

I suppose that sometime around now I'm expected to analyze this song lyrically and discuss its clever linguistic twists and turns. Sigh. I'd really rather not, because a) almost everybody else who has tried this ends up sounding foolish or, at best, pompous and presumptuous, and b) analysis seems inappropriate for lyrics that are probably little more than a clever avalanche of non sequiturs. The song is entertaining, so why not leave it at that? If you discern some inside joke or



underlying meaning, that's fine. Just remember, "You don't need a weather man to know which way the wind blows." Rather than suffer my interpretation, you may derive something else entirely, and that's OK. "Don't follow leaders." There will not be a test later. "Watch the parking meters." Perhaps the lyrics can't be understood "cause the vandals took the handles." Better yet, follow Dylan's own advice: "(If) you don't wanna be a bum, you better chew gum." Give your mind a rest, and let Dylan spin off his yarn without the cumbersome trappings of implication and metaphor. It works just as well, and it's a hell of a lot more fun.

## JUNE 1965 #1 MR. TAMBOURINE MAN—THE BYRDS

**B**ob Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home* album was his first to venture across the electric fence into the realm of rock and roll. Most of the songs abandoned acoustic folk treatments for rock instrumentation—much to the chagrin of the poverty-worshipping, college-educated, folk-purist phonies who saw no contradiction in obtaining wealth and fame by singing about the plight of the poor, yet who, paradoxically, saw Dylan as a traitor. One labyrinthine song from the album that did remain acoustic was "Mr. Tambourine Man." Dylan's endlessly rambling version sounded almost abrasive, since he made little effort to control the pitch of his nasal tenor, but the lyrics were, as usual, intriguing.

On the West Coast, Jim (now Roger, after a religious conversion) McGuinn, David Crosby, Gene Clark, Chris Hillman, and Michael Clarke had backgrounds as folk and/or country musicians, but were inspired to go electric by the influx of impressive English music, especially the Beatles. Calling themselves the Byrds, they used chiming (this, along with "jangly," are unavoidable adjectives when describing the Byrds) twelve-string electric guitars, which gave them a unique, jangly (I couldn't help it) sound. Employing the simple but effective idea of truncating Dylan's lyrics, adding a memorable guitar phrase, and arranging a rich four-part harmony, the Byrds turned "Mr. Tambourine Man" into a masterpiece of hip invention for the rock-and-roll crowd. The poetics of Dylan's artful lyricism brought a validity to the song that was previously unthinkable for a format as brutally simple as rock and roll.

Soon, an avalanche of Dylan cover versions were falling from the sky, and every person who used a strap to hold his guitar up was labeled (or begged to be labeled) a protest singer. No matter that Dylan had abandoned his own protest phase albums ago, complaining about the government was suddenly "in." If you weren't singing about something "meaningful" (i.e., protesting), then you were only making music for teenyboppers (how gauche). Hell, even Sonny and Cher were tagged as protest singers. Some guy named Barry McGuire sang about the end of the world ("Eve of Destruction") with a voice so rough it sounded doubtful he would last that long anyway. The Mamas and

**The Byrds turned "Mr. Tambourine Man" into a masterpiece of hip invention for the rock-and-roll crowd.**



the Papas joined forces from different folk groups and decided to praise sunny California and protest Mondays. Even on the East Coast, producer Tom Wilson got busy hiring musicians to overdub some drums and jangly guitars onto an acoustic tape of Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel singing “The Sounds of Silence.” Before the overdub, they couldn’t get arrested, but once they sounded like a rock-and-roll act, ka-pow, #1 with a bullet. While folk traditionalists scratched their goatees and wondered where all the flowers went, rock and roll was having a hootenanny. Actually, this almost coincides with the time that rock and roll, as a descriptive phrase, ceased to exist. The “...and roll” was dropped, and “rock” was excerpted to identify the new hybrid as “folk rock.”

### JUNE 1965 #1 (I CAN'T GET NO) SATISFACTION—THE ROLLING STONES

The Rolling Stones were the first real English rock-and-roll band with as much authority as the Beatles, but their recognition as such came slowly. They began with the intention of duplicating American blues, R&B, and rock and roll and felt little need to write their own material. To them, the idea of writing an English blues song seemed utterly ludicrous. At the time, Mick Jagger rhetorically asked a reporter, “After all, can you imagine a British-composed R&B number?” Well, times changed. After the Beatles supplied the Rolling Stones with their second

English single, “I Wanna Be Your Man,” the idea didn’t seem half-crazy after all. Why *shouldn’t* they compose their own songs in the style of their tastes? On their next single, manager Andrew Oldham tried to solve the problem the easy way by suggesting that the Rolling Stones claim they actually wrote Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away.” Thankfully though, the song was credited properly on the record sleeve. “Tell Me” was original, but it was also horrible, so the Stones reverted to covers for their next singles. How long, though, could a bunch of middle-class white Britons continue to score hits in America with uniquely African-American music? In one sense, the Stones were bringing coal to Newcastle, but then again, the teenage audience that was buying their singles didn’t have a clue about American black music, so the Rolling Stones were per-

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1965	#21
<b>I’VE BEEN LOVING YOU TOO LONG—</b>	
<b>OTIS REDDING</b>	
JUNE 1965	#24
<b>HERE COMES THE NIGHT—THEM</b>	

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1965	#8
<b>YOU TURN ME ON (TURN ON SONG)—</b>	
<b>IAN WHITCOMB</b>	

forming a service. By the time of “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction,” the point was moot.

During the Stones’ lukewarm first tour of America, Keith Richards woke up in the middle of the night. With a tape recorder and an acoustic guitar at his bedside, he recorded himself as he plucked out da-daa, da-da-da and moaned, “I can’t get no satisfaction” until he fell back asleep. Thinking it could be useful as a B



side or album filler, he gave the fragments to Jagger, who went off posthaste and wrote whatever came to mind. Lyrics about menstruating groupies and the idiocy of American consumerism (as he was witnessing it for the first time) spewed out of him and would forever cast the Rolling Stones as angry outsiders who thumbed their noses at those on the inside. Richards added to the song's perverse appeal when he stumbled upon a fuzz box in the studio and decided to give it a go, hoping it would generate a sound like a horn section. Instead, it sounded like an amplified buzz saw. The lyrics and music were so thoroughly antiestablishment that it is a wonder how on earth they ever thought they could get away with it. Keith Richards couldn't have cared less about the song's inherent nastiness, but he did adamantly argue against releasing it as a single, feeling that it just didn't measure up to what he heard in his head. He later stated that he felt Otis Redding's version was more in line with his intentions. As it was, "Satisfaction" rose to #1 and stayed there for four weeks, making it the biggest record of 1965.

**The Rolling Stones' image as licentious bad boys was deliberate to the point of convention, but what made it doubly convincing was that it was truthful.**

The social significance of "Satisfaction" would be difficult to exaggerate. Just like ten years earlier, disaffected youth were again champing at the bit and deliberately attempting to alienate their square parents. There was no better way to do this in 1965 than by liking the Rolling Stones. Andrew Oldham was in nirvana. The Rolling Stones' image as licentious bad boys was deliberate to the point of convention, but what made it doubly convincing was that it was truthful. It wasn't that the Stones were the antithesis of the Beatles; it was just that their image was more honest than the clean-cut, whitewashed stage persona that the Beatles carried around like a cross. John Lennon, the ultimate teddy-boy troublemaker if there ever was one, expressed resentment at having to comply with Brian Epstein's image of the Beatles while the Stones could cavort wildly and be congratulated for it. From this point on, the Rolling Stones and the Beatles would be portrayed as opposing forces, while the Rolling Stones would benefit from being elevated to the status of defining the true rebellious spirit of rock and roll.

## **JULY 1965 #1 I GOT YOU BABE—SONNY AND CHER**

It's hard to deny this song's goofy appeal. Before it was transformed into the "hippie" movement, the youthful bohemian scene that took root on the West Coast was mostly a conglomeration of optimistic and naive kids who longed for their own identity. Outrageous clothes and long hair caused them to become ostracized from society at large, but it also granted them acceptance among their peers. Somehow, Sonny Bono, already in his thirties, and his wife, Cher, came to





**It was nothing more than a cute love song, but the references to long hair, youth, and lack of money gave it credibility as a love theme for the outcast.**

represent the new values and flaky attitudes that were predominant at that time. They dressed in the wildest possible garb and sang songs about the burgeoning scene, guaranteeing them “freak” status among the straight folks and figurehead status among the kids.

Bono began his career as an A&R man for Specialty Records. He took up songwriting and had a few minor hits, one of which was even covered by the Rolling Stones (“She Said Yeah,” cowritten under the pseudonym of Don Christy). Teaming up with arranger Jack Nietzsche, they wrote a big hit for Jackie De Shannon called “Needles and Pins,” which scored again when it was covered by the Searchers. After Bono made an unsuccessful attempt at a solo career, Nietzsche drafted him to work as a member of Phil Spector’s wrecking crew. Around this time, he met Cherilyn Sarkasian Lapiere and, with much effort, convinced Spector to produce a single for her called “Ringo, I Love You.” Needless to say, it bombed. The lovers then recorded as a duo, calling themselves Caesar and Cleo, but to no avail. Bono remained persistent and produced what was intended as another solo single for his now-wife, Cher. Because she was uncomfortable in the studio on her own, Bono joined her to sing “Baby Don’t Go,” and the first Sonny and Cher single was released to little recognition.

Their next release was “I Got You Babe,” and it broke them wide open. Somehow, it was perceived as a folk-rock protest song. It was written by Sonny Bono and featured a Spector-cum-beerhaus arrangement by Harold Battiste, which was as unusual as it was appropriate—particularly the oom-PAH-PAH, oom-PAH-PAH waltz rhythm. How in the world anybody could have labeled this as folk-rock, though, or as a protest song, is beyond me. It was nothing more than a cute love song, but the references to long hair, youth, and lack of money gave it credibility as a love theme for the outcast. The loopy arrangement featured oboes over a dense mesh of orchestration, which only added to the record’s oddball attraction.

When “I Got You Babe” reached #1, Sonny and Cher became a hot item, both as a couple and as fashion plates. They both released solo singles and even rereleased some of their older recordings, all of which charted on the Top 40. After a four-year lull in the late ’60s, mostly because of a widening credibility gap between themselves and their intended audience, they regained their popularity with a new, older audience that now found their image comforting. They became stars of their own nationally televised show and were cradled by the same establishment that they supposedly had rebelled against. Cher was singled out by the media and was projected onto innumerable magazine covers, but by 1974 she and Sonny were divorced. As a solo act, Cher went on to record some of the most wretched and overwrought 45s imaginable, such as “The Way of Love,” “Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves,” “Dark Lady,” and “Half Breed,” all of which sold in the zillions and



provided her with an excuse to perform in some of the most hilariously insane stagewear ever conceived, short of Madonna. Her many movie roles provided her with credibility and proved that she had talent as an actress, but each new song release remains as untenable as the last. Bono, meanwhile, pursued a career in politics, becoming the mayor of Palm Springs and subsequently winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

## JULY 1965 #4 UNCHAINED MELODY—THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

**W**hen the Righteous Brothers were in the studio recording “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling,” Bobby Hatfield wondered aloud what he would be doing while Bill Medley was singing the verses. “You can go to the bank,” was Phil Spector’s reply. On “Unchained Melody,” it was Medley’s turn to cash his royalty checks, because Hatfield sang the lion’s share.

“Unchained Melody” was an evergreen from 1955, when it reached the Top 40 no less than four times by four different artists, namely Al Hibbler, Les Baxter, Roy Hamilton, and June Valli. The song became a chestnut of sorts and was performed with regularity by non-rock-and-roll artists until 1963, when Vito and the Salutations took a blindsided crack at it. The song never knew what hit it—“Unchained Malady” would have been more appropriate. Their dreadful doo-wop version never reached the Top 40, but it was enough of a regional hit in the Northeast to cause some permanent damage to the song’s validity. It didn’t do much to further the doo-wop cause, either. In one fell swoop, the group managed to show just how emotionless and downright stupid doo-wop was capable of being. It fell to the Righteous Brothers to salvage the song from the grips of lunacy and reinstate it to its rightful place. In the process, they not only interpreted “Unchained Melody” sympathetically, but defined its greatness in a manner that eclipsed all previous versions. The beautiful license that Hatfield took to interpret the song transcended the already mellifluous melody. Since the Righteous Brothers’ version, all other interpretations have sounded dated or artificial.

If you have a family but find yourself away from home because of your job, or if you are in the military service and are separated from your lover, or if you are in any way distanced or ostracized from someone whom you love, the power and majesty of the Righteous Brothers’ “Unchained Melody” is undeniable. If you find yourself in one of these situations, I strongly advise that you do not play “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” back to back with “Unchained Melody” unless you are prepared to be transformed into a hopelessly emotional and paranoid pile of mush. At the right moment, the cumulative effect of these two songs can

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1965	#8
<b>HOLD ME, THRILL ME, KISS ME—</b>	
<b>MEL CARTER</b>	
JULY 1965	#9
<b>DOWN IN THE BOONDOCKS—</b>	
<b>B.J. ROYAL</b>	
JULY 1965	#11
<b>BABY, I’M YOURS—BARBARA LEWIS</b>	



be so overwhelming that they are incapacitating.

The Righteous Brothers experienced a commercial rebirth when “Unchained Melody” was used as a tear-duct stimulus for the 1990 movie *Ghost*. A rerecorded version charted simultaneously with a rereleased version, with the odd result that the same song recorded by the same artist had to compete with itself for chart position. Younger fans probably didn’t know the difference, but if justice prevails, the ’65 version will survive the test of time.

## AUGUST 1965 #1 HELP!—THE BEATLES

The Beatles’ second feature film, *Help!*, was originally titled *Eight Arms to Hold You*, but producers changed it to *Help!* in light of John Lennon’s sparkling composition. Unfortunately, the movie was as silly as their next venture into film, *Magical Mystery Tour*, was stupid. The first mistake the movie makes is that it is not really about the Beatles at all. Lennon described the group’s role in *Help!* as being “like having clams in a movie about frogs.” At best, it is an amusing but poorly conceived parody of James Bond-style adventure films. At worst, it has aged so poorly that it is hardly worth viewing, except for the music—that marvelous music.

“Help!” is a first-class soundtrack taped onto a second-class movie. A few of the songs, notably Lennon’s, had an uncharacteristic, soul-baring quality that originally went all but unnoticed by fans who were usually too fascinated by the sound of the music to get overly philosophical about the words. The music *was* fascinating so, understandably, it took a while for the lyrics to sink in. The title song, “Help!,” in particular had a thick, multilayered melody and structure that were more than enough to keep casual listeners content. The interplay between Lennon’s lead vocal and George Harrison and Paul McCartney’s harmony gave the song a sense of constant motion. Fans were satisfied to simply sing along, but wait a minute. What were we singing here? The meaning of the song was staring us right in the face, but to the fans, discovering it was like unearthing a cryptic message. Was Lennon, one of the most successful human beings on the planet Earth, really crying out for help? It turns out that he was.

The title song, “Help!,” in particular had a thick, multilayered melody and structure that were more than enough to keep casual listeners content.

Later in his life, Lennon sardonically referred to this time as his “fat Elvis period.” He had a sense of unease and began to put on weight. Surrounded by sycophants, opportunists, businessmen, and adopted bosses—such as film director Richard Lester, producer George Martin, and manager Brian Epstein—the line between friends and business associates became unrecognizably blurred. Furthermore, he was so busy being “Beatle John” that his own id seemed to vanish. He was compelled to face the question of who he really was and became frightened



when he found that the answer wasn't forthcoming. Lennon was drowning in his own fame and was searching for some person to relate to his plight.

Unfortunately, the movie completely skips over this rather compelling imagery. Instead of dealing with the current state of the band (the very reason *A Hard Day's Night* was so fascinating), the bogus script overlooked the Beatles as thoughtful human beings. The sole purpose of the movie seemed to be to convey a '60s idea of immediacy and modernism, thus guaranteeing it would become a dated timepiece. As such, the only thing it can claim to have spawned was its bastard child: the American television series *The Monkees*.

## AUGUST 1965 #2 LIKE A ROLLING STONE—BOB DYLAN

**A**ny semblance of linear thinking that I may have had when I started this project has all gone out the window once I began to consider Bob Dylan. Writing about Dylan is like writing about Franz Kafka; for every word that he wrote, the pundits have written another two hundred in analysis and historical study. Besides, Dylan fits about as comfortably into a book about the Top 40 as Kafka would. When tracing pop music back to its Tin Pan Alley roots, Dylan stands apart. He knowingly and deliberately was an outsider who fancied himself to be the destructive force that severed pop music's ties with the moon June croon, at least until he decided to use pop for his own purpose. Dylan has had so many phases, most of them contradictory, that any attempt to be objectively factual would surely be questioned by the diploma-carrying Dylan-ophiles who dedicate more time to studying their subject of interest than most brain surgeons and nuclear physicists do.

One thing that everybody agrees on is that Bob Dylan is a moving target who defies definition. He's either a pathological liar or a weaver of mysterious fables who protects his privacy above all else. He's a folkie who seems dedicated to the plight of the powerless. He's an electrified rocker who sings surreal song/poems. He's a self-obsessed recluse who avoids the press and the public while casually recording great songs just for his own amusement. He's a confused country singer who seems to have trouble being understood or who deliberately confounds his fans. He's a self-analytical, introspective lover who lucidly and eloquently divulges personal information and heartfelt observations. He's a storyteller who spins fantastic tales of fantasy and experience. He's a single-minded Christian who seems unwilling to write about anything without including his religious concerns. He's a living legend (let him deny it) and maybe none of the things previously mentioned. We barely know more now than we did thirty years ago, except for his amazing catalog of words and music. When "Like a Rolling Stone" first appeared on the Top 40, there was nothing else even remotely like it. It seemed to arise from the

**One thing that everybody agrees on is that Bob Dylan is a moving target who defies definition.**





ashes like a phoenix born out of the controversy at the Newport Folk Festival, when Bob Dylan scandalized die-hard folk fans by showing up with a rock-and-roll band. The lyrics were not derived from that awe-inspiring travesty—it was recorded the previous month—but his renewed vengeance could easily have been directed at his detractors, or even at himself for allowing himself to be sucked into their vacuum.

When he wrote the song, Dylan was frustrated and exhausted to the point of considering quitting music entirely. He drew up from his well of emotion a seemingly endless torrent of words that he later distilled into the verses. His attitude was one of dismissive, vengeful anger, which is directed straight at *you*, the listener. Fortunately, you have a choice. You can either duck to avoid the line of fire and listen in sneakily, like an eavesdropper who overhears someone vent his rage at someone else, or you can stand up to the verbal assault and wipe the spittle from your face as he revels in your absolute failure and hopelessness. The very length of this diatribe is astounding. During the six solid minutes of nonstop put-downs, the song format doesn't allow the victim to counteract with, "You've got a lot of nerve to say..." There are only two believable possibilities: either his victim has been rendered mute, or Dylan, with a disguised gender, is singing into a mirror.

"Like a Rolling Stone" is so directly personal that it alienates the singer from everybody. He's singing for his own sake and simultaneously saying, "Let the masses be damned," i.e., "Save yourself, heathen, this is *my* lifeboat." Fortunately, we can interpret this to be something other than despicable, because there is freedom and liberation in hopelessness. "When you ain't got nothin', you got nothin' to lose." The accusations and condescensions build and build to interminable heights until, thank God, the chorus acts as a jubilant release where relief is derived from the knowledge of saying what you knew had to be said.

Not to interrupt myself in mid-thought, but can you believe I'm talking about a pop song? From 1965? *That's why Dylan is a big deal.* Before him, none of this would have been, or at least it was never considered to be, song fodder. Now, it is. To this day, the effects of this song are so ingrained that they are undeniable and often unrecognizable. Everything was touched by its wake. Calling this song the birth of folk rock would be an absurd oversimplification of its relevance because "Like a Rolling Stone" was a revelation. It was not poetry in the sense that it contained perfectly metered verse because, quite simply, it didn't. It's chock full of colloquialisms, casual phrases, and sloppy wordplay, but this only adds to its power because it seems to have flowered without pretense and deliberation. It brilliantly conveys spontaneity. Because of its liberating use of ideas and words, an entire universe of souls who harbored secret desires of unlimited self-expression were set free. Twenty-plus years on, this newfound freedom of expression is ingrained in pop music, and sometimes abused. In this sense, yes, you can indirectly blame Dylan for unleashing whining crybabies like Dan Hill

**"Like a Rolling Stone" is so directly personal that it alienates the singer from everybody.**





(“Sometimes When We Touch”), but for every oversensitized dolt who uses music as a masochistic forum, there are now dozens of artists who have been given a voice. It sounds almost crazy, but in this light, Dylan was like the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles, touching their tongues and bringing enlightenment to everybody who cared to listen. Music has spoken a different language ever since.

## AUGUST 1965 #3 CALIFORNIA GIRLS—THE BEACH BOYS

**T**he Beach Boys were never the hippest band in the valley, and their image always plagued them, even at the pinnacle of their fame. Al Jardine never looked like anything other than the dentist that he originally wanted to become. The Wilson brothers looked like a bowling team in need of directions, and Mike Love looked like an awkward, overgrown teenager who occasionally put his shirts on backwards. They seemed nerdy and wore the clothes to fit the role, whether it was chest-clinging acrylic sweaters (a static-electricity nightmare, I’m sure), short-sleeved candy-striped shirts, or permanent-press stretch slacks. They may not have been fashion plates, but no matter, because the hit songs kept coming, and astonishingly, they kept getting better.

By 1965, the Beach Boys’ music was infinitely cooler than their image. With Brian Wilson at the helm, the group’s musical creativity flourished. While the band stuck mostly to simple topics that celebrated the life of a typical California teenager, the songs began to sport a production that was nothing less than astounding. Carl Wilson said it best when he called his brother’s work “a juxtaposition of the dumb and the brilliant.” Dumb lyrics, brilliant composition. Dumb theme, brilliant production. The group’s square appearance contrasted drastically with the absolute hipness of Brian Wilson’s drug-inspired single, “California Girls.”

Ever since the Beach Boys’ first hit, the pressure on Brian was unbearable. Capitol Records had been demanding that the group tour, record an album, and release a single, all in rapid succession. Besides touring and rehearsing with the rest of the band, Brian shouldered the burden of songwriting and producing. This came to a standstill while on the road, though, because he never learned to write on anything other than a piano. For Brian, this was like being denied oxygen. His isolation was magnified by the fact that he lacked a steady writing partner or a sounding board on which to vent his frustration and share his exhaustion. The endless stream of insults and abuse that were administered by his father/manager surely didn’t help to improve Brian’s state of mind. Mentally, he teetered on a tightrope. Happiness and peace of mind came only when he worked in the studio. Otherwise,

**The group’s square appearance contrasted drastically with the absolute hipness of Brian Wilson’s drug-inspired single, “California Girls.”**



**Wilson might have been miserable and unstable, but in the summer of 1965, "California Girls" was the most joyous and "together" record on the radio.**

he was a mental wreck. After two years of relentless touring and recording enough songs to fill eight (!) albums, he finally snapped and suffered a nervous breakdown.

At last, Brian had the excuse that he desperately needed to dedicate himself solely to writing and production. While he stayed at home, the rest of the band toured, at first with Glen Campbell filling in as a temporary replacement, and later with Bruce Johnston as his permanent road substitute. Instead of taking the opportunity to nurse himself back to health, however, Brian began using marijuana and LSD as a part of his daily ritual. Disregarding any sense of precaution, Brian continued to push himself further outside the envelope of his by now fragile sanity. But while his mental instability festered, his creativity gushed. In a drug-induced and paranoid state of self-obsession, he composed a complex, harmonic instrumental piece that served as a gorgeous introduction to his latest composition, "California Girls."

Rather than wait for the Beach Boys to return—and compromise his new piece with their somewhat limited musical abilities—Wilson worked with the members of Phil Spector's "wrecking crew," including drummer Hal Blaine, guitarist Glen Campbell, and piano player Leon Russell. The Beach Boys were reduced to a group of vocalists who sang whatever Wilson asked them to. Regardless of the tension that may have resulted from this restructuring, "California Girls" was by far their most expansive single yet. Besides the hypnotic sound of the song's introduction, its melody and chiming piano sound were instantly addictive. The production possesses a clarity that makes Spector's mono recordings sound muddy in comparison, and it has a contemporary feel that rivals the best work of the Beatles. Never before was the dichotomy between an artist's work and his mental state more pronounced. Wilson might have been miserable and unstable, but in the summer of 1965, "California Girls" was the most joyous and "together" record on the radio.

## **AUGUST 1965 #5 IT'S THE SAME OLD SONG—THE FOUR TOPS**

**N**o kidding? I thought I heard this before. Oh yeah, now I remember. This is "I Can't Help Myself" with new lyrics, isn't it? It's an amusing, tongue-in-cheek title, considering that it's a deliberate lift from a previous success, but at Motown the Four Tops and their writing and production team were just following orders. Berry Gordy was the ultimate strip miner of pop music. If he hit a gold vein, he didn't leave until he was absolutely sure he had sucked out every last dollar. This usually meant two, sometimes even three, trips back to the source. Since "I Can't Help Myself" became a #1 hit, he ordered songwriters Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland to write another, and so they obliged. When Eddie



Holland was at a loss for a new theme, he turned to the obviousness of his task for a subject (although he denies that this was the case). Humorously, he writes, “It’s the same old song, but with a different meaning since you’ve been gone.” If the truth be told, the meaning isn’t any different, either. The strange thing is how easily their creative juices flowed when they blatantly ripped themselves off. Although it lacked the impact of “I Can’t Help Myself,” it still stood out from the pack of better-than-ordinary songs that it had to compete with. The well-honed talent of the Four Tops guaranteed that.

He might have been mercenary to a fault, but it’s hard to blame Gordy for urging his writers and performers to stick to what they knew best. When this song reached #5, it was impossible to contradict him; there *was* gold in them thar hills. It became something of an obsession, and “I Can’t Help Myself” clones continued into 1966 with “Shake Me, Wake Me (When It’s Over).” Convinced that he had finally squeezed every last drop of commerciality from that particular formula, Gordy finally allowed the Four Tops to search for a new place to dig. It wasn’t long before they hit pay dirt again with “Reach Out, I’ll Be There.” Once *that* song hit #1, they knew what to expect and started driving in stakes and preparing a homestead. They knew it would be a while before the boss man would want them to move on again, and they were right. Every single that they released for the next year had them returning to the “Reach Out” mine with pickaxes in hand.

It became something of an obsession, and “I Can’t Help Myself” clones continued into 1966 with “Shake Me, Wake Me (When It’s Over).”

## AUGUST 1965 #8 PAPA’S GOT A BRAND NEW BAG—JAMES BROWN

**B**efore he released “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” James Brown taped his appearance on the *T.A.M.I. / TNT Show*, a rock-and-roll revue filmed before a live audience. The show featured the most varied collection of rock-and-roll artists before or since, and it is an excellent historical document for anyone even remotely interested in rock-and-roll music in the mid ’60s. The show opens with Chuck Berry playing without a band, surrounded by seven professional dancers (*very* ’60s), followed by the Pacemakers with Gerry Marsden, who wore his guitar strapped so high it could bang him in the jaw. Sets followed by Bo Diddley, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles (not a particularly good voice day for Robinson), the Ronettes, Marvin Gaye (damn, he was good, but he must have been driven to distraction by the dancers who paraded around him like oblivious morons), Leslie Gore (is she for real?), and the insipid Jan and Dean.

Ike and Tina Turner offered a sample of things to come when they did “Please, Please, Please” with a primeval furor, but Diana Ross and the Supremes cooled things down by performing straight-ahead versions of their hits, surrounded by the idiotic dance team doing something that looked like zombies playing “Simon Says.”



Considering the enormous effect this song had on popular music and culture, it had quite an inauspicious beginning.

Thankfully, the dancers had the common sense to leave the stage when the real thing, Mr. Dynamite, “the hardest working man in show business,” Mr. Jaaaaaaaaaames Brown was introduced. Even if you could ignore all of the hype that Brown has generated, this single performance proves that he was the king. Two decades ahead of his time, he influenced everything that followed. “Out of Sight” and a derailing version of “Night Train” were his allotment for the evening, but before he left the stage (it took something like six attempts), everybody knew they had witnessed something they had never seen before and would probably never see again. Afterward, Ray Charles played his unique brand of brilliantly arranged soul, then the Rolling Stones came on with poor Mick Jagger, who probably spent the

day throwing up in the men’s room after watching James Brown rehearse. Still, despite the enormous pressure of following James Brown, the Rolling Stones did a very admirable job of defending their place on the bill as closing act.

The show’s debut airing coincided closely with the release of Brown’s next groundbreaking single, “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag.” Considering the enormous effect this song had on popular music and culture, it had quite an inauspicious beginning. Brown had just resolved contractual difficulties with his first label, King Records. To show good faith, he wanted to record a follow-up to “Out of Sight,” his previous hit on Smash Records, as soon as possible. According to Brown, he took a piece of music from his stage show, wrote a few words for it, and stretched it into a full song. He hadn’t memorized the words, so he sang the first take reading from a lyric sheet. The band stopped to hear the playback, to fine-tune the mix and tighten the arrangement, but instead of going back into the studio, they were able to go home. In one take, the most innovative song of Brown’s illustrious career was finished. The arrangement, which calls for Maceo Parker to play one lone note on baritone sax for each pass of the riff, was sped up for single release, and sounds as fresh and exciting today as it did in 1965.

Freddie Crocker, an influential New York disc jockey, got an acetate of “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” and although he initially hated it, he played it on the air, and the phone lines wouldn’t stop ringing. Brown, who was just getting (or taking) credit for inventing soul music, suddenly took everything one step farther. In 1965, they didn’t have a name for the style, but “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” defined a new rhythm-based music that eventually was called “funk.” Papa’s got a brand new bag? No doubt about it.

## AUGUST 1965 #16 TRACKS OF MY TEARS—THE MIRACLES

These Motown guys were really something else. They were notorious for sticking to a formula until it no longer sold records, then moving on to another. Whether the production team was Smokey Robinson, Norman Whitfield, or Eddie Hol-





land, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland, Berry Gordy usually would not *allow* them to try anything new until it was obvious that the original formula was completely expended. But what constituted a formula? Were they really so clever and deliberate as to revamp the oblique nuances contained in their hit songs? Coming out on the heels of “Ooo Baby Baby,” “Tracks of My Tears” makes me think that they really were.

Lyricaly, the connection between the two songs is fairly obvious. Listeners who related to the lyrics of “Ooo Baby Baby” would have little difficulty identifying with the protagonist of “Tracks of My Tears.” Robinson is a clever songwriter, and he knew Gordy’s reasoning for milking an idea that sells, but I doubt that the pride he had in his talent would allow him to be overt in his repetition. “Ooo Baby Baby” is a lilting song in triplet time that puts emphasis on a lyric by shifting the cadence to a four-beat pattern. This gives the song a significant hook when Robinson sings, “You’ve made mistakes too.” Now, this would be so subtle that it’s hard to imagine why he would bother, but “Tracks of My Tears” takes the same rhythmic idea and reverses it. While the song moves along at a steady four beats to the measure, he suddenly switches to triplets to emphasize the climactic lyrics, “My smile is my make-up I wear since my breakup with you.” The line is clever enough without the emphasis, but the triplets make it impossible to ignore. When it comes to songwriting, these Motown guys were good, and Robinson was the consummate Motown writer. Formulaic and yet quite original, “Tracks of My Tears” just may be his definitive song.

**When it comes to songwriting, these Motown guys were good, and Robinson was the consummate Motown writer.**

## **AUGUST 1965 #21 IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR—WILSON PICKETT**

**B**eing from the South, Wilson Pickett was, like nearly every black singer in those days, introduced to music through the gospel circuit. In the late '50s, a vocal group known as the Falcons (remember the prevalence of bird names for vocal groups back then?) combined gospel songs with R&B material but, following their mercenary instincts, moved steadily toward the latter. After the group scored with a #17 hit called “You’re So Fine,” Pickett joined them in 1959, and together they abandoned their gospel roots entirely—in substance, that is, but certainly not in style. Not too many people had the intense gospel shout down to a science as well as Pickett. His powerful vocal is prominently featured on the Falcons’ “I Found a Love,” but his restless nature and sense of ambition soon led him to leave the group in search of a

### **GREAT HITS**

AUGUST 1965 #17  
**SINCE I LOST MY BABY—  
 THE TEMPTATIONS**

AUGUST 1965 #29  
**SHAKE AND FINGERPOP—  
 JR. WALKER & THE ALL STARS**





**The kazillion versions of this song that have since been recorded by every artist with a craving for soul credibility are testament enough to the status of Pickett's original recording.**

solo career. He wrote and recorded a few demos, and they found their way to Jerry Wexler at Atlantic Records, who was interested enough to purchase the publishing rights for one composition, called "If You Need Me." Wexler could have signed Pickett lock, stock, and barrel, but at the time he was more interested in furthering the career of Atlantic artist Solomon Burke, who quickly recorded a not-too-shabby version of Pickett's song. The problem was, Wexler neglected to purchase Pickett's original demo recording, and while Burke's version was being prepared for release, Pickett's demo was already attracting enough attention to garner airplay. To avoid embarrassment and to salvage Burke's cover version, Wexler called in every connection he could think of and hustled Burke's version relentlessly. His efforts, more than any other factor, knocked Pickett out of the running and gave the hit to Burke.

A year or so later, Pickett walked into Wexler's office looking for work. Surprised but grateful that he didn't hold a grudge, Wexler signed him immediately. For his part, Pickett was no dummy; he saw how hard Wexler was willing to work and thought it was just better business if he could align himself with one of the most tough-minded A&R men in the industry. For the first year of their association, Pickett worked with house producer Bert Berns, but nothing of consequence emerged. Frustrated but not deflated, Wexler convinced Pickett to pack his things and head down to Memphis, the mystical land of Booker T. and the MG's and the home of the Stax/Volt recording studios. Once there, Wexler paired him with chief guitarist and songwriter/arranger Steve Cropper, checked them into a hotel room with a bottle of whiskey, and gave them a simple command: write. Emerging the next day a little bleary-eyed but a few songs richer, Pickett and the Memphis Musician's cut a near-perfect slice of sanctified southern soul called "In the Midnight Hour."

The kazillion versions of this song that have since been recorded by every artist with a craving for soul credibility are testament enough to the status of Pickett's original recording. His full-throated delivery combines so seamlessly with the punch of the rhythm section that it's hard to believe they hadn't been rehearsing together for years. The musicians at Stax, both black and white, had an innate understanding of contemporary soul music, and Pickett and Wexler eked from them some of their most profound rhythmic ideas. The inherent tension in the recording is the result of Pickett singing against the band. With an expressive, impatient style, he seems to be cajoling them to pick up the tempo and send the song into overdrive while the stubborn insistence of Al Jackson's drumming maintains order by consistently (read "perfectly") playing behind the beat. As a result, "In the Midnight Hour" is a textbook illustration of soul music as a constant battle between pent-up tension and sweet emotional release.



## SEPTEMBER 1965 #9 DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC—THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL

The West Coast already had bands like the Byrds and the Beach Boys, but once the Lovin' Spoonful emerged on the East Coast, it was final: America was finally responding in full force to the English Invasion's interpretation of American music with its own updated, ingenious sound. Both the Byrds and the Lovin' Spoonful formed in a direct reaction to hearing the Beatles and their ilk, while Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys was constantly taunted by the newest Beatles release, providing him with a form of inspiration through intimidation. Each of these homegrown bands had a distinctly American sound that grew from native sources. The Beach Boys built their way up from a Chuck Berry foundation, and the Byrds chose Bob Dylan as their own point of reference. John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful drew from the New York folk scene that spawned him as his own starting point.

The son of a classical harmonica player (is that an oxymoron?), Sebastian learned the instrument himself but preferred the blues and folk styles that were becoming popular in the Greenwich Village club scene. He played the local coffeehouses as an accompanist, including a short stint with the Mugwumps, where he met and became friendly with guitarist Zal Yonovsky. The Mugwumps disbanded when members Cass Elliot and Denny Doherty set out for California to find fame in their next incarnation as one half of the Mamas and the Papas. Sebastian, meanwhile, was listening intently to entrepreneur and fledgling manager Eric Jacobsen, who convinced him that he had plenty of songwriting talent and ought to electrify his music in order to try it out on the rock-and-roll scene. Recruiting Yonovsky, along with bass player Steve Boone and drummer Joe Butler, he formed a band and named it the Lovin' Spoonful, after a line from a Mississippi John Hurt song.

While Jacobsen worked hard trying to get the band a recording contract, the group rehearsed a combination of Sebastian's original songs and a handful of blues/folk standards. After two months of solid work, they opened at Greenwich Village's Night Owl Cafe to great acclaim. In the meantime, Jacobsen worked out a deal with a new label called Kama Sutra. The most commercial of Sebastian's new songs was called "Do You Believe in Magic," and they chose this for their debut single. It is an undeniably ebullient song that features joyfully ringing guitars over an upbeat shuffle rhythm. Sebastian sounds as though he's so happy he can't repress his smile. The bouncy, happy melody is contagious while Sebastian's vocals are as inviting as a summer's day. It just makes you feel good to hear it, and its optimism invokes the feeling of magic that the lyrics suggest. Jacobsen was right: the combination of a folksy jug band with rock and roll worked. The nascent rock scene in New York City was now getting national

### GREAT HITS

SEPTEMBER 1965 #4

CATCH US IF YOU CAN—  
THE DAVE CLARK FIVE

SEPTEMBER 1965 #7

YOU'VE GOT YOUR TROUBLES—  
THE FORTUNES



attention, which would broaden once pop radio recognized other bands such as the Young Rascals and the Blues Magoos.

## SEPTEMBER 1965 #13 WE GOTTA GET OUT OF THIS PLACE—THE ANIMALS

**E**ric Burdon was a vocalist with a serious identity crisis. He had a fixation with black culture that went beyond fanaticism. Most British musicians were satisfied to sound authentic, but Burdon needed to *be* authentic. He desperately wanted to be black, since he assumed he would then have a divine right to sing the blues.

Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, one of many sets of famous songwriters working out of New York's Brill Building, wrote "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," which more or less invokes images of black ghetto life. They were shopping the song around when Alan Price, the Animals' keyboardist, heard it and picked it up.

Burdon remained convinced that the band ought to write its own material or stick to authentic blues records, but previous attempts to do so fared only moderately on the charts. Against his will, the Animals recorded the song. Burdon was vindictive and made a point of telling anyone who asked that he despised the song. As far as Mann and Weil were concerned, the sentiment was mutual, since the Animals' raucous and unsubtle version of their song wasn't what they expected or intended.

It's surprising today to think that neither party appreciated the success that this crossbreeding yielded. Burdon's manic soul obsession gave perfect voice to Mann-Weil's uptown sophistication. He inadvertently gave the song an edge that perhaps was not intentional when it was written. He sings "We gotta get out of this place, if it's the last thing we ever do" with such raw power and conviction that it's hard to tell if he's escaping ghetto life or a lunatic asylum.

The band members surely related to the sentiment expressed by the lyrics. One by one they left the band, each time with the ostensible implication that working with Burdon was too difficult. Burdon, left to his own pursuits, continued recording with various sidemen under the name "Eric Burdon and the Animals." By this time he had renounced his previous obsession, saying "(I) was someone trying to be an American Negro. I look back and see how stupid I was." He subsequently reinvented himself as a San Francisco hippie and continued to have hits with ridiculous songs such as "San Franciscan Nights" and "Sky Pilot," before returning to his African-American persona with Eric Burdon and War.

## OCTOBER 1965 #1 YESTERDAY—THE BEATLES

**T**he working title for "Yesterday" was "Scrambled Eggs." It's a goofy little piece of information, but Beatles fanatics revel in this sort of ephemera.

George Martin was a classically trained musician who started work at London's EMI Records as a recording assistant for the serious music department of its subsidiary label, Parlophone. Occasionally, he would be assigned to work with



popular artists, and over time most of his energy was spent recording nonclassical material. By 1955, he was placed in charge of Parlophone. Although his background was firmly rooted in serious music, he tended to be open-minded when it came to recognizing the salable potential of other acts. This is precisely how and why he became involved with recording comedy records for Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers, and others, collectively known as “the Goons.” One thing that Martin didn’t have, though, was a continuously successful popular act. He was looking for an artist or group that would be malleable enough to perform a wide variety of material, and for this reason he agreed to audition the Beatles when the opportunity arose in 1962. The fact that they hailed from the provinces (Liverpool, of course) didn’t give him much hope, and when he first heard their demo tape, he was less than impressed. Nevertheless, he agreed to audition them. George Harrison, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and the group’s original drummer, Pete Best, arrived and played, but Martin was critical of Best. He stated that if he were to record the Beatles, he would use a professional as a substitute. This comment stimulated the Beatles to take action, something they had already been privately considering anyway. Pete Best was out. Ringo Starr, who played with Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, was in. The rest, to use a tired phrase and to avoid an even more tired story, was history.

In the recording studio, Martin’s role with the Beatles began with him organizing the arrangement—that is to say the structure—of their material. Also, he often contributed piano lines to the instrumental breaks. This pattern continued for the first few years of their relationship, but all the while the Beatles’ input and ideas were becoming steadily more sophisticated. When McCartney wrote his melancholy ballad “Scrambled Eggs,” Martin’s role became more like that of an artistic collaborator.

The Beatles had begun to branch out with their writing projects. More and more, McCartney’s and Lennon’s songwriting styles had begun to polarize. Although the credits always read “Lennon/McCartney,” most songs were now the product of one or the other. The varied styles that each of them developed called for different approaches to their arrangements. The Beatles were well aware of Martin’s musical background and decided to make good use of it. The first big change came when McCartney realized he needed something other than a rock-and-roll band for his ballad, now titled “Yesterday.” Martin suggested fleshing the song out with an arrangement for string quartet. Martin wrote the part, they recorded the song, and McCartney became the only Beatle to appear on the final product.

Surprisingly, the song was not released on a single in Great Britain until 1976. As usual, though, America was a different story. Here, the single rose straight to the #1 position, where it stayed for four weeks. “Yesterday” has

**In the recording studio, Martin’s role with the Beatles began with him organizing the arrangement—that is to say the structure—of their material.**





since been honored by more than 2,000 cover versions (egad!) and is the most covered song of the rock-and-roll era. Of these 2,000 versions, only one ever managed to reach the Top 40: Ray Charles scraped his way to #25 in 1967.

## OCTOBER 1965 #1 GET OFF OF MY CLOUD—THE ROLLING STONES

London, England in the late '50s was awash with a music scene that was referred to as trad jazz. Inspired by the New Orleans jazz tradition of the American South, trad jazz was derivative and strict, thriving on pointless rules regarding style, play, and appropriate material. It became obsessed with purity while completely ignoring the fact that there really wasn't anything pure about white, English people playing African-American jazz. The imposed limitations of trad jazz exerted a stranglehold on the British music scene until a counter-movement developed to challenge this restrictive style. The counter-movement was another form of African-American music: the blues. Between trad jazz and the blues, the English obsession with the musical styles of the American Negro was consummated.

Whether it came from Texas, Chicago, or the Mississippi delta, the blues was essentially black in its heritage—most white Americans ignored or knew almost nothing about the blues. But in England, particularly London, American blues singers were being elevated to the point of hero worship. Although initially small in number, English blues fans were fanatical purists who spurned trad jazz purists, and vice versa. Since trad jazz was firmly ensconced in the London club scene, blues bands were usually not welcome to perform in these venues. Initially, it was fans of the less stringent skiffle scene who found a certain compatibility with this style. Blues Incorporated was an incipient conglomeration of musicians who became enamored with the blues. Members included Alexis

Korner (guitar), Cyril Davies (harmonica), Jack Bruce (yes, *that* Jack Bruce, on bass), and Charlie Watts (drums) among others. From this seed sprouted an English blues scene that would eventually grow so large it would overshadow the beat group scene and dominate Western popular music well into the '70s.

As legend has it, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards were previous acquaintances who crossed paths at a train station while commuting from their respective schools. Richards, an avid Chuck Berry fan, couldn't help but notice the brand new record albums that Jagger had ordered direct from Chess Records and was carrying home with him. A friendship developed, and for fun they began to rehearse off-the-record versions of their favorite songs, along with a mutual friend named Dick Taylor (later of the Pretty Things) and some others. One night the three novice musicians ventured to the Ealing Jazz Club (a

**The universal-  
ity of the blues  
songs the  
Rolling Stones  
covered stood  
in marked  
contrast to the  
divisive  
parochialism of  
their own  
material.**





venue that broke down and allowed blues music), where they saw Brian Jones sitting in and playing slide guitar under the pseudonym of Elmo Lewis. Later on, they also met a square-jawed blues enthusiast named Ian Stewart (“Stu”), who played a mean barrelhouse piano. It should be stressed that the attraction between these various characters was somewhat obvious—the blues scene was in its infancy and they all felt as though they shared a passion for something that still was generally unknown. Jones was intent on forming his own band so he brought these sundry characters together for rehearsals.

Jagger, meanwhile, had submitted an audition tape to Blues Incorporated and was accepted as a part-time member. Soon afterward, the BBC offered that band a prestigious radio appearance but would only allow six members into the studio. Jagger, being number seven, volunteered to stand down and cover their usual slot at London’s Marquee Club with his other group. The lineup of Jones, Jagger, Richards, Taylor, Stewart, and Mick Avory (later of the Kinks) took the stage that night with a name that Jones chose: “The Rollin’ Stones.” The evening was mostly uneventful, except for some controversy that was provoked by Jagger’s daringly effeminate stage presence. When Taylor quit the group, they hired Bill Wyman, for his excellent equipment as much as for his bass playing. All that was left to complete the classic lineup was Charlie Watts. Watts also had belonged to Blues Incorporated but quit when he lost interest in playing drums professionally. He was replaced by Ginger Baker. The Stones, aware of his availability and tired of the ineptitude of their other drummers, offered him the drum slot. In a move that he felt displayed a complete lack of common sense, he said yes.

Georgio Gomelsky, a garrulous Russian immigrant, befriended the Rolling Stones and actively began to promote them through appearances at his nightclubs and advertisements in music magazines. Their popularity was increasing steadily when nineteen-year-old impresario Andrew Loog Oldham and his business partner, Eric Easton, convinced the Rolling Stones to sign them on as managers. Gomelsky felt betrayed since he had a verbal agreement with the band, but without documentation he could lay no claim and would have to satisfy himself with his other discovery, the Yardbirds. Oldham immediately took charge of creative matters and focused on the group’s image. The Rolling Stones were the most frighteningly sloppy and rude bunch of curs he ever had the pleasure to meet, but he felt that Stewart just didn’t look radical enough for his vision of the band. Oldham sacked him offhandedly, then threw him a bone by allowing him to remain on as chief roadie and occasional studio musician. Next, he pitched the band to Dick Rowe, the infamous Decca Records talent scout who had be-

**Georgio Gomelsky, a garrulous Russian immigrant, befriended the Rolling Stones and actively began to promote them through appearances at his nightclubs and advertisements in music magazines.**



come famous as “the man who turned down the Beatles.” Eager not to make the same mistake twice, Rowe was an easy target and immediately signed the band. The Stones released Chuck Berry’s “Come On” as their first single in June 1963 and dented the British charts at #20. Using Berry and Chess Records’ sound as their firmament, they kicked off what was to become the lengthiest career of any group in all of rock and roll.

The universality of the blues songs the Rolling Stones covered stood in marked contrast to the divisive parochialism of their own material. “Satisfaction” placed them squarely in the center ring of the rock-and-roll circus by mocking convention. “Get Off of My Cloud” did the same. Thematically, it closely followed the rage of its predecessor, but sonically, it resembled a wall of mud. As the song goes on, the verses degenerate into a series of disconnected and often inaudible vignettes that are tenaciously held together by the chorus. The Stones’ sound, particularly in their early days, was always rough and crude (some would say inept), but it still had a certain authenticity. “Get Off of My Cloud” turned crudity from a liability into a virtue by capitalizing on the vagueness of the material while defining its grit. It wasn’t a traditional blues song, yet it somehow qualified. It was a white, privileged, perhaps more refined blues tune of the Martin Mull variety. Mull’s blues went, “I woke up this afternoon, I saw both cars were gone (repeat two times). I felt so lowdown deep inside, I threw my drink across the lawn.” It isn’t much of a reach to imagine Jagger singing those words. The Stones’ version goes, “Hey, you! Get off of my cloud!” There you have it: even middle-class white kids sometimes get the blues.

## OCTOBER 1965 #1 I HEAR A SYMPHONY—THE SUPREMES

**M**arketing was, and still is, a necessary evil in popular music. Today, performers sometimes gain wider exposure by promoting products—and larger incomes when companies sponsor their tours—but in the ’60s, the marketing of pop performers was less organized. Motown unashamedly marketed the Supremes through whatever means were available. They recorded television commercials for soda and deodorant. Hardly a week went by that they didn’t make a television appearance of some sort. They turned up on dozens of variety shows and occasionally were given roles in dramatic programs, including (this really happened) an appearance on *Tarzan*, in which they portrayed three nuns. At one point, they even licensed “Supremes White Bread,” with a picture of their faces on the plastic wrapping. A better symbol of Berry Gordy’s ambition and ideology could not be found. Hell, I seriously doubt that a better one could be invented.

**Motown  
unashamedly  
marketed the  
Supremes  
through what-  
ever means  
were available.**

Yes, the Supremes were a money-making machine, but according to the figures that have since been made public, it was not the Supremes who got rich. According to the terms of their contract, they earned 3 percent of 90 per-



cent of the suggested retail price of each record sold. The 3 percent applied to the group, not the individual, so each member's cut was 1 percent. If records sold for around 75 cents, that translates into two-thirds of a penny for each 45 RPM sold. Also, all expenses for recording and touring—and I mean *all expenses*—were deducted, including studio time spent on unreleased material. A song like “Where Did Our Love Go” is on record as having sold more than one million copies; according to these terms, each Supreme, *before* taxes and expense deductions, earned less than \$7,500. Although most fans assumed that fame and fortune went hand in hand, this amply proves that it isn't necessarily the case. The sideline ventures brought in extra money, but you must remember that the Supremes belonged to Motown, and Motown was a subchapter S corporation. That meant that, financially speaking, Motown equaled Berry Gordy (at least essentially).

After a brief hiatus from the top spot on the charts, the Supremes returned with “I Hear a Symphony.” It was their sixth #1 record in seven releases since 1964. Songwriters Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland continued the pattern of rewriting their earlier material, this time updating “Where Did Our Love Go.” Diana Ross sang the original with an excess of sexy reserve, and a second attempt yielded similar results. She purrs “I Hear a Symphony” so coyly that it invokes the kind of shivers usually reserved for when a loved one whispers into your ear. The intimacy of her performance brings her so close that everything else, including the other Supremes, seem miles away. By now, some fans may have wondered if the *other* Supremes could sing anything besides “Oooh” or “Baby, baby.” By their next single, these fans would be wondering if they sang at all.

## OCTOBER 1965 #2 1-2-3—LEN BARRY

**W**hat ever became of songs like this? In 1965, pop music was at such a creative crossroads that almost every record seemed to have a direction all its own. An omnipresent optimism and sense of freedom soaked into the very fiber of popular music and seemed to signal that we were on the threshold of a brave new world. English bands changed music ineradicably while soul bands were rearranging our ideas of American black music. American rock-and-roll bands were charting a course to unknown regions, and even the usually traditional classic pop was breaking new ground. “1-2-3” was one of those unabashed pop songs that wasn't afraid to blare its optimism in your face. An upbeat tempo supported a fabulous horn chart with a heavy backbeat, and it was all soaked generously in reverb, giving the song a brand new and shiny luster. What it lacked in substantive lyrics it made up for in pure entertainment. The inventive melody demanded a great singer, and Len Barry was certainly up to the challenge. Part schmaltzy Vegas, part gritty James

**“1-2-3” was one of those unabashed pop songs that wasn't afraid to blare its optimism in your face.**



Brown, his voice was perfect for the pure pop of “1-2-3.”

Barry (Leonard Borisoff) came out of the Philadelphia doo-wop scene, where he was lead singer for the remarkably successful Dovells. A series of hits, including two in the Top 10 (“The Bristol Stomp” and “You Can’t Sit Down”) made the group very popular and emboldened Barry to follow his longings for a solo career. “1-2-3” satisfied that ambition when it reached #2 on the pop charts, at a time when the competition was at its most fierce. Before the complicated and often confused ramblings of psychedelia—a style that was as unsuited to Barry as Gregorian chants—“1-2-3” was as straightforward and likable as a pop song could be.

By the way, where did the idea originate that it was easy to take candy from a baby? From my personal experience, taking anything from a baby, particularly candy, is a dangerous proposition. It’s much easier to *give* them candy, as any overindulgent grandparent could testify. Sammy Davis Jr. got it right in 1971 when he released what was arguably the most sickeningly sweet pop record of all time. “The Candy Man” talked about turning the world into one giant, sugar-coated candy bar, just to satisfy the demands of the already dangerously hyperactive, sweet-toothed little monsters. This song should be required listening for anybody in desperate need of a dietary aid. If you are like me, just the phrase “Who can take the su-un-liiiiight...” is enough to warrant an insulin injection. At the very least, it ought to help you swear off sweets for the rest of your life. Barry’s song might have been lyrically inaccurate, but at least it didn’t make you gag. It was also among the last of a dying breed, since progressive music trends would eventually sweep good old-fashioned pop under the carpet and off the charts.

## OCTOBER 1965 #2 A LOVER’S CONCERTO—THE TOYS

**H**ere’s a strange one that just made it under the wire before the girl-group trend faded away completely. The male-dominated doo-wop groups that were so popular in the ’50s had to share the spotlight once rockabilly and R&B performers began to redefine popular teenage music by playing what came to be known as rock and roll. Throughout the late ’50s, traditional doo-wop cohabitated uneasily with the new driving rhythms and raucous beats. The payola scandal quashed both styles very handily by inducing a paranoia over the recording industry that seemed to affect more than the standard methods of doing business; it also altered the music. As if calming the content of the music would quell the wrath of the government investigators, record companies sublimated riotous and/or suggestive recordings and replaced them with a premanufactured type of music that hearkened back to the days before rock and roll or doo-wop. By 1960, it appeared that these musical forms were on their last legs, being totally usurped by the corporate teen idols. Surprisingly, they both held on and were able to make a resurgence. Rock and roll would have to wait for England to revive its essence. Doo-wop sprang back to life more quickly but with one very noticeable difference: suddenly there were more girl groups than guy groups in the Top 10. The sound





changed, as well. Instrumental backing was no longer considered to be extraneous accompaniment but instead became integral to the songs. The girl-group trend continued to thrive until 1964, when the English Invasion rendered it almost extinct. The only American doo-wop groups that survived were those that adapted to the constantly evolving musical developments that were taking place at a near-dizzying pace.

Few groups were better at adapting than the Four Seasons and their producer, Bob Crewe. Crewe had a keen eye for trends, and besides his work with the Four Seasons, he produced many recordings for other artists, particularly the girl groups. One of his most successful efforts was “A Lover’s Concerto” by the Toys. Songwriters Sandy Linzer and Danny Randell came up with a snippet of a melody culled from a Bach piano exercise (“Minuet in G”) and wrote some moon-June-style lyrics to fit the pattern. Crewe then took the melody—which, although pretty, repeated itself endlessly without any variation—and fleshed it out with some interesting production flourishes. He recruited the Toys, who had previously done some session work for him, to sing. The result was a charming love song with innocent lyrics that would have been hopelessly out of sync with the times had it not been for Crewe’s imaginative production. After “A Lover’s Concerto,” the girl-group trend was essentially finished.

**The only American doo-wop groups that survived were those that adapted to the constantly evolving musical developments that were taking place at a near-dizzying pace.**

### OCTOBER 1965 #3 LET’S HANG ON!—THE FOUR SEASONS

**T**he fan base that supported the Four Seasons was dedicated and catholic in taste. The English Invasion could not be ignored, nor could Motown, but the consistently charming songs of the Four Seasons just would not go away. “Dawn,” “Ronnie,” “Rag Doll,” and “Save It for Me” all reached the Top 10 in 1964. With innovative musical styles breaking out all over, the Four Seasons became something of a guilty pleasure. They weren’t quite hip, yet they managed to remain popular and relevant throughout the ’60s. Sticking to what they knew best, they sang well-crafted, falsetto-based harmony with a solid rhythmic base, and the result was always undeniably catchy.

“Let’s Hang On!” was their first (and only) Top 10 single in 1965. With a guitar sound that would have been unthinkable two years earlier, the song further modernized the doo-wop genre, changing it significantly and permanently. Like Dorothy accidentally throwing water on the wicked witch, the Four Seasons might even have inadvertently killed doo-wop. They altered traditional vocal-group styles so much that the term “doo-wop,” which was never adequate to define their music anyway, became forever obsolete. “Let’s Hang On!” served as evidence that the Four Seasons were capable of burning their bridges behind them. They may





have been rooted in styles of the past, but from this point on, Frankie Valli and Company were most certainly more concerned with maintaining relevance into the future.

## OCTOBER 1965 #7 A TASTE OF HONEY— HERB ALPERT AND THE TIJUANA BRASS

**M**y parents weren't big music fans, by any stretch of the imagination, but like most others in their age group, they owned a reasonable sprinkling of record albums. The majority were by popular vocalists, such as Andy Williams, Robert Goulet, Perry Como, and particularly Jerry Vale. My dad thought Vale was the greatest. I can still hear him raving about how perfect his diction was, as if that were the most important characteristic a singer could possess. It also implied that most of the singers I listened to were Cro-Magnon heathens who were barely capable of grunting. It didn't matter much, though, and we could peaceably coexist

(I wasn't a teenager yet) as long as we didn't subject each other to our unique preferences. Looking back, my parents owned certain records that I truly liked, although I'd have been loath to admit it then. At various times, however, my sister and I discovered some wonderful alternative uses for their record albums. To her, they made great pretend dishes for playing house. For me, they were excellent projectiles and worked almost as good as Frisbees. In some ways they were even better, since I discovered that they would explode upon impact with a high-tension wire. When we were younger, we both tried to draw on the vinyl with our crayons. In short, my parents' record collection was either totally annihilated or wrecked beyond use.

With their record collection becoming so "multifunctional," my parents often were unable to play their old favorites. A simple solution to the musical drought that descended over our house-

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1965 <u>RESCUE ME</u> —FONTELLA BASS	#4
OCTOBER 1965 <u>POSITIVELY FOURTH STREET</u> — BOB DYLAN	#7
OCTOBER 1965 <u>RESPECT</u> —OTIS REDDING	#35

GREAT MISSES	
OCTOBER 1965 <u>DAWN OF CORRECTION</u> — THE SPOKESMEN	#36

hold was to replace the destroyed or (ahem) missing disks with new albums, so as the old Harry Belafonte or Trini Lopez records went (literally) out the window, my parents would bring home new stuff and hope that, since we were no longer young and stupid (yeah, right), we wouldn't trash their new purchases. One record that I vividly recall my mother bringing home was by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. Called *Whipped Cream and Other Delights*, it pictured an apparently naked woman up to her cleavage in the stuff. Now *this*, I thought, was interesting.

Sporting a sound that was like a mariachi band with a heavy and swinging



beat, I liked this record as much as I supposed that my parents did. Best of all, it was all instrumental, with none of the crooning vocals that usually made “their music” all but impossible for me to appreciate. The key song here was a Top 10 hit called “A Taste of Honey.” I was already familiar with the tune because the Beatles did a very boring version of it on one of their albums, but Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass’s version was something else. It was lively, sprightly, and hip—much cooler than the Beatles’ version. Heck, here I was, a preteen smack dab in the middle of Beatlemania, and I actually preferred a version of a song from a record that my parents bought more than the *Beatles’* version. “Boy,” I must have thought, “I hope my friends don’t find out about this.” As it turned out, most of my buddies loved the song, too, and they didn’t even know that the Beatles had recorded it. All was fine. Just to be on the safe side, I amended my ways, stopped throwing records at power lines, and made sure that, from now on, my sister would use something other than records when she invited her imaginary friends over for tea.

### NOVEMBER 1965 #3 I GOT YOU (I FEEL GOOD)—JAMES BROWN

**A** AOOOOWW!” “I Got You (I Feel Good)” was kept in the can for a while, since James Brown was having legal problems for the better part of the previous year. When things cleared up, a mother lode of material was ready to be unleashed on an unsuspecting public. The first salvo, “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” was a direct hit. Anyone who was left standing after this record was released was soon felled by its follow-up, “I Got You (I Feel Good).” Back-to-back hits of monstrous innovation, they changed the course of popular music perhaps even more significantly than the entire British Invasion.

“I Got You (I Feel Good)” capitalized on the momentum of “Out of Sight” and “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” peaking on the pop charts at #3, the biggest hit of Brown’s career. He has entered the Top 40 forty-four times (to date), a record surpassed only by Elvis Presley, the Beatles, and just recently, Stevie Wonder and Elton John.

### DECEMBER 1965 #1 WE CAN WORK IT OUT—THE BEATLES

**M**y dictionary defines “symbiosis” as “the living together in more or less (I love that part) intimate association or close union of two dissimilar organisms...in a mutually beneficial relationship.” Therein lies a perfect overview of “We Can Work It Out.” Paul McCartney scribed the initial formula for the song, but his version was lacking for two reasons. First of all, it needed a middle section to alleviate the repetitiveness of the verses, and secondly, it needed a sense of duality to bring it a depth of meaning that might temper its optimism. Enter John Lennon. By supplying a bridge that contained enough thought and melody to



**GREAT HITS**

NOVEMBER 1965 #1  
**TURN! TURN! TURN!**—THE BYRDS

NOVEMBER 1965 #6  
**I CAN NEVER GO HOME ANYMORE—**  
**THE SHANGRI-LAS**

**GREAT MISSES**

NOVEMBER 1965 #15  
**MAY THE BIRD OF**  
**PARADISE FLY UP YOUR NOSE—**  
**"LITTLE" JIMMY DICKENS**

form the basis for a song all by itself, Lennon made McCartney's verses spring to life. From their differing perspectives, they wrote a song that is both an articulate plea for compromise and a textbook example of how effective a compromise could be.

By combining the optimistic perspective of McCartney's verse with the realistic earthiness of Lennon's bridge, "We Can Work It Out" becomes greater than the sum of its parts. The song contains a conversation within itself, displaying by example what it requests from the listener. It's a gorgeous formula, but it can only work when both halves are equal but different. Black/white, fire/water, male/female, up/down, Lennon/McCartney. When it works, symbiosis can bring greater meaning to each half's existence.

## DECEMBER 1965 #5 DAY TRIPPER—THE BEATLES

**B**y now, if you wanted to assess the state of popular music, all you needed to do was familiarize yourself with the latest Beatles release. Their influence was so pervasive that the entire pop industry awaited each Beatles record with bated breath in order to determine what the new trend might be. With the whole world looking to them for direction, it was no wonder that they constantly remained one step ahead of the competition. Once they started releasing B sides that were as good as A sides, though, there was no competition. "Day Tripper"

**GREAT HITS**

DECEMBER 1965 #1  
**SOUNDS OF SILENCE—**  
**SIMON AND GARFUNKEL**

started a trend that would double the appeal of the typical Beatles release. From now on, John Lennon and Paul McCartney would often compete with one another to see who could write the best single, then release the results back to back. This (at first) healthy competition would solidify their reputations as the premier songwriters of their time.

With a killer guitar riff (another son of "What'd I Say") that burrows itself deep into the recesses of the brain's pleasure center, "Day Tripper" plays mind games with its intended audience. Lennon's pervasive humor drove him to write a song that made veiled reference to drug use and sex, but in a phrase that was beyond suspicion. The lyrics posed a challenge to listeners who wanted to be hip but who couldn't part from the ritualistic formalism that bound them. The term "day tripper" normally applies to somebody who leaves for a short excursion. Lennon used the phrase to define the new breed of "weekend hippies." It wasn't so much that



he despised this type of person as that he simply wanted to know what side of the fence they were on. This was at a time when people went around wearing buttons that said “Don’t trust anyone over thirty” (I wish I didn’t remember that). “Day Tripper” was an inside joke that provided food for thought to anyone who cared to read between the lines.

Nineteen sixty-five drew to a close, and once again, the Beatles had accrued more commercial material than they could release. Like my previous list of songs from 1964 (see “I’ll Cry Instead”), the following list contains songs from 1965 that, surprisingly, were never given a chance to enter the Top 40: “No Reply,” “I’m a Loser,” “The Night Before,” “You’ve Got to Hide Your Love Away” (actually a hit for the English folk group Silkie and produced by McCartney and Lennon), “You’re Gonna Lose That Girl,” “I’ve Just Seen a Face,” “Drive My Car,” “Norwegian Wood,” “Michelle,” and “In My Life.”

## DECEMBER 1965 #10 YOU DIDN’T HAVE TO BE SO NICE— THE LOVIN’ SPOONFUL

Less than three months after their debut single, the Lovin’ Spoonful were back on the charts with “You Didn’t Have to Be So Nice.” For the next two years, they would continue to release singles at this pace, and each of them would easily grace the Top 20—nine singles in twenty months, to be precise. Their singing-with-a-smile sound was labeled “good-time music” and sounded quite unlike what you would have expected to emerge from a city as jaded as New York. The Lovin’ Spoonful’s music stood in marked contrast to that of many other bands that shared their home turf, such as the Fugs and the Velvet Underground, neither of which enjoyed much recognition in their time. Gritty realism and artistry did not sell, but happy pop tunes were being bought by the crate. The Lovin’ Spoonful’s material was inviting and catchy without being cloying or saccharine, so the group was able to enjoy pop success without losing its credibility among the city’s trendsetters. Andy Warhol in particular had become something of an icon in New York, and his unbiased embracing of pop culture in all its forms may actually have played a role in helping the Lovin’ Spoonful maintain integrity with the “in” crowd while they concentrated on their own core audience.

“You Didn’t Have to Be So Nice” moves along with a steady, almost monotonous shuffle beat while John Sebastian sings just a shade louder than inaudible. The song’s hook is nothing more imaginative than a guitar mimicking the vocal line, yet it is somehow almost as infectious as their first single, “Do You Believe in Magic.” The band sounds relaxed and confident that their message is getting across, while Sebastian’s low-key delivery makes him seem about as carefree and satisfied as a man lounging in a hammock after eating a big meal. All in all, the performance

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1965 #4  
FIVE O’CLOCK WORLD—THE VOGUES



comes across as both effortless and graceful. Once this song also reached the Top 10, it became apparent that the Lovin' Spoonful would probably be around for a while. For the next two years, they would remain a pop radio staple.

## DECEMBER 1965 #33 MYSTIC EYES—THEM

Forget the Yardbirds. Forget the Animals. Forget the Rolling Stones, at least their early sides. Them, featuring Van Morrison, was hands down the most convincing European blues band of the mid-'60s. Nobody else was as expressive and heartfelt in their vocalizations as Morrison was, and nobody else's arrangements sounded so authentic; the only English group to come close was John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. To the others, the blues was a style to be emulated. To Morrison, it was a religion.

George Ivan Morrison was a shy only child born to George and Violet Morrison, he an avid collector of American recordings and she an aspiring dancer. Through his father's record collection, young Morrison was exposed to the blues of Muddy Waters and Leadbelly, the country of Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers, the jazz of Charlie Parker and Jelly Roll Morton, and the sanctified gospel of Mahalia Jackson, not to mention the not-so-sanctified R&B of Ray Charles. Morrison took up saxophone and played with a variety of show bands around his hometown of Belfast, eventually graduating to the rest of the U.K. The most notable effect of performing was his abrupt personality change once he climbed onstage. Suddenly the withdrawn schoolboy was gone, and in his place was a crazed showman who would do almost anything to attract attention. It was in this way that he began to be featured as a lead vocalist. His love

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1965	#11
JUST LIKE ME— PAUL REVERE AND THE RAIDERS	

for R&B music soon pulled him away from the show-band scene, and he aligned himself with a blues group that called themselves, quite simply, Them.

It was during his time with Them that Morrison's phenomenal ability to interpret the blues became obvious. The group's version of "Baby, Please Don't Go" proved it, but the B side of that single was the real eye-opener. "Gloria" was an original composition that was so lustily sexual and dynamically moody that it has since become recognized as one of the most classic rock-and-roll recordings of all time. At the time of its release, though, it barely made an impression, at least not on our side of the Atlantic. Helped by constant rotation on English television's *Ready, Steady, Go*, "Baby, Please Don't Go" rose to the Top 10 there, but in America it may as well not have existed. Considering that this is one of the best two-sided singles ever released, it is a travesty that it was not overwhelmingly recognized for its greatness at the time, but that oversight has since been rectified. In 1966 a vastly inferior (but still good) cover version of "Gloria" by the Chicago-based garage band the Shadows of Knight made it onto the Top 10. A subsequent rerelease of Them's original kicked and screamed its way to





#71, but it was too late, since the song was now in the shadows of the Shadows of Knight. Today, it's usually (and rightfully) Them's version that gets recognition.

"Here Comes the Night," a poppish number composed by American producer Bert Berns (also the coauthor of "Twist and Shout") became Them's first American hit when it reached #24 in June 1965. But the band's unwillingness to cooperate with either the press or their own management, coupled with numerous personnel changes, had an adverse effect on their popularity. Their photos usually had enough scowls to make the Rolling Stones look like Benny Hill impersonators, and they were soon tagged "the angry young Them." The band lasted for two albums, which have since fallen victim to so many repackagings that their original identity is all but totally lost. As for the band, the only member who escaped with any identity at all was Morrison.

"Mystic Eyes" was a wild instrumental tune, which the band used for jamming and which featured some excellent blues harp work by Morrison. When the song was recorded, it was nothing more than an unfinished set of changes on which Morrison ad-libbed a few vocal phrases and excerpted some lyrics from his other compositions.

Although the track is only approximately two and-a-half minutes in length, vocals don't enter until the midway point. Even then, they sound every bit as scattershot and loose as they were, with the guitarist darting in and around Morrison's phrases in an amphetamine-drenched game of tag. The key moment comes when Morrison locks onto the title phrase as if it were a life-sustaining moment. He screams the words "Mystic Eyes" over and over until the band is fully revved and ready to roll away on a pumped-up charge toward the abrupt fade-out. The song is hardly classic in its structure and is anything but standard Top 40 fare, but it stands out for being an early version of the ad-libbed blues/mystical music that Morrison would later perfect on solo albums like *Astral Weeks*. Although Them was short-lived, recordings like "Mystic Eyes," "Gloria," "Baby, Please Don't Go," and their remarkable cover version of Bob Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" (perhaps the best reworking of a Dylan song ever) have built their reputation as one of the most talented and exciting but unrecognized bands of the U.K. blues scene.

**"Here Comes the Night," a poppish number composed by American producer Bert Berns (also the coauthor of "Twist and Shout") became Them's first American hit when it reached #24 in June 1965.**





**Chapter  
Four**

**1966-1967**

**The Rolling Stones**







## JANUARY 1966 #1 LIGHTNING STRIKES—LOU CHRISTIE

**H**ow can a song so politically incorrect sound so cool in the '90s? The subject of young lust has been addressed ad nauseam on the Top 40 but never better than here. And to drive the point home, Lou Christie uses his incredible vocal range to display just how excited a virile male can be when he just “can’t stop.”

The protagonist comes off as a kind of Dr. Jekyll. Christie’s voice and the song structure help to map the transition as he becomes a Mr. Hyde. The verse, sung in a natural range, has him trying real hard to convince his baby “You’re old enough to know the makings of a man” so “For the time being, baby, live by my rule.” This line of argument apparently doesn’t go over too well, so when the bridge begins, he completely changes the tone of his voice, becoming sensitive (as a fox) as he sings pleadingly about “trust to the very end” and settling down at some “chapel in the pines.” (Chapel in the pines? Geez, lady, if you buy this, I’ve got some real estate in the Everglades you’d be interested in.)

But uh-oh...here comes that feeling again. Suddenly he snaps and confesses, “When I see lips waiting to be kissed, I can’t stop, I CAN’T STOP MYSELF...”

Before you know it, his cool is completely blown. Christie’s voice rises by an octave (at least) as he yelps uncontrollably, “LIGHT-NING’S STRI-YIKING AGA-YANN!” Hoo, boy. The poor guy then has a few moments to compose himself before the whole process starts again, with new words.

The craziest thing about this record is that any red-blooded guy who hears it can relate to it. So can most women. What a world. What a cool song.

## JANUARY 1966 #3 UPTIGHT [EVERYTHING’S ALRIGHT]—STEVIE WONDER

**I**t is hard to describe the career of Stevie Wonder without relying heavily on superlatives. After Elvis and the Beatles, Wonder has racked up more Top 10 singles than anybody (twenty-six and counting). He’s been the most continually successful of all the Motown-related artists while remaining one of the most artistically idiosyncratic. He has also maintained a level of consistency in the quality of his output that is unequalled by any contemporary artist with his longevity.

Born a month early on May 13, 1950, the baby Steveland Morris was placed in an incubator and subjected to an excessive amount of oxygen, which has been explained as the cause of his blindness. Although one of his senses was compromised, Stevie showed a natural facility with music, and he hoped it would provide him with an avocation. In his preteen years, he was brimming with talent that was obvious to anyone who ever heard him sing on a neighborhood doorstep. A friend of his was the brother of Ronnie White, a member of Smokey Robinson’s Miracles, and he constantly harassed his brother to come and check Stevie

**After Elvis and the Beatles, Wonder has racked up more Top 10 singles than anybody [twenty-six and counting].**





**For almost two years, Motown and "Little Stevie Wonder," as Gordy dubbed him, searched for an appropriate single to break him onto the pop charts.**

out. Tired of the pestering, White and Pete Moore (also a Miracle) became the first members of the Motown Record Corporation to hear Steveland Morris, and they were impressed enough to introduce him to the label's "talent scout," Brian Holland. Not expecting much, Holland didn't even bring him into the building and instead asked him to audition on the front stoop of the studio, not realizing that this was the young singer's most natural environment. Berry Gordy was next to be notified of the blind boy's talent, and promptly made him the youngest member of the Motown family.

Just like a musically inclined kid in a recording studio, he could hardly believe his luck at having access to so many instruments, and he jumped at every chance to play whatever he could get his hands on. Motown recorded numerous tracks with him, but he was such a unique artist that, because of his age and his specialized sound, Wonder resisted being molded into the standard Motown routine. For almost two years, Motown and "Little Stevie Wonder," as Gordy dubbed him, searched for an appropriate single to break him onto the pop charts. The first few they attempted performed miserably on the charts and were ignored by radio. Wonder's saving grace at this time was his live performances. Gordy booked him a spot on the "Motown Revue," a traveling tour of the various Motown acts featuring a very controlled set of performances by the label's numerous acts. Since his spot on the live show was usually loose and instinctive, Little Stevie stood out. He would inspire the audience with his improvisational playing and singing until they erupted into a frenzy. Among all the acts to appear on the bill, the response to Wonder was the most overwhelmingly supportive, so Gordy decided to try something new and recorded him onstage. "Fingertips" was a seven-minute-long highlight of his show that was broken in half and released as a single in two parts. "Fingertips, Part II" featured little more than a series of improvised encores and confusion while the band changed personnel for the next act and followed Wonder's lead as best as they could. It was a mess, but it was an exciting mess, and it went to #1, suddenly establishing Little Stevie Wonder as a premier artist on the Motown label. He was thirteen years old.

A dip in the pitch of his voice the following year led Motown to drop the "Little" prefix from his name. Unfortunately, the tremendous success of his live recording and his predictably steady maturation both conspired to destroy his career. His subsequent studio efforts weren't nearly as appealing as "Fingertips," and his deepening voice meant that a complete change of direction was in order, as well as a change in the key of his backing tracks, if he was to remain active at Motown.

Songwriting was the key that salvaged Wonder's career. While on tour, he would often keep everybody on the bus awake while he worked out musical ideas that he had in his head, making it obvious that he had an innate talent for creating his own music. Although Motown generally frowned on artists writing their own ma-



terial, Gordy recognized that Wonder was something of an anomaly and let him write with house producer/writer Henry Cosby and lyricist Sylvia Moy. “Uptight (Everything’s Alright)” was the fruit of their labor, and it became the most identifiable song of Wonder’s career. With a joyous message and some cockeyed lyrical phrasing (a trademark of much of Wonder’s work), “Uptight” was as infectious and life-affirming as a song could be when sung by someone who’s “Got empty pockets. See, I’m a poor man’s son.” A searing horn riff sets up the song’s positive vibe until Wonder’s voice takes over. From then on, the song brims with unharnessed exultation. With a new voice and a more focused musical style, Wonder was back on the pop charts in a big way. “Uptight” climbed to #3 and provided the foundation for the next thirty years of his career.

## JANUARY 1966 #5 MY WORLD IS EMPTY WITHOUT YOU—THE SUPREMES

As the Supremes’ career wore on, Diana Ross steadily moved farther into the spotlight while Mary Wilson and Florence Ballard steadily receded. By the time of “My World Is Empty without You,” the “other” Supremes were deemed as tokens. Their presence on this record is so minimal that they seem extraneous. Actually, Ballard was absent altogether; she missed the recording session and was replaced by another vocalist named Marlene Barrow.

The grooming that Motown offered to (or required of) its acts was met with a variety of responses within the Supremes. Wilson did what was expected, while Ballard did what was necessary. Ross, however, made sure to take advantage of whatever would increase her “star appeal.” Part of this grooming included four months of intense and grueling rehearsals to prepare for an appearance at New York’s prestigious Copa Cabana Club. After this show—and in subsequent ones—Wilson and Ballard became, at best, pillars of support for Ross, who used the concerts as a vehicle toward stardom for herself as opposed to the group as a whole. Sappy renditions of “Put on a Happy Face,” “You’re Nobody ’Til Somebody Loves You,” and “The Girl from Ipanema” became part of their live program, moving them about as far away from soul as a group of black girls could possibly be. Thankfully, they never lost sight of what made them popular as recording artists and continued releasing material that was written by Lamont Dozier and brothers Eddie and Brian Holland.

The rather incongruous, distorted bass drumbeat that starts off “My World Is Empty without You” is at odds with the professionalism displayed on the rest of the track. The house band plays with the panache and liveliness typical of a Motown recording, while the polish of Ross’s vocal is so obvious that it requires no mention. With so much continual success, it seemed as though the organization that supported the Supremes could churn out material like this while sleep-

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1966	#6
<u>CRYING TIME</u> —RAY CHARLES	
JANUARY 1966	#28
<u>IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR</u> —FRANK SINATRA	

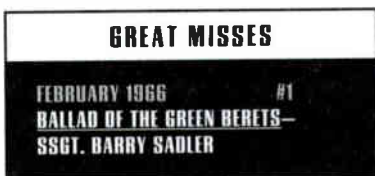


ing. Critics might have resented it, but fans who cared only about the image and the music were indifferent to the means used to get it. A good song was enough, and despite the rumblings that were tearing them apart, the Supremes remained, in the public's perception, a lovable trio fronted by the indefatigable Diana Ross.

## FEBRUARY 1966 #1 THESE BOOTS ARE MADE FOR WALKIN'— NANCY SINATRA

**S**ome songs are so bad that they're good. It's like they enter some black hole of bad-dom, only to emerge from the other side as a wholly enjoyable experience. "Boots" is that kind of song. You just gotta believe that everybody knew the record was ridiculous and deliberately capitalized on its badness. Even producer/songwriter Lee Hazlewood had to know he was being silly beyond redemption; either that or he was hallucinating. And the guitarist—if he thought of that "riff" that sounds like someone noisily tuning a guitar string, it was either genius or insanity.

Then, there is Nancy Sinatra herself, completely willing to be portrayed as the camp queen of the decade as she deliciously flagellates her lover. Just listen to the lyric: "You keep lyin' when you oughta be truthin'," and "you keep sam'in' when you oughta be changin'." Wha? I don't know who's smarter, the tongue-in-cheek lyricist, the shamelessly humorous Sinatra, or the arranger (the aptly named Billy Strange). Either way, this song is a rip. Crank it up.



## FEBRUARY 1966 #3 LISTEN PEOPLE—HERMAN'S HERMITS

**W**ell, at least I didn't pick "I'm Henry VIII, I Am." It would be terribly easy to make disparaging remarks regarding Herman's Hermits, and more serious musicians and critics have been quite adept at doing just that. Sure, a lot of their material was recycled British pub tunes and disposable, schmaltzy pop. Peter Noone's relentless cuteness was annoying—unless you were one of the millions of fans who adored him. He was totally unabashed about his persona, and as a result he appeared to be completely sincere in his performance. That sincerity is precisely why "Listen People" works so well. He is offering us a little piece of advice, a small kernel of wisdom, and he sounds so utterly truthful that we want to listen and believe him.

The plaintive guitar and sparse arrangement help to put the emphasis on the vocals. It was particularly intelligent to not overarrange the song because, in this case, less is definitely more. The band certainly had all the orchestral trim-



mings at their fingertips, as evidenced on songs such as “There’s a Kind of Hush,” so their restraint was deliberate and admirable.

“Listen People” was written by Graham Gouldman, who wrote two other Top 40 hits for Herman’s Hermits. He also wrote “Bus Stop” for the Hollies and later became a founding member of 10 C.C.

## FEBRUARY 1966 #9 WORKING MY WAY BACK TO YOU— THE FOUR SEASONS

The Four Seasons may not have seemed innovative at first glance, but upon further investigation, their creativity and originality become more obvious. In 1965, “Let’s Hang On!” brought them thoroughly up-to-date. With their farcical and entertaining version of Bob Dylan’s “Don’t Think Twice, It’s Alright” as a follow-up, they made the point that they were both hip enough to like Dylan and self-effacing enough to have some fun. Presumably the result of Frankie Valli fooling around with various silly voices in the studio, the song was so outrageously comical that it begged for release. They were doubly clever tricksters, as well, when they released it credited to the “Wonder Who?” and it reached #12. No version of any Dylan song could more adequately demonstrate the malleability of his songwriting.

“Working My Way Back to You” was the legitimate follow-up to “Let’s Hang On.” It reached the Top 10 in February 1966, stopping at position #9. Producer Bob Crewe’s fascination with Phil Spector’s production techniques helped to guarantee that a Four Seasons record would not be lacking in craftsmanship, and “Working My Way Back to You” is certainly no exception. One major difference is that you can easily discern the instrumentation on Crewe’s production, whereas Spector’s wall of sound comes at you in one heaving mass, thus rendering the individual instruments inaudible. Valli didn’t emphasize his upper register as much on “Working My Way Back to You.” Depending on whether you’re a glass-is-half-full or glass-is-half-empty kind of person, the result is either a more mature or a less juvenile sound. Either way, the Four Seasons did it again against the odds, continuing their streak of contemporary-sounding hit records.

Cole Porter’s “I’ve Got You under My Skin,” as well as “Tell It to the Rain” and “C’mon Marianne,” all graced the Top 10 from 1966 through 1967. These tracks

### GREAT HITS

FEBRUARY 1966 #4  
CALIFORNIA DREAMIN’—  
THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS

FEBRUARY 1966 #5  
HOMEWARD BOUND—  
SIMON AND GARFUNKEL

FEBRUARY 1966 #9  
I FOUGHT THE LAW—  
THE BOBBY FULLER FOUR

FEBRUARY 1966 #22  
CALL ME—CHRIS MONTEZ

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1966 #5  
ELUSIVE BUTTERFLY—BOB LIND



showed signs of wear, though, and they lacked new ideas to carry the Four Seasons into the upcoming decade. In 1980, the Spinners revived "Working My Way Back to You" and had a #2 hit with it. By then, Valli was an established star on the disco scene.

## MARCH 1966 #1 (YOU'RE MY) SOUL AND INSPIRATION— THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS

**O**kay, so it's a direct cop of "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." From the theme of the lyrics to the pleading vocal to the song's structure, "(You're My) Soul and Inspiration" could be overlaid on top of "Lovin' Feeling" and compared bar for bar, with little of note that would appear different. But why complain when the root is so solid? Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil wrote "Soul and Inspiration" as the intended follow-up to "Lovin' Feeling," which they also penned. For whatever reason, Phil Spector saw things differently and instead had the Righteous Brothers record Gerry Goffin and Carole King's "For Once in My Life," followed by "Unchained Melody" and "Ebb Tide."

Spector didn't own the Righteous Brothers outright as he did his other acts, but he leased their contract from their previous label. He was becoming more concerned with developing his masterwork with Ike and Tina Turner, so when MGM offered him \$1 million for the Righteous Brothers, Spector decided to sell. Abandoned by their producer, the Righteous Brothers desperately needed to find a healthy dose of soul and inspiration, and they did, literally, in the Mann-Weil composition that they set out to record. Bill Medley had some experience as a songwriter and record producer, and he obviously was not falling asleep in the studio while Spector meticulously crafted his material. So he took over the production chores and set about recreating the sound that Spector had obtained. The final product is evidence that he was in no small way quite successful. Although derivative, the song was almost the emotional equal of its prototype, and it became their biggest hit when it remained at the #1 position for three weeks.

Although derivative, the song was almost the emotional equal of its prototype, and it became their biggest hit when it remained at the #1 position for three weeks.

Meanwhile, Spector remained ensconced behind the recording console for months, producing what was perhaps the most meticulously structured pop single of all time. "River Deep, Mountain High" was complex even by Spector proportions, with dozens of layers and climaxes. Tina Turner gives the performance of a lifetime, sounding even less inhibited, and yet more in control, than usual. Even by his own standards, Spector had created his ultimate masterpiece. Unforgivably, unpredictably, and actually quite impossibly, "River Deep, Mountain





High” never reached the Top 40. Deluded and overcome by the curiously indifferent response to his masterwork, Spector decided he didn’t want to play anymore so he took his ball and went home. He would completely avoid the music industry for the next three years and even then resurfaced only temporarily. After doing some very good (and some not so good) work with the post-breakup Beatles, he retired permanently.

The Righteous Brothers would not repeat their feat, either. After “Soul and Inspiration,” a few forgettable hits followed until Medley left in search of a solo career that didn’t blossom (prophetically his first “hit” was titled “I Can’t Make It Alone”) until he became involved in the soundtrack for the 1987 movie *Dirty Dancing*. Hatfield, meanwhile, toured and recorded with an impostor brother. They reunited briefly in the mid-’70s (“Rock and Roll Heaven” hit #3 in 1974) and again more than ten years later for a rerecording of “Unchained Melody,” used in the 1990 film *Ghost*.

## MARCH 1966 #2 19TH NERVOUS BREAKDOWN—THE ROLLING STONES

From their inception, the Rolling Stones were continuously being provoked by the media, who insisted on portraying them as the “great unwashed” and a bane to all things decent. For their part, the Stones fought back by writing songs that poked holes into the soft white underbelly of middle-class moralism. The brilliance of setting themselves up as adversaries to staid conservatism and acceptable social mores was self-evident. A valuable function of contemporary art is to reflect the current state of affairs in all its ugly splendor, forcing a type of self-examination from the audience. The Stones did this beautifully, simply by turning the tables. “So you think *we’re* the problem, eh?” they seemed to be saying, “Well, take a look at your own sorry selves.”

On “19th Nervous Breakdown,” Mick Jagger and Keith Richards lampoon crusty societal woes by painting a caricature of a wealthy, nail-biting, self-obsessed neurotic (my God, I’m getting old; instead of identifying with Jagger like I used to, I now find myself sympathizing with the unstable woman that he mocks). There’s no sympathy here, though. Instead, Jagger bemusedly posits, “Here comes your nineteenth nervous breakdown.” Just for good measure, he throws in a rather blatant reference to tripping on LSD in the third verse, just to make sure there is no doubt as to where he sees himself in the scheme of things. It is ironic and pithy that Jagger could openly criticize the segment of society that he aspired toward. The Stones’ wealth lent them a mystique and brought them into closer contact with upper-class social circles that found them, particularly Jagger, to be intriguing and oddly powerful. Considering his current status as a jet-set gentleman of the world, he could hardly sing this song today with any conviction—unless he

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1966	#1
<b>GOOD LOVIN’—THE YOUNG RASCALS</b>	
MARCH 1966	#2
<b>DAYDREAM—THE LOVIN’ SPOONFUL</b>	



interpreted it in a self-critical manner. His bad-boy posturing of the '60s elevated him until he became rock-and-roll royalty. Now, it is not the devil but Jagger himself who is very much "a man of wealth and taste."

### MARCH 1966 #3 NOWHERE MAN—THE BEATLES

Nineteen sixty-six marked the complete disappearance of the "Fab Four" and the emergence of a new image for the Beatles. Their live shows had degenerated into playing before audiences who couldn't give a damn about the musical performance and only wanted to scream at the top of their lungs in some form of ritualistic catharsis. So they made the collective decision to quit playing live and instead to concentrate solely on their records. No longer playful, lovable mop-tops, they now showed themselves as introspective and full of contradiction. Their album *Rubber Soul* posed the first of many musical challenges to Beatles fans who, ready or not, had to accept the change or be left behind. Luckily, the musical innovation caught on and emboldened the Beatles to continue their experimentation by recording music that was continually breaking new ground.

Fashion styles and social attitudes were also changing very rapidly. The stark, gray austerity that defined London in the early years of the decade gave way to a playful, colorful, "swinging" London. Designer Mary Quant and supermodels Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy became stars in their own right. Miniskirts, wide-brim hats, and flowered shirts in the brightest of colors were all the rage, and Carnaby Street came to resemble a carnival more than the staid clothing designer's district it had previously been. The Beatles and the fashion world fed off one another, and each one escalated the other's supposed importance.

Once again, the Beatles clearly articulated and reflected their times. "Nowhere Man" addresses the invisibility that this sameness of fashion and style renders. By using some of the constantly evolving "hip" speech that set the younger generation apart, it celebrates individuality and at the same time points out that a sense of community is desirable. John Lennon's autobiographical plea is surrounded by Paul McCartney and George Harrison's harmony, as well as a stunningly original guitar break by Harrison. By example, "Nowhere Man" demonstrates what can be achieved when individuals pool their talents for the betterment of the group; it's a perfect amalgam for the optimistic, community-minded younger generation of the mid-1960s.

### MARCH 1966 #4 KICKS—PAUL REVERE AND THE RAIDERS

My opinion regarding Paul Revere and the Raiders runs counter to the popular critical position. Most critics hated the band in its prime but in retrospect heap all kinds of accolades on them, but not me. I was a big fan of "Where the Action Is" and watched the group (featuring Mark Lindsay) almost every weekday afternoon on Dick Clark's weaker cousin of *American Bandstand*. I loved the ridiculous suits



they wore, I loved the ridiculous antics they performed while lip-synching, and I loved their ridiculous, second-rate cover versions, which I didn't even know were cover versions. I thought they wrote stuff like "I Know," "Searchin'," and "Ooh Poo Pah Doo," but what can you expect from a ten-year-old kid? Slowly but surely I eventually heard the original artists' versions of just about all their early stuff, and each time I did, my memory of the Raiders' versions would slip further into my subconscious until they were all but forgotten. Today, only a handful of songs remain that are identified as Raiders' songs, and "Kicks" has got to be the best of the batch. For one thing, the demented "Louie Louie" beat that they used on most of their material—the way a bad cook would use salt—is not evident, and for another, it sounds like they took a bit more than their usual half-hearted interest in the production quality. The main factor, though, is that it was written by one of the best songwriting teams of all time, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil.

Mann and Weil actually wrote "Kicks" for the Animals as a follow-up to "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," but producer Terry Melcher talked them into giving the Raiders a shot. Against the odds, the Raiders not only did the song justice, but recorded a version that couldn't be beat. Augmented by session players, they exuded a sense of professionalism throughout the recording. Session drummer extraordinaire Hal Blaine lists "Kicks" on his résumé of hit performances.

My wife told me a story that helps to explain why I think "Kicks" is the best Raiders song. After living all over the U.S. throughout her early life, she left America for England in 1975 and lived there for five years. As far as England was concerned, Paul Revere and the Raiders were invisible, so she completely forgot that the band ever existed. Upon returning to the states, she was walking through Greenwich Village in Manhattan when "Kicks" drifted out the doorway of some record shop. She froze in her tracks and felt a shiver as the memory of the song drifted over her. Unable to move, she listened, completely captivated. I doubt if there is another song in the band's repertoire that ever could have done that.



## MARCH 1966 #5 TIME WON'T LET ME—THE OUTSIDERS

**B**esides causing American teenagers to spend all their pocket money on records, the English Invasion bands inspired another trend, as well. On the heels of beat music, which was booming its way up the charts, American teenagers were forming rock-and-roll bands that emulated the structure and sound of their British heroes. In no time, every city and small town across America had a smattering of local bands. Some were hopelessly awful and would never quite get the hang of even tuning their instruments (which didn't necessarily mean that they were not interesting to hear—think of "Louie Louie" by the Kingsmen, which happens to predate the English Invasion), while others became quite good and could write some of their own songs. Some were terribly derivative (which also didn't necessarily mean



they were worthless—think of “Lies” by the Knickerbockers, which sounds like a spitting image of the early Beatles) while others were quite original.

The Outsiders did an excellent job of finding their own nonderivative sound and executing it with aplomb. Made up mostly of seasoned musicians who worked the midwestern nightclub circuit, they certainly were not amateur garage-punks.

They wrote most of their own songs and recorded a few, hoping to land a record deal. Capitol Records heard their demo recording and almost immediately offered them a contract. “Time Won’t Let Me” was their first, best, and biggest single.

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1966 <u>THIS OLD HEART OF MINE—</u> THE ISLEY BROTHERS	#12
MARCH 1966 <u>GET READY—THE TEMPTATIONS</u>	#29
APRIL 1966 <u>MONDAY MONDAY—</u> THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS	#1

All that a song really needs to be memorable is a good hook, which this song certainly has in spades—along with horns, a hard-hitting up-tempo rhythm, a rocking guitar part, organ, harmony vocals, a syncopated melody...you get the picture. All the stops were pulled to propel this song to its rightful place. It was custom-built for pop radio, and I’m sure that everyone must

have been very pleased with the results when “Time Won’t Let Me” peaked at #5. A few hits followed for the Outsiders, but most of them sounded much too similar to keep record buyers interested for any extended period of time. They disbanded in the late ’60s, and vocalist Sonny Geraci then formed another group named Climax, which had a middle-of-the-road hit in 1972 with “Precious and Few.”

### APRIL 1966 #1 WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN—PERCY SLEDGE

What amazes me is that a song as good as “When a Man Loves a Woman” could just “happen” spontaneously, but I suppose that depends on whether you are considering the creation or the final product. Percy Sledge supposedly stumbled upon a chord phrase that his organist and bass player were tooling around with, ad-libbed a few lines about heartbreak, was overheard by songwriter/producer Quin Ivy, who rewrote the lyrics and recorded the song so that months later, almost every heart in America was touched. Its effect was both immediate and obvious, as it became a #1 hit on both the R&B and the pop charts, the first southern soul record to do so. Yet nobody seems to agree on the haphazard circumstances surrounding its development.

“When a Man Loves a Woman” is often credited for being the song that established Muscle Shoals, Alabama, as a viable entity in southern soul music. Before it, Stax Records in Memphis was the primary source for the homegrown, “grits and soul” approach to recording. Rick Hall’s Fame Recording Studios became the focal point for the Muscle Shoals sound, but actually “When a Man Loves a Woman” was not recorded by Hall, who turned the song down because he thought it was too ordinary. It seems that twenty people who tell the story tell it twenty different



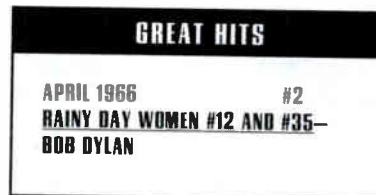
ways, but this much seems to be true: Hall assisted an associate named Quin Ivy in setting up a studio to handle his overflow work, called Quinvy Studios. Around the same time, Sledge, who was working as a hospital orderly, was asked to sit in with a group called the Esquires when a member became ill. One night he was feeling particularly blue, and with a few Scotches under his belt, he began to make up a song based around the phrase “why did you leave me?” Ivy, in any one of twenty different ways, somehow crossed paths with Sledge and started working on the song in earnest, changing the lyrics until it became what was eventually recorded in December 1965. Convinced of the song’s potential, Ivy told Hall, who told Atlantic Records’ Jerry Wexler, who agreed to release it, and the rest, to make a long story short, is history.

With all the dignity of a religious hymn, “When a Man Loves a Woman” hits home with a fundamental emotion that is as powerful and pure as soul music can be. Sledge seems to sing the melody with such naked honesty that it is almost impossible not to shudder with sympathetic recognition of his pain. Even the bleating horns on the last chorus sound as though they are sobbing mournfully and sympathetically. Never a professional singer, Sledge sings his heart out for anybody who has ever felt the pain of unrequited love. He eked out a few more hits afterward, but he could never sustain the intensity of his first recording. After two years that were spotted with four more appearances on the Top 40 (most notably with the naive message song, “Take Time to Know Her”), Sledge has spent the better part of his career singing his first song on the oldies circuit, a song that he claims can still bring tears to his eyes.

## APRIL 1966 #3 SLOOP JOHN B—THE BEACH BOYS

**S**loop John B” was a traditional song, probably Jamaican or Trinidadian in origin, which had known some popularity in folk circles. Al Jardine was a neotraditionalist folkie before he joined the Beach Boys, and “Sloop John B” was a part of his early repertoire. He had suggested that the band record the tune, but for one reason or another the project was never begun, so he assumed that Brian Wilson was uninterested. Meanwhile, the Beach Boys toured the world with Bruce Johnston taking Wilson’s place, while Wilson, who abhorred touring, stayed at home to write and do preproduction work for the group’s forthcoming LP.

The Beatles had recently released *Rubber Soul*, and after listening to the album in its entirety, Wilson was both floored and inspired. It was as though the Beatles had issued him a personal challenge: “Can you, Brian Wilson, top this?” He made up his mind to record an album that was fascinating from beginning to end, with no filler. In short, he intentionally set out to record the world’s greatest album of all time.







Wilson's textures took the song away from its simple roots and bathed it in an elaborate musical setting that ignored its humble origins.

His first song project was "Sloop John B." On a wave of inspiration, he arranged and recorded the instrumental tracks by himself virtually overnight. Surely, Jardine must have wanted to collaborate with him on the arrangement, but once he heard what Wilson had come up with, he could hardly complain. Wilson's textures took the song away from its simple roots and bathed it in an elaborate musical setting that ignored its humble origins. Despite the baroque flourishes, the emotional impact was not lost in overproduction. In fact, it was amplified by the beautiful setting provided by Wilson's arrangement. Interlacing harmonies and intricate instrumentation combined for a song that was wholly original, despite its public domain heritage.

"Sloop John B" was just a slice of what Wilson's album was intended to be, but Capitol Records was aghast. Where were the girls in bikinis? The surfboards? The hot rods? As if to prove its point, Capitol released another song from Wilson's tapes, called "Caroline, No," which they perceived to be less of a risk. It was an unlikely single and was credited to Wilson in lieu of the Beach Boys (his only solo single, in title anyway). Then Capitol pointed to its disappointing sales figures when it failed to chart any higher than #32. Still, despite doubt on all sides, Wilson stuck to his intentions and insisted that "Sloop John B" be released as the next single. To everyone's surprise (except Wilson's, of course), the song shot to #3. Ironically, the label then insisted that Wilson include the song on the group's new album, *Pet Sounds*, although Wilson had originally intended it to be only the companion single. Even worse, Capitol refused to relent with its self-destructive, sabotage tactics and decided not to support *Pet Sounds*. Instead, it released a greatest-hits package within eight weeks of the new record and gave the rehashed collection plenty of advertising, which caused it to completely outperform the ingenious and inspiring new album. To Capitol and to the other Beach Boys, this was proof positive that the public had no interest in hearing any musical development and preferred the Beach Boys to remain terminally adolescent. By smothering the sales potential of *Pet Sounds*, Capitol hoped that Wilson would fall in line, but not a chance. His independent streaks would only increase until, by year's end, he would find himself alienated not only from his label, his band, and the expectations of his fans, but from himself as well.

## APRIL 1966 #14 EIGHT MILES HIGH—THE BYRDS

It's the little things in life that can sometimes be so weird and amusing. For example, pity the poor parents of Roger (né Jim) McGuinn. As confused and befuddled as they were by the stardom and name-changing of their rebellious folk-rocker son, they coauthored a book called *Parents Can't Win*. Ha! No, I haven't



read it, but I do wonder what book title might have applied had the parents of his bandmate, David Crosby, decided to do the same.

Isn't it funny how all of those songs from the '60s that we swore were about drugs turned out to be about something else? Like the McCarthy era, when the only good commie was a dead commie, conservatives in the '60s sincerely believed that the only way to deal with rock music was to ban rock music. God forbid if you used metaphor in your lyrics—or the words “grass,” “high,” “smoke,” or even “puff.” (Remember the brouhaha over Peter, Paul, and Mary's absurdly innocuous ode to lost childhood called “Puff, the Magic Dragon”?) “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” was not about LSD, but a child's drawing. “Grazing in the Grass” really was about a sunny day, “Mr. Tambourine Man” most certainly was not about a drug pusher, and Donovan's “Mellow Yellow” was just an idiotic nonsense rhyme. Even the first big psychedelic hit, “Eight Miles High,” was innocuous—which, in retrospect, is disappointing, really. At the time, it was great to think that the Byrds would fly in the face (no pun intended) of conservative mores by issuing codes from the underground to their pop audience. The record *was* banned, which only added to the illusion.

In reality, “Eight Miles High” was about flying to London (“the gray town known for its sound”) while at the height of their fame, only to “touch down” and have the British press tear them to shreds. “Eight Miles High” is no more than a reference to the height at which jet planes fly, and perhaps a metaphor for the optimistic feeling of flying to Europe for the first time as stars. Apparently, they disappointed England, the English press disappointed them, and now the truth about this autobiographical song will probably disappoint a generation of ex-hippies. No matter. It still sounds musically innovative, and people can choose to believe whatever they care to believe.

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1966	#10
<b>GLORIA—THE SHADOWS OF KNIGHT</b>	
APRIL 1966	#11
<b>SIGN OF THE TIMES—PETULA CLARK</b>	
APRIL 1966	#11
<b>SHAPES OF THINGS—THE YARDBIRDS</b>	

## MAY 1966 #1 PAINT IT BLACK—THE ROLLING STONES

Ever since the Rolling Stones' first visit to the United States in the summer of 1964, they had made good use of their penchant for American recording studios. R&B was their passion, and Chicago's Chess Recording Studios was their mecca. Initially, their intent was to duplicate the sound of their favorite artists with as much accuracy as possible. When things clicked, the results were staggering. The only limitations were caused by their own occasional lack of ability, most apparent when Mick Jagger would take a turn at a soulful classic ballad. Jagger's butchery of Otis Redding and Solomon Burke tunes was twofold. Yes, his pitch was atrocious, but worse was the fact that his singing was fundamentally unbelievable. Even if he sang songs like “That's How Strong My Love Is” or “I've



Easily the most reflective of the Rolling Stones' early singles, "Paint It Black" paints Jagger and Company as a decidedly somber bunch of satanists.

Been Loving You Too Long" note-perfect (and believe me, he didn't), it would be pointless to hear because he was about as convincing as a bowl of plastic fruit. Blues and soul were about emotion and feeling, and Jagger was much too busy posturing to convince his audience otherwise.

Once Jagger and Keith Richards started writing their own songs, however, that problem was solved. They recorded nearly all of their mid-'60s output at either Los Angeles's RCA Hollywood Studios or Chicago's Chess. The band's confidence was increasing geometrically while Jagger and Richards's songwriting prowess expanded exponentially. Released in mid-1966, the album *Aftermath* consisted entirely of original material. One side effect of this productivity was the influence it had on the Stones' founding guitarist, Brian Jones. Jones began feeling terribly insecure about his role in the band, which was only compounded by the paranoia induced from his excessive drug intake. Almost as a means of compensation, he threw himself into learning new instruments and finding new sounds for the group. Because of his work, *Aftermath* also represented the Stones' first attempt to stretch the boundaries of standard rock-and-roll instrumentation, by featuring such exotic touches as the dulcimer, marimba, and sitar. The result was a brand of raga-rock that caused John Lennon to complain, "Everything we'd do, the Stones would copy four months later," referencing the Beatles' use of sitar on *Rubber Soul's* "Norwegian Wood."

Easily the most reflective of the Rolling Stones' early singles, "Paint It Black" paints Jagger and Company as a decidedly somber bunch of satanists. Here they are searching their souls, and all they can find is an empty void. How encouraging. The moodiness of the lyrics was, let's say, a bit overwrought, but the mood of the record came off as believable. "Paint It Black" was far afield from the normal Rolling Stones fare, but experimentation was hardly out of the ordinary for the times. The American public had no problem adjusting to the shift in direction, and "Paint It Black" rose to #1 for two weeks.

## MAY 1966 #8 IT'S A MAN'S MAN'S MAN'S MAN'S WORLD— JAMES BROWN

**M**r. Excitement. James "Butane" Brown. Mr. Please Please Please. Soul Brother Number One. The Hardest Working Man in Show Business. Mr. Dynamite. Mr. Superbad. The Godfather of Soul. Number One Soul Survivor.

His four-decade career has earned James Brown a veritable collection of titles by which he is instantly recognized. While other performers often let managers and producers control their careers (and their destinies), Brown refused to be pigeonholed and remained fiercely independent. Perhaps more than any of his



contemporaries, he based the standard of success for his records not on sales, but on feel. While the competition would try to remain comfortably within a defined formula, Brown's relentless energy and ambition drove him to constantly experiment and expand his stylistic repertoire.

Instead of allowing his string of innovative singles to continue unabated, Brown paused momentarily to record the retrogressive single "It's a Man's, Man's, Man's, Man's World" (at the time, did anybody notice the title's allusion to the all-star comedy film *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World?*). With a string section arranged by Sammy Lowe, this song harks back to the sound of Brown's earlier ballads and blues arrangements. Released between "I Got You" and "Cold Sweat," it sounds almost out of place. Perhaps he wanted to take one last nostalgic look back before he delved into the uncharted territory of stone-cold funk, as exemplified by "Cold Sweat" and "Licking Stick-Licking Stick."

In the '90s, the lyrics of "It's a Man's, Man's, Man's, Man's World," if taken literally, are enough to raise the ire of most women and embarrass even the staunchest of chauvinists, but it is not the politics of the lyric that make the record effective. It is the conviction in Brown's performance. He gives the impression that the weight of the world is suspended on our backs, and if you can hear the lyric as being about the state of man, as opposed to men, the song takes on a broader, universal thrust.

"It's a Man's, Man's, Man's, Man's World" marked the last time Brown utilized the formal structures of traditional pop music, pursuing instead the percussive sounds of funk. Some of these later records are so drenched in hypnotic rhythm that a chord change seems to be superfluous, if not an outright sacrilege. These sparse arrangements were a spawning ground for an interminable list of popular music styles, including disco, rap, and hip hop. Perhaps the reason Brown had so many tags is because a new one was needed each time he reinvented his genre. From Mr. Please Please Please to the Number One Soul Survivor and everything in between, Brown has proven that he is worthy of each and every one.

## JUNE 1966 #1 PAPERBACK WRITER—THE BEATLES

**B**y now, Paul McCartney and John Lennon were almost always writing exclusively of one another. Even when they did collaborate, they usually wrote their

### GREAT HITS

MAY 1966 #3

**I AM A ROCK—  
SIMON AND GARFUNKEL**

MAY 1966 #10

**SWEET TALKIN' GUY—THE CHIFFONS**

MAY 1966 #12

**OH HOW HAPPY—SHADES OF BLUE**

MAY 1966 #16

**THE MORE I SEE YOU—CHRIS MONTEZ**

MAY 1966 #20

**ROAD RUNNER—  
JR. WALKER & THE ALL STARS**

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1966 #28

**THE "A" TEAM—SGT. BARRY SADLER**



**McCartney wrote the melodically dense "Paperback Writer" as an attempt at what the Beach Boys were accomplishing with their complex harmonies.**

parts separately and then stitched the pieces together. Their competitive relationship usually inspired each of them to concoct a song that would be the next Beatles single. "Paperback Writer" was McCartney's submission while John Lennon presented "Rain" as his own choice. They were released back to back, but the more traditionally commercial "Paperback Writer" was chosen for the A side, and it eventually reached #1 for two weeks.

McCartney wrote the melodically dense "Paperback Writer" as an attempt at what the Beach Boys were accomplishing with their complex harmonies. His lyrics take the form of a submittal letter from a struggling author to a publishing firm and begin: "Dear Sir or Madam, Would you read my book? It took me years to write, won't you take a look?" It's an unusual approach, but the lyrics never break the droll (dull?) prose of the letter format. The only double entendre is what the listener might want to read into it. Still, it's a very clever song.

"Paperback Writer" is infinitely more manic than anything attempted by the Beach Boys (it is hard to know exactly what McCartney was thinking). The fuzz-tone guitar amplifies the impatience of the lyric and the tempo. The song moves along so swiftly that it never stops to assess whether it is sinking in, at least until the vocal returns to the dense, four-layered harmony. Even then, gears are shifted only temporarily before the song lurches back into overdrive. In a sense, "Paperback Writer" suffers from an excess of originality. It's easy to lose grasp of what the Beatles were trying to convey, and some fans began to question whether they really were infallible (which, of course, they weren't). Rather than slipping from former glory, the Beatles were merely testing new waters. "Paperback Writer" was certainly an imaginative, if somewhat modest, step toward the future. As such, this song should be recognized for what it is: a conscious decision to leave the dry land of the familiar while tentatively heading toward the heavens.

## **JUNE 1966 #23 RAIN—THE BEATLES**

**W**hile Paul McCartney took his first cautious steps toward experimentation with "Paperback Writer," John Lennon jumped headlong into the fray with "Rain." He recklessly ignored whatever qualifications were expected from a Beatles 45, and for this reason it remains one of their most interesting titles to ever enter the Top 40. It wasn't Lennon's style to approach an idea cautiously. Whatever notion possessed his curiosity, he felt compelled to jump headlong into the fray, until it bored him. He had no patience to temper his vision and expected everybody, his fellow Beatles included, to follow him as he chose the path less traveled.

It is patently unfair to criticize McCartney for being less innovative than his





partner, especially considering that in the wake of his murder, Lennon has been all but sanctified. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that "Rain" contains one of McCartney's most fascinating bass guitar lines: twisting and turning and always interesting. But while his creativity with the Beatles speaks for itself, McCartney could become his own worst enemy when his occasional lapses into saccharine sweetness rose to the surface unchecked. It is telling that Lennon would write about "Rain" while at the same time McCartney would write about "Good Day Sunshine." Lennon's "Rain" spoke to anybody who ever sensed the ambivalent and daring side of their nature while McCartney's "Good Day Sunshine" was so unrelentingly optimistic that only an android could withstand its "have a nice day" platitudes without screaming.

In its time, "Rain" was so extraordinary that it seemed to be an end in itself. Hardly. Lennon's later experimental recordings with Yoko Ono would make "Rain" seem like a Partridge Family record, but at least here his experimentalism was accessible. The band recorded the song at a sped-up pace and then slowed down the tape to overdub the vocals. Besides changing the pitch, this altered the tone of the instruments, particularly Ringo Starr's snare drum, which has a deeper, wet tone. The technicalities were fascinating, but Starr's inspired performance might be the highlight of his playing career. The backward vocals that grace the end of the recording were the result of an accident when Lennon, in an altered state of consciousness and near exhaustion, looped an in-process mix of the song backward onto the tape reel and loved what he heard. If he had been given free reign, it is a distinct possibility that the entire song would have been released backward. He would save such extremism for later in his career. Meanwhile, this song was not only challenging, but stimulating, as well.

Lennon's later experimental recordings with Yoko Ono would make "Rain" seem like a Partridge Family record, but at least here his experimentalism was accessible.

## **JUNE 1966 #4 YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY YOU LOVE ME— DUSTY SPRINGFIELD**

**W**ow, what an intro. This beginning sounds like what you'd hear in a Cecil B. DeMille movie when God parts the Red Sea for Moses. With all the bombast that a full orchestra can muster, the horn section summons the percussion to try to outdo itself. Everything rises to a towering crescendo, which pauses, and then... "When I said I needed you, you said you would always stay"...Dusty Springfield's voice enters and manages to express the overwrought anxiety of the lyric without resorting to histrionics. The orchestration practically dares her to oversing. The restraint that she shows in singing this song is more than admirable—it's a small miracle. The song builds to such an emotive climax that you would expect a lesser



Springfield's  
controlled  
delivery  
evinces just  
enough emotion  
to make the  
point of the  
lyric and  
implies some-  
thing else  
besides.

performer to break into octave-leaping screeches while fireworks explode. Springfield's controlled delivery evinces just enough emotion to make the point of the lyric and implies something else besides. Holding back makes her sound as though she is afraid of losing control, instead of like she already has. Hanging on by a thread adds both power and passion as she pleads, "Believe me, believe me, I can't help but love you, but believe me, I'll never tie you down." "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me" was originally an Italian ballad. Simon Napier-Bell, producer of the Yardbirds, and Vicki Wickham, producer of the British TV show *Ready Steady Go*, adapted English lyrics to the Italian arrangement and offered the finished product to Springfield, who was a regular host on Wickham's extraordinarily popular TV series.

The heavy black eyeliner and the beehive hairdo that Springfield wore in the mid-'60s gave her an image of being the epitome of swinging London. She later decried the four-hour effort involved in preparing for a public appearance by describing the style as "tacky glamour." But it was a popular look, and at the time it was expected of a woman performer. Since then, she has also noted that the lyrical content of her hits was often quite sexist and that she very well might not have sung many of them if she had paid closer attention to the words. As it was, the women's movement was still in its infancy, leaving Springfield free to sing as many weepy ballads and woman-as-victim anthems as she cared to.

## JUNE 1966 #8 LITTLE GIRL—THE SYNDICATE OF SOUND

**A**ttitude, attitude, and more attitude. Records don't get any punkier than this. The musical execution of "Little Girl" is nothing less than glorious, but it is the unbelievably wrongheaded vocal that gives this song its pervasive (and perverse) appeal. Not many songs before or since have managed to sound so unwittingly self-repugnant. Maybe you don't recognize this beaut by the title. A lyric or two are in order, if not to jar your memory, then to convey just what I mean by "wrongheaded" and "self-repugnant": "Hey, little girl you don't haveta hide nuthin' no more. You haven't done nuthin' that hasn't been done before." In itself, this is a meaningless gem of a repeated triple negative if ever there was one. But that's not the half of it. Later, the vocalist sneer-sings, "Little girl thought she wouldn't get caught, you see. She thought she'd get away with goin' out on me. Huh-huh, YAY-Yeah." That Beevis and Butthead chuckle at the end of the phrase says it all. He's celebrating this! He thinks the issue is that he caught her, not that she was double-timing him in the first place. Maybe it's false braggadocio in the face of a broken heart, but it sounds a lot more like he doesn't get the fact that he's been duped—royally. He struts around like a peacock simply because he was able to



figure out that he was being emasculated. Sounds cool to me. What a genius.

Other musical genres would take a similar situation and turn the event into a suicidal soap opera. Think Leslie Gore, for example. Think Gene Pitney. Think Michael Bolton. On second thought....

It's amusing that the singer never seems to get it—or that he chooses to pretend he doesn't care. He's not crying about it, he's hanging out in the parking lot with Clearasil all over his face and bragging to his friends about how he couldn't care less about losing another girlfriend to somebody else—probably one of the guys that he's bragging to. He even admits that she hasn't "done nuthin' that hasn't been done before." Hey, this happens to him all the time.

The guitar riff for this song ought to be playing twenty-four hours a day in the lobby of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame for the way it captures the punky ethic of rock and roll without any compromise of technical ability or deliberate posturing. As it stands, the magic of "Little Girl" comes from the singer being as confident in his screwy self-righteousness as the band is in its musical execution. Of all the punk-rock songs that were popular in the second half of the '70s, none captured so succinctly the humor or the art of confident self-loathing as well as "Little Girl" did, more than a full decade earlier.

## JUNE 1966 #11 DIRTY WATER—THE STANDELLS

**T**hank God for the Rolling Stones. By reestablishing rock and roll as a distasteful and rude musical genre, they caught the interest of every pimple-faced adolescent kid with a bad attitude and inspired them with the idea that they too could write, sing, and play annoying music. Across America garage bands rehearsed a handful of three-chord songs that they copped from the radio, while the better of the lot wrote a few of their own. These garage punk bands unknowingly laid the groundwork for removing the old vanguard and replacing it with anarchy.

Looking back, it's interesting to think how naive America was about its own culture in the '50s and '60s. Despite the various inroads that were made by doowop, rock and roll, and R&B during the late fifties, Americans still managed to ignore much of their musical heritage. It took the Rolling Stones to reintroduce us to our own blues heritage, and then they stood the whole process on its head by adding a young, white, discontented, middle-class perspective to the proceedings. A certain breed of youth absolutely loved the hybrid and quickly began to emulate it. They all wanted to *be* somebody other than the dorky kid who got laughed at by the best looking girls and then beat up by the jocks after school. A cheap Dan Electro guitar or an imitation Gibson bass were the talismans for a new life and a new sense of respect. A homemade brew of rock and roll began to flourish nationwide and yielded a seemingly endless stream of one-hit wonders.

**Looking back, it's interesting to think how naive America was about its own culture in the '50s and '60s.**



**The Standells were more or less typical of the garage-band genre, but their songwriter/producer was anything but.**

At its worst (which was also its most bizarrely entertaining), garage rock sounded like generic noise from the genetically damaged, while at its best it was genuinely good. The Standells were more or less typical of the garage-band genre, but their songwriter/producer was anything but. Ed Cobb's résumé with the music industry included a stint as a member of a cheesy vocal group called the Four Preps. They had plenty of hit records between 1958 and 1961 but have since become a virtual nonentity in pop music history. Cobb continued his career in music by writing songs, and he proved his diversity and knack for commercial appeal by penning "Tainted Love" (Gloria Jones, Soft Cell), "Every Little Bit Hurts" (Brenda Holloway), and "Dirty Water." The Standells could qualify as the original Hollywood brat pack. Bandleader Larry Tamblyn was actor Russ Tamblyn's brother, guitarist Dick Dodd was an ex-Mouseketeer, and along with rhythm section Gary Lane and Tony Valentino, they were all from the Los Angeles area. Cobb's song was about Boston, which was about 2,000 miles away from the Standells—who probably wouldn't have known the difference between the "River Charles" and the River Kwai—but it was also about frustrated (or, really, frustrating) women, who assuredly exist just about everywhere.

A blues riff, a Jaggeresque growl, a strutting beat, and testosterone-addled lyrics all made this worth hearing in 1966. Almost thirty years later, it's still great, and it's still worth hearing, for the exact same reasons. Although this style of blues-based rock has been covered ad nauseam for thirty years now, "Dirty Water" holds up well—which only goes to show you that you can alter the formula in an infinite number of ways, but only a few are good enough to stand the test of time.

## **JUNE 1966 #13 AIN'T TOO PROUD TO BEG—THE TEMPTATIONS**

**B**erry Gordy was not one to upset the apple cart when things were going smoothly. Since Smokey Robinson had proven to be quite successful writing and producing for the Temptations, he was continually enlisted to perform these jobs for them again. Only once during an intimidating string of hits—including "The Way You Do the Things You Do," "I'll Be in Trouble," "My Girl," "It's Growing," "Since I Lost My Baby," "You've Got to Earn It," "My Baby," "Don't Look Back," and "Get Ready"—did Norman Whitfield produce a track for the group, with a song called "Girl (Why You Wanna Make Me Blue)." He had hoped to usurp Robinson's throne as producer par excellence, but #26 on the pop charts simply wasn't good enough by Motown standards.

By 1966, things were changing rapidly at Motown. Robinson was named vice president, and his workload required some rearranging. He was doing less writing and arranging and remained active only with the Temptations and his own band,





the Miracles. Robinson's songs were certainly as good as ever, but his productions for the Temptations were showing signs of wear. Worse, they were not consistently reaching the Top 10, causing consternation and horror at Motown's quality-control department. When Robinson and Whitfield both submitted their latest projects with the Temptations, a decision was required. Ever conservative when it came to business, the Motown top brass chose Robinson's "Get Ready" for single release but stated that if it didn't reach the Top 10, they would next release Whitfield's "Ain't Too Proud to Beg." When Robinson's energetic but perhaps too straightforward song stalled at #29 on the pop charts, Whitfield's moment had arrived. It should be noted that "Get Ready" did reach #1 on the reactivated soul charts. (*Billboard* abandoned the R&B charts for about a year but brought them back under the "soul" moniker in January, 1965.)

"Ain't Too Proud to Beg" pulled no punches. Instead of offering up a lukewarm version of a Robinson production—as he did the first time with "Girl (Why You Wanna Make Me Blue)"—Whitfield simultaneously found his own voice and updated the Temptations' sound. The song wastes no time getting started, jumping immediately into the opening verse. The backbeat, supplied by bassist James Jamerson and drummer Benny Benjamin, pulsates with both the finesse and energy that were crucial to the best Motown product, but here they add a funky stride to their rhythm sound that gives the record its extra bounce. The high key was chosen to push lead singer David Ruffin to the edge of his range, eliciting cracks and strains that give the song a powerful, churchy feel. It was new and different for the Temptations, and it soon charted at #13 and #1 on the pop and soul charts, respectively.

Whitfield became the band's new writer/producer, allowing Robinson to concentrate on his own band, personal matters, and his managerial responsibilities at Motown. It was a change of pace that the Temptations needed, and it sparked new life in them. Without disrupting their identity, Whitfield pointed them toward another phase in their career that would modernize their image so that they could easily survive the stylistic changes that the future held.

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1966 <u>DON'T BRING ME DOWN—</u> ERIC BURDON AND THE ANIMALS	#12
JUNE 1966 <u>HOLD ON I'M COMIN'—SAM AND DAVE</u>	#21
JUNE 1966 <u>DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF FASHION—</u> THE KINKS	#36

## JULY 1966 #1 SUMMER IN THE CITY—THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the transistor radio on mid-'60s rock and roll. In the '50s, a common place for most kids to hear rock-and-roll radio was in their parents' cars, cruising Main Street on Saturday nights. By the mid-'60s, though, the transistor had made the radios both cheap and portable, so every kid could take one wherever they went. A trip to the park or the beach was considered incomplete without bringing along the radio. Best of all, you didn't





**In the heat of July, the song perfectly captured the spirit of the season and the mood of an age when innocence still permeated all aspects of pop culture.**

need a driver's license to have access, so radio fast became the property of adolescents as well as older teenagers. Music was now able to penetrate every minute of our leisure hours. Anyone who ever did it will always remember the thrill of going to bed with a radio pressed against the pillow and listening clandestinely while some deejay at a faraway station played rock-and-roll records all night long. It was romantic, both because it fired your sleepy imagination and because it freed your mind to roam across the miles with the radio signal, making sleep all but impossible.

To me, "Summer in the City" was the ultimate portable radio song. Hundreds of songs fit the bill, but "Summer in the City" had every key ingredient that I looked for when tuning in. First of all, it was a hit in the middle of summer. Second, it had a trebly tone and a heavily rocking beat that were new and exciting and sounded even better coming out of a tinny radio than they did on a record player. Best of all, the song pushed all the right buttons to cause my imagination to work overtime. Images of hot days in the big city and cool nights on the town danced in my brain. My mind would roam wildly, envisioning hot, sweaty sidewalks where construction crews worked jackhammers during the tense verses, and beautiful girls and nightclubs during the release of the chorus. It was a multifaceted fantasy that was only heightened by the strikingly original sound of the music and the novelty of hearing it come from a three-by-six-inch, chrome-plated, plastic box that ran on batteries. For an anonymous preteen growing up in the suburbs, nothing else could have stimulated my senses more. For three weeks, "Summer in the City" sat at the #1 position. In the heat of July, the song perfectly captured the spirit of the season and the mood of an age when innocence still permeated all aspects of pop culture.

## **JULY 1966 #5 I SAW HER AGAIN—THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS**

**T**he San Francisco scene that took hold in the summer of 1967 never really translated properly to vinyl. The proper medium for San Francisco's music was the stage, like Bill Graham's Fillmore West, but the further we move away from that time, the more difficult it is to comprehend the appeal that these shows once held. Most recordings from that time failed to capture the ambiance that hung in the air. By 1967, too many bands were forsaking well-constructed records for endless jams that resembled little more than public exhibitionism. Because these bands couldn't focus their intuitive energy into a compact, commercial, organized shape, their ramblings only fit on albums. As a result the "hokey" 45 RPM single was ignored or looked down on by the hippie movement.

In time, San Francisco came to represent a lifestyle and a sound. The new lifestyle forced an alternative culture to develop in which a form of hippie elitism took place.



Anything with ties to the mainstream became suspect. Country Joe and the Fish, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Janis Joplin, and the Grateful Dead stood on one side of the fault line, while the Mamas and the Papas, the Turtles, and the Beau Brummels seemed to tumble into the sea. With America's first united surge of a musical scene since the onset of Beatlemania, the hit single was almost rendered obsolete. At the time, the fate of the Top 40 was looking grim, but in retrospect, has anybody listened to *After Bathing at Baxter's* recently? Still playing those Quicksilver Messenger Service records? How many of us bought *I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die* on CD? The acid-drenched bands were embarrassed by and unwilling to acknowledge any debt to the pop acts, but it would be the pop acts whose music would enjoy longevity while the shelf life for some acid rock compositions ended before the bands finished playing.

Another factor that had an insidious effect on pop music was the expansion of FM radio. Better sound quality, an ability to broadcast in stereo and a significantly smaller broadcast range all helped to make FM radio the perfect outlet for the burgeoning underground music scene. FM radio indulged artists who habitually broke the three-minute threshold of AM programmers. It quickly became the broadcast medium of choice for all but the teenyboppers and the hopelessly outdated.

In 1966, when the Mamas and the Papas had their first hits, things weren't so divided yet. They were seen as a fascinating update of the earlier folk sound, with their rock-and-roll melodies and well-thought-out four-part harmonies. Their first two singles were huge, so huge that they still generate enough airplay to keep you thoroughly bored any time they come on the radio: "California Dreamin'" and "Monday Monday" are both very good 45s, but enough already. I can't even judge them properly any longer since my ear has become jaded from learning to anticipate every sound that exists in the grooves of these songs. "I Saw Her Again" stands up better, probably because I've heard it less often and also because I think it has a more interesting arrangement. John Phillips was gaining confidence as a producer/arranger/songwriter and really flexes his muscles here. The sound is dense and layered, resembling Phil Spector's kitchen sink approach to production. Everything seems to be vying for space at the same time, but the melody survives just about every onslaught that Phillips throws on top of it.

An excellent reworking of the 5 Royales and the Shirelles' "Dedicated to the One I Love" and the topical nonsense of "Creeque Alley" kept the Mamas and the Papas in the public eye throughout early 1967, while Phillips's composition "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" became a huge hit for his

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1966 #1

**WILD THING—THE TROGGS**

JULY 1966 #2

**SUNNY—BOBBY WEBB**

JULY 1966 #2

**LIL' RED RIDING HOOD—  
SAM THE SHAM AND THE PHAROHS**

### GREAT MISSES

JULY 1966 #3

**THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE ME AWAY—  
NAPOLEON XIV**



**By 1968, they self-destructed amid marital problems and endless infighting.**

friend Scott McKenzie in the summer of that year. They (Phillips in particular) were crucial in organizing the Monterey Pop Festival, which was a defining event in San Francisco's developing musical image, yet the Mamas and the Papas were soon abandoned by the "scene," apparently because of their contact with pop culture.

The Mamas and the Papas were legendary in their time, whether viewed as the playful and friendly innocents of their image or as the drug-addled and sexually dysfunctional unit that they actually were. Even if they had continued to be embraced by the alternative elite, though, they stood little chance of survival. By 1968, they self-destructed amid marital problems and endless infighting. Mama Cass (Cass Elliot) went solo and released a few singles that ranged from bearable ("Dream a Little Dream") to unbearable ("Make Your Own Kind of Music") before dying of heart failure (not from choking on a ham sandwich as the ubiquitous rumor has it) in 1974. Denny Doherty quietly faded into obscurity while Michelle Phillips became an actress (she had a pivotal role on the nighttime soap opera *Knots Landing*) and fodder for the gossip rags. Meanwhile, John Phillips succumbed to, and then recovered from, one of the most voracious drug habits imaginable. But while most of the acid music of their contemporaries has been labeled, post-mortem, as D.O.A. (Dopey, but Only noticeable Afterward), the pop songs of the Mamas and the Papas, despite their personal trials and tribulations, linger on.

## **JULY 1966 #8 MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPER—THE ROLLING STONES**

**M**other's Little Helper" was the leadoff track from the original English version of the Rolling Stones album *Aftermath*. As was standard for the time, the American album varied significantly from its English counterpart, with fewer tracks (eleven instead of fourteen) and a different running order. England and the United States held two completely different theories concerning what an LP should be. In England, it was considered fraudulent to pad out an album with a song that was already available as a single; in America, albums were little more than extended showcases for hit singles, with other songs used solely as filler. Because "Paint It Black" was already a hit single, it was considered to be the best candidate for the leadoff spot on the American album and replaced "Mother's Little Helper," which was removed from the lineup entirely. Instead (and inexplicably), "Mother's Little Helper" was released in America as a corresponding single to *Aftermath*. Together, they comprised a heretofore unseen, but not unpredictable, side of the Rolling Stones.

Even more perversely fascinating than the multi-instrumental indulgences used on these records was the underlying misogyny that crept its way into many of their lyrics. Mick Jagger's still-evolving sexual ambiguity and "star" status made *him* the sexually desirable object and cast his female partners as humili-



ated, self-flagellating masochists who were willing to be seen as props standing in his shadow. Furthermore, with sex as readily available as a can of beer, most of the Stones overindulged themselves until women became hardly more than flesh-covered blow-up dolls. This was reflected in the words of their songs. “Stupid Girl” speaks for itself. “Under My Thumb” revels in holding down a “squirring dog who just had her day” while “Out of Time” treats the woman in the song like a product with an expired shelf life. “Mother’s Little Helper” is hardly more reasonable in the way it belittles and mocks the supposed stress of being an everyday housewife.

If “19th Nervous Breakdown” had the Stones dishing up dirt with their impressions of “societal taboos,” then “Mother’s Little Helper” could have been subtitled “Societal Taboos Revisited.” Without painting an overtly explicit picture, it’s still easy to see a woman in curlers, slippers, and a rayon house dress talking over the fence to her look-alike neighbor, complaining bitterly about everybody else’s lifestyle while she randomly pops speed pills to get her through her day. Although his wording is sometimes awkward, the disdain in Jagger’s voice is unmistakable and further eviscerates any hope of ever crossing the generation gap. Still hilarious is the “Hu-uy!” ending, which sounds less like a bunch of dangerous rock and rollers than a chorus of Polish whalers at a sing-along. With their damning imagery and unrestrained musical drive, the Rolling Stones continued to offer inspiration to an entire generation of pimply-faced, garage-based, do-it-yourself, suburban white dopes with a song about white mums on dope.

Although his wording is sometimes awkward, the disdain in Jagger’s voice is unmistakable and further eviscerates any hope of ever crossing the generation gap.

## AUGUST 1966 #24 LADY JANE—THE ROLLING STONES

**W**hat? Mick Jagger and Keith Richards composed a love madrigal? (I never know whether to say Richards or Richard; he dropped and added the “s” at different points in his career. Dionne Warwick(e) did the same thing, but I have difficulty keeping track of these nuances.) Just for implausibility, this song rates as a classic. Just who, or what, was it about, and what did it mean? Was it, as Jagger led his then-girlfriend, Chrissie Shrimpton (sister of model Jean Shrimpton), to believe, about her (I wonder if she noticed that he got her name wrong)? Or was it about Lady Jane Seymour, one of the six wives of Henry VIII (yeah, right; this is what the record company would have you believe)? Maybe it referred to one of Jagger’s royal acquaintances, Lady Jane Ormsby-Gore, as he implied when he was in her presence. Could it have been an obliquely veiled reference to the evil weed, Maryjane, aka marijuana? Considering the Stones, the most licentious possibility is also the most believable. Jagger was a big fan of D.H. Lawrence’s





The vagueness of the lyrics made sure that each listener could imagine his own scenario and bring out the "true" meaning of the song.

novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In the book, a character refers to his lover's vagina as "Lady Jane." Of the above possibilities, what would you believe? (Me, too.)

This really is a pretty song, though. Despite, or perhaps because of, its peculiar period-piece instrumentation, "Lady Jane" brings one aspect of the developing flower-power '60s into clear focus. The ideals of the younger generation were partly based on a desire to return to simpler times, something that was reflected in the penchant for Elizabethan-style clothing and longer hair styles on men. The present was romanticized as a reflection of times gone by, and songs like "Lady Jane" made the tenuous connection a bit more believable. The vagueness of the lyrics made sure that each listener could imagine his own scenario and bring out the "true" meaning of the song. As songwriters, Jagger and Richards were coming to realize that vagueness was a tool that could be worked to their advantage. Soon, almost all of their singles would be veiled in a shroud of mystery. Although it was a B side to "Mother's Little Helper," "Lady Jane" charted on its own, reaching #24. The Rolling Stones had embarked on a new phase of their career, a phase that would focus on ornate and elaborate instrumentation, with surreal lyrics that would be almost entirely devoid of the group's blues roots.

## JULY 1966 #9 I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOUR LOVE—PETULA CLARK

**P**etula Clark was the consummate professional who achieved international fame simply because she worked hard and was talented. She spent almost two decades of her life as a soon-to-be-overgrown child actress in European family films until, in her late twenties, she channeled her energy into performing as a vocalist. Mostly because of her manager and soon-to-be husband, Claud Wolff, she received excellent guidance, and her transition from child actress to mature pop star was relatively painless.

Always upbeat, catchy, and accompanied by full-blown orchestral accompaniment, her hits were different enough from the average rock-and-roll pop songs to remain thoroughly autonomous from her English competition. She lacked the rebellious immediacy of her contemporaries, eschewing any false posturing in favor of high-quality material. While English rock and roll was so different that it demanded a certain adjustment on the part of the listener, Clark simply sang pretty songs. This is exactly why some critics found her songs to be extraneous fluff and also why audiences ate them up. In the '70s, performers like Barry Manilow and the Carpenters catered to a similar audience, but with cloying, simplistic, and sentimental material. In the '60s, Clark may have been a precursor of these pop music icons, but she continually had great material to work with. "I Couldn't Live Without Your Love" has a melody that Barry Manilow would sur-





render a limb for, and the contagious expression of Clark's singing goes light years beyond the flat expression of Karen Carpenter. Without the bombast that occasionally hampered some of her other hits (remember "My Love"?), "I Couldn't Live without Your Love" takes a light and breezy approach. It also avoids any pretension, never trying to make any grand statement or represent itself as anything more than it is: a well-sung, pretty pop song.

## **JULY 1966 #22 TRAINS AND BOATS AND PLANES—DIONNE WARWICKE**

**W**hile reading liner notes for "Trains and Boats and Planes," I was surprised to discover that it was originally recorded by Billy J. Kramer and the Dakotas. Dionne Warwicke reached the Top 40 with her rendition in the summer of 1966, barely a year after Kramer's version fell from the charts, but I am confident that hers is the definitive version.

"Trains and Boats and Planes" has an understated arrangement and performance so perfect that it gleams. A cranked-up guitar spurts a sound that is purely percussive and propulsive while a chorus supplies the melody over an electric keyboard. In front of this backdrop, Warwicke enters and sings the first verse. She could not possibly have sung the song any better. Every note is in its place. Percussion and brushed drums introduce the second verse, which adds a nylon-string guitar. Then gradually a string section and a female chorus enter, all with the crisp attention to detail that made songwriters Burt Bacharach and Hal David famous. The successful combination of Warwicke, Bacharach, and David that began in 1963 perhaps reached its zenith with this recording.

## **AUGUST 1966 #1 YOU CAN'T HURRY LOVE—THE SUPREMES**

**M**aybe not, but you can hurry a recording session every now and then. The Supremes were so busy with the business of being "the Supremes" that they had precious little time to spend in the recording studio. As a result, their input on their recordings was minimal. They usually ran in, recorded, and ran out to another nonmusical obligation or a live performance. Their presence for their songs' development became secondary to the image-making machinery that Motown engineered for them. Somehow, the material never seemed to suffer. For one thing, the behind-the-scenes professionals made sure that everything was in order before the Supremes arrived. In the studio, their job was to sing (at least that was Diana Ross's job) so they didn't need to get involved with the other details. In many ways, the resultant hustle and bustle probably added to the music's exuberance by giving it an excited and breathless presence. This mood is perfectly appropriate for "You Can't Hurry Love." The song's lyrics deal with the patience that is sometimes necessary to find true love, but as anybody who has ever been in that position can testify, "It ain't easy, no it ain't easy." The music sounds like it can't wait another second. If Ross sounds harried, so much the better.



The criticism that has most often been leveled at the Supremes is precisely the reason I think they were a great band. Specifically, they are faulted for being a contrived pop product that required input from dozens of other more talented people to record a good song. Well, you'll get no argument from me, but I'm not terribly interested in the machinations involved or in the group's merit as musicians. I am very interested in the quality of the recordings that were released under their name, though, and almost without fail, they tend to be well-written, well-produced, infectious, and memorable. Why quibble about the Supremes when the music, even when viewed as nothing but product, is so good? In the end, nothing really matters but the song itself. The professionals at Motown knew it, and they had it down cold.

## AUGUST 1966 #2 YELLOW SUBMARINE—THE BEATLES

The Beatles' last concert tour was such a series of nightmarish horrors that it left them feeling alienated and disgusted. The mad determination of their fans had worn them down until it was no longer fun. Actually, it became a horror for them to do anything at all publicly. After two solid years of imprisonment within their isolation chamber of hotel rooms and limousines, they began to go mad with cabin fever. Besides this, things were going wrong. An unintentional snub of Imelda Marcos in the Philippines led to a near life-threatening confrontation with the island's authorities. The Beatles were lucky to escape alive, and even after they boarded their plane, they were refused permission to taxi to the runway until they surrendered half of their earnings from their concert appearance. Even worse was the fracas that resulted from an off-handed comment John Lennon made during an interview with a friendly acquaintance from the *London Evening Standard*. The conversation had turned toward how out of hand the Beatles fame had

After two solid years of imprisonment within their isolation chamber of hotel rooms and limousines, they began to go mad with cabin fever.

become, and Lennon noted, "We're more popular than Jesus now." In the context of the conversation, his remarks were both appropriate and thought-provoking, but once the American press got a hold of it, all hell broke loose. Through deliberate misrepresentation of his intention, Lennon appeared to be the embodiment of the Antichrist. Self-righteous but misguided fundamentalists feigned horror and organized boycotts and record burnings. Lennon received numerous death threats, as Christian a method of reprisal as could be imagined, I suppose. His songs took on unintended meaning, as well; the backward vocals on "Rain" must have sounded outright satanic to these fervent zealots. Each whistle-stop along the American tour, particularly in the South, required a veritable army of security personnel, but the group still remained frighteningly vulnerable when onstage. Add to this the misguided judgment that led to the cover of their Ameri-



can compilation album *Yesterday and Today* featuring a photo of the band wearing butcher's jackets while covered with torn-up baby dolls and pieces of meat, and you've got a band in the midst of a serious image problem.

With all of this insanity, some self-induced and some incidental, surrounding them, the Beatles needed to make a positive impression to set things right. What better tonic could there have been than a simple fairy tale sung by good old self-effacing Ringo Starr, the Beatles' resident everyman? "Yellow Submarine" was as unthreatening as the group could be while sounding playful and inventive. Instead of straining to make a big statement, they parodied English Music Hall styles (their vaudeville of sorts) and had fun with the silly surrealism of the lyric by adding whistles, bells, bubbles, and distorted intercom transmissions into the mix. Lennon seems beside himself with glee as he mimics Starr's every line on the last verse, sounding as though he is singing through his hands while adopting an exaggerated cockney accent. By the time the whole band and crew of friends join in for the last chorus, all is forgiven. Some people thought the song might contain drug references, but most thought it was good, clean fun. And it was. The storybook fantasy of "Yellow Submarine" later took on mythic proportions when it provided the title and theme for an animated film that featured the likenesses, but not the voices, of the Beatles.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #11 ELEANOR RIGBY—THE BEATLES

**W**ith *Revolver*, the relevance of the Beatles' albums surpassed the importance of their singles. The overwhelming impact of having a series of truly great songs running back-to-back made Beatles albums some of the most important collections of music ever assembled. Each song contains a unique vision whose only thematic link to its brethren is the experimental daring that they share. The double A-sided single (each side was considered side "A") of "Yellow Submarine"/"Eleanor Rigby" was released on the same day as the album from which they were extracted. A more eclectic pairing of songs could not be imagined.

While "Yellow Submarine" is a goofy children's fantasy, "Eleanor Rigby" is a portrait of intense loneliness. The hollow lives of the characters are spelled out with telling scenarios that depict the mundane pointlessness of their existence. Both Eleanor Rigby and Father MacKenzie seem to live their lives devoid of any human contact except for the little bit provided by the servile roles of their unrewarding jobs. The lyrics don't attempt to give us every detail, so coloring their bleak lives is up to the listener's imagination, which is part of the inherent beauty of this record. In my own mind's eye, I can easily imagine the shabby dress of the widowed Mrs. Rigby, who only halfheartedly attempts to maintain her appearance, or the dark, musty room where Father MacKenzie sits darning his socks. It is easy to as-

**While "Yellow Submarine" is a goofy children's fantasy, "Eleanor Rigby" is a portrait of intense loneliness.**



sume that the church where Eleanor Rigby picks up rice, cleaning up after someone else's wedding (which vaguely reminds her of her own), is the same place where Father MacKenzie labors for a God that he sometimes feels has abandoned him. It can also be imagined that while Eleanor Rigby moves about cleaning and sweeping around the pews, Father MacKenzie putters about on the altar, preparing a sermon (that no one will hear). Perhaps neither one ever acknowledges the other's presence. Perhaps their paths never cross until Father MacKenzie presides over the gray, empty burial service that lays Eleanor Rigby in the ground.

The emptiness of their lives is pathetic and emotionally taxing. It is made even worse when Paul McCartney sums things up by flatly stating, "No one was saved." There is no vent to escape the claustrophobic vacuum of their loneliness, and all the listener can do is sympathize. At best, it may inspire us to think twice before we blithely ignore someone who could easily be overlooked. With black and white paint, McCartney and the Beatles paint a picture that asks us to face the humbler side of humanity with empathy and concern. Not bad for a pop song.

## AUGUST 1966 #5 BUS STOP—THE HOLLIES

**T**he Hollies formed in Manchester, England, in 1962 when old friends Graham Nash and Allan Clarke decided to expand their vocal/guitar duo. After a few name and personnel changes, they became the Hollies, intended as an homage to American rock and roller Buddy Holly.

An awful lot has been said about English bands in the first half of the '60s, but in America, not much was said about the Hollies. Although they were overwhelmingly popular throughout England and Europe, they did not have nearly the same impact on the other side of the Atlantic. Their first U.K. Top 10 hit came in 1963, but they would not reach the American Top 40 until 1966, with "Look through Any Window." By then, they were already superstars in their native England.

When they released "Bus Stop" in the summer of 1966, the Hollies finally broke wide open in America. The song was written by professional songwriter Graham Gouldman (later of 10 C.C.), who had previously written hits for Herman's Hermits and the Yardbirds. Set off by Middle Eastern modalities in the guitar bridge, "Bus Stop" is an otherwise conventional boy-meets-girl song with lyrics that sound like an excerpt from a second-grade reading primer ("Bus stop, wet day, she's there, I say, 'Please share my umbrella'"). The simplicity of the words adds to the song's effect by putting emphasis on the rhythm and melody of the vocal. The song features some of the richest harmonies on vinyl this side of the Beach Boys and was a harbinger of Nash's later work with David Crosby and Stephen Stills.

**When they released "Bus Stop" in the summer of 1966, the Hollies finally broke wide open in America.**

To strengthen the group's hold, an American tour soon followed and was a tremendous success. "Bus Stop"



peaked at #5 and was immediately followed by “Stop, Stop, Stop,” a song about a belly dancer, which reached #7.

## AUGUST 1966 #8 WOULDN'T IT BE NICE—THE BEACH BOYS

**W**hile formulating ideas for his upcoming album project, Brian Wilson felt he needed to collaborate with a lyricist. Tony Asher was a friend of a friend whom he thought might be a good foil for his gentle yet ever more complex melodies. When Asher got the call from Wilson, his initial reaction was disbelief. This famous rock star was requesting his services not only as a songwriter, but as a collaborator! He wrangled a three-week leave of absence from his day job as an ad writer and immediately went to work with Wilson.

At the time, the Beach Boys were touring the world with Bruce Johnson taking Wilson's place while he stayed home to work on the album. Since Wilson was following a highly personal muse, he was averse to sharing his ideas with the other Beach Boys, feeling that they would reject them as both inappropriate and uncommercial. He did not let this fear deter him from his intentions, though. Musical ideas that were much moodier than the usual Beach Boys fare were flowing from him, and Asher provided words that almost always reflected his personal concerns and problems. Since Asher found Wilson to be extremely difficult to work with, he often insisted on finishing his lyrics at home. Wilson continued to write, even when there were no words. One song in particular, “Let's Go Away for Awhile,” was so musically expressive and evocative that they abandoned the idea of writing lyrics altogether, and the song remained the instrumental pastiche that Wilson began with. It eventually ended up on the B side of “Good Vibrations.” After recording the basic tracks, Wilson recorded most of the songs for the new album live, using a hired ensemble of some of the best session players available. The result was, in essence, the first Brian Wilson solo album, called *Pet Sounds*. When the Beach Boys returned from their tour, Wilson's instincts about their reactions proved to be correct. They were shocked to find that he had been presumptuous enough to record an entire album in their absence and were uncomfortable with the rococo production and writing style that he employed. While on tour, they were simply a surfing band, but when they came home, they discovered that Wilson was fully prepared to change everything. This took some getting used to. To their credit, they basically remained patient with him and followed his instructions for putting down the vocal lines. If he was unhappy with the results, he would simply erase the tape and record his own voice over theirs.

Musically and thematically, *Pet Sounds* was Wilson's baby. It also signifies the high watermark of his creativity. Every song is either heavily laden with a longing melancholy or celebrates some type of escapist fantasy. “Wouldn't It Be







The spiritual beauty of "Wouldn't It Be Nice" lies in its blend of youthful optimism and in its childish impatience.

"Nice" kicks off the album and was the first intentional single. It fit neatly into the "escapist fantasy" category, and three decades later its lyrics have lost none of their artful significance. Innocently and deliberately, the song conveys the fanciful desire of a youthful couple to "say goodnight and stay together." The love is pure, and the desire is reasonable. The most beautiful and touching line comes in the refrain: "Maybe if we think and wish and hope and pray, it might come true." The power of positive thinking has been said to move mountains, so why not try? The spiritual beauty of "Wouldn't It Be Nice" lies in its blend of youthful optimism *and* in its childish impatience. Best of all, it captures the singular moment in which the promise of a happy future and the desire of the present make these traits not only appropriate, but enviable.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #39 GOD ONLY KNOWS—THE BEACH BOYS

In other essays I delved into the somewhat sordid reality which engulfed this band. Now I can't help but think that perhaps the best thing to do would have been to leave the Beach Boys' myth alone. Each of their songs possesses such a singular beauty that any discussion of reality tends to mar the purity of essence that defines a Beach Boys song. After all, each song as art occupies its own peculiar place away from reality. It's as if the best songs are hovering just above the ground and any attempt to define the circumstances of their creation tends to tramp them down until their fragile magic dissipates. I really hope that presenting fragments of their sad story did not have that effect, although I fear that it might. The distance between these songs and *any* reality, much less the Beach Boys reality, is immense and it is the myth that they hold which gives them such lasting value.

Why "God Only Knows" was placed on the B side of "Wouldn't It Be Nice" instead of being released on its own is completely beyond my understanding of supply and demand, but the result was one of the best two-sided singles ever released. Even more mysterious is why it never charted any higher than #39. Songs this beautiful don't come along very often, and the chart position of "God Only Knows" speaks volumes, either about how fallible the Top 40 can be or how fickle the record-buying public is. Brian Wilson's brother Dennis offered the opinion that Brian's writing was "hypnotic, entertaining, and beautiful." No less an authority than Paul McCartney referred to "God Only Knows" as the perfect pop song. Perhaps radio station programmers were afraid to play a song that used the word "God" in the title, even though it was used respectfully and tastefully, or maybe it was ahead of its time. Most likely the answer lies somewhere in between, with poor marketing thrown in for disruptive measure. Somehow, this song did not make the impact that its soulfulness deserved.



Unlike most everything else in popular music at this time, the Beach Boys lacked any real R&B credibility. Even the most innocuous English bands could claim some R&B as a significant influence, but the Beach Boys remained aloof. “God Only Knows” helped to broaden the definition of soul because of its soul-baring honesty. Ideally, “soul music” wasn’t a stylization at all but a means of honest expression. What else could “God Only Knows” be if not soul music? One thing was for certain: it most definitely was not surf music.

Wilson’s early songs were mostly made up of adolescent, stereotypical platitudes, and they haunted him now that he wanted to express himself in a more personal manner. He was no longer a boy, hardly even a “Beach” Boy, and his songwriting collaborations began to address his concerns with coming of age. Although, by all accounts, Wilson remained a child emotionally, he wrote “God Only Knows” with Tony Asher from the perspective of an adult. The lyrics attempt to look bravely at what may lie ahead. For the time being, he earned himself a brief respite.

The soul-searching sense of satisfaction that lies on the surface of the song is counterbalanced with an insecurity that prevents the lyrics from resolving themselves. This lack of resolve guarantees the song its lasting strength. The emotion it captures is akin to a seesaw that is precariously balanced on a fulcrum, in a state of suspension where things float just above the surface. Whatever dangles eventually drops, and the sadness inherent in this lyric is one of recognition. In the present, it celebrates satisfaction and a sense of wonder, but it is also sad in that it simultaneously recognizes the fallibility of love. The French horns only add to the lonely undertow. The real beauty here is that “God Only Knows” is broadly interpretable, and each listener can hear it and gather his own meaning. Facts and gossip nonsense about the various comings and goings of the group might only serve to colorize the conceptions of the listener. Hopefully, the ears will have the last word.

Unlike most everything else in popular music at this time, the Beach Boys lacked any real R&B credibility.

## **AUGUST 1966 #25 THE DANGLING CONVERSATION— SIMON AND GARFUNKEL**

It is difficult to choose appropriate songs from the Simon and Garfunkel catalog since many of their best songs were never Top 40 hits (“America,” “The Only Living Boy in New York,” “For Emily, Whenever I May Find Her,” and the “Old Friends”/“Bookends” medley are a few), and quite a few of those that were now sound painfully dated. So, here’s what we’re dealing with. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel had fifteen Top 40 hits. Let’s go through them one song at a time and give them cursory consideration.



## GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1966 #14  
 SUNNY AFTERNOON—THE KINKS

1) “The Sounds of Silence”—#1 for two weeks, December 1965

Let’s be honest. Bob Dylan hit with “Like a Rolling Stone” a few months earlier, and Simon and Garfunkel (or their producer, more accurately) hopped on the electric folk bandwagon in a way that was overtly opportunist and baldly commercial.

Had they left it alone and not dubbed on the extraneous instrumentation, *maybe*, just maybe, it could have withstood the changes of time (though admittedly, it never would have been a hit). As it is, it’s parenthetically clever and plainly derivative.

2) “Homeward Bound”—#5, February 1966

A pretty song, really. A bit forced emotionally, but still it sounds like an honest and convincing account of loneliness. Best of all, Garfunkel’s cherubic voice doesn’t interfere with the pretty melody, but enhances it.

3) “I Am a Rock”—#3, May 1966

An awkward reversion to blatant Dylanisms. The arrangement, and the naive Al Kooper-style organ flourishes in particular, make it almost impossible to take this record seriously—which is a shame since, over the years, parochial school seventh graders will find it increasingly difficult to understand why their religion counselors find this song so precious.

4) “The Dangling Conversation”—#25, August 1966

Precious? What an appropriate word. Yes, it sounds like a sensitive college student’s first attempt at existentialist poetry, but its very quaintness gives it a measure of profundity. Rock and roll, even folk music (depending on how you would categorize this song), doesn’t have very many poet laureates anyway, so who really cares if the words aren’t capital “A” Art? Simon has since attempted to distance himself from this song, but it continually comes back to haunt him. I wish that I could cooperate and allow it to fade into oblivion, but the fact is that I like this song. Compared to “Bridge over Troubled Water,” this is raw and youthful (then again, anything would be). The naïveté is charming and convincing, while the melody, not to mention the production/execution, is entrancing. Perhaps as I get older I also will abandon all attempts to defend this song, but in the meantime, “I’ll continue to continue to pretend” that this is really clever. I’m sorry, Paul.

5) “A Hazy Shade of Winter”—#13, November 1966

A mediocre piece of dated material that the Bangles considered to be retrievable. Somehow, enough people agreed, and they had a hit.

6) “At the Zoo”—#16, April 1967

A likable enough ditty, but hardly classic.

7) “Fakin’ It”—#23, August 1967

Forgettable.

8) “Scarborough Fair”/“Canticle”—#11, March 1968

A pretty madrigal with excellent workmanship; ho-hum.

9) “Mrs. Robinson”—#1, May 1968



Excellent. See separate entry in Chapter 5.

10) "The Boxer"—#7, April 1969

They're on a roll. See separate entry in Chapter 5.

11) "Bridge over Troubled Water"—#1 for six weeks, February 1970

Oh, no. In the past ten years, I have yet to hear anybody play this song through to its conclusion without somebody else complaining. Sure, it's pretty, but Garfunkel's castrato imitation is more than most people care to bear. And that bombastic production is just *too* precious. But the country was apparently ripe for anthems on brotherhood, considering that the Hollies' "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" was a contemporary (and superior) second cousin, but like "The Star Spangled Banner," we just don't want to hear anything so huge for casual listening.

12) "Cecilia"—#4, April 1970

I can't even parody this song when the lyrics do it all by themselves: "I get up to wash my face. When I come back to bed, someone's taking my place." Wait a minute, is that innocent Art peeking through the window?

13) "El Condor Pasa"—#18, September 1970

I'd rather be a pimple than a mole. Yes, I would. If, indeed, I could, I surely would.

14) "My Little Town"—#9, November 1975

A lackluster reunion song.

15) "Wake Up Little Susie"—#27, May 1982

Another lackluster reunion song, and pointless besides.

That's all of 'em. After that, the two went their separate ways. Simon continues to write usually intelligent songs that reflect the emotional maturity of his age, and Garfunkel sings songs that are so fragile only the pathologically sensitive can relate.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #1 REACH OUT I'LL BE THERE—THE FOUR TOPS

Here, at what may well be the Four Tops' grandest achievement, would be a good spot to discuss the producers and writers who made this song possible. Eddie Holland started as a singer who recorded demos for Berry Gordy to present to Jackie Wilson. It was no real surprise, then, when Gordy started his own label and recruited Holland as a performer, since his vocal style bore an uncanny (and unflattering) resemblance to his mentor. He was a derivative singer, and genuinely uncomfortable with performing, so he decided to "retire" to the production end of the business. His brother, Brian, had worked his own way into Motown as an engineer and became a member of the loosely based production team that recorded the company's early hits. His biggest success came with a song he cowrote for the Marvellettes called "Please Mr. Postman." When it hit #1, it insured him a prime spot among the staff producers. Brian Holland agreed to work with Eddie at about the same time that Lamont Dozier was looking for collaborators. Like Eddie Holland, Dozier was coming down from an unsuccessful recording career (he used the name Lamont Anthony), and the threesome came to realize that their individual



**Between 1963  
and 1966,  
Holland-Dozier-  
Holland pro-  
duced twenty-  
eight Top 20  
hits, twelve of  
which went to  
#1. "Reach Out  
I'll Be There"  
was one of the  
twelve, and  
it was  
perhaps their  
masterwork.**

talents and personalities complemented one another.

When working as producers, Brian Holland generally took charge of the recording console and solo instruments while Eddie Holland coached the lead vocal (if needed) and Dozier worked with the rhythm section and backing vocals. When writing songs, Dozier usually came up with the melody and a title while Brian Holland would arrange the structure. Then Eddie Holland would put it to words. Amazingly, none of the three could read or write music, and they relied on staff members to write out chord sequences and transpose the key to suit the recording artist. Often, there was more than a little resentment on the part of Motown's staff musicians, who were as much as a generation older than the young producers and who saw themselves as more capable and knowledgeable musicians, which in all fairness, they surely were. But could they write lyrics and melodies, and handle production chores? Did they have the same innate understanding of what the kids who bought records wanted? For this, Holland-Dozier-Holland reigned supreme at Motown. After arranging a song, they would record it, often with as many as twelve different versions and mixes. From there, it went to Motown's quality-control department, which issued a thumbs up or a thumbs down.

If rejected, the recording was usually scrapped, but if accepted, it almost certainly became a hit. Between 1963 and 1966, Holland-Dozier-Holland produced twenty-eight Top 20 hits, twelve of which went to #1. "Reach Out I'll Be There" was one of the twelve, and it was perhaps their masterwork.

Every time I hear the opening instrumental phrase to this song, the hairs on the back of my arms stand on end. I get goose bumps. It is as evocative as hearing a train whistle in the distance on a warm summer's evening. I can't be sure of the instrumentation, but there is certainly a flute, and a guitar harmonizing the lead line while a bass and percussion instrument add tension underneath. The phrase repeats twice, until "RrrrrRRAAA!!" The Four Tops enter, and Levi Stubbs puts on the performance of a lifetime. In his hands, this song of devotion has a religious fervor that is feverish in its intensity. When he sings these lyrics, he's not offering help because he's a nice guy, but because he has no choice. His love is so overpowering that it has become his sole purpose in life to serve his beloved—not that the lyrics come close to saying this. They never do. The song has such generic lyrics that it could have served as a prototype for "Bridge over Troubled Water." It is the quiver in Stubbs's voice that causes the implicit meaning of the words to rise above their obvious intent. To paraphrase his earlier hit, he can't help himself. Whether it was sheer professionalism or honest emoting is moot. What matters is that the entire record is as convincing as the most pain-wracked and honest soul performance. The marriage of Holland-Dozier-Holland and the Four Tops would never get any better than this.





## SEPTEMBER 1966 #1 LAST TRAIN TO CLARKSVILLE—THE MONKEES

The Monkees almost single-handedly proved the axiom that in America anything is possible. Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider's inspired dream of inventing an American Beatles was not exactly a stroke of genius, but rather a very well-crafted attempt to make money.

Preteens were spending an unprecedented amount of cash on pop music and its related product. All that was needed to get a piece of the action was a viable (i.e., salable) band. Waiting for the right band to just “happen” would be difficult, but this could be overcome if you just invented the band yourself. Rafelson and Schneider both had backgrounds in film and TV so naturally they felt that TV would be the best medium for their idea.

They concentrated on finding the correct personalities who would make their show a success. Musical talent was desired, but it wasn't of primary importance. The Lovin' Spoonful initially auditioned for the job, but they did not come across as possessing strong enough personalities. Ads were placed in the *Daily Variety* looking for “folk and rock musicians/singers for acting roles in a new TV series.” After 400-plus tryouts—including auditions by Stephen Stills (later of Buffalo Springfield and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young), Danny Hutton (later of Three Dog Night), and Paul Williams—the final nod went to Davey Jones, Mike Nesmith, Peter Tork, and Mickey Dolenz. It was Stills, rejected because of crooked teeth, who convinced his then-roommate Peter Tork to audition.

While the band was rehearsing and filming, Don Kirshner, a businessman of renown with remarkable knowledge of the music industry, rounded up a tremendous variety of talent to record a series of songs that would be used for the show. The Monkees were then brought into the studio to lay down their vocal lines over the prerecorded tracks. “Last Train to Clarksville,” written by Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, was chosen to be the first single. Boyce and Hart claim they wrote the song during a twenty-minute coffee break. Using a guitar riff derivative of the Beatles' “Ticket to Ride,” they deliberately incorporated the hook “no, no, no...no, no, no...” to counteract the Beatles' “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” This combination virtually guaranteed the song hit status. The guitar riff still sounds fresh today and is good enough to make most authentic bands envious, but the commercial success of the single was considered secondary to the success of the TV show. Once “Last Train to Clarksville” went to #1, though, it forced everyone to rethink their priorities.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #1 96 TEARS—? AND THE MYSTERIANS

Names forever etched in history, household names that instantly bring to mind the classicism of their universally respected and identifiable sound: Rudy Martinez (Mr. ? himself), Robert Balderrama, Frank Lugo, Frank Rodriguez, and Edward Serrato. Huh?

Well, OK, so maybe you don't know the individual names of the band members, but you just gotta know their only real hit, “96 Tears.” The funny thing was that



The song's  
dopey but ultra-  
cool riff give it  
an identity all  
its own, but it's  
?'s chilling  
vocals that  
make this a  
truly stoopid  
record.

the band, at least the lead singer, ?, never wanted anybody to know their names and assigned letters, such as x or y, etc., to themselves. You get the idea. ? also wore sunglasses all the time. He was *really* mysterious.

When this bunch of Tex-Mex rockers moved north to Michigan, they found work by playing the local teenage dance halls and dreamed, against all hope and common sense, of hitting the big time. When ? told the band he had written a poem called "Too Many Teardrops," they helped him put it to music but suggested changing a key lyric from "69 Tears" to "96 Tears." ? questioned whether he would be compromising his artistic credibility but concurred that it was probably a necessity if they wanted a hit record (something that he persistently believed to be possible). The song became a staple of their live shows and was often requested by people who became familiar

with the band. A tiny independent record label called Pa-Go-Go Records, from their home state of Texas, thought enough of the song to pay for a demo tape, so they recorded a two-track version in somebody's living room. They also recorded a version of "Midnight Hour," which some bandmembers thought might make a better A side than ?'s "96 Tears." ?, however, insisted that his composition get top billing, since it deserved to be a huge hit.

This all became sublime once local radio picked up on the tune and propelled it hard enough and far enough for it to nearly miraculously become a nationwide #1 hit record. I wonder how well this song would have fared were it not for the cheesy electric organ that bangs out eighth notes throughout the entire number, except for when the player almost indiscriminately breaks into the central riff. ? and the Mysterians are credited with being the first garage-punk band to sport this new sound. To date, most people still associate the Farfisa organ sound with this particular recording. The song's dopey but ultra-cool riff give it an identity all its own, but it's ?'s chilling vocals that make this a truly stoopid record.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #5 PSYCHOTIC REACTION—THE COUNT FIVE

Somebody was eager to give these guys an instantly identifiable image, so photographs were taken of the bandmembers standing around in front of a spooky mansion while wearing capes. OOOHHH! The cover shot for their album has them peering menacingly into the lens of a camera that is lying at the bottom of a freshly dug grave. OOOOOHHH! Sure, this sounds pretentious, but in truth, the Count Five were dime-store existential visionaries. You could see it in their scowling faces. The gimmicky stuff was certainly ludicrous, but their music and lyrics combined the banal with the profound in perfect proportion (most likely this was done purely by accident), lending their songs a warped sensibility that was both amusing and stimulating.



A fuzz-tone guitar opens the track, then other instruments enter layer by layer. A harmonica blast, a grungy rhythm guitar, a thumping bass, and then the pounding drums enter, followed next by the vocals...which brings me to the lyrics. “I feel depressed, I feel so bad, cuz you’re the best girl that I ever had” certainly hasn’t inspired any poetry awards for originality. It’s such a cliché that it is instantly dismissible, but wait. “I can’t get love, I can’t get affection. Oh, little girl, psychotic reaction.” Well, that’s different. A screwed-up love scene induces a psychotic reaction “and it feels like this....” With that, the band exits the shuffle rhythm it was using and launches into an all-out assault.

The double-time *instru-mental* break is derived directly from the rave-up (an English-derived term for an all-out, speed-addled, rhythmic assault) style that was initially popularized by the Yardbirds, but none of the Yardbirds’ singles sound quite so manic—or quite so deranged. The Yardbirds were cool and critically popular, but they were also aloof. The Count Five sound eager to be as cool and popular as their heroes, but instead they come off as clueless. They overcompensated for their presumed shortcomings by shrouding their lyrics (and their bodies, via capes) in mystery, while their music took on an edge that sounded like desperation. In the process, they beat the Yardbirds at their own game, since it is wholly appropriate for a band singing about mental instability at a hundred miles an hour to give the impression that they are teetering. A sense of awareness about the drug culture helped make the song more understandable somehow, as well.

There was a feeling in the ’60s that pop music was much more than something that you hummed along to on the radio. It was a phenomenon that you could fry your brain on, something that could stimulate long-passive neurons and inspire you to become an enlightened member of the new youth culture. Of course, this meant taking drugs. Pop music, suddenly laden with oblique drug references, seduced us to turn on, tune in, and drop out, while most respectable citizens were only obliquely aware of the “brain invasion” that was taking place. Usually, they found the music so distasteful that it was absolutely unlistenable. Only when it was too late did they realize that Johnny and Betty had changed their names to “Sunshine” and “Moonbeam” and were subjecting themselves to counterculture propaganda. This “underground conspiracy” (hardly accurate, since it was neither underground—it was pop music—nor a conspiracy) caused a backlash from the government, but it was too little too late. By then, we were all sitting around on Persian rugs with dilated pupils, eating Twinkies and playing the latest Jefferson Airplane record backward, not because there was a hidden drug message but because Jefferson Airplane sounded better when played back-

**Pop music, suddenly laden with oblique drug references, seduced us to turn on, tune in, and drop out, while most respectable citizens were only obliquely aware of the “brain invasion” that was taking place.**



ward. We were going to change the world, but we couldn't even get up to change the channel.

"Psychotic Reaction" is great because it captures a time before this subject matter and style of playing became "serious" music (i.e., album rock) and pop music came to be perceived as childish. It exists on the fault line before the split that forever kept songs like "Psychotic Reaction" off of top 40 playlists. In 1966, this song could be both subversive and popular. Once songs like this were no longer welcome on the Top 40, pop music suffered for it. We didn't know it at the time, but this trend was the first step toward complacency that eventually led to the bland homogenization of popular music.

## SEPTEMBER 1966 #5 WALK AWAY RENEE—THE LEFT BANKE

**B**oy, this "rock" business is starting to get awfully complicated. It was so much easier when we called it "rock and roll." Either you played rock and roll or you didn't. With rock, so many factions were forming that prefixes were required. There was California surf music (a form of rock), English rock, garage or "punk" rock, folk rock, blues rock, pop rock, and now, thanks to the Left Banke, neo-Elizabethan sonnet rock. OK, I made that up, but the two hits that Michael Brown composed for the group were so different from everything else on the music charts that they deserve their own category. Both "Walk Away Renee" and the lesser-known but almost equally resonant "Pretty Ballerina" are filled with influences from serious, or ancient, music, including string quartets and harpsichords, but the real timelessness of these recordings stems from their melodies. The dandified styles in clothing and coiffure that were prevalent in 1966 reflected a hearkening back to earlier times, and the Left Banke put this stylization into aural form. It is both admirable and evident that the song's quality was good enough to transcend what was simply stylish and become a generally well-loved classic.

**There was California surf music (a form of rock), English rock, garage or "punk" rock, folk rock, blues rock, pop rock, and now, thanks to the Left Banke, neo-Elizabethan sonnet rock.**

Brown was a classically trained musician whose father owned a successful studio in Manhattan called World United Recording. This matter played no small part in allowing him and his friends to work on material and perfect their style of harmony and instrumentation without undue pressure or financial stress. Lead singer Steve Martin sounded appropriately aloof for the confusing lyrics, and the tired resignation in his voice brought the song an added measure of self-pity. Smash, an offbeat division of Mercury Records, picked up on the Left Banke's recording of "Walk Away Renee," but without much publicizing, it appeared the band was going to suffer a quick death. Luckily, a Midwest radio station picked the record up, and in a few months it spread like wildfire. "Walk Away Renee" climbed to the



#5 position. Unfortunately, the band fell apart as soon as it finished work on its first album. Brown would resurface as a member of Stories, with Ian Lloyd, who had a #1 hit in 1973 by covering Hot Chocolate's "Brother Louie."

Still, all the words in the world cannot adequately explain the unique and crafty melody of "Walk Away Renee" or the inventiveness of the band's musical approach, so hearken. 'Tis a wondrous sound emanating thus. Lend an ear and, at my word, thou shall connote this group hath borne a melody soothing to thy soul and pleasing to thy senses, in equal measure.

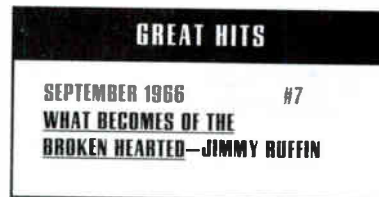
## SEPTEMBER 1966 #25 SUMMER WIND—FRANK SINATRA

Frank Sinatra's career can be neatly encapsulated into three distinct stages, each coinciding with the record label that he was affiliated with at the time. His Columbia years (1943-1952) are the "Frankie" stage: the skinny kid with the bow tie who crooned while bobby-soxers fainted. At the end of the war decade, his popularity took a serious dip. Perhaps as a result of the tumultuous decline in his career, Sinatra toughened up and came back a new man. The Capitol years (1953-1962) gave us the confident and swinging "Ol' Blue Eyes," the singer with a new edge to his delivery, deeper and more forceful. By the end of the '50s, Sinatra had become the entertainer incarnate. He founded Reprise (1961- ), a label built especially to display his formidable talent. In complete control of his destiny, Sinatra became "The Chairman of the Board."

Sinatra is the ultimate example of the artist who can take all the experiences of his life and convey them in a simple popular song, which is why Sinatra aficionados can correctly assert that as he got older, he got better. "Summer Wind" is yet another Sinatra-Nelson Riddle collaboration and features an organ for the first time on any Sinatra record. It was recorded at the same sessions that yielded "Strangers in the Night," his previous (solo) #1 single, which doobie-doobie-dooed all the way to the top of the charts three months earlier.

"Summer Wind" starts off slow and lilting, sounding for all the world like a languid summer breeze. As the song progresses, the key modulates upward often enough to give the song a sense of motion, as if it were pushing itself along. By song's end, the tempo is faster, and the band is swinging. It takes listeners somewhere, and then it gently returns them.

Sinatra almost single-handedly kept the best material from the Tin Pan Alley era alive and simultaneously rescued from oblivion newer songs by contemporary writers who were estranged by rock and roll. As such, for him to have a #1 hit and a follow-up pop song that sounded innovative smack dab in the middle of rock music's most creative era is nothing less than fantastic, but that's Sinatra. Always swimming against the tide while remaining true to his own personal artistic endeavors, he is *the* survivor of twentieth century music.







## OCTOBER 1966 #1 GOOD VIBRATIONS—THE BEACH BOYS

Let's face it: the Beach Boys were one of the weirdest groups that ever graced popular music. Everything about them was in direct contradiction to the hipness and good times displayed on their recordings. A bunch of square suburbanites who ranged from adequate to poor musicians (excepting Brian Wilson, of course) had a sound that defined the meaning of cool. Wilson's severe depression and schizophrenia were thoroughly concealed by the unrelentingly happy vibes of his music. The myth was much more pleasant than the reality, and the Beach Boys were more than happy to oblige by keeping the more distasteful and uncomfortable aspects of their union a well-kept secret.

Although the album *Pet Sounds* displayed a creativity that was virtually unmatched by other pop artists at the time, public acceptance of this new direction was slow in coming. For all intents and purposes, the Beach Boys had painted themselves into a corner with their early surf, sun, girls, and cars image. By 1967, this would cause them to appear as passé as Guy Lombardo. Their only hope for continued relevance came when Wilson sent up his last flare with "Good Vibrations," marking his final S.O.S. before sinking under the weight of his mental problems.

Attempting to prove himself worthy of the "genius" appellation with which he was tagged after *Pet Sounds*, Wilson set out to record a single that would be a "pocket symphony." "Good Vibrations" was destined to become his best and his last shot simultaneously. At a reported cost of \$50,000, the song was a wildly self-indulgent and ridiculously expensive project. It was compiled from nearly twenty sessions that incorporated work from four

different studios and filled more than ninety hours of recording tape. Editing must have been grueling.

The most compelling sound on "Good Vibrations" is an instrument called a theremin. It produces a single monophonic tone that alters pitch when you slide your finger back and forth along its playing surface. Before "Good Vibrations," it was most often used as a soundtrack instrument for psychological thrillers such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*. Organ and a bowed cello also contribute to this record's startlingly unique sound. Mostly, though, this song is interesting because of the way the various sections contrast and are intertwined. At the time, it was (unbelievably) the only million-selling record that the Beach Boys ever recorded. Wilson had his cake and he ate it, too.

It was while writing and recording this follow-up to *Pet Sounds* that Wilson stretched the rubber band inside his brain a little bit too far. His next album was to

### GREAT HITS

OCTOBER 1966 <u>POOR SIDE OF TOWN—</u> JOHNNY RIVERS	#1
OCTOBER 1966 <u>DEVIL WITH A BLUE DRESS ON &amp;</u> <u>GOOD GOLLY MISS MOLLY (MEDLEY)—</u> MITCH RYDER AND THE DETROIT WHEELS	#4
OCTOBER 1966 <u>HAVE YOU SEEN YOUR MOTHER, BABY,</u> <u>STANDING IN THE SHADOW—</u> THE ROLLING STONES	#9
OCTOBER 1966 <u>I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT</u> <u>TO DO WITH MYSELF—</u> GIONNE WARWICKE	#26



be a personal masterpiece that would outstrip all of his competition. He intended it to be a “teenage symphony to God” called *Dumb Angel*. Unfortunately, the work in progress never became more than an unfinished morass. As the album transmogrified into dozens of related projects, the title was altered to the simple purity of *Smile*. Ranging from the complex sound paintings of “Mrs. O’Leary’s Cow” (also known infamously as “Fire”) to the gorgeous (and also complex) word paintings of “Surf’s Up,” Wilson and collaborator Van Dyke Parks created a mad-denyingly eclectic collection of scraps that required more assembly than Wilson was willing to face. He lost his sense of direction with the project and became frightened, like a child who can’t find his parents in a shopping mall. To distract himself from his fear, he indulged his slightly mad eccentricities as much as humanly possible, including building a sandbox for his piano, installing a gigantic tent in his living room and surrounding it with gym equipment that went unused, and placing a tree house against his front door so that anyone who entered had to crawl through it. He hoped that these things would somehow fuel his childish creativity, but all they turned out to be were additional stumbling blocks and distractions.

**It was while writing and recording this follow-up to *Pet Sounds* that Wilson stretched the rubber band inside his brain a little bit too far.**

Capitol produced the cover and waited for Wilson to deliver the album. And waited. And waited. Wilson, uncertain and confused, hesitated. Meanwhile, the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Then the Monterey Pop Festival went on. While the Beach Boys reneged on their invitation, the festival drove home the point that popular music had, in the meantime, changed irrevocably. The focus moved north to San Francisco, and Wilson was victimized by his own vacillation. Once uncertain but now horrified, he retreated into the safety of his inner sanctum. The rest of the Beach Boys were rudderless without him. With no sense of direction, they fell apart, leaving nothing but the shrapnel of their past successes and Wilson’s works in progress. The fact that they held onto some semblance of their former glory for nearly three more decades is perhaps their biggest claim to fame—except, of course, for their glory days, when Wilson ran the whole show by writing and recording songs as challenging and exciting as “Good Vibrations.”

## NOVEMBER 1966 #1 YOU KEEP ME HANGIN’ ON—THE SUPREMES

**F**lo Ballard was a founding member of the Supremes and the one responsible for recruiting members Mary Wilson and Diane Ross. Vivacious and talented, she was quick with a joke and full of ambition. It was apparent that she had the strongest voice and the best pitch control of the three, so in the beginning it was usually her job to sing lead. Ballard changed, however, after a nightmarish inci-



dent in which she was raped by a supposed "friend." As could be expected, it had a profound effect on her personality and scarred her in a way that was much deeper than could often be perceived. Less able to maintain her status as the group leader, she surrendered the job to Ross, who quite willingly filled the role—too willingly, according to some.

At times, Ballard's resentment of Ross rose to the surface, and both Ross and, more importantly, her boss, Berry Gordy, began to consider her as difficult and uncooperative. The situation worsened when Gordy's personal relationship with Ross intensified. It was no secret that they had more than a standard business relationship, and Gordy soon made it plain enough that he had every intention of making Ross a huge star. A turning point came when, at their prestigious performance at the Copa Cabana Club, he took away Ballard's one solo number and bestowed it upon Ross. Ballard complained bitterly and vociferously, but Gordy remained implacable. In his mind, Ballard was becoming nothing more than a nuisance, and in time her own self-respect began to wane. She gained weight, started drinking heavily, and became ill quite often. She lost interest in the group and began missing rehearsals and recording sessions.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1966	#7
<b>STOP, STOP, STOP—THE HOLLIES</b>	
NOVEMBER 1966	#9
<b>A PLACE IN THE SUN—STEVIE WONDER</b>	
NOVEMBER 1966	#28
<b>KNOCK ON WOOD—EDDIE FLOYD</b>	

A final blow came when it was announced, with no forewarning, that the group's name was to be officially changed to Diana Ross and the Supremes. Ballard was furious and made plain her intention to quit. Her behavior helped to make the decision unanimous: Ballard was out, and Cindy Birdsong became her replacement. Motown settled Ballard's account by paying all of her proceeds from her duration as a Supreme, which amounted to approximately \$160,000.

Also, they allegedly agreed to pay her \$2,500 a year for six years, but she received no royalties, not even for her earlier recordings, and had no right whatsoever to use the word "Supremes" for promotion of her solo projects.

Ballard recorded briefly and unsuccessfully for ABC Records. With her husband acting as her manager, she was a long way from the power-broker approach used by Motown, and her career floundered. She retired to live with her husband and children in the house that she purchased while still at Motown. Unfortunately, soon afterward her lawyer informed her that her funds were nearly exhausted. Allegations of embezzlement and misrepresentation were made, and although the lawyer would later be disbarred, the damage was done. The bank foreclosed on her home, and she had to apply for welfare to support her children. In 1975, the Detroit press caught wind of her predicament and publicized it. Ballard then sued Motown, alleging a conspiracy to remove her from the group and inappropriate accounting procedures, but the suit was dismissed as groundless. In the next few years, she was separated from her husband, mugged, and her residence was robbed. On February 21, 1976, she passed away. The medical report stated the cause of death as cardiac arrest, the result of a blood clot in a coronary



artery. Ross attended the funeral but was met with jeers and animosity. Gordy did not attend.

“You Keep Me Hangin’ On” was released while Gordy actively searched for a replacement for Ballard. “Soulful” is not a word that usually applies to a Supremes performance, but if any one song of theirs earns the word, this is it. In retrospect, the lyrics seem to convey some of the personal difficulties that plagued the group. A telling moment occurs during the bridge when the music breaks down and a frustrated Ross sings, “There ain’t nothin’ I can do about it.” Then Ballard, singing solo, replies, “Set me free, why don’t you, babe.” Knowing now that they wanted to get away from each other in the worst way, I can only wonder how much of it was pure coincidence when they then sing, in unison, “Get out of my life, why don’t you, babe.”

The song’s introduction is immediately riveting. The stereo effect of panning the stuttering guitar riff left and then right was unusual for Motown, but it works, sounding like a frantic message in Morse code. Messages were bouncing around the studio, alright, but the propriety of any code was long forgotten. The message was no longer veiled, and considering Ballard’s exit into obscurity and Ross’s subsequent rise to solo stardom, the results were plainer still.

“You Keep Me Hangin’ On” has the honor of being covered with two memorable versions. A plodding, organ-laden version by the Vanilla Fudge reached the Top 40 in 1968, and in 1987, Kim Wilde took the tempo in the other direction and reached #1 with her nightclubbing, high-energy rendition.

**“Soulful” is not a word that usually applies to a Supremes performance, but if any one song of theirs earns the word, this is it.**

## DECEMBER 1966 #1 I’M A BELIEVER—THE MONKEES

**T**he Monkees’ second single, written by Neil Diamond, was a two-sided hit with the punk garage-rock song “I’m Not Your Steppin’ Stone” on the flip side. The younger audience that watched the TV show and heard the group’s first hit, “Last Train to Clarksville,” bought “I’m a Believer” by the millions. The corresponding album, *More of the Monkees*, received advance orders of one-and-a-half million copies, higher than any previous Beatles or Elvis LP, and went from #124 to #1 within a week of its release.

The Monkees, an invention for a TV show, had become America’s most famous band. Month after month, virtually every fanzine, such as *16* and *Tiger Beat*, had their faces on the cover (especially Davey Jones’s), sometimes with entire issues dedicated to them with important scoops like “Davey’s Dream Date,” or “Mickey’s Favorite Foods.”

Of course, serious rock fans found all of this completely distasteful. The Monkees were not taken seriously by older teenagers and in fact were looked upon with disdain by discriminating fans who preferred, say, the Rolling Stones or the Byrds. Today, though, it is tough to deny this well-written and well-crafted pop song.





Previously jaded listeners now can enjoy "I'm a Believer" when it comes on the radio without fear of being ostracized.

Lead vocals were once again performed by Mickey Dolenz, who was beginning to prove himself to be a more than adequate singer. Interestingly, the success of "I'm a Believer" inspired Neil Diamond to further his own singing career.

## DECEMBER 1966 #20 I'M NOT YOUR STEPPIN' STONE—THE MONKEES

**R**eleased as the flip side of "I'm a Believer," this song garnered enough sales and airplay to achieve Top 40 status in its own right, reaching #20. It takes a considerably harder tack than the other Monkees hits. Mickey Dolenz sings with more than a hint of anger in his voice. Although he possessed limited vocal abilities, he delivers a convincing performance, spewing lines like "When I first met you, girl, you didn't have no shoes, now you're walkin' 'round like you're front-page news." Written by Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart—the same pair who wrote "Last Train to Clarksville," "She," and later "Valleri"—"I'm Not Your Steppin' Stone" gave the Monkees a much needed bit of credibility with older rock fans by virtue of its toughness.

Demands for live performances grew with the group's popularity, and eventually they agreed to perform, to the utter disbelief of their detractors. They held their first live show before a near-rioting crowd in Hawaii. It's interesting to note that the Monkees began to perform live just weeks after the Beatles announced their intention to stop touring. To further their acceptance among older fans, Dolenz took personal responsibility for one of the strangest double bills of the rock era. He hired the Jimi Hendrix Experience as a support act, which proved to be an embarrassment for both parties. Monkees fans were mostly adolescents who couldn't care less about any opening act, particularly one as strangely innovative as the Experience. Catcalls and chants of "WE WANT THE MONKEES" interrupted the group's performance. After a handful of shows, the two bands parted ways.

## DECEMBER 1966 #2 TELL IT LIKE IT IS—AARON NEVILLE

**B**efore Aaron Neville became everybody's duet darling, those who knew of him considered him the most soulful singer in New Orleans's funkier band. While the Neville Brothers laid down some truly nasty contrapuntal rhythms, Aaron Neville's melisma-drenched voice would float over the syncopations like an angel who got lost on the way to heaven. Once away from his brothers, though, it became impossible to predict what tripe he might lend his God-given talent to. Besides his overwrought warbling of romantic mush with Linda Ronstadt, he has lent his ethereal, falsetto-tinged tenor to something as base as an airline commercial—which, of course, is his prerogative, but it makes it that much more difficult to take him seriously when he finally sings something worthy of his abil-





ity. I remember seeing Neville perform solo, with piano accompaniment, and being horrified at his poor choice of material. By the time he launched into Anne Murray's hit "You Needed Me," the person next to me, a total stranger, leaned over and said, "I can hardly wait to hear him sing 'I Am Woman.'" We both began to laugh uncontrollably, so much so that we had to leave, taking with us a camaraderie born of disappointment. Neville's live performances of "Tell It Like It Is" suffer from overfamiliarity, since he is required to sing it constantly. Once his sound became a commodity, the line that separated him from, say, Barry Manilow, was erased, except for that voice. That haunting voice can make the hair on your arms stand up, which can make you feel pretty stupid if you're only watching a TV commercial, but you might as well surrender because Neville's voice will always win out.

Before it became a rote staple, like cornflakes, "Tell It Like It Is" was recognized to be one of the finest soul songs of the '60s. On vinyl, it still is. Its languid 6/8 rhythm and self-righteous lyrics convey pride and heartbreak, while Neville's voice does what it always does so well: it soars. Best of all, the recording captures him while the melody is still fresh, and he sounds invigorated by the crisp arrangement.

All four of the Neville Brothers—Art, Aaron, Charles, and Cyril—have been struggling for continued widespread commercial success for so long that it is misanthropic of me to begrudge Aaron Neville of his recent popularity. Whether it was as solo artists or as part of the Hawketts, the Neville Sounds, the Soul Machine, the Wild Tchoupitoulas, or the Meters, they have flirted with fame but never quite broke through to enjoy the popularity they so richly deserve. Of course, this is no problem in their hometown of New Orleans, where they are walking icons, but the rest of the world adamantly refuses to catch on. For everyone else, "Tell It Like It Is" remains their crowning achievement (or Aaron Neville's), and odds are good that it will remain their most requested song wherever they play.

Before it became a rote staple, like cornflakes, "Tell It Like It Is" was recognized to be one of the finest soul songs of the '60s.

## DECEMBER 1966 #6 STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF LOVE— THE FOUR TOPS

As mentioned earlier, the writing and production team of Lamont Dozier and brothers Eddie and Brian Holland were more than adept at helping Berry Gordy run his photocopy service when a song hit it big, and "Standing in the Shadows of Love" was their very deliberate and successful attempt at writing "Reach Out (Again), I'll (Still) Be There." After this became a hit, they wrote "Bernadette," which was "If You Keep On Reaching Out, I'll Keep On Being There" or "Standing in the Shadows of Our Last Hits." As long as record buyers kept



reaching out (and into their pockets), Gordy made sure the product was there.

The way that “Standing in the Shadows of Love” cleverly incorporates that frighteningly effective riff in “Reach Out I’ll Be There” is more than enough reason to consider it a brilliant pop song, but its appeal goes beyond that. Three decades removed from its inception, it has taken on an identity all its own. Lyrics to most Holland-Dozier-Holland songs existed more for their syllabics than their clever imagery, but “Standing in the Shadows of Love” is something of an exception. It is unusual for their lyrics to demand precise and inventive phrasing from the performer, but here Levi Stubbs often has to be sure to accent the lines properly so as not to get tripped up. His gospel roots are more useful here than on any other Four Tops song. He needs to testify to get the song across, and he does, with all the conviction of a man who carries the weight of the world on his shoulders.

## DECEMBER 1966 #23 MUSTANG SALLY—WILSON PICKETT

Atlantic Records’ Jerry Wexler called him the Black Panther before the phrase had any political connotation, but Wicked Pickett was the name that stuck. Both hot-blooded and hot-headed, Wilson Pickett deserved the name, both onstage and off. Onstage, he exuded a startling enough quantity of sexual energy to pull off the macho bravado of his song lyrics while offstage his behavior confirmed that he was simply singing it like it was. Pickett tore his way through women and alcohol with no fear of either wrath or consequences, respectively. Judging by both his music and his image, he was a prime example of just how much black music had changed since the mid-’50s. The downtrodden, self-obsessed blues man who sang of secular, if not outright sinful, concerns was modified over time into the mid-’60s soul man. The “soul man” was a proud and politically astute individual with a newfound sense of self-worth. Instead of singing about how hope-

lessly bad things were, soul singers vocalized about how righteous they were. Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, Solomon Burke, Otis Redding, and Aretha Franklin could all sing about the pride they felt, and collectively their work went a long way toward causing a segment of the white population to sympathize with the black cause. In many ways, it was the music of artists



like these that caused white Americans to examine their conscience and begin to enact a peaceable realignment of the country’s social structure. Perhaps it was too little too late, but it was still something and there can be no denying that soul music played a significant role in effecting a change. When this sense of identity passed away from soul music, leaving it high and dry, black music, culture, and identity all suffered when the vacuous and narcissistic disco music took over and strangled most of the activism that existed. All of the major soul artists were rendered obsolete and were replaced by a mindless rhythmic drive that



didn't care a damn about artistry or message, so long as it had a hot mix and moved along at 110 beats per minute. What was once proudly called soul music had been obliterated by a form of music that was, by definition, soulless.

"Mustang Sally" was written by Mack Rice, Pickett's friend and ex-bandmate from his days in the Falcons. By now, Jerry Wexler was moving the Wicked from Stax Records in Memphis (where his forceful personality caused him to become unwelcome) to Muscle Shoals in order to work with producer Rick Hall at his Fame Recording Studios. Here the musicians were sympathetic with Pickett's aggressive and sweaty approach, but they had a style all their own. Whereas the Memphis musicians would lay back on the beat with painfully glorious precision, the Muscle Shoals musicians would often propel Pickett into warp speed. His "Land of 1000 Dances" has a relentless punch that never lets up. "Mustang Sally" is only slightly more restrained, containing an immense energy that resembles a thoroughbred racehorse waiting for the gate to fly open. The brilliant stuttering guitar riff, played by Chips Moman, provides enough drive to propel the song all by itself, but the bass and drums of Tommy Cogbill and Roger Hawkins sound like they are prepared to challenge Sally and her brand new Mustang to a drag race. Spooner Oldham's keyboards round out the rhythm section. On top of this rhythmic momentum, Wicked Pickett provides an energetic and entertaining narrative in all of his full-tilt, bone-rattling glory. The day of the soul man was at its peak. Before the rootsy sound of southern soul music was pummeled to death by the more sanitized sound of disco's precursors, Pickett reveled in the glory of his much-deserved recognition.

What was once proudly called soul music had been obliterated by a form of music that was, by definition, soulless.

## DECEMBER 1966 #25 TRY A LITTLE TENDERNESS—OTIS REDDING

First, I need to clarify one of the caveats of this book. In the interest of space and avoiding repetition, I decided up front that only one version of any song should make the final list. This worked well—until I considered Otis Redding. "Respect" was *his* song and was extremely powerful and relevant, since it addressed both sexual and racial consciousness without any sense of threat, which might have undermined the demanding lyric. The problem was, Aretha Franklin stood this already great song on its head and in the process stole it away from its rightful owner. By adding a feminist perspective, she made the song too cool for words and as out-of-control brilliant as any pop record could possibly be. It was Franklin's version that introduced the overtly suggestive "sock-it-to-me, sock-it-to-me" backup line and, more importantly, the "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" refrain. Now, whenever I hear Redding's original version, it sounds like he forgot to write that part, which in a sense, I suppose he did. Redding knew Franklin stole his tune and said as much



**Redding personified the very meaning of soul, and he fancied himself a country boy through and through.**

when he first heard her version. From then on, he made good and sure that he would hold onto his later songs by recording versions that to this day remain definitive.

Redding personified the very meaning of soul, and he fancied himself a country boy through and through. This earthiness gave him the character he needed to sing with enough raw, honest emotion to touch every person within earshot. Although he wasn't a mover in the style of Sam Cooke or Jackie Wilson, Redding had a pleading vulnerability that instantaneously enraptured his audience. His friends and associates say that offstage he was as confident and natural as a person could be, but once he started performing, a painful ache appeared from nowhere and just poured out of him. "These Arms of Mine," "Pain in My Heart," and "I've Been Loving You Too Long" were all 6/8 tempo weepers that expressed emotion laden with yearning. Listening to these songs is like being caught in a trap because their direct intensity leaves little room for escape. Like a deer mesmerized by oncoming headlights, the listener stands transfixed and unable to move.

With "Try a Little Tenderness," Redding and the MG's set up the same intensity level, but by record's end they are blowing enough steam to compensate for every one of his previous (and gloriously claustrophobic) recordings. It is like hearing somebody suddenly deciding that *today* he finally has the courage to release a tension that was building for years. He achieves this on a song that dates back to 1933 and has since become something of a hoary standard. Drummer Al Jackson taps out the rim-shot rhythm on the second verse, sounding like a device attached to a time bomb. The horn arrangements, which Redding usually created on the spot and conveyed to the players by singing what he heard in his head, is a marvel of intelligent interplay and teamwork. They signal the upcoming explosion with all the warning and blaring confidence of an air-raid siren. By song's end, Redding and company have captured a performance that is simply unrepeatable, with ad-libbed phrasing that stands out as some of the most moving and exciting moments in the history of soul music. Although Franklin might have slipped "Respect" away from him, Redding proved his own interpretive skills by taking a song that had forty years of wear and making it indescribably new and undeniably his own.

## **JANUARY 1967 #1 KIND OF A DRAG—THE BUCKINGHAMS**

**B**esides the undeniably catchy melody and cheerful horn chart, the most interesting thing about this single is the subtext. While lead singer Dennis Tufano proclaims that losing his baby is "kind of a drag," the background singers let loose with a torrent of barely discernible lyrics that betray the casually cool attitude of the main phrase. Tufano indifferently states that he might be a little upset, but the backing chorus tells the truth: "Listen to me when I'm speakin' 'cuz you know



the words I'm thinkin' and I know that you been cheatin'. Oh, I hope that you'll be weepin'." No, I don't have the wrong song; those words are buried underneath the main phrase and repeated three times. Regardless, the song maintains an upbeat feel and makes you want to sing along. "Kind of a Drag" is intended to be pure pop from start to finish, so it's understandable why the happy sound of the music would contradict the miserable topic of the lyrics. It was so infectious that it became a #1 single, despite the fact that it was released on a small independent label (USA) with distribution problems. The Buckingham's may have been from Chicago, but they sure didn't have the blues.

Oh, one more amusing thing. After two more Top 40 hits—"Don't You Care" and "Hey Baby (They're Playing Our Song)"—the Buckingham's career was suddenly interrupted after they were arrested for possession of drugs. That's not the amusing part. They subsequently parted ways with their producer, Jim Guercio, who then went on to adapt his penchant for blaring horn charts to the recordings of Blood, Sweat, and Tears and the Chicago Transit Authority. The Buckingham's tried to continue without him and released a thoroughly forgotten album titled *In One Ear and Gone Tomorrow*. That's the amusing part.

## JANUARY 1967 #7 GIMME SOME LOVIN'—THE SPENCER DAVIS GROUP

If Stevie Winwood played the band's most recognizable instrument (the organ), sang lead, and wrote most of its material, why was it called the Spencer Davis Group? Good question. When he joined, Winwood was basically nothing more than a little kid who played keyboards fairly well. His older brother, Mervyn (called "Muff"), played bass and was the leader of a jazz band before he teamed up with Spencer Davis. Davis played guitar, sang, and had the right credentials for R&B. He also had the appropriate sensibility to be a leader so it naturally became his role to stand front and center. It was Davis who hired drummer Pete York and gave the nod to let Muff's fifteen-year-old kid brother sign on, as well.

That was in 1963. After he joined, Winwood began to find his voice. His abilities grew exponentially, and as they did, his role in the band changed. He played guitar, as well as piano and organ. He became the chief songwriter, and since he had the best voice for his own material, he usually sang lead. His distinctive vocals owed considerable debt to Ray Charles, but the physical, geographical, and age differences meant that he could only go so far in emulation. In other words, considering who he was, how old he was, and where he lived, he managed to sound as soulful as could be expected from a white teenage kid from the British Isles.

At the behest of their producer, Chris Blackwell, who also happened to own Island Records, the band covered two songs that were written by transplanted Jamaican Wilfred "Jackie" Edwards. The net result was a pair of #1 singles in the







**The band was known to be a driving R&B-based outfit, but nothing prepared them or their audience for this powerhouse classic.**

U.K. Winwood composed “Gimme Some Lovin’” sometime around the end of 1965. The band was known to be a driving R&B-based outfit, but nothing prepared them or their audience for this powerhouse classic. The central organ riff is so effective that it works like a bulldozer pushing bodies onto the dance floor. The band is loud as all get-out, and Winwood has to yell over the din, making it nearly impossible to hear what he’s saying. It doesn’t help much that he deliberately makes himself sound like he has a mouthful of marbles, but the song isn’t about clarity, it’s about dancing. The lyrics don’t matter half as much as the way the music forces you to move. Inexplicably, “Gimme Some Lovin’” did worse in the U.K. than its predecessors when it stalled out at #2, but it became the first and biggest Top 40 hit in the states for the Spencer Davis Group, peaking at #7.

One more Winwood composition, “I’m a Man” (also a hit for Chicago in 1971), followed “Gimme Some Lovin’” into the Top 10, but Winwood already had one foot out the door. By then, he had already played with Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and others in a side project called Powerhouse and had decided to form a band of his own. About the same time, his brother Muff left the band, as well. The Spencer Davis Group carried on for a number of years with a huge variety of personnel, but their glory days were when young Stevie Winwood stood behind his organ and belted out “Gimme Some Lovin’.”

## **FEBRUARY 1967 #1 RUBY TUESDAY—THE ROLLING STONES**

**T**he Rolling Stones spent the summer of 1966 touring the United States for the fifth time, but this tour was noticeably different from the previous four. The screaming teenyboppers and confused boys who had attended their previous shows had all mysteriously disappeared. In their place were fashion-conscious young women and slightly long-haired young men who were far less naive than they had previously been. The Rolling Stones’ original fans had grown into teenagers with a whole new system of beliefs. Drugs, which were previously frightening and mysterious, had begun to infiltrate and define the American counterculture. Instead of screaming and fainting, a large segment of the audience was actually “turning on.” They were becoming wise to the aura of the rock-and-roll bands and began to adapt aspects of their attitude and style for themselves. They had heard all about the drug bust at Keith Richards’s country home in West Wittering, England, and the titillating presence of a woman wearing only a rug. Instead of ostracizing the Rolling Stones from their fan base, it strengthened the bond by exhibiting the hazards they confronted while living on the edge of an alternative lifestyle.

“Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow” was the band’s previous single, and it contained some of Mick Jagger’s best lyrics yet. Unfortu-



nately, the dense musical mix makes it impossible to hear him through the din. What could have been the Stones' best single was instead an indistinguishable blur of noise. Their next release had the distinction of being their most clear and pristine recording yet. It was easy to hear every syllable of "Let's Spend the Night Together," which promptly resulted in a moralistic backlash that prevented the song from receiving airplay. Instead, deejays played the equally commercial B-side, a baroque melody featuring Brian Jones on the recorder, called "Ruby Tuesday." Coming on the heels of "Lady Jane," the lilting melody certainly confirms a distinct shift in the Rolling Stones' sound. The change from bad boys of the blues to figureheads for the flower children came easily enough, but could never have been predicted until it actually happened. Amazingly, even the scandalous Stones were now falling prey to the fashionable times.

## FEBRUARY 1967 #7 FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH—BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD

The folk-rock boom that took place in 1965 inspired a plethora of consciousness-raising "protest" songs that were really little more than hymns of self-awareness. Consciousness-raising suggested an alternative lifestyle that, in turn, suggested drug use. These factors set the scene for "enlightened" youths to develop their own "hippie" culture. This step-by-step transition could be mapped simply by following the early careers of Stephen Stills and Neil Young.

Stephen Stills, born in Texas, migrated to New York City's Greenwich Village much like Bob Dylan had, hoping to make a name for himself on the folk scene. While there, he met Richie Furay, another relocated folkie, and together they joined a somewhat pretentious folk group called the Au Go Go Singers. When the group failed to gain recognition and disbanded, Stills toured Canada, where he briefly met Neil Young. He then set out for Los Angeles with hopes of forming a rock-and-roll band in the mold of the Beatles. With hardly any prospects, Stills called Furay in New York and asked him to come West to join his great new band. Furay came, only to find that Stills was slightly exaggerating. As legend has it, Stills and Furay were cruising along Sunset Boulevard wondering what they would do when they happened upon a black hearse with Canadian license plates. Sure enough, Young was behind the wheel with his friend and bass player, Bruce Palmer (eventually replaced by Jim Messina). The pieces fit, so they recruited experienced session drummer Dewey Martin to complete the lineup. Boasting three songwriters, three lead vocalists, and two lead guitarists, Buffalo Springfield was bursting with diverse and excessive talent that, in retrospect, seemed predestined to explode. But the music the group made was a brilliant hodgepodge of folk, rock and roll, country, soul, jazz, Latin, and psychedelic styles with production that

**Stephen Stills, born in Texas, migrated to New York City's Greenwich Village much like Bob Dylan had, hoping to make a name for himself on the folk scene.**



**"For What It's Worth" signaled the beginning of the politicization of the youth movement.**

ranged from bare to ornate. Their initial single, "Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing," didn't catch on, but their follow-up certainly did. Stills wrote "For What It's Worth" in reaction to the police activity and the 10 P.M. curfew that was imposed along the Sunset Strip after the civil unrest of November 12, 1966 ("Stop! Hey, what's that sound? Everybody look what's goin' down"). The title implies that Stills knew his song wasn't a rallying cry, but it did draw a line between the police (and the institutions that empowered them) and the kids who by now were being called "hippies."

"For What It's Worth" signaled the beginning of the politicization of the youth movement. Eventually, this would lead to the showdowns at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the horrid debacle at Kent State University, in which a National Guard that should have been protecting students instead fired into a crowd, killing four of them.

What had begun as a protest against limiting the hippies' freedom to congregate had escalated to an antiwar stance that caused the country to split into ideological halves. Long hair ceased being a style, but a statement of purpose, much like a soldier's uniform. The battles between the "establishment" and the protest movement were so intense that at times they resembled the war the two sides were clashing over. Buffalo Springfield disbanded before most of these confrontations would play themselves out. Too many healthy egos were cohabiting, and the peculiar visions of each band member would, after three albums, need to find their outlets elsewhere. Some members went on to be solo artists; or joined bands such as Poco, Loggins and Messina and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Stills and Young, along with future

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1967 <b>IT TAKES TWO— MARVIN GAYE AND KIM WESTON</b>	#14
FEBRUARY 1967 <b>PRETTY BALLERINA— THE LEFT BANKE</b>	#15

bandmates Graham Nash and David Crosby, seemed to document every major confrontation in song. For what it's worth, their songs didn't inspire the events or vice versa, but they did help to unify most of their generation around a political agenda whose effects will linger indefinitely.

## FEBRUARY 1967 #15 DARLING BE HOME SOON—THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL

Mixing strings and heavy orchestration with rock and roll is usually frowned upon by music critics since it either has a negative effect on the gut impact of the song (the Beatles' "The Long and Winding Road") or it cheapens the emotional resonance of the lyrics by manipulating the listener (virtually anything recorded by Michael Bolton). Well, that may be true, and I accept the thought in theory. But every time the orchestral section of "Darling Be Home Soon" rolls around, I feel myself getting all misty. Maybe I have a certain vulnerability to



songs of this nature, but I think there is more to it than that. The song packs such a direct emotional punch that a shudder or two is inevitable.

In the lyrics, John Sebastian spends the last few moments he has with his lover by recounting the minutiae of their last day. Their upcoming separation is displayed in all of its painful and hopeful glory during the beautiful chorus, when he laments having to wait “for the great relief of having you to talk to.” By the second chorus, the listener has been thoroughly absorbed into the song’s restrictive atmosphere. It is at that moment that the strings soar off into the heavens on the gossamer wings of the melody. If you are a cynical person, this would seal the fate of the song right there. If not, then you would be drawn further in, because from then on every chorus becomes an emotional ordeal. The fragility of the mood is sustained by the flowing strings and horn accompaniment. Rather than destroying it, the orchestration captures that very tender moment and renders it into something emotionally complex, mixing equal doses of pleasure with the pain. Perhaps that is manipulative, or even sappy, but it works.

Since the Spoonful had previously focused on good-time music, “Darling Be Home Soon” automatically inherited a certain poignancy. Sebastian broadened the emotional range of his songwriting and confirmed himself to be a singular talent with appeal as a solo artist. After a controversial drug bust that hurt the credibility of two band members (it was rumored they ratted on others to save themselves), Sebastian embarked on a solo career that temporarily placed him squarely at the heart of the Woodstock generation.



## MARCH 1967 #1 PENNY LANE—THE BEATLES

**W**hile “We Can Work It Out” easily intertwined the opposing views of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, their differences became incompatible with “Penny Lane”/“Strawberry Fields Forever,” despite the fact that each song shares a common theme. McCartney was the songwriter behind “Penny Lane,” while Lennon contributed “Strawberry Fields Forever.” Both chose to reminisce about their childhoods, but their perceptions are radically different and contain deeply personal reflections that reveal quite a lot more of each author’s personality than perhaps was intentional. McCartney’s reminiscences are breezy and aloof, like a child staring wonderingly at an adult world that seems both silly and entertaining to him. In “Penny Lane,” the world is a stage, and McCartney is the lone, bemused audience member. “What a queer bunch these adults are,” he seems to be saying, “running willy-nilly without even enough sense to wear a raincoat in the pouring rain.” His memories are lighthearted yet withdrawn, where the only time any personal involvement comes into play is his reference to school-yard sexuality, “four of fish and finger pie” (got *that* one past the censors, didn’t you, Paul?).

“Penny Lane” was one of the most beautifully melodic and entertaining songs





**George Martin,  
the producer,  
considered  
“Penny Lane”/  
“Strawberry  
Fields Forever”  
to be the best  
record he ever  
made with the  
Beatles.**

McCartney ever wrote. Like most of his melodies, it suits his voice like a glove, and his performance flows effortlessly. The instrumental arrangement is ideal, as well, particularly the stunning piccolo trumpet solo that graces the instrumental break. Its lead-in phrase is so crammed with notes that it gives the impression of tripping over itself to catch up with the rest of the band, which lumbers on unperturbed—an impression that is fortified by the slightly legato phrasing. George Martin, the producer, considered “Penny Lane”/“Strawberry Fields Forever” to be the best record he ever made with the Beatles, and yet in England, it was kept out of the #1 position by Engelbert Humperdinck’s “Release Me.” This single, then, possibly their greatest artistic achievement, is the one that broke their streak of twelve consecutive #1 records in Great Britain. No such problem occurred in America, where “Penny

Lane” went to the top of the charts without impingement.

“Penny Lane” and “Strawberry Fields Forever” were originally intended to be included as part of the Beatles’ forthcoming album, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, but their impatient record company wanted to release a single to fill what then seemed to be an overly long gap between album releases (ten months). With this single and its “companion” album, the Beatles completely abandoned the self-imposed limitations of rock and roll and forayed into a musical hybrid of styles now simply called “rock music.” On “Penny Lane,” they didn’t even see any need to include electric guitars. Their curious excursions into alternate styles and their search for new sounds to add to their palette became a permanent character of their musical personalities.

Since its release, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* has been lauded as the most influential long-playing record of all time. It did so much to awaken the public to the limitless possibilities of popular music that the history of contemporary Top 40 music can be neatly divided into pre-*Pepper* and post-*Pepper* halves. Although its praises are well-deserved for both musical and historical reasons, not all subsequent developments were beneficial. For one thing, the idea of the single, the 45, the hit song, as being the ultimate means of expression became outdated. Instead, everybody felt compelled to make their own “big” statements, even if they had nothing to say. Theme albums began to proliferate, while high-quality singles were considered irrelevant and poppy. Another result of *Sgt. Pepper* was that it suddenly made rock music unreachable to the man in the street. The Beatles created their masterpiece with a near-limitless amount of time and money. Its baroque touches flaunt their wealth—not only of money, but ideas. Two guitars, a bass, and drums were all of a sudden old-fashioned. Surprisingly, “Penny Lane” and “Strawberry Fields Forever” somehow managed to avoid the sense of deliberate affectation that was littered throughout *Sgt. Pepper*. Personal involvement (or noninvolvement, in McCartney’s case) made these two songs something more than an attempt to make great art; they were soulful.





## MARCH 1967 #8 STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER—THE BEATLES

The drug culture that defined the latter part of the '60s had an overwhelming effect on popular music. John Lennon, in particular, embraced it unquestioningly and consumed hallucinogens as if they were a brain food. The drug revolution brought a sense of euphoria to everything it touched, and since most of the “hip” members of popular culture discovered psychedelics around the same time, a seemingly limitless universe blossomed before them. Typically, though, the inspirational value of the narcotic would diminish over time, replaced by a feeling of lethargy. In other words, instead of being consumed with a constant stream of drug-induced inspiration, acid-heads were slowly becoming a sleepy-eyed bunch of couch potatoes. Lennon had already touched on his desire to do nothing (“I’m Only Sleeping”), but he still believed that hallucinogens held a key that would open up new worlds and help his creativity. While reaching for the cosmos, he ultimately remained as earthbound as anybody else, but he was certainly correct in assuming that drugs would fuel his songwriting.

The laid-back, noncommittal, and occasionally paranoid mind-set that LSD induced is intricately woven into the lyrics of “Strawberry Fields Forever.” With the casualness of spontaneous thought, Lennon sings what at first sounds like stream-of-consciousness babbling. The indecisiveness of the lyrics—such as “Always, no, sometimes, I think it’s me” or “I think I know, I mean, ah yes, but it’s all wrong—that is, I think I disagree”—speaks volumes without ever saying anything committal at all.

Like Paul McCartney’s lyrics in “Penny Lane,” Lennon’s musings in “Strawberry Fields Forever” were inspired by childhood memories. Strawberry Fields was the name of a Salvation Army grounds near his Liverpool home where he sometimes played as a child. It was a refuge of trees and gardens that offered a magical escape from the dirty brick city that contained it. The adult Lennon sings more about the impressions left by these memories than he does about the memories themselves. What matters isn’t so much what he remembers, but how he feels about what he remembers. His tone is withdrawn and introspective, and the drug-induced apathy shows him to be uncertain of whether he even fits into his own escapist fantasy. He expresses this feeling of alienation (although he is again uncertain) when he sings, “No one, I think, is in my tree.” The best clues as to why Lennon never lost touch with his “inner child” are buried somewhere deep in the mysterious folds of this song. Unfortunately, Lennon’s child wasn’t happy, and it might have done him well to shrug him off, but he lingered. This is something that he never worked out to his own satisfaction, despite numerous attempts, including the primal scream therapies espoused by Arthur Janov.

The bemused hyperreality of McCartney’s Liverpool in “Penny Lane” stands in marked contrast to Lennon’s surreal and somewhat pained memories. While McCartney’s song more or less says, “I don’t understand these people,” Lennon’s says, “These people don’t understand me.” In this sense, these two songs capture, better than anything else the Beatles ever released, the psychological differences and opposing world views of Lennon and McCartney.



No single before or since has ever challenged the listener as much as “Strawberry Fields Forever.” Its construction of two separate mixes combined with loopy sound effects, backward tape splices, false endings, string arrangements and, ironically, a Salvation Army-style brass band have kept listeners engaged for a quarter century. Amazingly, it never sounds forced or phony, thanks mostly to Lennon’s autobiographical and self-revealing lyrics. Drugs would continue to provide warped inspiration not only to the Beatles, but to practically every other pop group of this time, but never again would one song reveal so much about the character of its author.

### MARCH 1967 #1 SOMETHIN’ STUPID—NANCY AND FRANK SINATRA

It was a #1 single for four straight weeks and Frank Sinatra’s first gold record, but Sinatra fans seem to thrive on belittling this song. Despite anybody’s best efforts to reduce the value of the recording, though, “Somethin’ Stupid” remains a pop classic. Although it is hardly representative of Frank’s best work, it is a pretty melody that benefits greatly from the charm of his daughter’s harmony.

Other parent-child duos have charted, but they almost always miss the intended mark by a mile. Neil Sedaka’s treacly and embarrassing duet with his daughter Dara on “Should’ve Never Let You Go” serves as an excellent comparison. The Sedakas set up an inescapably romantic encounter that is at once maudlin and inappropriate to any listener who is aware of the parent-child relationship. The Sinatras avoid this entirely. “Somethin’ Stupid” works on either a romantic *or* a parental level. Perhaps it was unintentional, but the song could easily be interpreted as a father and daughter awkwardly overcoming generational differences. Singing literally every note in tandem, the father-daughter duo sounds simply charming. You can almost hear their eyes sparkling as they harmonize together, taking pleasure in the simple act of sharing an important moment.

Although it wasn’t really necessary, Nancy Sinatra’s youth revalidated her father to a younger audience, making him reachable for adolescents and teenagers. Like the Eveready bunny, Frank Sinatra’s career just kept going and going. As his legacy continues, an entire generation of baby boomers weaned on rock and roll is finally ready to appreciate the enormous talent and catalog of the greatest “saloon singer” of any age.

### MARCH 1967 #1 HAPPY TOGETHER—THE TURTLES

In their younger days, the Turtles went through a number of mostly unsuccessful incarnations before they achieved their moment of stardom. Originally, they were a surf-rock outfit from Los Angeles who called themselves the Nightriders, later changed to the Crossfires. Next, they abandoned surf rock for a loopy brand of acoustic folk and renamed themselves the Crosswind Singers. Once the Byrds became a phenomenon on the West Coast by electrifying a Bob Dylan song, the Cross-



wind Singers once again sensed the winds of change and headed off in a modified direction. Copying the formula the Byrds had used, they recorded their own jangly versions of Dylan tunes. Initially, they planned to go as far as calling themselves the Tyrtles, a rather obvious reference to their source of inspiration, but ultimately decided to stick with the traditional spelling. Although it is difficult to determine whether it had any degree of effectiveness, the Turtles also initially pretended that they were English, hoping the ruse would give them an edge at a time when popular American bands were in short supply and faced even less demand. “It Ain’t Me Babe” contained enough of the spirit of Dylan’s original and enough of the Byrds’ musical ideas to propel it to #8 in the summer of 1965. A pair of mediocre singles (“Let Me Be” and “You Baby,” both written by P.F. Sloan, a founding member of the original Grass Roots and the author of Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction”) followed it onto the Top 40, but the group’s next releases barely charted at all.

It looked like the Turtles had used up their allotted fifteen minutes of fame, so the band’s rhythm section of Don Murray (drums) and Chuck Portz (bass) decided to pack it in. They were replaced by Johnny Barbata (later of Jefferson Airplane/Starship and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young) and Jim Pons (ex-member of the legendary garage band the Leaves), who augmented the original lineup of Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman (vocals), and Al Nichol and Jim Tucker (guitars). Next, an active search began for new material.

Considering how ideally the amusing lyrics of “Happy Together” fit with the oddball humor of singers Kaylan and Volman, it’s surprising to learn that they didn’t write the song, but found it through their production company. Staff songwriters Gary Bonner and Alan Gordan wrote the playful words and addictive melody while the Turtles’ cleverly constructed harmonies and instrumental arrangement brought the song to life. “Happy Together” became a #1 hit for three weeks and salvaged their slumping career, setting them on a revitalized path to international stardom.

## MARCH 1967 #2 A LITTLE BIT ME, A LITTLE BIT YOU—THE MONKEES

Hey, hey, we are the Monkees,  
 You know we love to please,  
 A manufactured image  
 With no philosophies...  
 The money’s in, we’re made of tin  
 We’re here to give you more.  
 —from the Monkees film *Head*

**T**he controversy that plagued the Monkees, notably that they didn’t play their own instruments, broke wide open in early 1967. To put this in perspective, it’s important to realize that the Monkees were an invention, a fictional band created for a sitcom. There really never was a “Monkees” at all—that is, until they started having #1 hits. Then, to be sure, they became a band that happened to have a TV



show. So the whole point of whether or not they played on their own songs was moot until a segment of their audience (and the press) confused the fact with the fiction.

The truth was obviously skewed when the media started criticizing the Monkees for not “paying their dues.” Resentment abounded among self-righteous critics that a band could be handed success on such a grand scale without suffering, but for two albums the Monkees remained inured to these bizarre complaints. Then all hell broke loose when, during an interview, Mickey Dolenz offhandedly stated that, because of tight filming schedules, the Monkees couldn’t record their own backing tracks. The Monkees became a critical anathema. Mike Nesmith, a talented guitar-

ist/songwriter and a member of the group, responded by saying, “It was like suddenly the press getting very angry that Raymond Burr was not really practicing law or that Ben Casey wasn’t making house calls. We were actors in a TV show. Period.” Even Nesmith overlooked the fact that the music had usurped the show. Besides, Ben Casey and Raymond Burr weren’t making hit

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1967	#2
DEDICATED TO THE ONE I LOVE— THE MAMAS AND THE PAPAS	

records. Meanwhile, Don Kirshner, their musical director, denied all allegations.

A battle for artistic freedom ensued, led by Nesmith. Executives from the TV show were mortified by the entire debacle; they wanted their actors back. Eventually, the smoke cleared, Kirshner was gone, and the Monkees’ next single became the issue at hand. Nesmith chose producer Chip Douglas, and their third single, “A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You” was issued. The B side, “The Girl I Knew Somewhere,” was written by Nesmith and featured a performance the Monkees recorded themselves. Their subsequent third album, *The Monkees Headquarters*, became a group effort with minimal outside assistance. It even featured a performance of Dolenz’s drum lessons! Although it sold only half of what their first album, *Meet the Monkees*, did, it still reached #1 without the inclusion of the single or the B side.

“A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You” was the Monkee’s second consecutive hit single written by Neil Diamond. A rhythm-driven dance song sung by Davey Jones, it’s about compromise, which from the Monkees’ point of view must have seemed entirely appropriate.

Postscript: “The Girl I Knew Somewhere” charted in its own right, reaching #39. Kirshner eventually found some cartoon characters who were more inclined to cooperate with his demands. He formed the Archies and with the song “Sugar, Sugar” had one of the biggest-selling singles of all time, more than any single Monkees record.

## MARCH 1967 #4 BERNADETTE—THE FOUR TOPS

This was the third-generation offshoot of “Reach Out I’ll Be There.” The fundamental difference between “Bernadette” and its sound-alike predecessors is in the directness of the lyrics. The subject is still desire, but now we know the name of the targeted passion and the cause of all this discomfort. The protagonist is a man





who has found everything that any man could ever hope for in love, and apparently that is the problem. To be polite and to give human nature the benefit of the doubt, maybe it's her charming personality that has the entire male half of the human race running to her door and propositioning her, but judging from the agitated state of Levi Stubbs's vocals, it sounds like something more than her beguiling sense of humor that is worrying him. Is Bernadette leading our poor hero on and making him miserable in the process?

Once again, the extracted meanings stem more from Stubbs's impassioned delivery than from the lyrics themselves. In the hands of a lesser singer, "Bernadette" would sound like nothing more than the rantings of a jealous misanthrope who needs to own the object of his desire. *She* would be the problem. Instead, Stubbs sings as though *he* is the problem. All he can do is hope that she reciprocates. He will never be able to appreciate the sum total of his perceived riches until she does. With her, he *has* everything. Without her, he *is* nothing. It is the ever-elusive peace of mind that plagues him, but from the sound of things, he might as well go bang his head against a tree.

Believe it or not, a few more great-grandchildren of "Reach Out I'll Be There" were cut (notably "Seven Rooms of Gloom") before the Four Tops embarked on a rather strange attempt to score hits with cover versions of songs by the Left Banke ("Walk Away Renee") and Tim Hardin ("If I Were a Carpenter"). Neither song suited them particularly well and might have been recorded because of the deliberate work slowdown initiated by the songwriting and producing team Lamont Dozier and Eddie and Brian Holland. Money problems arose between Holland-Dozier-Holland and Berry Gordy, and they stifled their output hoping for a better deal. This left the Four Tops in an awkward position that only became worse when it was decided that the producers would leave the label.

When Holland-Dozier-Holland departed Motown on less than amicable terms, they left the Four Tops in a bit of a lurch. They had become so deeply identified with the production and songwriting team that observers were curious to see what steps they would take to survive. Unlike the Temptations, they could not adapt easily to psychedelic topics or social issues. Their *Still Water* album, which was a chain of thematically linked songs subtitled "Love," "Peace," etc., was as close as they got to contemporary, but it didn't fare particularly well commercially. When Motown was ready to move west in 1972, the Four Tops opted to stay behind.

Their next affiliation was with Dunhill Records, which yielded two quick Top 10 hits—"Keeper of the Castle" and "Ain't No Woman (Like the One I've Got)"—before the group disappeared from the charts for a while. Still, their story didn't end. The '80s saw them aligned with the disco-affiliated label Casablanca and immediately caused their old fans to expect the worst. Surprisingly free of disco clichés, "When She Was My Girl" charted at a very respectable #11.

**In the hands of a lesser singer, "Bernadette" would sound like nothing more than the rantings of a jealous misanthrope who needs to own the object of his desire.**





Their return to Motown for the twenty-fifth anniversary television show proved the symbiotic role that the Four Tops and Motown played for each other, when their good-natured but still very competitive sing-off with the Temptations proceeded to steal the show. After forty years, the Four Tops are still ticking.

### MARCH 1967 #4 THERE'S A KIND OF HUSH—HERMAN'S HERMITS

**P**eter Noone was a child actor from Manchester in a popular English TV series called *Coronation Street*. His ambitions leaned toward singing as well as acting, and he soon joined a local band called the Cyclones, soon to be the Heartbeats. For no particularly good reason, they later changed the name again to Herman's Hermits. This had no real effect on the band's status, though. Audition after audition was fruitless—until they contacted Mickie Most, a successful producer who eventually worked with the Animals, Donovan, and Lulu, among others. Their subsequent first single, "I'm into Something Good," written by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, was released on MGM and became an international hit. Overnight Noone became "Herman," and a remarkable string of hits followed. The fact that they sold more than seventeen million records and had nine consecutive Top 10 hits says nothing for their talent, but it sure says plenty about their popularity. Perhaps Herman's Hermits are perceived as lightweights today, but the talents that combined to make "There's a Kind of Hush" what it is transcended the one-dimensional nature of the band and certainly came up with a keeper.

"There's a Kind of Hush" was their last Top 10 single. Considering the number of studio musicians who have since claimed (or confessed) to play on Herman's Hermits records (Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, et al.), it's hard to say who did what, except that Noone did sing. It is a remarkable pop confection, with full orchestration that weaves effortlessly around the band and the harmony vocals. The mixing job, in particular, deserves special mention. Drastic volume changes for individual instruments can destroy a mix. Here, instruments come to the fore at the perfect time and fade back unobtrusively. Strings, horns, and percussion each have specific moments in which they stand out but otherwise remain supportive to the overall sound. All in all, "There's a Kind of Hush" is a perfectly agreeable song with excellent arrangement and production.

### MARCH 1967 #9 I NEVER LOVED A MAN (THE WAY I LOVE YOU)— ARETHA FRANKLIN

**A**retha Franklin was born on March 25, 1942, to the family of the Reverend Clarence L. and Barbara Franklin. While the large majority of black vocalists who came of age in the '50s were introduced to singing through their exposure to gospel music, Franklin and her siblings were completely immersed in it. With a father who would become one of the most renowned ministers of the Baptist faith



and a mother who had extraordinary talent as a gospel singer, Franklin found in religion not only an expressive outlet, but an overwhelming life force that touched every aspect of her existence. Her mother, for reasons that remain zealously guarded, left the family when Franklin was only six and passed away four years later. Her father, whose reputation as a sermonizer caused him to be in great demand, was called on to speak all over the country, and he often left his children in the care of such famous associates as gospel legends Marion Williams and Mahalia Jackson. When you consider that and the family's steady stream of guests—such as Dinah Washington, Lionel Hampton, Sam Cooke, Art Tatum, and Clara Ward—the musical development of the Reverend Franklin's children would seem to be a matter of course.

By the age of twelve, Aretha and her sister Erma were singing in a gospel quartet that was directed by the Reverend James Cleveland. Soon, she was traveling around the country as a featured vocalist in her father's revivalist shows. When back home in Detroit, she would perform at her father's church and impress the congregation, which included such future members of the Motown family as the Temptations, the Vandellas, the Supremes, and the Miracles, earning her a reputation as Detroit's most gifted musical talent. When her friend (and secret heartthrob) Sam Cooke took the plunge from religious to secular singing and became wildly famous, Franklin thought she could follow a similar path. If Berry Gordy had started his Motown record label earlier, it surely would have featured the vocal talents of Aretha and Erma Franklin. As it was, Gordy was still formulating his vision in 1958 and, more relevantly, Franklin's promising career became suddenly sidetracked when, at age fifteen, she discovered that she was pregnant.

It took a few years for her to reorganize her life and, with the blessings of her family, set out for New York City in search of recognition as a pop artist. In practically no time at all, she was brought to the attention of John Hammond, a living legend who over the course of his tenure at Columbia Records would sign artists as diverse and chronologically distant as Billie Holliday, Count Basie, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen. In 1960, he signed Franklin. Though Columbia was willing to forego its standard procedure of strictly categorizing its artists, Franklin had trouble finding the proper niche. Neither jazz nor pop nor straight blues nor standards suited her exclusively, and when the label mixed them all together, her image lacked continuity. Her stay at Columbia yielded only one Top 40 single, 1961's "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby with a Dixie Melody." The rest of her material was known by parts of the jazz and R&B cognoscenti but remained lost on the

### GREAT MISSES

MARCH 1967

#4

I THINK WE'RE ALONE NOW—  
TOMMY JAMES AND THE SHONDELLS

**By the age of twelve, Franklin and her older sister Erma were singing in a gospel quartet that was directed by the Reverend James Cleveland.**



**Over six years  
and numerous  
albums,  
despite many  
high points,  
nothing of note  
happened in  
her career, and  
her contract  
with Columbia  
lapsed.**

general public. Over six years and numerous albums, despite many artistic high points, nothing of note happened in her career, and her contract with Columbia lapsed.

By the time Franklin signed with Atlantic Records, she was practically bursting. After holding back on her naturally emotive style, she was fully prepared to pour every ounce of feeling that was humanly possible into her material. Jerry Wexler was familiar with her previous work and was eager to begin work with her, as well, but he wanted to set her up in new surroundings away from the spit and polish of the New York City studios. His recent work for Wilson Pickett at Fame Studios in rural Muscle Shoals, Alabama, made his choice of location obvious. Although the Muscle Shoals session musicians were mostly white, Wexler deliberately attempted to make sure that this first session would be integrated. As it turned out, everybody in the room was white. Franklin and her often overbearing manager/husband, Ted White, arrived at the studio, and the recording process began. Things soon deteriorated, however, when White drank whiskey with a few band members and got into an argument about racial slurs. The incident continued through the night and ended with White leaving Muscle Shoals in a huff and taking Franklin with him. Perturbed by the absurd turn of events, Wexler resigned himself to review the one song that was completed before the disaster, and he was stunned to discover that it may have been one of the best recordings he ever took part in. "I Never Loved a Man" was—perhaps accidentally, perhaps not—a wonder of self-analytical musings on the singer's marital situation. The rural funk that the band provided gave Franklin the most sympathetic support she had yet received. After this most incongruous beginning, her career as the most successful solo female artist of a generation was under way.

## **MARCH 1967 #10 JIMMY MACK—MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS**

**A**fter releasing "Dancing in the Street" in the summer of 1964, Martha and the Vandellas found themselves thoroughly supplanted by their label mates, the Supremes. Literally every Top 40 hit the Supremes had through 1968 was written and produced by Lamont Dozier and Eddie and Brian Holland. Before the Supremes usurped them, this team had originally worked its magic for Martha and the Vandellas, and in 1965 they returned briefly with "Nowhere to Run." This soulful, powerful song certainly was not appropriate for the more sublime Supremes; it took a singer with the energy of Martha Reeves to get the song across. While it featured the awesomely powerful rhythmic drive of the Motown session musicians at their best, "Nowhere to Run" was hampered by a monotonous melodic line that never really allowed Reeves to break out in conjunction



with all that energy that percolated behind her. Quite literally, the melody left her with nowhere to run. The song was still strong enough to garner public support, and it broke the Top 10, but the stigma of being second to the Supremes still lingered.

Two good singles featuring other producers followed—“You’ve Been in Love Too Long” and “My Baby Loves Me”—but they only confirmed the group’s status as also-rans when neither record reached the Top 20. With their Midas touch, Holland-Dozier-Holland returned to salvage the situation with another composition that was originally intended for the Supremes. Although Reeves felt slighted by being offered second-hand material, she had no cause to complain when “I’m Ready for Love” broke the Top 10.

“Jimmy Mack” had been recorded at an earlier session but was shelved for a number of months, presumably because it bore a similarity to whatever contemporary disk the Supremes were working on. By 1967, though, the girl-group trend was all but dead. With the emergence of a soul diva like Aretha Franklin and a sophisticated chanteuse like Dionne Warwick, the music of the Crystals, the Ronettes, the Chiffons, et al., seemed positively old-fashioned. It was in this progressive atmosphere that Motown eventually released the undeniably anachronistic “Jimmy Mack.”

As if to prove that some things never change, “Jimmy Mack” became a Top 10 hit and today is arguably the most remembered of all the hits by Martha and the Vandellas. Times and styles changed drastically, and then changed drastically again, but for some reason “Jimmy Mack” retains its popularity. It’s a perfect example of a record that immediately triggers a nostalgic response. Its appeal, by virtue of the fact that it was released out of time, is timeless. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the career of Martha and the Vandellas. After a few years devoid of any significant hits, they officially disbanded in December 1972.

**It’s a perfect example of a record that immediately triggers a nostalgic response.**

## APRIL 1967 #16 FRIDAY ON MY MIND—THE EASYBEATS

In the mid-’60s, Australia was flooded by the same wave of British bands that America was. Add to that the more or less obvious influence that American rock and roll had on Australian musical taste, and you end up with a country that had little support for indigenous musical talent and whose musicians developed a confidence complex. This changed when the Easybeats became megastars on their home continent. Ironically, each of the bandmembers was a first-generation Australian whose parents had moved to Sydney from various parts of Europe. In 1963, they lived in a youth hostel and formed the band, which developed in the image of the English bands. A string of hits on their home turf made them the antipodean Beatles, something that didn’t sound too appealing to either Europe or the United States. Empowered by their Australian success, however, they headed



for England to work with producer Shel Talmy, who was already well-known because of his work with the Who and the Kinks. The Easybeats expected him to give them the overseas credibility they coveted.

Full of confidence, piss, and vinegar, they cut “Friday on My Mind” for their first international single. Whap! The song packed enough vitriol and youthful resentment into its verses to anger anybody over thirty who could understand it, thus guaranteeing its popularity among teenagers. It also had a chorus that miraculously and immediately released all of this tension into a joyful celebration of Friday night. With the rollicking energy of its double-time beat and relentless guitar riffs, “Friday on My Mind” became the worldwide youthful anthem of antiauthoritarianism. It was a hit in the U.S. (#16), the U.K. (#6), and especially in Australia, where it was #1 for eight weeks. Follow-

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1967 <u>THE HAPPENING</u> —THE SUPREMES	#1
APRIL 1967 <u>DON'T YOU CARE</u> —THE BUCKINGHAMS	#6
APRIL 1967 <u>MY BACK PAGES</u> —THE BYRDS	#30

up releases failed to make any impact in America, and the group disbanded in 1969. Songwriters Harry Vanda and George Young stayed together and achieved moderate success in the late '70s as Flash and the Pan, and they later boosted Young's younger brothers, Malcolm and Angus, to stardom by producing albums for their heavy metal band, AC/DC.

## MAY 1967 #1 RESPECT—ARETHA FRANKLIN

There are hundreds of reasons to praise the talents of Aretha Franklin, but what impresses me the most is the extraordinary range of her emotional palette. With equal conviction, she can portray the ultimate victim of love, i.e., someone who is at the total mercy of an abusive partner, or the self-assured and dominant vixen queen. Both are well within her grasp, and she can move from one to the other without any sense of contradiction. She made this obvious right off the bat, once she signed to Atlantic Records. Her first hit single, “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You),” portrays her as a woman trapped by her heart (or maybe her libido) while her second single, “Respect,” has her fully in control of the situation with a confidence that was startlingly frank for a mid-'60s female. It was powerful enough when sung by its author, Otis Redding, but once Franklin sang it from a woman's perspective, the lyrics resonated with an undercurrent of additional meanings. In her version, respect means much more than reasonable consideration. The way Franklin sings it, her demand for respect is more than simply economical, it is also sexual. What *else* could it mean when she tells her hapless lover to “whip it to me when I get home”? The chorus of “sock-it-to-me, sock-it-to-me, sock-it-to-me, sock-it-to-me” leaves little room for misinterpretation. She is requesting—no, demanding—sexual equity. The climactic moment is the break that was not even part of the equation when





Redding recorded his version. “R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Find out what it means to me. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Take care of T.C.B.” Good God, her lover had better be prepared to take care of business. Her forwardness is both entertaining and intimidating, not to mention that it may have single-handedly fast-forwarded the women’s movement by a decade. Add to this the civil rights repercussions, and you’ve got one hell of a provocative song here. I haven’t even mentioned yet that this is probably one of the most exciting and brilliant performances of the ’60s, bar none. With her track record of more than three full decades of chart history, Franklin has surely risen to the pinnacle of pop superstardom, but I’d bet that even if “Respect” was her only hit, her status as the reigning “queen of soul” would remain.

## MAY 1967 #1 GROOVIN’—THE YOUNG RASCALS

**A**s music styles changed, the Italian-American pop music phenomenon that existed in the Northeast required periodic updating. Dion gave way to Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, who in turn were replaced by the Young Rascals. Like their forebears, the Rascals were influenced by rhythm-and-blues and doo-wop, but unlike many of the R&B-crazed English bands, their sound emulated more than imitated. The assimilation was natural enough because urban areas on the East Coast often contained Italian-American neighborhoods which bordered on African-American ones. As a result, biracial vocal groups were quite common. This familiarity gave the Rascals a much-needed edge over their foreign competition.

Eddie Brigati worked as a member of Joey Dee and the Starlighters, a biracial group that hit it big with “Peppermint Twist” in 1961. A few other lesser-known hits and regular gigs at the Peppermint Lounge in New York City helped keep work fairly steady over the next few years for the Starlighters. A few personnel changes brought keyboardist Felix Cavaliere and guitarist Gene Cornish into the fold. Once the English Invasion established itself, though, Dee was automatically rendered into an oldies act. Facing obsolescence, Brigati, Cavaliere, and Cornish decided to jump ship and team up with their friend Dino Danelli, who was an experienced drummer. Naming themselves the Rascals (soon to be amended to the Young Rascals, only to eventually change back to the original moniker), they played the metropolitan New York club scene with a rootsy blend of rock and soul that served as a tonic for the more commercial British sound that was everywhere.

While playing one such gig at a Long Island nightclub called the Barge, the group was noticed by Sid Bernstein,

**Like their forebears, the Rascals were influenced by rhythm-and-blues and doo-wop music, but unlike many of the R&B-crazed English bands, their sound emulated more than imitated.**



Whatever  
was in the  
water (or in  
people's pipes),  
"Groovin"  
nicely captured  
the mood of the  
times.

a promoter who would be remembered mostly for arranging the Beatles' upcoming Shea Stadium appearance. He was initially put off by the Rascals' stage costumes of striped knickers, Peter Pan collars, and half-length ties, causing them to look for all the world like a bunch of outdated and overgrown school-yard brats. Still, after witnessing a searing set that left the audience drenched in sweat, Bernstein was on his way to managing the band.

When the Beatles played at Shea Stadium on August 16, 1965, he made sure the scoreboard flashed with the then-indecipherable message "The Rascals Are Here!" A bidding war ensued that was eventually won by Atlantic Records, which promptly issued the group's first single. "I Ain't Gonna Eat Out My Heart Anymore" contained the best aspects of the Young Rascals' R&B sound, but was somewhat subtle in its approach and stalled at #52. Their next release soon righted that. They covered "Good Lovin'," a minor hit (#82) for the Olympics the previous year, with a vengeance by flaunting all the pent-up energy of their live shows. It featured a beat that was, if imaginable, even more raucous than the Contours' "Do You Love Me," any of the Isley Brothers' rave-ups, or even the Olympics' original. The band's playing chops and feel for its material was immediately apparent to everybody who heard the record, except the band itself. Initially, they hated the recording and even denied it was theirs—that is, until it reached #1. The somewhat flimsy "You Better Run" and the rock steady "I've Been Lonely Too Long" both followed, and each cracked the Top 20. In an attempt to keep up with the mellowing times, Cavaliere and Brigati tried to downplay the hard edge of most of their material and modernized their sound by writing a gentle ballad to a lazy Sunday afternoon called "Groovin'."

Postscript from the "Things That Make You Go Hmm" Department: Did you ever wonder why so many songs from 1966 and 1967 celebrate the art of doing nothing? Let's see, there's the Lovin' Spoonful's "Daydream," the Rascals' "Groovin'," Spanky and Our Gang's "Lazy Day," Cyrkle's "Turn Down Day," the Beatles' "I'm Only Sleeping".... It was more or less for that reason that Atlantic's Jerry Wexler despised "Groovin'," feeling that the Rascals would blow all of their hard-earned credibility with the R&B market. Instead, the record took only four weeks to reach #1, and it stayed there for another four weeks. The plaintive yet relaxed harmonica combined with a conga rhythm and ethereal harmonies for a record that believably evokes fresh air, green grass, and warm sunshine. A few chirping parakeets make sure the point isn't missed. Whatever was in the water (or in people's pipes), "Groovin'" nicely captured the mood of the times.

## MAY 1967 #3 SHE'D RATHER BE WITH ME—THE TURTLES

In a short time, the music scene would change enough to render a pop confection like "She'd Rather Be with Me" as pointless pap unworthy of critical at-



tion. The release of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and the burgeoning San Francisco scene would see to it that anything as blatantly commercial as "She'd Rather Be with Me" would be relegated to the realm of "bubblegum" music. Luckily, the Turtles released the song before the distinction was well-defined. Admittedly, they were not breaking new ground here, but it was good to hear a band that had started as an inferior version of the Byrds grow into a first-class pop act in its own right.

Like "Happy Together," "She'd Rather Be with Me" was written by Gary Bonner and Allan Gordon. It also featured a chorus of relentlessly happy "baah baah baah" harmonies, a specialty of sorts for the Turtles. A straight-up optimistic rocker, it makes up in vigor what it lacks in subtle innovation. Unfortunately, the broad appeal of "She'd Rather Be with Me" may have caused some reactive damage to the Turtles' reputation when the group was later categorized with other, less progressive acts. Today, removed from the sociopolitical attitudes of the time, "She'd Rather Be with Me" sounds great, and the Turtles' reputation survives as an underappreciated and highly talented cult group.

## MAY 1967 #15 ALFIE—DIONNE WARWICKE

**A**lfie" was the title song for director Lewis Gilbert's movie of the same name, starring Michael Caine as a womanizing cockney who is forced to confront his carefree lifestyle. The lyrics speak directly to the title character, attempting to modify his behavior. Hal David, the lyricist, offers us an uncynical, existentialist view that makes a much broader statement than his usual scenarios of everyday events. The philanthropy of the words is almost saccharine sweet, but Burt Bacharach's adventurous melody, when coupled with Dionne Warwicke's worldly delivery, makes it all work. This is not as easy as it sounds, and if you care for an example of what happens when it doesn't work, check out "Theme from *Arthur*."

The material that the team of Bacharach-David-Warwicke produced after "Alfie" began to show signs of wear. Their method of constructing songs started to sound as formulaic as it actually was. By 1971, Warwicke left Scepter Records (and in the process Bacharach-David) and maintained a successful though sporadic career (at least commercially), which continues to this day.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1967	#5
<u>SOMEBODY TO LOVE</u> —	
JEFFERSON AIRPLANE	

## JUNE 1967 #1 LIGHT MY FIRE—THE DOORS

**T**he psychedelic phase of pop culture was focusing on flowers, peace, love, and brotherhood, but a backlash began to take place that focused on the darker aspects of the movement. On the East Coast, the Velvet Underground recorded



**No other singer had previously personified his stage image so convincingly as had Morrison.**

noisy sound portraits with sparse, amateurish instrumentation that startled listeners with their imagery of drug addiction and lewd sex. On the West Coast, the Doors focused their music and lyrics on an obsession with death and narcissistic nihilism. The Velvet Underground remained a cult band during its heyday and has since been considered one of the most influential bands of all time. The Doors reached a level of popularity that exposed them (literally, as in the performance and subsequent arrest of Jim Morrison in Miami, Florida) to a broader audience, making them controversial and provocative in their time, but today their influence is somewhat marginal.

The Doors came together when Jim Morrison shared some of his poetry with his friend Ray Manzarek, who was impressed enough to ask him to form a band. Although he had no experience and, initially, no ambitions as a vocalist, Morrison began writing melodies for his poetry and rehearsed them with Manzarek on keyboards, John Densmore on drums, and two of Manzarek's brothers on blues harp and guitar. After a while, Manzarek's brothers decided to walk, thinking Morrison's songs were a little too spaced-out for their taste, and they were replaced by guitarist Robby Krieger. A short-term contract with Columbia records yielded nothing except a few demos, but the band was playing regularly around Los Angeles and acquired a substantial cult following, particularly among women who became entranced by Morrison's shamanistic tendencies and "lizard king" image. One night, Arthur Lee, the leader of L.A.'s seminal cult psychedelic group Love, saw the band perform at the Whiskey A-Go-Go and urged the president of his label, Elektra, to see them. A contract with Elektra soon followed, and the Doors began work on their first album with producer Paul Rothchild.

Their eponymously titled debut album, *The Doors*, features an idiosyncratic mix of moody blues and sharp, edgy arrangements (the band lacked a bass player), paired with Morrison's psychological bouillabaisse of wordplay. The result is an emotionally complex and masterful study in self-obsession. Morrison's tendency to write overtly portentous lyrics would, over the course of the band's career, weigh down many of their later albums and render them as false or, even worse, silly. Before this became a habit, however, the first album sounded fresh—and very different. What's more, no other singer had previously personified his stage image as convincingly as Morrison. Through his persona as a leather-clad demigod, the Doors became rock's first postmodern stylists before the rock movement had even established itself.

"Light My Fire" was written by Robby Krieger, with a few lines added by Morrison ("No time to wallow in the mire...and our love become a funeral pyre"—pretty portentous, wouldn't you say?). At its original length of six-and-a-half minutes, the song has a meandering middle section of organ doodles that plods on endlessly and is mindless enough to turn your brain into goo. Just as you become certain that your melting brain will not withstand the assault, the or-



gan yields to an equally self-indulgent, directionless guitar solo. Edited to two-and-a-half minutes for the single release, “Light My Fire” makes its point without causing your eyes to glaze over. Morrison’s powerful voice sounds both hypnotic and dangerous. One minute seducing the listener, the next terrorizing them, he plays the song for every drop of drama imaginable. In 1967’s *Summer of Love*, “Light My Fire” became an engrossing anthem from the underworld and popularized a side of psychedelic culture that had heretofore gone unacknowledged.

## JUNE 1967 #2 CAN’T TAKE MY EYES OFF OF YOU—FRANKIE VALLI

The songwriting team of Bob Gaudio and Bob Crewe wrote virtually every million-seller the Four Seasons released, including “Big Girls Don’t Cry,” “Walk Like a Man,” and “Rag Doll.” They continued their streak of golden disks with “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You.” In the second half of the ’60s, Frankie Valli didn’t leave the Four Seasons for a solo career; he simply released recordings both by himself and with his band. Either way, Crewe handled the sessions, and “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You” may be his masterwork. I can only imagine the buzz that must have been circulating in the studio while Valli recorded this song. Each second of this arrangement just screams HIT RECORD. While most Four Seasons records had pretensions of being more than just pop songs, “Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You” suffers no such delusion. It is unabashedly pop, from the modified bossa nova beat of the verses to the Vegas-style bigness of the chorus. The sophisticated horn chart gives the syncopated rhythm of the drums and guitar competition for slickness. Valli starts the song in a near whisper, saving his burst of energy for the climactic chorus when he exclaims, “I LOVE YOU, BABY...”

Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons began to falter commercially in 1969, but it remains astounding that they managed to maintain artistic relevance throughout a decade so fraught with change. In the ’70s, they suffered a brief and disastrous stint at Motown Records. Taking a lead from Peter Lemongello (do you remember that guy? He’s a mail order millionaire!), the Four Seasons became a late-night television commercial staple, selling more than a half-million copies of their greatest-hits album on Longines Records. Meanwhile, Valli and Gaudio bought the rights to their recording of “My Eyes Adored You” back from an indifferent Motown. Credited to Valli, it was released as a single on Private Stock Records and eventually reached #1. With the commercial confirmation afforded by his next release, “Swearin’ to God,” Valli’s next move was to form a new Four Seasons. Together, they released the disco precursors “Who Loves You” (yegghh) and “December 1963 (Oh, What a Night)” (double-yegghh)—at 54 weeks, it is the longest running chart single in *Billboard’s* history—on Warner Brothers Records. This commercial rebirth came to a close in 1978 after Valli reached #1 for two weeks with Barry Gibb’s title song for the soundtrack *Grease*.





## JUNE 1967 #2 I WAS MADE TO LOVE HER—STEVIE WONDER

**A**fter “Uptight” gave his career a second wind, Stevie Wonder took to songwriting with the enthusiasm of a teenager who had discovered a latent talent. Often working in partnership with Henry Cosby and Sylvia Moy, he produced mature songs that were usually fully realized before they were presented to the house band. “Travellin’ Man,” “A Place in the Sun,” “My Cherie Amour,” and the brilliantly inventive “Until You Come Back to Me (That’s What I’m Gonna Do)” were all written around this time, although some were held back from release until years later. The potential that everybody sensed lingering just beneath the surface of the twelve-year-old kid was now fully realized. Once considered an adolescent genius, he was now seen as a prolific teenage prodigy.

“I Was Made to Love Her” placed Wonder more comfortably among the soul stylings of such non-Motown acts as Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, and Ray Charles. While most Motown material had a flat-out, four-on-the-floor rhythm that would never let the beat get away, Wonder’s songs had a slinky and subtle rhythm that was much funkier than other Motown singles. Even with Benny Benjamin pounding out the downbeats, “I Was Made to Love Her” didn’t beat you over the head with a 4/4 pulse. It exhibited an elasticity, particularly in James Jamerson’s bass line and Wonder’s deployment of the melody, that just didn’t exist anywhere else at Motown. Segregated by style from the rest of the Motown pack, Wonder was in line to watch his career skyrocket during the next decade while most of his label mates would fall on hard times.

## JUNE 1967 #5 DON’T SLEEP IN THE SUBWAY—PETULA CLARK

**B**y the time of “Don’t Sleep in the Subway,” Petula Clark had already compiled a formidable collection of pop classics. “Downtown,” “I Know a Place,” “My Love,” “Sign of the Times,” “I Couldn’t Live without Your Love,” and “This Is My Song” represent only about half the hits that charted in America. A host of others were popular in Europe, notably England and France, before Clark’s acceptance in America. Just as she had been doing since the onset of the second World War, she proved her ability to survive change. Other English “dolly birds” came and went—including Lulu, Cilla Black, Sandie Shaw, and Marianne Faithfull—and most of them never really even established themselves in America. Clark seemed capable of riding out any wave.

Clark didn’t do much to forward the progressive trend of pop music, and, in fact, she may have impeded its growth. In 1967, though, this wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. With popular music going through a remarkably creative and productive phase, there was nothing at all wrong with remaining focused on the present or being slightly retrogressive. Soon enough, progressive trends would lead popular music down a blind alley and abandon it there, so that by the mid-’70s, the fundamental groundwork that was laid down by commercial pop in the ’60s was all but destroyed. In 1967, stasis was fine because the organism was at its healthi-



est. This is the primary reason why so many songs from 1966-67 are represented here. “Don’t Sleep in the Subway” may be thought of as an unprovocative song in 1967 in the same way that “Please Mr. Please” by Olivia Newton-John was an unprovocative song in 1975, but only one of these could possibly warrant any serious attention.

Like almost everything else Clark recorded after “Downtown,” “Don’t Sleep in the Subway” was written by producer/arranger Tony Hatch. Rather than writing the song linearly, he compiled it from odds and ends of various tunes that were lying around unfinished. Hatch organized the pieces and ended up with a seamless composition that disguises any hint of fragmentation. The lyrics cleverly delineate what goes on in the mind of one-half of a loving couple after a serious blowout causes the other half to walk out.

Rather than wait any longer and face possible obsolescence, Clark began to taper off her career as a singer and wisely moved back into film, appearing in *Finian’s Rainbow* and *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. “Don’t Sleep in the Subway” became her last Top 10 hit in the U.S., rising to #5. A few other hits followed, but by the ’70s, she semiretired to dedicate more time to her family.

## JUNE 1967 #8 LET’S LIVE FOR TODAY—THE GRASS ROOTS

The Grass Roots started as a studio project for songwriters P.F. (Phil “Flip”) Sloan and Steve Barri. Their intention was to record songs in the mold of other West Coast hit makers, such as the Turtles, and in this regard they certainly became quite successful. They originally realized the profit-making potential of their compositions when they wrote the gruff protest anthem “Eve of Destruction.” Originally, they offered it to the Turtles, who decided to pass because of the controversial lyrics, so the song ended up in the hands of Barry McGuire. McGuire’s angry growl suited the ranting lyrics at a time when protest and popularity were synonymous, and “Eve of Destruction” became a #1 hit. This made everyone at Dunhill Records—particularly its owner, Lou Adler—very happy, and it meant that Sloan and Barri had a ready-made home for their next studio project.

The first Grass Roots single remained solidly in the mold of protest music, with a wacky version of Bob Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man,” which they retitled “Mr. Jones.” It didn’t sell well, so Sloan and Barri dipped into their own bag of compositions and recorded “Where Were You When I Needed You.” Through the virtues of overdubbing, the duo handled most of the instrumentation and vocals, and this time the song climbed to #28. When their next release flopped, Sloan and Barri decided that a change of strategy was in order. Hearing word of a Los Angeles bar

**The first Grass Roots single remained solidly in the mold of protest music, with a wacky version of Bob Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man,” which they retitled “Mr. Jones.”**



band called the 13th Floor (not to be confused with Roky Erikson's loopy psychedelic outfit from Texas, the 13th Floor Elevators), they decided to recruit the band into the studio. Warren Entner (vocals, guitar), Rob Grill (vocals, bass), Creed Bratton (guitar), and Ricky Coonce (drums) became the new Grass Roots, with Sloan and Barri maintaining their roles as writers/producers and (now part-time) vocalists.

Meanwhile, a band called the Rokes was tearing up the Italian pop charts. Originally from England, they immigrated to Italy to capitalize on the lack of home-grown Italian beat-group pop. There, they became a phenomenon with a popularity that surpassed everyone else, including the Beatles. Their most gigantic hit was a song called "Piangi con Me" ("Cry with Me"), a song written by two of the bandmembers. Although the Rokes remained virtually unknown in America, the Grass Roots somehow heard "Piangi con Me" and decided to adapt English lyrics to the Italian melody. Denoting the hippie aesthetic of cherishing the present moment and eschewing the future, "Piangi con Me" was stirred into a rewrite of a Drifters hit called "I Count the Tears," and became "Let's Live for Today." It was the first recording made with the new lineup of Grass Roots members, but its success meant that their acceptance was now firmly rooted. Soon after its release, Sloan left the fold, leaving Barri to continue as the group's sole producer. "Let's Live for Today" became a nationwide Top 10 hit and signaled the start of a series of singles that would lead the Grass Roots to become the most popular West Coast pop group of their generation.

## **JUNE 1967 #9 SUNDAY WILL NEVER BE THE SAME— SPANKY AND OUR GANG**

**M**amas and the Papas clones, I suppose. But while the Mamas and the Papas' *beaucoup* of airplay has tended to make their material stale, this Spanky and Our Gang hit maintains some of its original freshness. Yes, it has a melody that is (unfortunately) too tuneful and sweet for most modern tastes, and the backing harmonies sound like a direct lift from the "Gloria" part of "Angels We Have Heard on High." But this lends the tune a breezy air that was perfectly welcome at the height of the Summer of Love.

Despite their sound, Spanky and Our Gang were not California-based, but did most of their recording and performing in the Chicago area. Elaine "Spanky" McFarlane has significant vocal chops and belts the song out with admirable verve, assisted by the technique of double-tracking the vocal line. Because of the pure pop nature of the material, she could have come perilously close to lapsing into Vogues or Lettermen territory ("Turn Around, Look at Me" and "Goin' Out of My Head," respectively), but she steered well clear of the excessive molasses usually displayed by these acts. Four more Top 40 hits followed "Sunday Will Never Be the Same," the most well-known being "Lazy Day" and "Like to Get to Know You," but personnel changes and the deaths of two members (from natural causes)



caused the group to disband. Spanky and Our Gang re-formed in 1975 with a new lineup, but lack of interest led to their subsequent demise. Today, McFarlane is a sometime member of John Phillips's re-formed Mamas and the Papas, singing the parts that once belonged to Mama Cass Elliot.

## JUNE 1967 #14 SOCIETY'S CHILD—JANIS IAN

This song ought to be as dated as Stepin Fetchit movies. Unfortunately, it isn't. The interracial couple scenario that Janis Ian (originally Janis Eddy Fink) invents for "Society's Child" might have changed linguistically ("She called you 'boy' instead of your name") since 1967, but the social discomfort for mixed-race couples remains just about as formidable now as it ever was. Gratefully, it's not so much the topic as the production and arrangement that make the song memorable after all this time.

The drama of the melody comes perilously close to parody, and the harsh production serves to exaggerate these tendencies. Depending on your mood, this can be either laughably hokey or conceptually creative. The organ phrase that ends the song can sound either like a tasty blues run or a misguided adaptation of a Bach organ fugue lifted from *Phantom of the Opera*. Also, the ethereal refrain of "I can't see you anymore, baby" sounds as though Ian is singing from beyond the grave. The stark contrast between the rhythmic verses and the spooky chorus gives the song much of its personality.

On paper, it doesn't seem like it should work, but on vinyl, it somehow does. Maybe this is because Ian was only fifteen years old when she sang this song, and she sounds thoroughly convincing as a passive accomplice to prejudice. By showing how society's pressures can make even the least prejudiced of us modify our behavior in a shameful way, she also makes a valid sociological point that, as I said, unfortunately still holds water. Her arrival signaled the onset of the stereotypical "sensitive singer/songwriter who relies heavily on social issues for inspiration" syndrome. Thoroughly unimpressed with the record business, Ian retired soon after "Society's Child." She resumed recording in 1970 but didn't recover her pace until 1975 with her empathetic paean to homely teenage girls called "At Seventeen." The song reaped two Grammy awards.

### GREAT HITS

JUNE 1967 #19  
**AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH—  
 MARVIN GAYE AND TAMMI TERRELL**

## JULY 1967 #1 ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE—THE BEATLES

Ever since the Beatles crashed upon the American shores in early 1964, it was difficult to discern whether they were perfectly attuned to the zeitgeist of the times or if they *were* the zeitgeist. The Beatles became the arbiters of taste, influencing just about every tier of popular culture. Their release of "All You Need Is





GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1967 #34  
**BABY YOU'RE A RICH MAN—**  
**THE BEATLES**

Love,” though, marks a point when they were definitely influenced as much as they were influential. Just previous, the Summer of Love had been given *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and the entire Western world seemed to feel its effect. The magical feel of the album set the tone for the entire summer. During the so-

called Summer of Love, drugs were rampant, love was “free,” and words like “peace” and “love” began to replace the word “goodbye” in the English language. Even the expression “make love, not war” wasn’t considered corny yet. David Crosby, then a member of the Byrds and the ultimate self-appointed, optimistic hippie spokesperson, summed things up succinctly when he said, “I would’ve thought *Sgt. Pepper* could’ve stopped the (Vietnam) war just by putting too many good vibes in the air for anybody to have a war around.” *This* was the zeitgeist of the summer of ’67, and the Beatles innocently capitalized on it (in 1967, everybody was innocent) when they released the hippie national anthem, “All You Need Is Love.”

The original performance was broadcast live via satellite to more than two dozen countries worldwide and showed the Beatles dressed in full hippie regalia, singing and playing while surrounded by flowers and lots of groovy-looking people. The single is a slightly modified version of the actual transmission. The song announces its intention immediately by opening with a few bars of the French national anthem. Next, it lunges into a laid-back, improbable 7/4 rhythm and lyrics that have a way of saying hardly anything until the chorus rolls around. Then, groovy people all over the world got a chance to sing what they really believed in their hearts to be true. “All You Need Is Love” became the flawed “Battle Hymn of the Flower Power Generation.”

The song is flawed only because it lacks the unquestionable genius of everything else the Beatles released in 1967. Perhaps because it *was* an anthem, the melody sounds plebeian. To the credit of their producer, George Martin, the production is anything but ordinary. His orchestral arrangement gives the vocal portion of the song the melodic support it desperately needs, and the fade-out is just plain whacked-out. He combines snippets of various source material and ties them together almost haphazardly and certainly unconventionally. Trumpet flourishes excerpted from a work by Bach resound in the pattern of a round, eventually giving way to the saxophones playing the opening phrase of Glenn Miller’s “In the Mood.” Finally, the mishmash melts into the string section performing “Greensleeves.” On top of this entertaining racket, the Beatles make vocal references to their early hits “Yesterday” and “She Loves You.” All in all, it’s a strange way for a song to end, but the oddball touch keeps it interesting. The patchwork quilt that results when the pieces are stitched together seems to be saying, “Every-

**The song is  
 flawed only  
 because it  
 lacks the  
 unquestionable  
 genius of  
 everything else  
 the Beatles  
 released in  
 1967.**





body is welcome into the warmth of the fold.” What else could have been more appropriate for a song titled “All You Need Is Love”?

### **JULY 1967 #3 PLEASANT VALLEY SUNDAY—THE MONKEES**

**T**alk about fast, consider this: in September 1966 the Monkees’ first single, “Last Train to Clarksville,” reached #1, spurred by the success of their TV show. Less than one year later, in July 1967, their fourth single, “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” peaked on the charts, although not at #1. The artistic development that took place between these two singles is remarkable by any standard, but particularly for a band that begged for artistic credibility. By this point, the Monkees really had an ax to grind with the press, and as a result should have been compelled to prove themselves. Instead, they came off sounding cool, calm, and collected. Rather than invoke a diatribe against their critics, they recorded a relevant and timely song, written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, which questioned the social mores of suburban America.

This single was released to coincide with the group’s first big American tour. While on the road, the Monkees held jam sessions in various hotel rooms with such luminaries as Jimi Hendrix and Stephen Stills. They became eager learners and culled important lessons from this exposure. Getting the song right was all well and good, but it was just as important to get across a unique perspective while making a statement. Not an easy thing to do, but this song succeeds on all fronts. This is particularly surprising if you consider the strides that popular music had taken by this time and the amount of ground the Monkees had to cover just to catch up. The types of songs on the Top 40 were changing at an exponential rate, and the Monkees were not exactly perceived as innovative. All this makes “Pleasant Valley Sunday” that much more remarkable, with the Monkees serving as unlikely spokesmen for the hippie generation.

### **JULY 1967 #5 A WHITER SHADE OF PALE—PROCOL HARUM**

**I** suppose that any number of songs could qualify as the theme song to the Summer of Love, but none can lay claim quite as justifiably as Procol Harum’s “A Whiter Shade of Pale.” With its oh-so-precious lyrics—which are both as floral and opaque as the most self-indulgent excesses of the ’70s art-rock crowd that it influenced—it was astonishingly original and absolutely perfect for the mid-’60s mystics who observed life through their rose-tinted lenses. If Johann Sebastian Bach were a mid-twentieth-century songwriter from the American South with a predilection for psyche-inducing substances and bad poetry, then “A Whiter Shade of Pale” is probably what he would have come up with. Luckily for him (and us), he was an eighteenth-century European who redefined Western culture by expanding our present-day twelve-tone method of musical notation. Procol Harum can’t claim anything quite as heroic, unless of course you think that their influ-



The Procol Harum that recorded “A Whiter Shade of Pale” ceased to exist almost as soon as the song was released.

ence on the Nice, E.L.P., Yes, Genesis, Gentle Giant, Nektar, Focus, and the Electric Light Orchestra has altered the course of musical history. E.L.O. in particular deserves to be singled out for its grueling, obnoxious, and simpleminded one-off joke of combining pallid symphonic arrangements with tepid rock-and-roll rhythms. I mention this because the organ riff that gives “A Whiter Shade of Pale” its hypnotic appeal is based upon Bach’s Suite no. 3 in D Major—Air on the G String. As many of the above-mentioned bands have proved time and again, most subsequent rock reworkings of classical themes have met with less than startling results, but in 1967 this song was just that: startling.

The Procol Harum that recorded “A Whiter Shade of Pale” ceased to exist almost as soon as the song was released. The original group was hastily thrown together by keyboardist Gary Brooker and nonperforming lyricist Keith Reid who rehearsed and recorded their first composition (“A Whiter Shade of Pale”) and then proceeded to sack some bandmembers. Replacements were hired for live performances and to record their first album. This facelessness combined with some decidedly ludicrous business decisions to thwart the band’s career. The only thread of consistency came from the songwriting team of Brooker and Reid. They carried on against the odds until, in 1977, the “group” was abandoned for lack of interest. To be sure, mid-’70s England, in the full throes of punk rock, was a hostile environment for their high-browed, often pretentious compositions, and they appeared as dated as dinosaurs. After a stint as keyboardist for Eric Clapton’s band, Brooker once again attempted to revive Procol Harum in 1991 with ex-alumnus Robin Trower, but without the special magic of 1967, the band has stubbornly defied all attempts being rekindled.

## JULY 1967 #9 CARRIE-ANNE—THE HOLLIES

Unlike most other English bands that stormed America, the Hollies lacked a well-defined image. They considered themselves to be professional entertainers and for the most part avoided gimmickry and fads. They were pop artists, which to them meant releasing high-quality popular singles. By 1966, though, pop music was changing. Any British bands that were showing signs of longevity were releasing successful albums. Because the Hollies had no discernible identity, they enjoyed only fair to moderate success with long-playing records. They were a Top 40 band, and ultimately this was their strength as well as their weakness.

Of course, when the songs were as good as “Carrie-Anne,” the point was irrelevant. Few bands could hope to achieve the soaring harmonies that the Hollies employed regularly. With a steel drum playing the musical interlude, their instrumental experimentation was as modern as most any other band could claim in 1967.



It would not be long, however, before singer/songwriter Graham Nash felt limited by the artistic expression that a hit single could offer. He felt his talent could be put to better use and began presenting material to the Hollies that was not considered to be commercial. While in California, he met with David Crosby of the Byrds and Stephen Stills of Buffalo Springfield. Both were very receptive to his newer material, and Nash realized that he had found the combination of artists who would help him realize his ambition. Nash was eager to express himself, so when the Hollies decided to release an album of Bob Dylan songs, he announced his resignation from the group.

## JULY 1967 #17 TO LOVE SOMEBODY—THE BEE GEES

**B**efore Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb were the darlings of disco, they were the warblers of woe. In both roles, their popularity was immense, although the blinding success of their disco period has since obscured their earlier fame. In the beginning, even dating back to their years in Australia, they wrote songs in the style that was natural to them. Since they were hardly rockers, these tended to be from the Tin Pan Alley mode, but at least they sounded as though they meant what they were singing, even when it got as weird and convoluted as “I Started a Joke.” The Bee Gees’ disco music was a desperate attempt to remain relevant and lacked the soulful feeling of their best earlier recordings, but it is among the most popular music of all time. It didn’t matter that the contradiction between their earlier stuff and the dance tunes was unresolvable, nor that the Bee Gees were confirmed nondancers and found themselves completely at odds with their new material. Once it caught on, both the public and the band adjusted quickly. “Saturday Night Fever” was an unrepeatable phenomenon, much like the Beatles (“Yeah, yeah, yeah!”) or Frank Sinatra (“Frankie!”), and reflected the times from which it was born. Pity us who lived through it.

The Gibbs became so phenomenally successful and well-known through their role in the propagation of disco that it is often overlooked that they had a previous career as lonely, angst-ridden troubadours. It is hard to fathom the stylistic change that could take the Bee Gees from “New York Mining Disaster 1941” (“Have you seen my wife, Mr. Jones?”) and “Holiday” to “You Should Be Dancing” and “Tragedy,” but the ambition that fueled the creation of their early hits is also responsible for the sudden change to a more lucrative and popular style, once it became plain that their original methods were no longer effective. Their disco phase, particularly their soundtrack additions to “Saturday Night Fever,” had such an impact on the culture of the mid-’70s that everybody from Mick Jagger to Leo Sayer

**The Bee Gees’ disco music was a desperate attempt to remain relevant and lacked the soulful feeling of their best earlier recordings, but it is among the most popular music of all time.**



**"To Love  
Somebody"  
requires no  
excuses. Its  
skillful execu-  
tion barely  
contains a  
passion that  
was not usually  
found in music  
like theirs.**

to Marvin Gaye (!) felt it was necessary to sing in a nerve-rattling falsetto while an entire youth generation became cocaine-sniffing swine wearing rayon shirts unbuttoned to their navels in a mating ritual that was meant to impress some unsuspecting dancing queen out of her dress. Did we really need this? Was this progress? Is it fair that I entered manhood (a loose term) while this cultural lunacy was at its peak? It certainly beat getting drafted, but a contingent of directionless youths on a crusade to salvage our culture resisted disco with a fervor that resembled the sloganeering bred by war. "Disco Sucks!" was the chant, and to this day, many of the people who survived it shudder at the memory of battles fought over "Disco Duck," "Bad Girls," and "(Shake, Shake, Shake) Shake Your Booty." The last straw was when country music began to get into the disco mind-set that lewdness was hip and charted huge hits with songs like the Starland Vocal Band's "Afternoon De-

light," but that's a wide digression and now I don't have a clue how to get back to talking about the Bee Gees circa 1967, except to say that since I was already a closet Bee Gees fan from their earlier days, I harbor less malice toward their disco work. "Fanny (Be Tender With My Love)," "Stayin' Alive," "Night Fever," and "How Deep Is Your Love" were, I thought, not only justifiable recordings, but good, yet I'd have been loath to admit it in 1977. But it is their early recordings that continue to compel me. Their first album, *Bee Gees' 1st*, impressed me immeasurably in my preteen years, and I still love certain songs from it. I (almost literally) cut my teeth while listening to "Every Christian Lion-Hearted Man Will Show You," "I Can't See Nobody," and "To Love Somebody." Although the album was thoroughly stomped by the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the Bee Gees didn't fare as poorly as most other bands who were trying desperately to remain hip. Their orchestral arrangements were special at a time when such things were far from commonplace, and the blue-eyed soulfulness of their best songs rivals anything else in its category, up to and including the Righteous Brothers.

"To Love Somebody" requires no excuses. Its skillful execution barely contains a passion that was not usually found in music like theirs. It was soulful enough to inspire a series of cover versions, some recent, which all fall far short of the compelling believability of the Bee Gees' original. In their hands, it was perfect enough to make me fantasize about being as lovelorn as the singer, and for me, that is the ultimate compliment that any pop song can be paid.

## AUGUST 1967 #1 THE LETTER—THE BOX TOPS

**S**ome songs you just never outgrow. I remember when this single came out, I hurried down to the stationery store in my neighborhood that sold the Top 40 singles, paid seventy-seven cents for my copy, and then raced back home to play it.





I can still remember the blue Mala label and how the vinyl felt stiffer, more like plastic, than most other singles. Then I hurried into the basement of my family's house, where I kept my portable record player, and proceeded to play the song over and over and over. I must have played that record a hundred times. I can even remember the feeling that I had while the song faded to the sound of a jet plane rushing by. I'm not quite sure what it was, but I learned something that day. The song touched me emotionally. Whether it was the words, the production, the melody, or the flat but expressive delivery of the lead singer, the song genuinely moved me. I felt as if I had found an aural means to touch a mysterious longing that I had buried inside and an inexplicably pleasurable sense of loneliness consumed me. "The Letter" somehow generated a feeling of deepness that I was not previously in touch with. It might be hard to imagine how a simple pop song that was only a minute and fifty-eight seconds in length could do this, but I feel confident that most music lovers have had similar experiences. It's both wonderful and a mystery how this works, but that is what makes music more than just a mathematical relationship of tones. Everybody is unique, so for everybody, the song that reaches them will be different. For me, I will always remember that moment of self-awareness, and I will always love the Box Tops' version of "The Letter."

## AUGUST 1967 #10 BROWN-EYED GIRL—VAN MORRISON

Dear Van,

As I sit down to collect my thoughts and reflect on the enormity of your career, I am on a short business trip in a rural area of western Massachusetts. I am spending the night at a tiny country cottage with only a potbellied stove for heat and a forty-year-old radio for entertainment. For company, I've turned the boxy AM radio on and am listening to the local station play its hybrid of classic country music, easy listening, and golden oldies, with occasional garage sale announcements and advertisements for small local businesses. As a fairly remarkable coincidence, they just played "Brown-Eyed Girl." Afterward, the disc jockey announced that today, August 31, 1994, is your forty-ninth birthday. Happy birthday, Van, and thank you for three decades of music that has always been heartfelt and honest.

Considering the length and breadth of material you have recorded, it is difficult to appreciate the enormity of your output. Your recent greatest-hits package highlights the diversity of your work by tracking early punk-blues classics, such as "Gloria" and "Baby, Please Don't Go," alongside more recent Celtic-introspective explorations, such as "Did Ye Get Healed" and "Have I

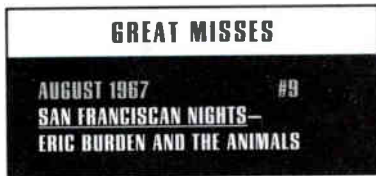
### GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1967 <u>ODE TO BILLY JOE</u> —BOBBIE GENTRY	#1
AUGUST 1967 <u>REFLECTIONS</u> —DIANA ROSS AND THE SUPREMES	#2
AUGUST 1967 <u>BABY, I LOVE YOU</u> —ARETHA FRANKLIN	#4
AUGUST 1967 <u>COLD SWEAT (PART 1)</u> — JAMES BROWN	#7
AUGUST 1967 <u>FUNKY BROADWAY</u> —WILSON PICKETT	#8





Told You Lately” (a megahit with Rod Stewart’s sensitive cover version, but in reality not a whit better than your own original recording). While most other rock-and-roll figures from the ’60s pretended to know the secrets to the fountain of youth, your music always reflected an unresolved longing for self-awareness. Mick Jagger became obsessed with maintaining his youthful image. You worked just as hard to shake it. To see you today in photographs, it is difficult to equate the forty-nine-year-old man with the impatient man-child that sang lead for Them. Really, though, it’s no different than looking at a fifty year old and trying to see the child inside that he once was. Since rock and roll puts what is traditionally viewed as “normal” maturity into a state of suspended animation, it is usually a lot easier to compare today’s surviving rock-and-roll stars with their past. Pete Townshend, Paul McCartney, Ray Davies, Lou Reed...all more or less still fit the mold of their youth. As a fan who doesn’t know you at all except through your music, I have the distinct



impression that your explorations have taken you miles from where you once were. “Enlightenment, I don’t know what it is” is a memorable lyric from a recent album of yours, and of course, I believe you. But the simple desire for enlightenment and spiritual growth seems to have made the quest worthwhile. It’s not the destination but the journey that counts, and though it is only human to

continually fall short of any lasting peace of mind, your desire for personal growth has surely put considerable distance between the existential beauty of your recent work and the terrifyingly confused young man who sang “T.B. Sheets.”

“Brown-Eyed Girl” was your first significant solo recording after the splintering of Them, and already it signified your desire for change. Instead of writing in the present tense and singing about sexual obsession and frustration, you reflect on the memories of those days that have since passed. While you were “sometimes overcome just thinkin’ ’bout makin’ love in the green grass behind the stadium...,” you were inspiring my own desire to fulfill my dreams and cherish the moment. My own memories have a heightened significance whenever I hear this song. We’ve come a long way since 1967. To paraphrase the lyrics, my, how we have grown. A lot has happened since then, but to be honest, I know little and have even less desire to know about the details of your personal life. Our connection has been thoroughly one-sided, and the only conduit has been your music. It’s meant a great deal to me for thirty years, so thank you. And happy birthday.

## SEPTEMBER 1967 #1 TO SIR WITH LOVE—LULU

Lulu was born Marie McDonald McLaughlin Lawrie in a small town near Glasgow, Scotland. She was a precocious child and had started winning talent contests by the age of five. Before the general acceptability of rock and roll, she sang with an accordion band, but once the more modern American teenage music began to become popular in Europe, she joined an electrified band called the Gleneagles.



They changed their name to Lulu and the Lovers at the request of their first record company and a rather raucous but definitely “white” version of the Isley Brothers’ “Shout” became their first European hit. Follow-up releases were less than remarkable, and by 1966 the group disbanded, leaving Lulu to follow a career as a solo performer. To her advantage, record producer Mickie Most began to shape her image and material sufficiently to re-establish her popularity in the European market.

Thanks to Most, Lulu found herself well-known in Great Britain but hardly significant in the U.S. This changed when she landed the plum role of a precocious white teenager (typecast, perhaps?) who taunts and then learns to respect her black teacher (Sidney Poitier) in the James Clavell movie *To Sir with Love*. The importance of this role came into full view when she was asked to sing the title song, written by Don Black and Mark London, which went on to become a #1 hit for five weeks in America. Paradoxically, it never entered the English charts.

Lulu’s mastery of pop and her awkward adaptation of R&B suggested that she was much better suited for material like “To Sir with Love.” At a time when pop music was intended for mass consumption—before the multitudinous cubbyholes that segregate today’s music formats—this song was exposed to both adolescents and adults and appealed more or less equally to both. I can’t say what became of the songwriters, but this song possesses one of the most undeniably pretty and ingenious melodies of the rock-and-roll era. It stood out then, and still does today, because of the clever movement of the melody. It is deceptively complex, swirling up, down, and all around the chord structure, floating and soaring by the sheer will of its ingenuity. Lulu deserves credit for singing the song straight enough to allow the tune to speak for itself, while capturing the respectfulness inherent in the lyric and demanded by the melodic structure.

Songs this well-written were (and still are) a rarity. “To Sir with Love” brings to mind the ideal that was prevalent among Tin Pan Alley songsmiths from the first half of the century, such as Hoagy Carmichael and Cole Porter. Sophisticated and demanding in interpretation, their songs usually demanded respect for the songwriter’s craft and artistry. Lulu’s version of “To Sir with Love” does just that, capturing an excellent performance and arrangement that are both formidable and beautiful.

**The melody is deceptively complex, swirling all around the chord structure, floating and soaring by the sheer will of its ingenuity.**

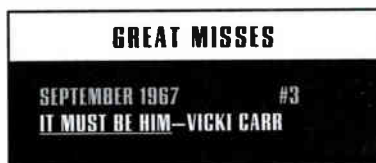
## SEPTEMBER 1967 #4 HOW CAN I BE SURE—THE YOUNG RASCALS

**A**tantic’s signing of the Young Rascals in 1965 signaled a widening of the target audience for each party. Bringing an all-white rock-and-roll group to the mostly black R&B-based label had two interesting side effects. Young white fans who were mostly unfamiliar with Atlantic’s classic R&B acts were now acquainting



themselves with the red-and-black label, while the label's traditional fan base found the Rascals to be appealing and accepted them as bona fide R&B artists. Working with the Atlantic production staff of Arif Mardin and Tom Dowd certainly played a role in bringing out the early blue-eyed soul aspect of the Young Rascals' sound. Also, their experience as a first-class bar band helped them to hold and control an audience when they played cover versions of contemporary

R&B songs such as "Mustang Sally" and "In the Midnight Hour." Over time, though, this began to wear thin, and they felt compelled to compete with the more laid-back and adventurous sounds that were cropping up all over.



The Rascals' first conscious attempt at change was met with spectacular success when "Groovin'" became one of the biggest hits of 1967. Their next record, "A Girl Like You," was released two months later and signaled a compromise by combining aspects of their early R&B sound with their new, mellower approach. It reached #10. In only another two months, "How Can I Be Sure" entered the Top 40 and soon

peaked at #4. With all the grace of a European waltz, the Rascals moved light years away from "Good Lovin'." What a gentle and lilting melody this is. An accordion, a trumpet, and a chiming piano all lend credence to the curiously compelling treatment. By abandoning what they did best, the Young Rascals found their own voice; forceful soul sounds were decidedly out, and sophisticated, pastoral melodies were in.

## SEPTEMBER 1967 #6 (YOUR LOVE KEEPS LIFTING ME) HIGHER AND HIGHER—JACKIE WILSON

I don't quite know how he did it, but just as the world was beginning to forget about Jackie Wilson, he released the best record of his career. Free of the horrible accompaniment that hampered his early recordings, "Higher and Higher" sounds positively modern. Instead of flooring us with vocal pyrotechnics (a technique he often used to a fault), he sings the song straight and soulfully, and his backup band perfectly handles the infectious rhythm. Even the horns and background singers sound appropriate. At a time when Motown was redefining the sound of black music, sometimes at the expense of authenticity, Wilson recorded this soul classic that perhaps owed more than a little to the sounds emanating from the motor city. A laconic, dull cover version was later released by Rita Coolidge, which inexplicably became more popular than Wilson's wonderful original.

The bullet that entered Wilson's abdomen during a scuffle with a confused fan in 1961 was never removed, but his recovery seemed to be complete. He began to



perform live again but usually without the same energy that he had become known for. Poor management and material, as well as a developing drug dependence, once again took their toll, and his return to the spotlight turned out to be short lived. He was soon relegated to touring the oldies circuit with Dick Clark's traveling revue. In September 1975, Wilson had a heart attack and collapsed while onstage in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. He lapsed into a coma and suffered ineradicable brain damage, with his speech and physical abilities terribly impaired. At the time of this accident, he lacked health insurance and allegedly owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in back taxes. Musicians such as Barry White, the Spinners, and the Asbury Jukes contributed and performed benefits to ease his financial burden, but Wilson's problems proved to be insurmountable. He passed away on January 21, 1984.

## SEPTEMBER 1967 #14 DANDELION—THE ROLLING STONES

**W**hat in the world is this song about? It hardly matters, but...aah, never mind. Perhaps some readers will experience hidden meanings from song lyrics, but in this case, I'd rather just bob along to the melody with everybody else. I could ramble on about how Mick Jagger evokes the flowery nature of hippiedom by reflecting on the temporal nature of physicality and the ultimate uselessness of timekeeping, etc., blah, blah, blah, but I'd bore even myself and I don't believe that rubbish anyway. Jagger is probably just frothing meaningless nonsense that sounds good syllabically, and I couldn't care less. It's the unforgettable melody that matters here. By now, the Stones were so steeped in psychedelia that their blues roots had been sublimated to the point of irrelevance. Writing floral pastiches to suit the times was mindless fun and made for great listening while wearing Nehru collars and love beads. "Blow away, Dandelion" didn't have to mean anything so long as it sounded good, and it did. "Dandelion" was a leftover track they recorded around the same time as "Ruby Tuesday," and it contains many of the same ingredients that made that song a hippie classic. Another thing "Dandelion" had in common with its predecessor was the band's intention for it to be a B side to another recording.

For the rest of the world, 1967 might have been an optimistic year signifying the promise of a new lifestyle, but for the Rolling Stones 1967 was hell. Earlier in the year, Jagger and Keith Richards had both been convicted on drug charges. Both received exceptionally stiff prison sentences. After spending a short while behind bars, Richards's conviction was overturned, and Jagger's was reduced on appeal. Their first point of order was to record a tongue-in-cheek celebration of freedom titled "We Love You," which features sound effects (a cell door slamming shut, for instance), backward tape loops, and a drug-crazed Brian Jones wailing again on a new electronic instrument called a mellotron. It also allegedly contains

### GREAT MISSES

SEPTEMBER 1967 #9  
I DID ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC—  
PETER, PAUL AND MARY



backing vocals from John Lennon and Paul McCartney. The extravagant nature of the song is in perfect keeping with the times, and the Rolling Stones released it as their new single. Inexplicably, the experimental “We Love You” stiffed while the more easily palatable B side, “Dandelion,” did just fine. Just as it did with the Stones’ previous single, American radio ignored the A side and instead played the much safer and obviously commercial “Dandelion.” As a result, the group continued to have hits in America, even if they were unintentional.

## OCTOBER 1967 #2 THE RAIN, THE PARK, AND OTHER THINGS— THE COWSILLS

The story of the Cowsills is a shining example of why some people, upon hearing a hare-brained scheme, will usually say, “I wouldn’t sell the farm if I were you.” Bud Cowsill retired from the U.S. Navy in order to dedicate his energies to promoting his four sons in the world of professional music. He also enlisted his wife and four-year-old daughter into the program. Two *other* sons (this guy has a big family) were taken on as road manager, sound engineer, and sometime instrumentalists. He then proceeded to spend his life savings on musical instruments and promotion. In a phrase, he sold the farm. Deeply in debt to the point of burning furniture for warmth in the wintertime and warding off repossession proceedings on his home, he suddenly saw a ray of hope when MGM agreed to sign the Cowsills.

Artie Kornfeld was a songwriter who was impressed not only with the novelty of the singing family, but with their genuine talent. (By the way, this is the same Artie Kornfeld who would eventually become one of the principal organizers of the concert event of the century, Woodstock.) They sang in well-constructed harmony, could play their own instruments, and even wrote much of their own material, a forgotten fact after the subsequent superstardom of their pretend television clones, the Partridge Family. Kornfeld wrote “The Rain, the Park, and Other Things” with someone named S. Duboff, and he produced the group’s first session for MGM. The ray of hope became an abundance of sunshine when the arrangement shot to #2, blocked from the top spot only by the Monkees’ “Daydream Believer.”

Any band  
that in this day  
and age would  
attempt to  
sound as  
optimistic and  
floral as the  
Cowsills did in  
1967 would  
become a  
laughingstock.

Any band that in this day and age would attempt to sound as optimistic and floral as the Cowsills did in 1967 would become a laughingstock. Even for their time, they seemed to represent an absurdly happy and well-adjusted family, not a particularly cool image to convey in the early days of the hippie movement. But this *was* 1967, and “The Rain, the Park, and Other Things” made all the right references: love, flowers, and a peaceful sense of optimism.





The melody is classically brilliant. Exotic instrumentation, including an echoey organ, sound effects, and a very prominent harp, round out the (Five part? Six part? Seven part? More?) harmonies and make the song a guilty pleasure that is effective far beyond the standard pop confection. It may have been gooey, but it was really good goo.

Most of the Cowsills' subsequent sessions were produced by the two eldest brothers, Bill and Bob, who also handled much of the songwriting. "We Can Fly" (#21) and "Indian Lake" (#10) followed "The Rain, the Park, and Other Things." The group's career was capped in March 1969 when their arrangement of the title song from the musical "Hair" sat at the #2 position for two weeks. Bill Cowsill left in May 1969 for a career as a songwriter, and the Cowsills have been inactive as hit makers ever since.

## OCTOBER 1967 #8 A NATURAL WOMAN (YOU MAKE ME FEEL LIKE)— ARETHA FRANKLIN

**A**retha Franklin's Atlantic recordings were the natural extension of the work that was begun when Ray Charles made his first recordings for Atlantic. His innate genius brought gospel vocalizations to popular music by first breaking the self-protective barriers of the R&B charts, then crossing over to the widespread pop audience. When Charles left Atlantic in the early '60s, he opened a void that remained mostly unfilled until Franklin arrived. Franklin's gospel background was more formalized than Charles's and was also more studiously ingrained. Her transition to pop was also less controversial than Charles's had been a decade earlier. On the contrary, once Atlantic wooed her from Columbia and allowed her to sing as she saw fit, she appealed to virtually every audience that heard her. Whether you were a fan of rock and roll, jazz, pop, or R&B, Aretha Franklin was *it*.

Atlantic producer Jerry Wexler came up with the title "A Natural Woman" and asked Carole King and Gerry Goffin to compose something around the phrase. When they returned, they had a finished composition that suited Franklin to a tee. When she sings "You make me feel like a natural woman," her voice conveys not only the knowing earthiness of her sexuality, but also the sanctified purity of religiosity. It is a hymn as well as a song of lust, which is no easy feat. King later recorded her own version on the phenomenally popular *Tapestry* album and performs it admirably, but the double-edged sword of Franklin's interpretation is tempered in the hands of the songwriter. On her best recordings, Franklin's piano playing is as integral to the overall soulfulness as her voice is, and "Natural Woman" is a perfect example of the organic sound that she brings to her material. The sonority of the string arrangement (credited to Art Nardin) adds a sweetness without pilfering the root

**Whether you  
were a fan of  
rock and roll,  
jazz, pop, or  
R&B, Aretha  
Franklin was *it*.**



integrity of Franklin's interpretation, and Tom Dowd's production is as perfectly unobtrusive as it always is.

Franklin's remarkable talents have inspired an endless line of disciples. Any woman (or any man, for that matter) who has since sung with gospel inflections—and these days anybody who doesn't is hopelessly outdated—owes her a debt of gratitude. The entire catalog of popular music has incorporated the sound and feeling that was initially popularized by Ray Charles and then made universal by Aretha Franklin.

## NOVEMBER 1967 #1 DAYDREAM BELIEVER—MONKEES

Give her my autograph and tell her  
It's been nice knowing you  
—“Star Collector” (Gerry Goffin and Carole King)

It was time for Davey Jones to reinvent himself. After such image-reducing songs as “I Wanna Be Free” and “The Day We Fall in Love,” he was finally singing material that was substantive. In “Daydream Believer,” songwriter John Stewart invokes images of domestic bliss derived from dreams and fantasy. It is lyrically opaque even after all these years, but it still begs you to belt it out at the top of your lungs when the chorus rolls around.

Despite the quality of this song, the Monkees' days as hit makers were numbered. One more song followed in the Top 10 (“Valleri,” which Mike Nesmith decried as “the worst single ever made”), another in the Top 40 (“D.W. Washburn”), and then oblivion, until a short-lived reunion in 1986.

Just because the hits stopped doesn't mean that the band no longer released good material, however. They spent the next few months working on the unfathomable but creative movie *Head*, which essentially drove the nails into their commercial coffin. Despite the fact that this movie yielded some of their greatest and most mature material (notably “Porpoise Song” and “As We Go Along,” both Goffin-King compositions), nobody bothered to watch or listen. The Monkees had become so self-conscious that they deliberately made a movie that made fun of the fact that they were making fun of themselves. In the process, a grossly commercial band of slight artistic merit had become a remarkably creative unit with little commercial appeal.

## NOVEMBER 1967 #4 I SECOND THAT EMOTION— SMOKEY ROBINSON AND THE MIRACLES

With an ear for lyrics that was so original it defied logic, Smokey Robinson could make unique phrases sound universal. When an acquaintance accidentally blew the phrase “I second that motion” during a casual conversation, a



lightbulb went off in Robinson's head that started the lyrical formation of "I Second That Emotion." The song proves that not only could he turn a phrase in a clever way, but that he could also be expressive and poetic. He makes the point that he is sincere in his desire for a serious relationship by systematically stating what he does not want: "Maybe you want to give me kisses sweet, but only for one night with no repeat." He goes on to say, by way of a beautiful melody, that he wants nothing to do with anything that might break his heart but, "If you feel like loving me, if you've got that notion, I second that emotion." That is pop poetry incarnate.

Without actually counting them, Robinson estimates that he has written *and published* 1,500 songs and that another 2,500 or so remain unpublished. To me, that's like saying, "I have twenty kazillion dollars." It's an unimaginable quantity. In the '60s, forty-three of his compositions reached the Top 40. He has written and produced Top 40 hits for Mary Wells, the Temptations, Marvin Gaye, the Marvellettes, and a carload of others. His visibility may have diminished in recent years, but he remains a formidable, although enigmatic, presence on the popular music scene.



## NOVEMBER 1967 #11 (THE LIGHTS WENT OUT IN) MASSACHUSETTS— THE BEE GEES

**T**he Bee Gees are some of the most successful hit makers of our era, which is to say, of all time. Before any of this was even a remote possibility, they were a trio of English kids whose family moved to Australia for the promise of a better life. While there, they practiced singing until they became local stars around their hometown of Brisbane. Most of their appeal was with adults who saw them as cute kids working the local circuit with a vaudeville act. Their roots were most definitely not in rock and roll, and about as close as they came to R&B was the Mills Brothers. Their early attempts at songwriting were a basic and primordial stew, but their three-part harmonies and ambitious drive kept them in the spotlight, including appearances on Australian television and radio. Although they earned a recording contract with Festival Records, constant attempts at hit singles failed to yield anything of consequence, so the Bee Gees and their family decided to trek back to England in search of the big time. It wasn't until after plans were made and passage booked that their single "Spicks and Specks" became a #1 antipodean hit, but they decided they had had enough of Australia and continued with their dream of becoming stars in England.

They weren't in England for long before they were signed to a five-year contract with NEMS Enterprises, a partnership formed by Beatles manager Brian Epstein and entrepreneur Robert Stigwood. Stigwood was eager to discover his



own Beatles and hoped that the Bee Gees would provide the ticket. Finally, the brothers had a company with confidence in them, not to mention access to funds. They immediately began to imagine orchestral arrangements for their songs while the label launched an expensive campaign to introduce and promote them to the press. This led to premature performances with a quickly hashed-out program of cover songs for their newfound rock-and-roll audience, including Cream's "Strange Brew" (wince) and a straight-faced rendition of Peter, Paul, and Mary's "Puff, the Magic Dragon" (double-wince, uncontrollable twitch, and a shudder).

"New York Mining Disaster 1941" was a fantasy story that became their first single. Among the hoopla and the Beatles comparisons, it was a hit on both

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1967 I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER— DIONNE WARWICKE	#4

GREAT MISSES	
NOVEMBER 1967 AN OPEN LETTER TO MY TEENAGE SON—VICTOR LUNDBERG	#10

sides of the Atlantic. The surprisingly soulful B side, "I Can't See Nobody," was a precursor of their next hit single. "To Love Somebody" was a perfect record. It signaled a change in style that was not readily apparent from their previous work, but its follow-up, "Holiday," was a flaky number that nonetheless worked because Robin Gibb sounded so *sincerely* flaky. All three singles were culled from the Bee Gees' debut album.

Their second effort was called *Horizontal*, which despite high points, was considerably weaker than their first album. It yielded only one Top 40 single, but that song single-handedly saved them from the sophomore curse and thrust

them into international stardom. "(The Lights Went Out in) Massachusetts" is a mid-tempo, brooding number that seems to tell a self-conscious tale of a disillusioned hippie returning home after a discomfiting spell in San Francisco. It ran counter to the message of the Summer of Love school, but it was also vague enough to avoid cliché or political incorrectness. It wasn't the hippies who were listening anyway. Although the progressive audience did not unilaterally dislike them, the Bee Gees' appeal was squarely in the pop field. Any band with such pristine production values, what with full orchestral accompaniment and three-part harmonies sung in rounds, must have been suspect. It probably didn't help that the Bee Gees sounded about as familiar with Massachusetts as most people are with Antarctica. Maybe their fascination with America was subliminally contagious, but for whatever reason, the song works. The Bee Gees were quickly becoming the most famous quirky band without a niche to suit them.

## NOVEMBER 1967 #26 BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX—GLEN CAMPBELL

Well, satanists, I'm afraid that Glen Campbell is living proof that one of your major tenets doesn't always apply. Campbell was born the seventh son of a



seventh son, but as far as I can tell, he seems to be something less than a bona fide progenitor of evil. In fact, his personable smile can sometimes be so damned ingratiating that he can seem as annoyingly hokey as a typical *Hee Haw* guest. Yep, if he's the best the forces of evil can muster, then I'm confident that I can sleep a bit more easily at night—unless a permanent smile and a habitual penchant for Jimmy Webb songs qualify as a form of possession. Yes, sir, Campbell may be a rhinestone cowboy, but he sure ain't Lucifer's play toy.

**Yes, sir,  
Campbell may  
be a rhinestone  
cowboy, but he  
sure ain't  
Lucifer's  
play toy.**

Campbell became familiar with “By the Time I Get to Phoenix” through its inclusion on a Johnny Rivers album. Jimmy Webb wrote the song, as well as “MacArthur Park” and “Worst That Could Happen,” about a woman he was dating at the time. Judging from the lyrical content of these songs, it must have been one heck of a relationship. The most intriguing aspect of the song is the subtle cry in Campbell's voice, which makes the overt romanticism of the lyrics somewhat more palatable. The string arrangement that accompanies his vocal makes it clear that this is no straightforward country tune, but a pure pop confection that captures a desire that crosses everybody's mind from time to time. If life isn't the way it should be, then why not simply pack up and drive off to an unknown destination? As in James Thurber's “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,” Webb invents a protagonist who does what he wishes *he* had the courage and wherewithal to do. Like the rest of us, though, since such an impulsive move could have seriously affected his career, I'm sure it was nothing more than a fantasy. In reality, he probably made sure to stay home to answer the phone when she called, and they found a temporary compromise for their differences. For a while, though, the thought of driving off must have been intriguing. For the hundreds of thousands of people who bought the record and bought into the lyrical premise, it sure did.

Much too pop-oriented to remain a country-western artist, Campbell made numerous TV appearances on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and his own network TV show in the early '70s, which gave him broad-based exposure as the whitewashed country boy who played a mean guitar/banjo/mandolin/anything with strings on it. His relationship with country singer Tanya Tucker kept him (and her) in the spotlight throughout the '70s, but he has been less visible since their breakup in 1981.

## DECEMBER 1967 #1 HELLO GOODBYE—THE BEATLES

**W**hen the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, passed away from an accidental overdose of barbiturates, the precarious balance of power that existed between John Lennon and Paul McCartney tipped considerably in McCartney's favor. Lennon's own drug use and philosophical tendency to sublimate his ego made him an inappropriate candidate for taking charge of the Beatles' busi-





**By now, well-constructed, highly imaginative, and melodic pop songs were routine for the Beatles and were, at a minimum, expected.**

ness. McCartney, on the other hand, appeared eager to take control and immediately launched the group into a movie project of his own conception, which he felt certain would strengthen and revive their image. *Magical Mystery Tour* was his title for a conceptual film without a plot or a script. The idea was that the Beatles would host a tour-bus journey to nowhere in particular, and that is exactly where this mind-numbingly idiotic movie went. A film about getting a flat tire on the Cross-Bronx Expressway would have been more interesting (and almost certainly more exciting). Critics were tripping over themselves trying to find words that were sufficiently insulting. Compelled to explain himself, McCartney made a statement that sounded like a public apology for his effort, which was strange: how many other creators *apologized* when they missed their mark?

The other effect of McCartney's sudden rise to power was that his songs became the dominant choices for singles releases. With the exception of "Come Together" and, obviously, "The Ballad of John and Yoko," virtually every Lennon-McCartney composition that graced an A side from now on belonged to McCartney. "Hello Goodbye" was the first post-Epstein single. Lennon submitted "I Am the Walrus," a seriously paranoid drug fantasy with a melody that was inspired by a police siren, but "Hello Goodbye" was considered to be the safer choice. If chart position means anything, it was a wise choice as well, since "Hello Goodbye" reached #1 for three weeks while "I Am the Walrus" failed to even crack the Top 40.

By now, well-constructed, highly imaginative, and melodic pop songs were routine for the Beatles and were, at a minimum, expected. Here, the challenging aspect of their creations was absent, though, or funneled entirely into Lennon's B side. Well-constructed, highly imaginative, and melodic pop songs may have been routine, but they were still pleasant to hear, even if you didn't know what McCartney was trying to say. Was he talking about the problems between himself and Lennon? Beats me. Channeling his feelings about the generation gap? That's a reach. Singing about himself and girlfriend Jane Asher? I doubt it. The lyrics were probably nothing more than meaningless hot air, but the music is both memorable and effective. The false ending before the song fades is pure Beatles wit and still sounds as fresh as it did in 1967.

The two sides of this single might have drawn attention to the ever-widening chasm between McCartney and Lennon—and "I Am the Walrus" certainly deserved better than its paltry #56 chart position—but "Hello Goodbye" was as good as it was harmless. Less than their personal best but still better than most, it showed the world that, despite the fact that the Beatles might have lost some of their sanity—and, with the death of Brian Epstein, a great deal of their business acumen—their pop smarts were doing just fine.



## DECEMBER 1967 #2 CHAIN OF FOOLS—ARETHA FRANKLIN

**A**fter Aretha Franklin's husband, Ted White, stormed out of Fame Recording Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, with Franklin reluctantly in tow, producer Jerry Wexler found himself in a bind. It was his idea to bring Franklin south for a sympathetic recording session, and instead an alleged racist comment by an ignorant, horn-playing session man led to an evening of arguments and fisticuffs. With only one complete song in the bag ("I Never Loved a Man"), Wexler was unable to release a single until he tracked Franklin down to finish her vocals on the B side, but she was nowhere to be found. He could hardly believe the quality of the completed song and sent acetates to radio stations. They loved it and played it constantly, but without a B side, there could be no product. In the interim, he waited. Two weeks later, Franklin returned with her sisters and dubbed her keyboards along with the background vocal arrangement, adding the perfect finishing touches to Chips Moman and Dan Penn's "Do Right Woman, Do Right Man." The single was finally released, and Franklin entered the Top 10 for the first time. From that point on, things kept burning. "Respect." "Baby, I Love You." "A Natural Woman." All were recorded in New York at Atlantic's 1841 Broadway studios, since White refused to let Franklin return to Muscle Shoals. To preserve continuity and allow what was obviously a winning mix to prosper, Wexler did the next most sensible thing and flew the musicians to New York. For "Chain of Fools," he also recruited Joe South, the guitarist/songwriter who became well-known after scoring a hit with his own "Games People Play."

With Wexler's excellent taste and reasonably unobtrusive judgments, Franklin's esteem for him grew, while White began to play a lesser role in the making of creative decisions. Considering the Muscle Shoals debacle and his tendency to berate Franklin publicly, this could only bode well for her creativity, and Franklin flourished.

Wexler and Franklin both have fond recollections of their time together, and the resultant product is testimony to the quality of their relationship. While on most all other fronts, pop music was getting floral and oblique, Wexler encouraged Franklin to make records that were direct and transparent. As a result, the majority of her recordings leave little room for interpretation. They speak plainly and with forthright candor and often imply a loose autobiographical honesty. "Chain of Fools" is a prime example of this. Although Don Covay wrote the song with Otis Redding in mind, Franklin sings it as though a spontaneous thought has occurred to her and needs to be conveyed. Her personal life has always been highly private, but enough is known about her abusive relationship with White to reveal more than a modicum of personal experience from her

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1967 #10  
IF I COULD BUILD MY WHOLE  
WORLD AROUND YOU—  
 MARVIN GAYE AND TAMMI TERRELL

DECEMBER 1967 #13  
DIFFERENT DRUM—LINDA RONSTADT

DECEMBER 1967 #23  
TELL MAMA—ETTA JAMES



interpretation of Covay's lyrics. Franklin sings with too much strength and pride to sound like a victim, so she comes off sounding more like an angry accomplice. She seems to be mad at herself for allowing this to happen. "Chain of Fools" speaks of a need for emotional detachment, and through the strength of her voice, it sounds like it is only a matter of time until she musters up the necessary courage. With Franklin, the best material is always the most honest material; "Chain of Fools" sounds as honest and soul-baring as she could possibly have been.



**Chapter  
Five**

**1968-1969**









## JANUARY 1968 #4 I WISH IT WOULD RAIN—THE TEMPTATIONS

Norman Whitfield was fast becoming the top dog at Motown for his production work with the Temptations. In the beginning, he wrote most of their material with lyricist Eddie Holland, of the famed Holland-Dozier-Holland production team. The pair teamed up to write hits as diverse as the funky “Ain’t Too Proud to Beg” and the bizarrely humorous celebration of ugliness called “Beauty Is Only Skin Deep.” For their next single, they developed a musical idea that was written by guitarist Cornelius Grant and came up with the emotionally intense “(I Know) I’m Losing You.” The collaboration between Holland and Whitfield was obviously a productive one, but Holland was expected to concentrate most of his energy on his main charges, the Supremes, so his work with the Temptations was relatively short-lived.

By 1968, Whitfield had found a new collaborator in Barrett Strong, the vocalist on Motown’s first hit, “Money.” Strong became interested in songwriting some time after his brief recording career stalled. Just like Holland before him, he abandoned singing and eventually became Whitfield’s main lyricist. Another occasional collaborator at this time was Roger Penzabene, a lyricist with a penchant for sad love songs. “I Wish It Would Rain” featured overtly morose lyrics and was credited to Whitfield, Strong, and Penzabene.

How many songs are there about walking in the rain to hide the pain, the tears, etcetera? The theme was tired, even in 1968, but David Ruffin’s believable voice managed to salvage the proceedings. His gravelly delivery carries considerable emotion, even when only going through the motions, but here he really puts a lot of himself into the song. Ultimately, “I Wish It Would Rain” sounds less corny than heartfelt. When Penzabene later shot himself over a long-suffering love relationship, it was fair to assume that the words really were meaningful. Ruffin’s powerful performance leaves no doubt and made him the group’s focal point, but this was fast becoming a problem.

Ruffin’s stardom began to go to his head. All five Temptations were capable vocalists, and either Eddie Kendricks or Paul Williams had sung lead at various times, but Ruffin thought he deserved extra recognition. Since other acts had a featured star, most notably the recently renamed “Diana Ross and the Supremes,” he felt that “David Ruffin and the Temptations, featuring Eddie Kendricks” would be appropriate, and he wasn’t kidding. Notwithstanding the moniker’s unwieldy size, not many agreed with him, least of all the other Temptations. When Ruffin refused to share a limousine with the other bandmembers, his dismissal was seriously considered. Ruffin never saw it coming. He thought he was so integral to the overall sound that he would never be considered expendable, but he was

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1968 #3  
SPOOKY—CLASSICS IV

### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1968 #4  
SIMON SAYS—1910 FRUITGUM CO.



wrong. When he deliberately chose to miss an engagement in order to see his girlfriend, the band decided to take action. Unceremoniously, he was handed his walking papers, an action that would eventually become fairly commonplace for the Temptations.

Dennis Edwards, a singer from the Contours, was waiting in the wings and was immediately enlisted to take Ruffin's place. The group taught him the songs and the dance routines as quickly as possible, and in practically no time, he began touring with them. Ruffin, meanwhile, was shocked. In a sad and pathetic flashback to the band's early shows, before he joined, Ruffin would appear at their gigs and jump onstage, unannounced and unwelcome. Eventually, security guards were hired to keep him off the stage. Ruffin began recording as a solo act, but after one sizable hit, "My Whole World Ended," he began to drift into obscurity. Soon enough, Kendricks would be in a similar predicament.

## JANUARY 1968 #8 NOBODY BUT ME—THE HUMAN BEINZ

The third edition of the *Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits* blithely and succinctly describes the Human Beinz thusly: "Cleveland bar band."

Oh. Well, that explains everything. Here's what I know: the Human Beinz come from Cleveland, and they say "no" on "Nobody but Me" even more times (thirty times, then *another* thirty, and then another forty or fifty during the fade-out) than Bill Withers says "I know" on "Ain't No Sunshine" (twenty-six times). Now you can't say that I haven't done any research. That's a pretty awesome statistic and is probably good enough reason to include this song here, don't you think? Or maybe I ought to come up with something a bit more valid. How about claiming that "Nobody but Me" is such an imaginative and fun punk/psychedelic reworking of Chris Kenner's (or Hannibal and the Headhunters' or Wilson Pickett's) "Land of 1,000 Dances" that it surpasses the source of its inspiration?

Of course, the Isley Brothers had the first opportunity to do this, since they wrote and released "Nobody but Me" in the first place. But they blew it, and no-no-no-no-nobody heard it. The Human Beinz added a few more dance crazes (and a few more no-no's, undoubtedly), along with some feedback and a warped fuzz-tone guitar, and proved single-handedly that even though it was 1968, we were still not too cool to dance.

## JANUARY 1968 #25 SHE'S A RAINBOW—THE ROLLING STONES

This single signifies the end of the second stage of the Rolling Stones' career. The first stage, broadly speaking, consisted of the band interpreting U.S. blues while posing (convincingly, I might add) as dwellers on the threshold of all things evil. The second stage was defined by an almost warped acceptance of hippie culture and a struggle to remain relevant among the rapidly changing times. The very fact that the caustic, wary, been-there-done-that Stones might have fallen under



the spell of youthful optimism shows just how powerful the platitudes of the youth movement were. To be honest, though, I think the primary reasons Mick Jagger and his cohorts embraced the “movement” were purely financial and narcissistic. The Stones couldn’t imagine letting themselves become obsolete (who could?), so it was imperative that they absorb the new ideology into their act.

On the heels of the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, the Rolling Stones released their own vastly inferior psychedelic effort, titled *Their Satanic Majesties’ Request*. Although the title made a lame attempt at upholding the Stones’ image as the masters of darkness, the album itself was a meandering mess of hippie rhetoric and rudderless noodling. With the exception of the two songs that were extracted for single release, the album existed as little more than a poor relation to the Beatles’ effort. In fairness, its slipshod quality was largely caused by the Stones’ legal entanglements, which distracted them from their music.

For the third consecutive time, the Rolling Stones released a single whose flip side thoroughly outperformed the intended hit side. “2,000 Light Years from Home” contained an atmosphere of forced futurism, which inevitably dated the song, but “She’s a Rainbow” was another of the group’s wistful period pieces. It was based around a light-classical piano part that most definitely was not played by the Stones’ resident blues/boogie instrumentalist, Ian Stewart, who objected to anything that varied from standard blues changes. Instead of the blues, the song suggests the music of someone like Mantovani, at least until the band enters. Two years ago, a song like this would have been unthinkable in the Rolling Stones’ repertoire. Knowing full well that their demonic image had gone too far—possibly spurring the media and legal backlash that led to their arrests—the Stones seemed to be deliberately holding back on anything demonstrably intimidating or provocative. Once their cases were settled, though, look out: Jagger and Keith Richards were prepared to make up for lost time and most definitely were not about to kowtow to the “petty morals” (an actual quote of Richards’s during his drug trial) of their prosecutors. Upcoming songs such as “Jumping Jack Flash” and “Sympathy for the Devil” made that point quite plain.

These times also were marred by the downfall of Brian Jones. Jones’s time with the Rolling Stones had always been pockmarked with controversy, but his situation, both in the band and personally, seemed destined to end tragically. It was Jones who founded the band and took the initial role of leader. Back then, he named the group, negotiated its first contracts, and decided what material it would perform. As the Rolling Stones’ resident blues expert, he gave the band an aura of authenticity—that is, until Jagger and Richards became visionary songwriters.



Instead of the blues, the song suggests the music of someone like Mantovani, at least until the band enters.



**As strange as it now seems, the further Jagger and Richards ventured from their blues roots, the more important Jones's role as a multi-instrumentalist became.**

Almost at once, Jones felt cut off, and although his fragile ego refused to accept it, he was no longer the bona fide leader of the band. As strange as it now seems, the further Jagger and Richards ventured from their blues roots, the more important Jones's role as a multi-instrumentalist became. Still, his difficult personality, paranoia, and personal problems were exacerbated by his excessive drug intake, until he became simply unbearable to his associates. Although Jagger and Richards resolved their own drug problems (albeit temporarily), a police raid of Jones's London flat led to his arrest and a lingering court case, causing his lawyers to suggest that he not interact with the other Rolling Stones. Jones was on his own. When he did convene with the band, he was barely capable of playing music. The court case made public his "fragile grasp of reality" and "extremely precarious state of emotional adjustment," doing little to boost his almost nonexistent sense of confidence. Tension and paranoia worsened immeasurably when his girlfriend, Anita Pallenberg, grew

tired of his violence and abandoned him for Richards. Although his sentence was waived on appeal and the band was completing work on perhaps the best album of its career, Jones's second bust complicated matters further. It is painfully ironic that while the Rolling Stones were moving back toward the hard-edged blues that Jones specialized in, he was physically and mentally incapable of any significant contribution. In 1969, with a tour looming on the horizon, Jones and the Rolling Stones parted ways. Until Bill Wyman's exhausted departure in 1993, Jones was the only original member who left the band. He never physically recovered or regained his sense of direction. While the Rolling Stones rehearsed new material with his replacement, Jones floundered aimlessly. On July 2, 1969, he was found motionless at the bottom of his swimming pool. Despite all attempts to revive him, he never regained consciousness and was pronounced dead at the scene. The cause of death was determined to be drowning, brought on by an excess of alcohol and drugs, compounded by severe liver degeneration.

## **FEBRUARY 1968 #1 [SITTIN' ON] THE DOCK OF THE BAY—OTIS REDDING**

**O**tis Redding was raised in Macon, Georgia, in the shadow of his hometown heroes Little Richard and James Brown. Originally, he styled himself after Little Richard and won many an amateur show with his impersonation of the flamboyant singer. It was at one of these contests that guitarist Johnny Jenkins, a Jimi Hendrix prototype who has been overlooked by time, first heard Redding and hired him as his featured vocalist. Jenkins had recorded an instrumental with his band, the Pinetoppers, called "Love Twist," which scored regionally and





created a demand for a follow-up. A session was scheduled to take place at Stax Records in Memphis, and legend has it that Redding came along simply to share the drive from Macon with Jenkins. Once there, the session was somewhat of a disaster, and out of desperation Redding sang a pair of songs in an attempt to salvage the last half hour. One of these was the slow ballad “These Arms of Mine,” and it was chosen for release simply because of the dearth of usable material recorded that day. At the time, the session was seen as uneventful, if not a complete waste, and this was only confirmed when “These Arms of Mine” took months to make a modest showing on the R&B charts. Even then, the credit for sales went to a deejay who was given 50 percent of the song’s publishing proceeds as a form of “inducement” for airplay.

From such inauspicious beginnings, Redding would develop into the very personage of southern soul and would become the centerpiece around which the Stax/Volt record label would build its image. As his individuality, confidence, and songwriting improved, Redding’s reputation and fame also built steadily, from a series of R&B hits to mass appeal within the crossover pop market. With the MG’s as his support group, Redding had a formidable live show that would intimidate anyone else who shared the bill with him. He could set an audience on fire with his supplications and powerful presence. It was his performance at the Monterey Pop Festival that broadened his audience when, against the odds, he went head to head with the leading psychedelic San Francisco bands and whipped them good right in their own backyard. The “love” generation welcomed Redding unconditionally, and suddenly he was appealing to both black and white in equal measure.

Now, while he was at the pinnacle of his career, Redding decided to change his artistic direction. After listening endlessly to the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper* album, he began to write songs that were more reflective and less traditionally soulful. Laid up for nearly two months after having polyps removed from his throat, he was concerned that the tone of his voice would be altered permanently. The doctors convinced him otherwise, but all that time without singing brought out a mellower sound in his writing that, quite frankly, gave his band and record label cause for concern. Even his manager, Phil Walden, and his wife thought Redding was cracking up the first time they heard “Dock of the Bay.” Where was the screaming? Where was the pleading? Where was the powerful ad-libbing that he was famous for? And what the heck was he doing whistling while the song faded away? Nobody got it, but Redding insisted it would be his first #1 record. Once the band finished the recording session, they were inclined to agree.

Two days later, on December 10, Redding was flying to a television appearance on the show *Upbeat* in a private twin-engine Beechcraft. Although commercial flights were grounded because of inclement weather, he didn’t want to miss the show. Mid-flight, things went wrong, and the aircraft plunged into the frozen water of Lake Monona out-

**The “love” generation welcomed Redding unconditionally, and suddenly he was appealing to both black and white in equal measure.**





side Madison, Wisconsin. Redding, along with most of the backup band, the Bar-Kays, perished in the crash. Posthumously, Redding was proven to be correct when “Dock of the Bay” reached #1 on the national charts. His death dealt such a powerful blow to the Stax/Volt label that it never fully recovered. Although it would continue releasing hit records into the ’70s, Stax would never again regain the magisterial aura that disappeared with the death of its flagship artist, Otis Redding.

## FEBRUARY 1968 #15 WORDS—THE BEE GEES

To my knowledge, never has a singer so effectively employed tremolo in his voice as Barry Gibb does on “Words.” His vocal cords tremble from beginning to end, which lends a brilliant effect to both the theme and the rhythm of the song. The-

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1968	#4
<u>LA LA MEANS I LOVE YOU</u> —	
THE DELFONICS	

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1968	#5
<u>JUST DROPPED IN (TO SEE WHAT</u>	
<u>CONDITION MY CONDITION WAS IN)</u> —	
KENNY ROGERS AND	
THE FIRST EDITION	

matically, the quaver in his voice makes him sound as though he is forever on the brink of tears. Rhythmically, it establishes a sixteenth-note pulse that keeps the song from sinking into a sea of mush. This effect certainly wasn't lost on the producer, who also mixed the song in a unique manner. The voice is way out front and center while the orchestral accompaniment is reduced to a hush. Even when the band is at its loudest, the sound of Gibb's breathing is clearly audible, making this as close to an a cappella performance as one could get without dismissing the musical accompaniment entirely.

The melding of words and melody, as well as the manner in which the words fit rhythmically within the melody, is faultless. Except for Gibb's emotional slurs and judiciously bent notes, the melody carries exactly one note per syllable from beginning to end. This is a sign of astute workmanship and clever songwriting. It also explains

why the tremolo is so important as a source of rhythm. It is probably no accident that a song called “Words” was executed so deliberately, and what better reason is there to prominently feature a well sung vocal line than to highlight the well written “Words?”

## MARCH 1968 #2 CRY LIKE A BABY—THE BOX TOPS

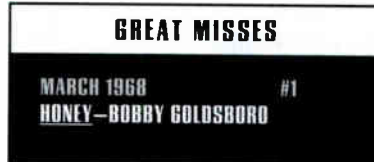
Dan Penn and Spooner Oldham were two of the most talented songwriters to emerge from the South in the mid-'60s. Penn, who has been regarded by no less an authority than Jerry Wexler as one of the finest white soul vocalists around, worked with (and sometimes against) Chips Moman at Moman's American Re-



ording Studios in Memphis. Before that, he was a songwriter and engineer at Rick Hall's Fame Recording Studios, the first proper recording studio to hit the rural area of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Oldham was a session player and ace songwriter/arranger at Fame, who eventually relocated to American. The good ol' boys who played in these two studios (along with the session guys at Stax Records, where Moman got his start) would often overlap their responsibilities. The result was the construction of some of the most potent hit records ever. The music may have had universal appeal, but a majority of the players shunned the notion of stardom, with its prerequisite requirement of traveling. They remained in the South and retained their rural demeanor and backwoods funky charm. Before they were finished, they had affected pop music profoundly through artists like Arthur Alexander, Percy Sledge, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Clarence Carter, and the Box Tops, not to mention dozens of others.

Penn and Oldham came across Alex Chilton when he was only sixteen years old. The Box Tops came in for a recording session, and Penn decided to produce them, recording a demo song that was lying around called "The Letter," written by Wayne Thompson. When the record became a #1 hit, Penn and Oldham got busy. The group's second single, "Neon Rainbow," was disappointing, so they decided to write the next song themselves, and "Cry Like a Baby" was the sterling result.

This record is simply one of the best hybrids of Memphis soul, country, pop, and psychedelia ever concocted. It qualifies as a classic in all four categories and deserves enormous praise for its remarkable craftsmanship and faultless construction. Chilton's vocal is spot-on perfect. His deliberately hoarse and deepened tone was an affectation to make him sound older, and it worked beautifully. Anybody who is familiar with Chilton's later work with Big Star or as a solo act would find it hard to believe that the keening tenor of his natural voice could have been altered so much, at such a young age. I imagine that it would be revelatory to hear Penn's original demo recording. Still, this version was treated lavishly, from the electric sitar solo to the overdubbed (but not overdone) strings, horns, and background vocals. It was a beautifully tasteful piece of work, and other than a later hit called "Soul Deep," the Box Tops never again came close to creating a recording as definitively perfect as "Cry Like a Baby."



## MARCH 1968 #4 LADY MADONNA—THE BEATLES

**L**ady Madonna" would have done practically any band proud. It had intriguing lyrics, its construction was impeccable, its melody was hummable, and the performance was spot-on. For the Beatles, though, it was hopelessly retro. With the baroque constructions of most all their record releases since *Sgt. Pepper*, the Beatles had painted themselves into a corner. How much more complex, layered, and



convoluted could they hope to get? Well, chuck all that, they must have thought, it was time to chill out and just play. “Lady Madonna” is a straightforward, piano-based composition with the only concession to gimmickry being the late addition of a saxophone quartet. The public must have been initially disappointed, because the single rose no higher than the #4 position, the group’s worst chart performance for an A side since 1964. In retrospect, though, “Lady Madonna” is much better than its initial reception indicated. The song moves at a rollicking pace and is perhaps their most energetic single since “Paperback Writer.” Again, the lyrics are obtuse and vague, but the music has a rootsy gutsiness, inspired by the piano playing of Fats Domino and the vocals of Elvis Presley. John Lennon’s sardonic and equally stylized backing vocals (going “bup-bah-bah-bah bup-bah-bah-bah-bah”) seem to be passing commentary on Paul McCartney’s confusing imagery. In the scope of the Beatles’ thoroughly amazing career, “Lady Madonna” can be viewed as a throwaway or as a means to bide time, but judging from the distance of more than twenty-five years, it is a very good song indeed, which has outlasted and even surpassed some of the Beatles’ more ornate compositions.

### MARCH 1968 #5 (SWEET SWEET BABY) SINCE YOU’VE BEEN GONE— ARETHA FRANKLIN

Since I’ve been so busy recapping historical ephemera and personal musings on the previous Aretha Franklin entries, I am well overdue for releasing my torrent of superlatives, so here it is. While with Atlantic Records, Franklin recorded some of the most important and trendsetting American recordings of the twentieth century—on a par with the work of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. Pretty superlative, huh? I think it is essentially true, though, because with all three artists, you cannot separate their technical virtuosity from their means of expression. In other words, their greatness cannot be measured simply by their musical talent. Producer Jerry Wexler put it brilliantly in his autobiography, *Rhythm and the Blues*, when he stated, “To my way of thinking there are three qualities that make a great singer—head, heart, and throat. The head is the intelligence, the phrasing. The heart is the emotionality that feeds the flames. The throat is the chops, the voice.” Precision of execution, mentally and vocally (or in

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1968	#8
<u>DANCE TO THE MUSIC—</u> SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE	
MARCH 1968	#11
<u>SCARBOROUGH FAIR/CANTICLE—</u> SIMON AND GARFUNKEL	

the case of Ellington and Satchmo, instrumentally), is only good insofar as it communicates to the heart of the listener. Regarding Franklin, this is so transparent that it is inherently sad. If she so much as attempts to sing something other than what is heartfelt, the result is abject failure. This is quite a burden, for your options are to suffer the pain of endlessly baring your soul, or coasting.



Luckily, standing naked before the crowd isn't always painful—on occasion it can be invigorating. “Since You’ve Been Gone” is just such a song. In spite of the lyrics, Franklin and her then-husband, Ted White, composed something that triumphs over the slackening will expressed in the words. The arrangement is an amazing pastiche of modern rhythm and soaring melody. It incorporates gospel fervor over a walking soul riff that is anchored by a rock-solid rock-and-roll beat. It could have been the product of the seemingly endless creativity of the Muscle Shoals instrumentalists, or maybe the ingenuity of Wexler’s Atlantic team, but regardless, the expressive instrument is Franklin’s voice. After that, the rest is fancy icing. Aretha alone imbues innuendo, intent, and insecurity. Therein lies the soul of her artistry.

### GREAT MISSES

MARCH 1968 #7  
THE UNICORN—THE IRISH ROVERS

## APRIL 1968 #3 A BEAUTIFUL MORNING—THE RASCALS

It starts with chiming bells and then nearly trips over itself trying to recreate the pastoral atmosphere of “Groovin’,” but “A Beautiful Morning” still manages to sound every bit as beautiful as the day it describes. The creative and original melody and vocals of Felix Cavaliere and Eddie Brigati can take the lion’s share of the credit for this. Although the Rascals dropped the hard-rocking approach of their early material, they couldn’t wash the soul from their singing, which was a good thing. The vocals in particular here make the difference between a good song and a great one. The Rascals were willing to take a few musical risks, but this was perfectly in keeping with the “anything goes” atmosphere of the times. Also, they finally and permanently dropped the juvenile “Young” Rascals tag so that their name would reflect the maturation of their sound. Their next single, however, marked a temporary return to flat-out soul with their energized and optimistic antiracism anthem “People Got to Be Free.” Although with age it appears a little rough around the edges, “People Got to Be Free” was right on target for its time and held the #1 position for five weeks.

When other bands abandoned pop to seek more personal avenues for their creativity, the Rascals felt compelled to do the same. Since they were known almost exclusively as a pop act, however, they felt that their transformation needed to be more dramatic than that of other bands. If they were to gain credibility with the “hip” audience that they wanted to appeal to, they would have to completely reinvent themselves. Unfortunately, they overcompensated and aimed their sights so high that they shot right over the heads of their intended audience, or maybe they just shot themselves in the foot. With foolhardy but

When other bands abandoned pop to seek more personal avenues for their creativity, the Rascals felt compelled to do the same.

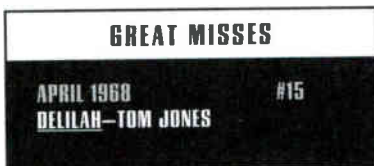




admirable gusto, they refused to appear on any show or billing unless a black act was also included. This cost them many profitable and high-profile bookings, including an appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Their change to overtly personal and decidedly noncommercial material also completely ignored their traditional audience. By annoying both the establishment that supported them and the fans who bought their records, the Rascals' popularity faded rapidly. One by one, the bandmembers left until Cavaliere decided to disband the group. He continued to work on a few eccentric solo albums and production work while ex-bandmates Gene Cornish and Dino Danelli went on to form Fotomaker.

## APRIL 1968 #8 AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING— MARVIN GAYE AND TAMMI TERRELL

In 1964, both Marvin Gaye and Mary Wells were well-established stars. As a marketing ploy, Motown president Barry Gordy decided to team them up for a set of duets. When both sides of their single "Once Upon a Time"/"What's the Matter with You, Baby," charted in the Top 20, it was proven to be a commercially viable idea. Soon afterward, though, Wells left Motown in search of a better recording deal, so Gordy sought a replacement. In the interim, Gaye supposedly recorded some tracks with the unknown Uma Heard, but they remain unreleased. His next pairing was with Kim Weston. In late 1966 they released "It Takes Two," and it also broke into the Top 20. The success of these duets made it apparent that Gaye was a natural foil for a female singer, particularly if the theme was romance. Weston was a talented vocalist, but unfortunately, Motown never gave her the support or recognition that her talent seems to have warranted. Gordy spent all of his energy on his new glamour girl, Diana Ross, and wanted her to have as little competition within the company as possible. As a result, Weston followed Wells's lead and also decided to quit Motown. Once again, Gaye was without a partner.



By 1967, Gaye's personal and professional life seemed to be slumping. He had only one minor (solo) Top 40 hit, and his marriage was imploding. The seventeen-year age difference between him and his wife, Anna, may have been partially responsible, but regardless, he seemed to be restlessly drifting and lacking in inspiration. Enter Tammi Terrell. Terrell came to Motown after a short stint with Luther Dixon at Scepter/Wand Records, where she recorded under her birth name of Tammy Montgomery. Next she joined the "James Brown Revue," and began a relationship with Brown that, by most accounts, was stormy and ultimately doomed. Afterward, she changed her name to Terrell. When she arrived at Motown in 1966, Terrell impressed everybody not only with her voice, but with her infectious, headstrong personality as well. Gaye in particular was quite smitten. Although he denied until his death that there was any romantic





involvement between them, the image they portrayed on vinyl was one of absolute, blissful love.

Gordy “assigned” Gaye and Terrell to record together with his new songwriting team, Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson. Their first release, “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” reached #17 and established a theme of everlasting love, which would appear on virtually all of their subsequent releases. “Your Precious Love” and “If I Could Build My Whole World around You” followed, with both songs reaching the Top 10. Things finally seemed to be going smoothly for Gaye, until tragedy struck. Terrell was constantly complaining of blinding headaches, and one night, while performing onstage in Virginia, she collapsed into Gaye’s arms. Diagnosed with a brain tumor, she became partially paralyzed from the illness. While she convalesced, Gaye attempted to honor their obligations by performing solo or with Barbara Randolph as a replacement, but he was often emotionally unable to go onstage.

Terrell’s partial recovery eventually brought her back to the studio in 1968. Ashford and Simpson continued to write love songs for her and Gaye, including “Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing” and “You’re All I Need to Get By,” and this time they also handled production. “Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing” was the team’s first single since Terrell’s diagnosis, and it exemplifies everything that was perfect about the Gaye/Terrell linkup. Fans who had assumed Terrell was near death were elated to hear her voice with Gaye, still singing of true love and devotion. It is always a dangerous thing to confuse image with reality, but their performance here is so convincing that it becomes hard to believe Gaye’s claim of a platonic relationship. Sadly, Terrell never really recovered from her illness. To be mobile, she required crutches, so trips to the studio were often difficult and painful. The illness sometimes caused her to have memory lapses, in which she would have trouble recalling the lyrics to her songs. On March 16, 1970, Tammi Terrell passed away. She was twenty-four years old. Gaye’s grief and heartbreak seemed boundless. They may not have been lovers, but their love for each other was none the less for it. Shattered and withdrawn, Gaye vowed to stop performing, a promise he would keep for four years. His duet days were over, as well, except for a short-lived and ill-conceived pairing with Diana Ross in 1973. To date, the emotional passion of the Gaye/Terrell performances remains the yardstick by which all subsequent duets are measured. So far, nobody else has even come close.

To date, the emotional passion of the Gaye/Terrell performances remains the yardstick by which all subsequent duets are measured.

## MAY 1968 #1 THIS GUY’S IN LOVE WITH YOU—HERB ALPERT

**T**he success that Herb Alpert achieved with the Tijuana Brass was phenomenal. In two short years (’65-’66), the group sold 13.5 million units in the U.S. alone, more than any previous artist, including Elvis Presley or the Beatles. It was all



**"This Guy's in Love with You" was made to order, and Alpert's reticent vocal made it one of the most charming and unassuming love songs of all time.**

the more odd, then, to discover that the Tijuana Brass did not really exist, at least not initially, until Alpert required a group of musicians to perform his songs onstage. Only then did he recruit other members to play the rhythms, harmonies, and lead lines in tandem with his own trumpet part. The Ameriachi sound, as it has come to be dubbed, was discovered accidentally by Alpert when he was fooling around with a tape recorder and noticed that doubling his trumpet part gave it a "Spanish flair." On vacation in Tijuana, where he attended a bullfight for the first time, it struck him how he could utilize this new sound. Upon his return, he set about recording an instrumental track called "Twinkle Star" using his technique, and he retitled it "The Lonely Bull." Then, in conjunction with his friend Jerry Moss, he formed an independent record label for the explicit purpose of releasing the song and called it A&M Records. "The Lonely Bull," on A&M, gored its way up to #6 on the national charts, and A&M Records began its astronomical climb to the top of the American independent labels with a song that appealed mostly to a more sophisticated audience than the usual pop fare. Alpert's subsequent singles sold well enough, but his album sales broke all records and established him as the premier easy-listening artist of the time.

After having some difficulty during pop's psychedelic era, Alpert needed to change his style a bit. In 1968, he starred in a television special and asked songwriters Burt Bacharach and Hal David to supply him with a romantic song that he could sing to his wife. "This Guy's in Love with You" was made to order, and Alpert's reticent vocal made it one of the most charming and unassuming love songs of all time. He was certainly no power singer, but his soft reading of the pretty song made it sound honest and heartfelt. He never intended to release the song commercially, but radio phone lines and record shops were flooded with requests for it after the TV special aired. Once he became aware of the huge demand, Alpert had records pressed as quickly as possible, and the song rose rapidly to #1 and stayed there for four weeks. It was his first #1 hit single, and Bacharach/David's first #1 hit, as well. Strangely, it would be Alpert's last Top 40 hit for more than a decade. His next appearance came in 1979. "Rise" repeated the trick of "This Guy's in Love with You" by rising all the way to #1.

## **MAY 1968 #1 MRS. ROBINSON—SIMON AND GARFUNKEL**

**P**aul Simon and Art Garfunkel were neighbors and school chums from Queens, New York, who each had an interest in singing at a young age. They enjoyed harmonizing together and worked on duplicating popular songs. Their well-rehearsed arrangements attracted the attention of their schoolmates, and this



inspired them to take the next step of writing their own material. Fortune came their way when one of their compositions, “Hey Schoolgirl,” was picked up for release in November 1957 and became a surprise hit for the pair, who billed themselves as Tom and Jerry. They continued recording together but were soon dismissed as one-near-hit wonders. The duo split and attended separate colleges, considering careers outside the music industry. Simon, however, continued writing, and his songs began to take on the leftist political bent that was popular among (and apropos for) early ’60s folk musicians. Columbia Records, through producer Tom Wilson, became interested in Simon’s songs and, after hearing him perform with his old partner, Art Garfunkel, signed the pair in 1964. Their first album, the acoustic *Wednesday Morning 3 A.M.*, was released and promptly forgotten. Critics belittled the duo as uptown folk wanna-bes or suburban Dylanists, a criticism that stung them. Simon, who had previously visited England, returned and played the European folk circuit. While there, he continued to write and record his compositions as a solo act for the BBC. Months later, a radio station in Boston discovered a track from their album titled “The Sounds of Silence,” and began to play it with some regularity. Wilson, who had worked with Bob Dylan on recording his electrified hit “Like a Rolling Stone,” seized the opportunity. He grabbed the acoustic tape of “The Sounds of Silence,” dubbed amplified instrumentation and drums over the original tracks, and then rereleased it as a single. You could argue that he got chocolate on their peanut butter, or that they got peanut butter on his chocolate, but either way, the combination of folk issues and rock instrumentation resulted in a very salable product. The revamped “The Sounds of Silence” climbed all the way to #1.

Ignoring its presence on the debut album, Columbia quickly assembled a second album around the electrified single and rush-released it to satisfy the public demand for new folk-rock product. Although the material was quite good, the arrangements were somewhat sloppy and disjointed. It wasn’t until their third effort, *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme*, that Simon and Garfunkel had acquired sufficient studio acumen to oversee the recording process through to the finished product, resulting in a consistently satisfying and complete album. One person who took notice of their appeal to college-age audiences was filmmaker Mike Nichols. Nichols was directing a script by Buck Henry whose story revolved around the tribulations of a young man fresh out of college and unsure of whether he is capable of entering the “establishment.” Nichols envisioned Simon’s songs as the embodiment of the film’s protagonist, played by a young Dustin Hoffman, and hired the pair to record the soundtrack. Unfortunately Simon, never a prolific writer, had seemingly dried up and was incapable of supplying sufficient material. At the end

**Columbia Records, through producer Tom Wilson, became interested in Simon’s songs and, after hearing him perform with his old partner, Art Garfunkel, signed the pair in 1964.**



Simon's lyrics were usually more transparent, revolving around themes of egalitarianism and alienation, but "Mrs. Robinson" was different.

of his wits (and his deadline), Nichols inserted a few older Simon and Garfunkel songs into the film and exasperatedly requested something new. One song that was only in its formative stages had the working title of "Mrs. Robinson," which excited Nichols greatly since that was the name of a major character in the film. Simon and Garfunkel completed the song in time for its inclusion, but all hopes for a soundtrack album seemed quashed. Enter Clive Davis, the recently named head of Columbia Records. Davis was desperate for an album to broaden Simon and Garfunkel's appeal beyond college campuses and insisted on compiling a soundtrack from the rehashed material and some incidental music. The release date for the soundtrack coincided closely with the release of Simon and Garfunkel's fourth album, *Bookends*, (could Simon have been hoarding his tunes from Nichols?) but instead of hampering sales, each fed off the other. In June 1968, Simon and Garfunkel occupied the top three positions on the album charts. They had become household names.

With its confusing wordplay and silly phraseology, such as "woo-woo-woo" and "coo-coo-kachoo" (a playful lift from The Beatles "I Am the Walrus"), it was and still is difficult to discern any specific meaning in the lyrics of "Mrs. Robinson." Up until this point, Simon's lyrics were usually more transparent, revolving around themes of egalitarianism and alienation, but "Mrs. Robinson" was different. Each verse varies in theme and imagery. The melody sounds sneaky and slightly foreboding while the lyrics sound underhanded and duplicitous ("We'd like to know a little bit about you for our files" and "Most of all, you've got to hide it from the kids"). Just as literate but less literal, Simon succeeded in writing a song without any sense of stridency or overt deliberation. The arrangement makes the song seem light and entertaining without dissolving the topical content of the words. The result is one of the most memorable and confusing songs Simon ever wrote.

## MAY 1968 #2 MacARTHUR PARK—RICHARD HARRIS

Either you love it or you hate it. I suppose that anybody who writes overwrought lyrics about cakes being left out in the rain gets what he deserves. Richard Harris sounds so towel-wringingly distraught while singing about his lost recipe that he practically begs for ridicule. It doesn't help matters when he sings a line like "Between the parted pages and were pressed in love's hot fevered iron like a striped pair of pants" as though he were Richard Burton performing Hamlet—not to mention the fact that I can discern no meaning whatsoever from this gobble-dycook. Am I missing something here? Is it intended to be a play on words—pressed...iron...pants—get it? To make it even sillier, Harris pronounces "striped"





in his most excessively English accent so as to render it a two-syllable word; he says “stri-ped” if you can believe it.

This must be the most gloriously pretentious record that ever came anywhere near the Top 10. Never before and never again could anything approach this level of grandiloquence. So why do I like it? I don't know. The only thing more embarrassing than admitting that I like it is being unable to explain why. Maybe it's because it's so god-awfully funny. Maybe it's the go-go middle section that instantly brings to mind visions of girls with hoop earrings, miniskirts, and white thigh-high patent-leather boots doing the jerk. Mostly, though, I think it's the way Harris feels compelled to emote these lines convincingly, like Peter O'Toole reciting “Louie Louie.” Maybe I should turn the tables and ask why you don't like it. Doesn't it make you laugh? Don't you feel the urge to sing along, despite your best instincts? Be honest now, wouldn't the song almost take you in emotionally if you could ignore the words? Besides, why quibble about the words? Critics often go ga-ga over music that is naively absurd, so why not apply the same rule of thumb to the stupendously absurd? Isn't it wonderful that something as surreal as a Marcel Duchamp construction was capable of achieving hit status? I think so.

Jim Webb was born in 1946 in Oklahoma to a Baptist minister and his wife, who maintained strict conservative values for their children. He studied piano from the age of six and became a fluent reader of music, eventually writing his own compositions along with their corresponding orchestral accompaniment. When he was eighteen, his family relocated to San Bernardino, California, and all at once he found himself exposed to a gigantic vista of experiences that had previously been out of reach. Suddenly, his mother passed away, and the family decided to return to Oklahoma. Jim, with his senses reawakened, found it impossible to return and decided to find work in California. He took a job at a music publishing company and slept on the floor of an unfurnished one-room apartment. Within a year's time, he would be a millionaire.

His job put him in contact with Johnny Rivers, who recorded a song of Webb's called “By the Time I Get to Phoenix.” Nothing much happened with that recording, but Rivers next teamed Webb with a group on his record label called the Fifth Dimension. They recorded a song called “Up, Up, and Away,” and Webb's career followed the direction suggested by the song title. Next came their recording of “The Worst That Could Happen” (eventually a big hit for Johnny Maestro and the Brooklyn Bridge). Once Glen Campbell discovered Webb, critics were hailing him as the most outstanding contemporary American songwriter. “Wichita Lineman” and “Galveston” were both his, and he was perceived within the industry as the golden boy wonder.

Webb's compositions benefited greatly from his facility with orchestral arrangements, since they automatically added an emotional edge to his impressionistic tendencies. At times, he would push the envelope of communica-

**This must be  
the most  
gloriously  
pretentious  
record that  
ever came  
anywhere near  
the Top 10.**





bility and self-indulgence, which perfectly explains how he developed “MacArthur Park.” It was intended to be the last movement of a full-length cantata, but nobody was interested in recording the entire project. Richard Harris was a famous actor who had befriended Webb, and the two decided it would be both fun and interesting to have Harris record a collection of Webb’s compositions and arrangements. True to form, Harris picked what he considered to be the most dramatic songs Webb had to offer, and they set to work. Although it topped the seven-minute mark (a decidedly noncommercial length—remember, this was before the Beatles’ “Hey Jude”), “MacArthur Park” was picked up by FM radio, then AM, until it became a #2 hit, blocked from #1 by Herb Alpert’s “This Guy’s in Love with You.” Despite his reputation and the overwhelming popularity of his material, Webb would not have a #1 hit until 1978, with Donna Summer’s disco-fied reworking of “MacArthur Park.”

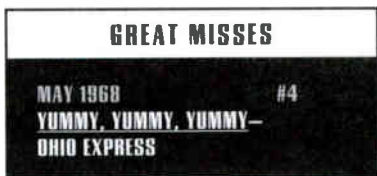
### MAY 1968 #7 THINK—ARETHA FRANKLIN

**A** year had come and gone since Aretha Franklin’s first hit graced the Top 10, and what a year it was. On virtually every front, popular music was changing by leaps and bounds in ways that were previously unimaginable. Although Franklin had the experience of a full-fledged veteran, the record-buying public perceived her as a newcomer who had practically single-handedly altered the direction of pop music away from the baroque and toward the basic—away from the surreal and toward the hyperreal.

Her husband, Ted White, was still her occasional songwriting partner, and together they wrote “Think,” her seventh consecutive Top 10 single. The song is another rocker in the mold of “Chain of Fools” and even has some topical similarity. One significant difference is that while “Chain of Fools” portrays Franklin as someone who is unwillingly beholden to her heart, “Think” allows her to sound off at the person who is messing up her life. How she temporarily turns this into a celebration of freedom is beyond me, but she does it so well that it seems natural. Maybe she is feeling a sense of liberation

because she has finally confronted the ne’er-do-well and is experiencing relief, which is something like freedom. Nah, I don’t buy that. When she sings it, it isn’t freedom she’s talking about, it’s FREEDOM! Liberation of the mind, body, and soul. Through the power of her voice and her expressiveness, Franklin came up with another anthem. It could apply to civil rights, but if it does, then it is in the context of the individual, not society at large.

In the midst of the tough years she faced in the late ’70s, when disco leveled pop music by sucking all the expressiveness out of soul music, Franklin made a shockingly effective appearance in John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd’s 1980 film *The Blues Brothers*. The movie was a critical failure, woefully short on humor or





excitement, until Franklin lit up the screen to sing “Think” in a pair of house slippers and a cooking smock. Although her appearance was intended to seem kitschy and retro, she shamed the contemporary artists of the time who couldn’t even hold a candle to her talent. She may have been away, but there was nobody to replace her. After an absence of what seemed like an age (which I suppose it was), it was a revelation to watch her inject a sudden burst of ferocious energy into the film. It may have also salvaged her career, judging from her subsequent hit-laden association with Clive Davis and Arista Records.

## JUNE 1968 #3 JUMPIN’ JACK FLASH—THE ROLLING STONES

Finally, the Rolling Stones threw the baroque flourishes and ornate trappings of their psychedelic phase into the dustbin and returned to no-holds-barred rock and roll. The departure of their manager, Andrew Oldham, was a significant reason for their return to stripped-down rock. Oldham was younger than the band and possessed an irreverent attitude that suited them to a tee in their early years. His p.r. talent was undeniable and brilliantly elevated them to superstar status by giving them a powerful image to live with (and die by, in Brian Jones’s case), as the antithesis of the Beatles. He was also crucial in inspiring Mick Jagger and Keith Richards to start writing songs. Oldham fancied himself an artist of sorts and often got involved in the band’s collaborative efforts, particularly with his favorites, Jagger and Richards. After a while, however, the Stones began to find him bothersome, particularly when he interfered with their creative ideas. Just to unnerve him, they would continually play bad, noncommercial, and off-key blues whenever Oldham came to the studio, until he decided that he had enough and left them to their own devices. Their first maneuver was to employ a talented American named Jimmy Miller, who was doing great work as the producer for the band Traffic. This relationship would result in the finest and most consistent output of the Stones’ career.

Talk about a comeback. After releasing an album that was almost unanimously panned, after losing their artistic direction and part of their precious image, after suffering through extensive and humiliating arrests, the Rolling Stones appeared destined to collapse. Instead, they enacted an amazing return to form with a song that defined the very essence of rock and roll. With lyrics that convey a nightmarish parody of poverty and evil, Jagger wrote a fable of Dickensian proportions that restored and further fueled the band’s demonic image while portraying himself as a mythic character extracted from a particularly gruesome Grimm’s fairy tale. The upper-class circles that had befriended Jagger must have been amused and mystified by his lyrical invention. During the verses, he teasingly invokes surreal images of horror and destitution, only to cockily rise above their squalor in the sardonic chorus. The instrumental riff is equally, if not more, important





and today remains one of the single most common musical phrases of our age. In fact, it has become so familiar that it is often difficult to really hear the song any longer, which is a shame. It was actually Bill Wyman who had stumbled upon the riff during an instrumental jam, but Jagger and Richards instinctively recognized its potential and developed it into the rock-and-roll classic that it has since become.

How strange and curious it is that a song with such intrinsically evil words and imagery should capture the mass imagination of its generation and become so timelessly popular. The victimization of the song's protagonist increases with each verse until he is ultimately "crowned with a spike right through (his) head." The interpretations these lyrics are open to run the full gamut, from satanic masochism to Christ-like suffering and innocence. Jagger's vocals walk the fine line between victim and torturer without ever committing to either, which is no small talent and a testament to why, at his best, he is one of the best vocalists in all of rock and roll. Instead of resolving these inhuman scenes of cruelty, he simply juxtaposes them against a chorus that matter-of-factly states, "But it's alright now. In fact, it's a gas," while never explaining how that could ever be possible. Now that things are "alright," is the singer benevolently lending a sympathetic ear to those who are less fortunate than he is, or has he become the guy with the lit cigarette, flicking ashes on the heads of the peons and using torture for his own whimsical amusement? The story also serves as a metaphor for the trials and tribulations that very nearly destroyed the Stones during the previous year, but it's alright now. In fact, it's a gas.

## JUNE 1968 #7 ANGEL OF THE MORNING— MARILEE RUSH AND THE TURNABOUTS

I always have and always will find it fascinating that "Angel of the Morning" and "Wild Thing" (The Troggs) were both written by the same person. How a songwriter could cover both the brainlessly Neanderthal macho-cool of one and the intelligently feminine vulnerability of the other is beyond me, but Chip Taylor did it. "Wild Thing" is an idiotic and brutish romp that sounds as though it took about as long to compose as it does to perform. The song ends up being entertaining because of its three-chord inanity and mock-cool performance. "An-

gel of the Morning" is everything that "Wild Thing" is not. While the Troggs sound as though they just stomped through somebody's flower garden, Marilee Rush sounds as though she is prepared to let somebody stomp through hers. Few songs before or since have so sensitively conveyed that awkward moment addressed in these lyrics. Although she is certain that her mate doesn't love her, she prepares for her "deflowering" by stating that "There'll be no strings to

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1968 <u>THE LOOK OF LOVE</u> — SERGIO MENDES AND BRASIL '66	#4
JUNE 1968 <u>REACH OUT OF THE DARKNESS</u> — FRIEND AND LOVER	#10



bind your hands, not if my love can't bind your heart." She's instigating this physical coupling and asks only that he not humiliate her afterward. "Just call me angel of the morning. Just touch my cheek before you leave me." It's a simple request and probably a good deal for her lover, but does it display female sexual liberation or propagate female servitude? The gorgeous melody captures the hollow feeling of someone who is only making love out of loneliness. It is a masterwork of characterization, with a penetrating melody that haunts both the soul and the conscience of the listener.

"Angel of the Morning" was originally recorded and released by a singer named Evie Sands on the Cameo record label. Although her recording was sure to be a huge hit, the record company went broke almost immediately after releasing it. With no capital to supply product, the record died a horrible death and went unheard. Months later, Taylor received word that a group called Marilee Rush and the Turnabouts had recorded a version of the song that was a regional hit around their home state of Washington. Slowly, the record crept from the Northwest and began penetrating other markets until it eventually peaked at #7. Rush had less luck with her subsequent recordings and has never again appeared on the Top 40. In 1981, country singer Juice Newton recorded a faithful cover of Rush's version of Sands's recording. Although she didn't improve the song, she did improve its highest chart position when her version went all the way to #4.

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1968	#14
<u>SKY PILOT</u> — ERIC BURDEN AND THE ANIMALS	
JUNE 1968	#17
<u>TIPTOE THROUGH THE TULIPS</u> — TINY TIM	

## JULY 1968 #2 BORN TO BE WILD—STEPPENWOLF

Although we may not have been aware of it at the time, the late '60s marked a period when music was the dominant force of our culture, ahead of television, the movies, fashion, art, sports, literature, etc. This is a major reason why there is so much music from the '60s that retains its vital qualities. A song was often much more than a rhythm and a melody; it was a key to a new way of thinking. To varying degrees, all other aspects of our culture took their cues from popular music, giving it a momentary power that has not existed since. Even politics was forced to kowtow to the power of popular music. John Lennon; Bob Dylan; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; and others had developed political identities that rivaled their identities as performers, influencing young minds in ways that the established politicians never could. They were offering new solutions to old problems. Music held the key to an open-mindedness that, for awhile, made us think that we were really different. Because of this, almost every famous

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1968	#1
<u>PEOPLE GOT TO BE FREE</u> — THE RASCALS	
JULY 1968	#10
<u>STAY IN MY CORNER</u> —THE DELLS	



**Steppenwolf encapsulated the freedom of riding a Harley, the freedom of speaking your mind, and the freedom of choosing your own damn lifestyle in a three-minute pop song.**

recording artist from the '60s was political in one sense or another, and that included Steppenwolf. "Born to Be Wild" was the theme song for the movie *Easy Rider*, which portrayed an alternative lifestyle—namely that of two dropouts on motorcycles—and packaged it for the mass market. For the most part, though, the music propelled the movie and made it a willing vehicle for a new musical genre that would come to be known as heavy metal. The starting point was Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild."

They didn't appear in the movie, but we could get a pretty good idea of what they looked like just by listening to the buzz-saw stomp of their hit song. Thoughts of tattoos, greasy hair, biker chicks, and no teeth came to mind, and I wasn't too far off. Steppenwolf looked like the ultimate greaser-cum-garage hard rockers. Long, dark hair, mustaches, leather, and sunglasses provided an image that made me think of them as chain-toting, stogie-smoking, car-bashing, fear-inducing bikers—the Hell's Angels on a holiday. The alternative they seemed to offer was as close to the total freedom of anarchy as could be imagined in 1968. What

better way to flip the bird at the establishment than through a heavy-metal motorcycle anthem? What better band to do it than the axle-grease and motor-oil-drenched members of Steppenwolf?

To Mr. and Mrs. Middle-Class America, the underground alternative lifestyle was becoming a bit terrifying and more than a bit titillating. Television airbrushed the rough edges and came up with *Room 222* and *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*. Other parts of the media tried to soften the blow of cultural degradation that seemed to be impending, as well. Only music remained untarnished, mostly because it was one of the few forums left in which individuals could speak for themselves without answering to a series of committees and shareholders. It was still free, man. And profitable. Even the major labels, such as Columbia and RCA, were starting to grant some liberation to their artists. Steppenwolf encapsulated the freedom of riding a Harley, the freedom of speaking your mind, and the freedom of choosing your own damn lifestyle in a three-minute pop song. Not television, not literature, not even the movies could do that. In the late '60s, that's just the way that it was.

## **AUGUST 1968 #10 I SAY A LITTLE PRAYER—ARETHA FRANKLIN**

**I** just lost my song. That girl took it away from me."

These were Otis Redding's words when he first heard Aretha Franklin's powerhouse version of "Respect," but had he lived longer, he would have realized that he wasn't her only victim. No matter what she sang, Franklin usually bettered what came before. Only when she delved into the mysterious world of rock lyrics, with their veiled references and indirect imagery, did she fall short of capsizing





the song's originator. Otherwise, she made mincemeat of the competition. "I Say a Little Prayer" was a casual knockoff that casually made Dionne Warwick's original recording sound stale in comparison. The only reason Franklin recorded the song in the first place was that she and the girls were singing Warwick tunes during a break and realized they could do something interesting with "I Say a Little Prayer." According to producer Jerry Wexler, they finished the song in one take. While somebody like Brian Wilson or Phil Spector would slave over a tape machine for months on end trying to perfect every nuance, Aretha and Co. were so instinctively together that they could walk in and complete a Top 40 hit without even rehearsing the number in advance. Aretha's music was a feeling, not a construction. Every single that Franklin released since joining Atlantic Records went to the Top 10 on the pop charts. Her eighth single scored on both sides when "The House That Jack Built" reached #6, and the flip side, "I Say a Little Prayer," peaked at #10.

An interesting part of the arrangement for "I Say a Little Prayer" is the way Franklin lays out for the entire chorus and inserts only tasteful but unreserved accents. Since her Atlantic debut, Franklin's sisters Erma and Carolyn were constant companions on disk and often shared the backing vocal chores, along with Cissy Houston (Whitney's mother) and her group, the Sweet Inspirations. The Sweet Inspirations sing the chorus here. Carolyn Franklin was not only a talented vocalist, but a formidable songwriter who supplied her sister with some of her best material, including the ethereal Top 40 ballads "Ain't No Way" and "Angel." Carolyn had her own record deal at RCA, and Erma recorded for Shout and Brunswick. In fact, Erma Franklin recorded the original version of "Piece of My Heart," written by producer Bert Berns, which reached the Top 10 on the R&B charts for her and later became a signature tune for Janis Joplin.

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1968	#6
<b>SLIP AWAY—CLARENCE CARTER</b>	
AUGUST 1968	#7
<b>YOU'RE ALL I NEED TO GET BY— MARVIN GAYE AND TAMMI TERRELL</b>	

## SEPTEMBER 1968 #1 HEY JUDE—THE BEATLES

The dream is over.

—John Lennon, from "God"

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought  
like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I  
became a man, I gave up childish ways.

—Corinthians I 13:13

**T**he time had come for the Beatles to give up their childish ways. It was hard to imagine that fewer than five years had passed since America discovered the Beatles, because so much had changed since then. The very fabric of our culture



**"Hey Jude" was  
McCartney's  
way of coming  
to terms with  
the changes  
that were  
happening all  
around him.**

had been inexorably altered, and the Beatles, who were in the eye of this tempestuous hurricane, changed with us.

In retrospect, the overall impression of 1964 that lingered was that of a virginal innocence becoming aroused by the prospects of an exciting future. In 1964, Americans had nothing more to be afraid of in popular culture than the androgynous nature of the Beatles' haircuts. From the vantage point of 1968, it was easy to look back wistfully at the optimism of those times. The Beatles themselves must have felt similarly. The overwhelming excitement of suddenly having the most famous four faces in the world, coupled with the energy and talent to rise up to the expectations of the masses must have given them at

least some sense of satisfaction and pride in their achievement, even if it was only short lived.

Human nature and time can be killers, though. They inevitably will disrupt anything that appears to be static and will wear down even the hardest of surfaces. Initially, the tumultuous events that surrounded the Beatles brought them closer together. The band became something of a private men's club, containing four exclusive members. Even wives and girlfriends were kept outside of the fold. Their manager, Brian Epstein, acted as doorman who prevented all interlopers from entering the private sanctum, but now Brian was dead.

The four Beatles, who lived like pharaohs, were never as innocent as their audience perceived them to be, but drugs, sex, money, and now the death of their manager had irreparably corrupted their outlook and disrupted the framework that held them together. Even the peripheral aspects of their lives (which is pretty much where you stood if you were a Beatle wife or girlfriend) began to disintegrate. John Lennon's marriage to his wife, Cynthia, was essentially over, and Paul McCartney's long-term relationship with Jane Asher had fallen apart, as well.

Not only the Beatles, but everybody else was going through similar turmoil. Law-abiding, respectful youth had learned about drugs, and many of us didn't hesitate to experiment with them. We began to question authority and even protested openly against the government. First Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered, and then Robert Kennedy. The Summer of Love had become a near-forgotten, seemingly perverted dream. We, all of us, were no longer innocent. All of a sudden we became older, but wiser. The Beatles, because of their fame and notoriety, became our sacrificial lamb. They, not the Rolling Stones, were the butterfly to be broken on a wheel.

But who really was to blame? Why was a sacrifice necessary? What else could be eviscerated to make right this divisive and troubled time?

Time. Time was the problem and time held the solution.

Maturity could loosely be defined as an awareness of yourself coupled with a loss of innocence. Time only makes us older. Experience and awareness makes us wiser. "Hey Jude" was McCartney's way of coming to terms with the changes that were happening all around him. His lyrics could be directed at John and



Cynthia's breakup, a means of cheering up their child, Julian, or a way of putting McCartney's own life in perspective—but they work best when perceived on a global scale.

Letting go of your childhood innocence is a rite of passage that is always taken reluctantly. "Hey Jude" points the way and says, essentially, "It's all right to move on." An entire generation was simultaneously developing a new awareness. Whether you were nine or twenty-nine, you heard the message. The Beatles even supplied us with a four-minute mantra to chant in unison while we learned to accept our pain. One of the most beautiful and transcendent moments in all of music occurs when the lyrics give way to the chanting chorus. The combination of pain and pleasure at that moment is immeasurably powerful. The "na na na nanana na" chorus is just as life-affirming as the earlier "yeah, yeah, yeah," but less childish and more realistic. McCartney's ad-libbed vocal lines are among the most expressive singing he has ever done, letting us know just how important and cathartic this moment is for him. Seven minutes and eleven seconds encapsulates a lifetime of experience and captures the moment when we became vaguely aware that the Beatles, by necessity, were nearing the end of their existence together. Symbolically, "Hey Jude" was the first Beatles record that was released on their own Apple Records label, and it became the biggest hit of their career when it remained at #1 for nine weeks. With a song that was intended to show the world that, as a group, they were as strong as ever, they acknowledged the importance of their individual independence. In one year's time, the Beatles would disintegrate completely, but by then, "Hey Jude" would justify the entire experience.

## SEPTEMBER 1968 #12 REVOLUTION—THE BEATLES

John Lennon's politics bear some careful reflection on "Revolution." All too often, the song is interpreted to be an anarchic plea for tearing down walls. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a plea for change, but it demands thought and caution before destroying what is familiar. Of course, Lennon couldn't win on that front, either, and leftists considered him to be anathema and noncommittal to "the cause." At least he was true to himself. Just as he wouldn't blindly follow an officer into a war zone, neither was he going to throw stones at authority figures. He really believed in "hair peace" and "bed peace." Naive or not, if we listened to him (fat chance), we'd all be lounging in bed with greasy hair, having nothing to fight but our own apathy.

The first version of "Revolution" was recorded at a somnambulist's pace and betrayed no sense of conviction or passion. Lennon sounds as though he won't fight simply because he doesn't have the energy to get up. He furthered the ambiguity of the lyric by singing the key phrase "count me out" as "count me out, in." This version later saw the light of day on side four of *The Beatles* (the "white" album). It was the energized second version that made the B side of "Hey Jude," and it suits the lyrics far better than the original. Here, Lennon is



Lennon's singularity was all over his music, but he was not careless enough to let it influence his politics.

impassioned and *very* political; it isn't the politics of Jerry Rubin or Abbie Hoffman, but he isn't taking sides with Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, either. In 1965, Dylan had sung "Don't follow leaders," and Lennon explicitly makes it plain that he has no intention of following anybody. The harsh, distorted toughness of the sound makes his statement that much more impassioned and provocative. In retrospect, I think it can honestly be said that he was right, too. Ask *why* before you support something, and ask *why* before you tear it down. It isn't a plea for compromise so much as a plea for ruminative, nonviolent thought and individuality.

Lennon's singularity was all over his music, but he was not careless enough to let it influence his politics. His experimental albums with his wife, Yoko Ono, and the haphazard tape-loop constructions on the white album's "Revolution #9" were usually so formless that they were impenetrable, but that was art, not real life. Safe art is usually inferior art, but safe politics...well, let's just say that nobody ever died from a bad painting (although some people may have experienced pain when they saw the photograph of the uncircumcised Lennon and Ono's pendulous breasts on their *Two Virgins* album cover).

Considering the horrific events at the Democratic National Convention and later at Kent State University, the younger generation had every reason to be self-righteous, reactive, and angry. But the violent extremism of the Black Panthers and the Weather Underground was something else entirely and demanded a different, more dangerous, commitment. For now, Lennon drew the line and stated that he would not cross it. The Beatles were always seen as leaders. On "Revolution," Lennon makes it plain not only that he will not lead, but also that he will not follow.

## SEPTEMBER 1968 #5 MIDNIGHT CONFESSIONS—THE GRASS ROOTS

Most people couldn't care less who the members of the Grass Roots were. I know this, you know this, and I suppose the Grass Roots themselves understand it. While other bands captured our imagination with their deeds as much as with their music, the Grass Roots were faceless hit makers, a constant presence on the pop charts that never went any further. In many respects, this worked in their favor. Without the excess baggage of image, we could paint our own mental picture when hearing their songs, which was a difficult thing to do with, say, the Doors or the Rolling Stones. This suited "Midnight Confessions" to a tee. Its subject matter of illicit love is straight out of a dime-store paperback romance novel. With no image of the band to cloud your perceptions, it is easy to drift away on the story line with your own make-believe (or filled-in) characters.

A song like "Midnight Confessions" was like a soundtrack to a specific moment in everybody's lives when we first heard it. It was something for us to sing along to when it came on the radio. It was also undeniably professional. Its construc-



tion was seamless and form-fitting, maybe too seamless and form-fitting for the West Coast music scene that spawned it. In this regard, the facelessness of the Grass Roots may also have helped keep them from being patently scorned by the suddenly quite proud and easily identifiable counterculture. Album rock—with its experimental forays into the nether regions of form, structure and melody—had become the norm for so-called counterculture bands, and the Grass Roots were simply a singles band. A singles band meant a pop band, and pop music was establishment music. This could have boded poorly for the band if they were recognizable. Since we couldn't point them out, all they could be judged by was their music, and luckily, it was their music that captured our imagination.

## GREAT HITS

SEPTEMBER 1968

#2

LITTLE GREEN APPLES—D.C. SMITH

## SEPTEMBER 1968 #8 I'VE GOTTA GET A MESSAGE TO YOU—THE BEE GEES

**W**hen it came to subject matter, the Bee Gees were really something else. If they weren't howling miserably with romanticized notions of the pain caused by love, they were singing ghastly fiction wherein the protagonist has only moments before his certain demise. "New York Mining Disaster 1941" has a couple of miners trapped underground. "Odessa" has a person lost at sea with little chance of recovery. "Trafalgar" has a seaman who was mortally wounded during battle—the Bee Gees even posed for a dramatic photo on the inside jacket, in which Barry Gibb is laying there, dead (or nearly), and the others surround him, dressed as naval officers. None is more gruesome, though, than "I've Gotta Get a Message to You," and none was as successful, either. Here, the singer is on death row, awaiting execution, and he longs to make contact with the woman who supposedly caused him to kill a man. Sure, it was criminally melodramatic (pun intended), but it made a great topic for a pop song. It builds and builds until, by the time they reach the last rounds of repeated choruses, the brothers' vocals, the orchestra, and the chorale group (doesn't everybody have one?) all compete for space. The over-the-top bathos of the moment wins out in the end. The record is so overblown in both content and execution that it is a minor miracle the song doesn't collapse under the force of its own pretension. If the melody were any less catchy or if the arrangement less sublime, then the recording, not the singer, would have been executed. Instead of laughing out loud, the audience sang along, and it became the Bee Gees' first Top 10 hit.

Unfortunately, the melodrama wasn't only on vinyl. Behind-the-scenes battling began to tear the Gibb broth-

**If the melody were any less catchy or if the arrangement less sublime, then the recording, not the singer, would have been executed.**





**Much more confounding than the Bee Gees' sudden lapse into obscurity was their meteoric return to stardom, then to superstardom.**

ers asunder, no doubt caused by the stress of their sudden fame and wealth. After releasing the highly ambitious and artistically successful (but thematically muddled) double album *Odessa*, the Bee Gees splintered in 1969. Over the next two years, they made disastrous attempts to carve out individual careers, but finally saw the error of their ways and reunited. *Two Years On* was their next, aptly named album, and "Lonely Days" became their best-selling single yet. This, in turn, was eclipsed by "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart," which held down the #1 position for four straight weeks in the summer of 1971. After that, the Bee Gees lost artistic direction, and their career started to slide dramatically. By 1975, they were nearly invisible.

Much more confounding than the Bee Gees' sudden lapse into obscurity was their meteoric return to stardom, then to superstardom. The album *Main Course*, produced by Arif Mardin and released in 1975, yielded "Jive Talkin'," "Nights on Broadway," and "Fanny Be Tender with My Love." The adenoidal screaming that they had stumbled upon while recording these sessions was paying off in a manner that was beyond belief. The Bee Gees were not only resurrected, they were elevated to the status of icons. In their photos from this time, they resemble blow-up doll versions of their former selves, with blow-dried hair and matching disco outfits. Hit singles continued unabated, all of them molded in the stereotypical formatting of disco and all of them hugely successful. From late 1977 through 1979, the Bee Gees had six consecutive #1 records and held the #1 spot for a total of twenty weeks: "How Deep Is Your Love" (three weeks), "Stayin' Alive" (four weeks), "Night Fever" (eight weeks), "Too Much Heaven" (two weeks), "Tragedy" (two weeks), and "Love You Inside Out" (one week). Then their younger brother, Andy Gibb, came into the picture and recorded a series of #1 hits: "I Just Want to Be Your Everything" (#1 for four weeks), "(Love Is) Thicker Than Water" (#1 for two weeks), and "Shadow Dancing" (#1 for seven weeks). There were other hits, too, like "Love So Right" (#3) and "You Should Be Dancin'" (#1).

Then, there were the hits they wrote but were recorded by (or with) others: Tavares recorded "More Than a Woman." Samantha Sang ("Emotion"), Frankie Valli ("Grease"), Barbra Streisand ("Woman in Love," "Guilty," and "What Kind of Fool?"), and Dionne Warwick ("Heartbreaker") all had their careers resuscitated, thanks to the Gibbs. They even dragged Jimmy Ruffin back onto the Top 10 for the first time since 1966 with "Hold onto My Love." Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers became huger than ever when they duetted on the Gibbs' "Islands in the Stream." There were others, but you get the point, I'm sure. For a few years, the Bee Gees virtually owned the music charts. No matter how you cut it, they have had an indelible impact on contemporary music trends.



## SEPTEMBER 1968 #12 PIECE OF MY HEART— BIG BROTHER AND THE HOLDING COMPANY

The Monterey Pop Festival of June 1967 was more than a concert, more than an event—it was a turning point. Besides kick-starting the Summer of Love, it showed how rock music was beginning to coalesce into something more mature and complex than simple entertainment. It was becoming a way of life. The festival also marked the apogee of the West Coast music scene. John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas was one of the festival organizers, and he sensed the enormity of the event that was being planned. He wrote a song to set the proper pacifist mood that he hoped would prevail during the three days. While people from all over the country and Europe headed toward California, their radios blared Phillips's request, as sung by Scott McKenzie, that they all should “wear some flowers in (their) hair” because “summertime will be a love-in there.”

And it happened. The attendees really did all have flowers in their hair—and jackets with epaulets, badges, face paint, sandals, tie-dye, stripes, paisley, Day-Glo, bare feet, medallions, hats, hair bands, funny glasses, and most importantly, a naive optimism coupled with a pretentious belief in the righteousness of their ideals. Oh yeah, they also had long hair and an inclination to take hallucinogens, as well. It was during her performance at the Monterey Pop Festival that Janis Joplin was introduced to and became embraced by the West Coast youth movement. Playing with Big Brother and the Holding Company, she astounded the audience with the sheer power of emotion that poured from her voice. Label chief Clive Davis was so impressed that he made sure to add Joplin to the roster of Columbia Records, even though it meant spending a considerable sum of money to free her from her previous contract.

Joplin belting her way through a cover of Erma Franklin's “Piece of My Heart” is one of the most hair-raising vocal performances in rock and roll. She sang the blues in much the same way that she lived her life—with reckless abandon and intense passion. Big Brother and the Holding Company could hardly qualify as being even a passable excuse for a blues band, but somehow their sloppy and amateur musicianship suited Joplin. They were certainly more sympathetic to her style than the brash Kozmic Blues Band or the somewhat staid Full Tilt Boogie Band, both of which backed her in later years. With Bessie Smith as her inspiration and enormous amounts of booze and drugs as her fuel, Joplin would bury herself under the emotional weight of her material. She sounded as though she was tearing her vocal chords to shreds, but she crawled so deeply inside whatever she sang that she *became* the song. Onstage and on her best recordings, she sounded like a frazzled mass of exposed nerve endings. This vulnerability and her penchant for getting high proved to be a lethal combination. A scant two weeks after Jimi Hendrix passed away, on September 18, 1970, Joplin died of an accidental overdose on October 4, 1970.

### GREAT HITS

SEPTEMBER 1968 #11  
TIME HAS COME TODAY—  
THE CHAMBER BROTHERS



## SEPTEMBER 1968 #20 ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER—JIMI HENDRIX

Jimi Hendrix's career was so short and yet so influential that it is difficult to come to terms with that fact. Between 1967 and 1969 he released only three (official) albums before his accidental death, yet he has become the most influential musician since instruments became electrified. Nobody else even comes close. Because his work was experimental—and expanded the horizons of rock and roll and all of amplified music—it generally lies outside the realm of the Top 40. Ever since the birth of rock and roll, even *including* the birth of rock and roll, the Top 40 has rarely welcomed innovators. With Hendrix, his most commercial singles, such as “Foxy Lady” and “Purple Haze,” failed to chart any higher than #67 and #65, respectively. The reasons for this, though, are slightly more complicated than chart resistance alone.

Hendrix was an American (from Seattle) who was introduced to the American public through his popularity in England. He had been playing small clubs in New York's Greenwich Village when Chas Chandler, a member of the Animals who was interested in leaving the performing side of the business for management, saw him playing guitar at the Café Wha. Chandler could hardly believe the talent he saw. Hendrix combined incredible technique with an overwhelming emotional power

and had a stage personality that worked like a magnet on his audience. Even more unbelievably, he was playing unlike anybody ever had. Everything was a part of his sound palette, from the most gently arpeggiated chords to ear-deafening feedback. He controlled all of these sounds with the confidence of a master, and his upside-down stringing of a right-handed guitar played left-

handed made even his most fundamental riffing difficult to discern or copy. Chandler was so impressed that he flew Hendrix to London and set him up with appropriate supporting musicians.

With no specific plan in mind, Chandler arranged some auditions and chose drummer Mitch Mitchell (who beat out his competitor Aynsley Dunbar by the toss of a coin) and bassist Noel Redding (actually a guitarist who was unfamiliar with playing bass) to accompany Hendrix for his first club dates. When a record contract was proffered, the lineup gelled, and their positions as support musicians became more secure, musically if not financially. The group, which called itself the Jimi Hendrix Experience, released “Hey Joe” as its debut single in England. It became a Top 10 hit there while America ignored it. The English music audience, which was very blues-oriented, was bowled over by this black American guitar genius who was (so far) unappreciated at home. The cognoscenti—including Eric Clapton, Pete Townshend, Jeff Beck, et al.—were stupefied, benumbed even, by Hendrix, finding him not only technically superior, but possessing a feel for his instrument and music that was unimaginable to any “proper” Englishman.

The first in a series of ill-begotten package tours began that, if you can believe it, featured the Walker Brothers as headliners with Cat Stevens, Engelbert





Humperdinck, and the Jimi Hendrix Experience as support acts. All thrown together, I'd say this motley crew covered a considerably catholic range of musical styles. Hendrix's reintroduction to the U.S. came with his triumphant appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival and was soon followed by another ill-advised tour, this time as a warm-up act for the Monkees, of all groups. His first two albums were warmly received, and by the end of 1967, Hendrix was generally recognized for the immense talent that he possessed.

Work on his third album showed a further shift toward free-form experimentation and jamming. This format precluded strict song structures and compact arrangements, making his music less pop-oriented but certainly no less interesting. Although he could be an anarchic performer, Hendrix was an absolute perfectionist in the studio and was willing to work endlessly until he was satisfied with the final product. Since he was basically unhappy with the results of his first two albums, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the recording of his third album, *Electric Ladyland*. This would eventually lead to his split from Chandler, who wanted Hendrix to follow a more commercial path, and from the Experience, particularly Noel Redding, who craved more autonomy. But Hendrix was unremitting in his approach to recording, and his work still stands up under close analysis. "All Along the Watchtower" was chosen as a single from these sessions and displays all of the care and workmanship that Hendrix bestowed onto these recordings. The instrumental passage in particular features four distinct guitar phrases, which change every four bars. From a blistering lead guitar part, to a spacey slide guitar sound, to a funky wah-wah, and finally to a climactic rhythm phrase, each part is fundamentally different from the others. The phrasing, however, is so brilliant that it is easy to overlook the thought that went into the structure unless you are paying close attention. "All Along the Watchtower" was destined to become Hendrix's only Top 40 single. The potent mix of Bob Dylan's wordplay with Hendrix's musicianship combined the talents of two acknowledged masters without compromising the artistry of either. Modifying Dylan's version from the *John Wesley Harding* album, Hendrix gives the song textures that weren't even suggested by the original recording.

Although it is stereotypical to bemoan the loss of anyone who died in his prime, Hendrix is an artist who I believe had not even approached his potential when he passed away from an accidental overdose. All three of his studio albums are intuitively brilliant and remain classics, but none of them captures the artist in a state of full development. Considering what heights he achieved without applying any large degree of discipline, it is staggering to think of what might have developed had he been given the chance to focus his creativity. More

**Although he could be an anarchic performer, Hendrix was an absolute perfectionist in the studio and was willing to work endlessly until he was satisfied with the final product.**





than any other figure, Hendrix is the ultimate rock-and-roll hero who burned out before he faded away.

## OCTOBER 1968 #1 LOVE CHILD—DIANA ROSS AND THE SUPREMES

**R**. Dean Taylor is at least partially responsible for two of the most unintentionally funny and yet captivating songs of all time. One is his own ode to a criminal on the lam, called “Indiana Wants Me,” and the other is the Supremes’ “Love Child.” Both songs tell a story that is as cinematic in scope as a below-average B movie, and both songs contain moralistic underpinnings that supposedly justify the dramatic intent. “Love Child” is by far the most successful of the two, but it certainly does have its comedic moments, usually at the expense of the unidentified background singers (Cindy Birdsong and Mary Wilson missed this session). When they sing the line “teehh-nement slu-um” out of context and before any other vocal, it is strangely humorous. If the band and accompanying musical riff weren’t so good, the song might have sounded like a bad parody of socially conscious soul music. Musical agility is the saving grace of “Love Child,” keeping it from lapsing into the overwrought melodrama that makes “Indiana Wants Me” one of the best accidental comedy records ever.

In the lyrics, the narrator herself is a “love child,” who wants to avoid having a child of her own under the same circumstances that tainted her life. Here then, on vinyl, is Diana Ross’s first dramatic role. Musically, it is one of the most interesting songs that the Supremes ever recorded. That in itself is interesting because it marks the first time in their hit-studded career that they had a #1 hit that wasn’t written and produced by Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland.

**If the band and accompanying musical riff weren’t so good, the song might have sounded like a bad parody of socially conscious soul music.**

The change of writers came about due to a “work slowdown” initiated by Holland-Dozier-Holland. They felt that since they had stuck with the label through thick and thin, particularly the thin part, they ought to be compensated now that the Motown organization was raking in money. Berry Gordy adamantly refused their demands and issued a \$4 million lawsuit for punitive damages resulting from their refusal to work. They countersued for twenty-two million, and it was eventually settled out of court. After Holland-Dozier-Holland’s departure, the Supremes’ career suffered. Other producer/writers were enlisted to fill the gaping hole, including Smokey Robinson and Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson, but the results were usually less than stellar. It took the unwieldy team of Pam Sawyer, R. Dean Taylor, Frank Wilson, and Deke Richards to compose “Love Child,” and then additional support from Motown president Berry Gordy and Henry Cosby to produce it.





The topicality of the lyrics was something new for the Supremes, who surely seemed more suited to the love songs that were their dietary staple. On the heels of the Holland-Dozier-Holland departure, it was risky business to fool with the carefully crafted image of Diana Ross and the Supremes, but it worked. “Love Child” became their first #1 record since April 1967.

## OCTOBER 1968 #3 MAGIC CARPET RIDE—STEPPENWOLF

**J**ohn Kay (from East Germany, original name was Joachim Krauledat), was the leader of Steppenwolf, and claimed that the band chose its name not because of any allusion to the writings of Herman Hesse, the German-born author who wrote a 1922 novel called *Steppenwolf*, but because it sounded “cool.” He even claimed to be completely ignorant of this author and his work until after the band name was chosen. Not only do I buy this story, but I can relate to it. At about the same time, I was not quite a teenager and eager to form my first rock band (with my parents’ permission, of course). Although nobody I knew at the time could play an instrument, we formed a band anyway and searched for a name that would validate our existence. After racking our brains for a while, we decided on the name Dogblood because it sounded “cool.” How much more inappropriately disgusting could a bunch of twelve-year-olds get? Later, when I was about fourteen and in a band with people who really could play their instruments, we once again needed a moniker. Although we were mostly a southern-rock copy band—playing the best of the Allmans, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and the Marshall Tucker Band—we somehow chose the name The Sartre Band, not because we were teenage existentialists who followed the opinions of the French writer, but because his name sounded “cool.”

Steppenwolf is actually a pretty good name, especially for a hard-hitting outfit that was defining the parameters of a new type of music that would come to be known as heavy metal. Although the term existed for years as a description for certain toxic substances, Steppenwolf was the first to coin the phrase in the musical sense in their debut single, “Born to Be Wild.” By the ’80s, heavy metal would encompass a genre so narrowly defined yet so hugely popular that it would roll over anything that got in its way, including the opinions of music critics. Before there was something called a “headbanger’s ball,” heavy metal meant Steppenwolf, Iron Butterfly, Vanilla Fudge, and maybe Blue Cheer. Of these, though, only Steppenwolf sounded lithe enough to get out of the way of an oncoming steamroller. The others were lumbering, plodding bashers, with barely a hint of musicality, and probably would have destroyed the heavy metal genre with their bull-in-a-china-

**Steppenwolf is actually a pretty good name, especially for a hard-hitting outfit that was defining the parameters of a new type of music that would come to be known as heavy metal.**



shop approach, had not Led Zeppelin come along and redefined it entirely. Led Zep were the patriarchs, but Steppenwolf were the forefathers.

“Magic Carpet Ride” appeared barely three months after “Born to Be Wild,” and it came so close to repeating the same chart performance as its predecessor that it seemed certain Steppenwolf would be around for the long haul. Its sound was equally heavy, but the lyrics were a wee bit more playful and less defiant. Apparently, the band members had traded in their Harleys for mystical Persian rugs. Despite the natural tendency to assume that the song makes reference to a drug-induced trip, this was probably not deliberate, as Kay was vocally antidrugs. He had political aspirations, and his views were surprisingly (and refreshingly) centrist, especially when compared with the otherworldly ramblings of his contemporaries. The midsection of “Magic Carpet Ride” is pretty much out of this world, too, but it seems to serve no purpose except to waste a few minutes of the listener’s time. As the Doors did with “Light My Fire” and Tommy James and the Shondells did with “Crimson and Clover,” Steppenwolf employed the good sense to edit the offensively meandering midsection to a few seconds and, voilà, a compact pop song!

Although Steppenwolf had a series of gold albums and a number of additional Top 40 hits, they also became casualties of the ’60s and found it impossibly difficult to maintain their brand of hard rock into the cynical ’70s. After a few personnel changes, they lost their identity and decided to call it quits. A few ex-members tried to lay claim to the Steppenwolf name, and at one point Kay even formed a new group called Steppenwolf, but it was all too obvious that the heyday for this band was to remain squarely in the atmosphere of political turmoil that existed during the late ’60s.

## OCTOBER 1968 #6 ELENORE—THE TURTLES

“Elenore” was a scathingly satirical barb aimed right at the heart of straightlaced pop music, but hardly anybody got the joke. Most listeners just heard a catchy melody with slightly goofy lyrics. In the context of the album that contained it, though, the humor of the song was more readily apparent. Titled *Battle of the Bands*, the album featured an “entry” from eleven fictitious groups, from the crazed psychedelia of Atomic Enchilada to the country-western weirdness of the Quad City Wranglers. “Elenore” was credited to Howie, Mark, Johnny, Jim, and Al—a send-up of the mid-’60s brat-pack rock group, Dino, Desi, and Billy. With lyrics as humorously inane as “You’re my pride and joy, et cetera” rhyming with “Tell me that you love me better,” it’s hard to believe that most of us missed the point.

The problem was that most listeners considered the Turtles themselves to be purveyors of pure pop. When they released “Elenore” as a single, it was taken at face value because it was

### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1968 #25  
 QUICK JOEY SMALL (RUN JOEY  
 RUN)—KASENETZ/KATZ SINGING  
 ORCHESTRAL CHORUS



simply too good to be seen as a send-up. Also, it was uncomfortably close to the historical sound and image that the Turtles already had. While tenaciously trying to maintain their place on the pop charts, the Turtles deliberately shot themselves in the foot, and nobody saw them do it. They became satirical observers of pop culture, which nobody, neither the bubblegum crowd nor the hip contingent, understood (or cared to understand). Once they accepted an invitation from Tricia Nixon to appear at the White House, the hip contingent instantaneously viewed the Turtles as obsolete.

With no place to go, the group disbanded quietly at the end of the decade. Lead vocalists Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan would next become members of Frank Zappa's band, under the pseudonyms Phlorescent Leech (Flo) and Eddie. By aligning themselves with one of the most notoriously anticommercial musicians in the business, they sailed right over the heads of the categorists who had once deemed them as being too commercial. Nyeah nyeah nyeah.

## **NOVEMBER 1968 #1 I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE— MARVIN GAYE**

**U**nlike most of the other major Motown artists, whose careers were dominated by a specific producer or production team, Marvin Gaye's producers were scattershot. Just about every active producer at Motown took a turn at producing him at one time or another. William Stevenson, Smokey Robinson, Berry Gordy Jr., the Holland-Dozier-Holland team, and a handful of others all produced hits for Gaye. "I Heard It through the Grapevine" marks the first recording that combined Gaye's interpretive skills with Norman Whitfield's production talent. Whitfield wrote "Grapevine" with Barrett Strong, and it was by no means a sure thing for Gaye. The song had already been recorded by other Motown artists, including the Isley Brothers, the Miracles, and Gladys Knight, so Gaye's version was hardly expected to be revelatory. Gaye himself resisted recording the shop-worn tune. His version was intended to be used as album filler, particularly since Gladys Knight and the Pips' version had sold two million copies the previous year. Nevertheless, Whitfield convinced the Motown "quality control" department to release Gaye's version as a single.

In truth, Whitfield's new arrangement had virtually nothing in common with Knight's raucous, gospelly version. Gaye replaces Knight's "a-ha, I caught you" attitude with something much more disturbed. He sounds haunted and obsessed by the visions portrayed in the lyrics. The ominous chord structure exacerbates the compelling paranoia in his voice. His distracted, unfocused vocal style

**"I Heard It through the Grapevine" marks the first recording that combined Gaye's interpretive skills with Norman Whitfield's production talent.**



**Whitfield displays his mastery of string arrangements by making sure that they never become intrusive.**

makes “Grapevine” doubly resonant because he sounds like a man shell-shocked by his newfound revelation. Gaye was surely the most soulful artist on the Motown roster, and his ominous interpretation of “Grapevine” stands out among a sea of classic Motown performances.

Whitfield displays his mastery of string arrangements by making sure that they never become intrusive. The tambourine, probably the single most common percussion instrument used on Motown’s recordings, deserved a Grammy award for “best dramatic role by a percussion instrument” for its chilling portrayal of the snake in the Garden of Eden. Gaye deserved an award, as well. He leaves little doubt in the listener’s mind that the snake (the devil in disguise in Genesis, remember?) is responsible for the evil that has been done. Before his birth, Gaye’s grandfather prophesied that his grandson’s success would lie “under the grapevine.” Considering the subsequent events in Gaye’s tumultuous life, it’s only a shame that he couldn’t also foresee that grapevines are a place where snakes take refuge.

## NOVEMBER 1968 #3 WICHITA LINEMAN—GLEN CAMPBELL

**G**len Campbell, the seventh of twelve children in a musical family, discovered at a young age that he had a facility for stringed instruments (guitar, banjo, and mandolin). While still a teenager, he played with a few failed bands of his own making and gained some necessary experience by occasionally playing guitar for his uncle’s Western swing outfit. He then formed his own band in 1958 and continued to tour the Southwest. When Dave Burgess left his post as leader of the Champs (most famous for “Tequila”), Campbell was chosen as his replacement. As hard as it is to imagine him being a member of this Tex-Mex outfit, it defies credibility when it is also noted that Seals and Croft’s (“Summer Breeze,” “Diamond Girl,” “We May Never Pass This Way Again,” “I’ll Play for You,” “Get Closer”) were also members of the band at this time. Campbell stayed with the group for about two years but decided to stay off the road and stick to session work after the birth of his first child.

He settled in Los Angeles, where he went to work on an endless series of recording sessions. By his own reckoning, he played on something like 600 sessions, only three of which were distinguished by profitable sales, until he recorded a version of “Turn Around, Look at Me,” which became a minor hit for the Crest record label. The die was finally cast, and Capitol Records decided to recruit Campbell and dedicated themselves to promoting his unique talents.

Dedication is apparently what it took. Campbell’s first twenty attempts at scoring a national pop hit either failed miserably or met with limited success. Meanwhile, he supplemented his income through numerous recording sessions that, because of his major label connection, were becoming increasingly lucra-



tive. Campbell's sessions included recordings by Frank Sinatra, Bobby Darin, Nat "King" Cole, the Association, Jan and Dean, Elvis Presley, Rick Nelson, and a stint as a member of Phil Spector's Wrecking Crew. For a while, he became a member of the Beach Boys when he initially took the ailing Brian Wilson's spot for live performances. At the same time, Capitol was growing increasingly frustrated with the failure of his own recordings and told Campbell to choose his own material. In other words, they assumed he would dig his own grave. Instead, he dug himself out of the commercial limbo he had been placed in. By choosing appropriate material for his image and sound, he gained national recognition with his recording of John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind." His choice of Jimmy Webb's "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" opened the floodgates, and in no time, Campbell was a star.

Numerous television appearances followed, along with a healthy dose of recognition within the industry, as can be attested by his numerous achievements at the 1968 Grammy awards. Seemingly overnight, these recordings transformed Campbell from a country artist and session musician to a bona fide pop star. Although his live appearances often displayed his multitudinous talents, he would from now on be permanently square-pegged as a middle-of-the-road pop artist, the eventually self-proclaimed "rhinestone cowboy." Before things got too carried away, though, he maintained the good sense to choose another Webb composition as a single. Although "Wichita Lineman" was almost as lyrically weird as Webb's other 1968 opus, "MacArthur Park," it became a nationwide #3 hit.

"Wichita Lineman" is a spooky, romantic song that conjures images of a repairman with a leather tool belt strapped to his waist hanging from a telephone pole. Judging from his obsessive thoughts about his lover, it sounds as though he might have gotten a little bit too close to the current. Although he is alone on some godforsaken country road, he imagines hearing his lover's voice as he works. "I hear you singing in the wire. I can hear you through the whine" captures that feeling when thoughts of love overwhelm every second of the day. "And I need you more than want you, and I want you for all time" is an eloquently plain yet poetic way of expressing this overwhelming desire. Webb songs have a way of drawing emotion from the most absurd imagery, and "Wichita Lineman" is a perfect example of this. Campbell continued to record Webb compositions, including the Top 40 hits "Galveston" and "Where's the Playground, Susie." Taken together, they represent Campbell's best work on vinyl, and he remains the best interpreter of Webb's tunefully romantic and convoluted imagery.

### GREAT MISSES

NOVEMBER 1968 #15  
CHEWY CHEWY—OHIO EXPRESS

NOVEMBER 1968 #22  
BANG SHANG A LANG—THE ARCHIES

"Wichita Lineman" is a spooky, romantic song that conjures images of a repairman with a leather tool belt strapped to his waist hanging from a telephone pole.





## DECEMBER 1968 #1 **CRIMSON AND CLOVER—** **TOMMY JAMES AND THE SHONDELLS**

**T**ommy James has one of the more bizarre discovery stories of any artist. In 1960, at the age of twelve, he formed a band with some of his schoolmates from Niles, Michigan, and they called themselves the Shondells. The group attracted some local attention and recorded a few tracks with funding from a deejay who thought they might have some potential. One song that they recorded in 1963 was called “Hanky Panky.” It was a Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich composition that James heard while at a nightclub, and it inspired him to record his own version. Since he was only vaguely familiar with the original version of the tune, he ad-libbed his way through the lyrics while the band pounded out a primal rhythm behind him. After some local recognition, the song faded away, and the band graduated from high school. Soon afterward, they broke up and proceeded to get on with their lives.

Two years later, a record promoter was rummaging through cut-out bins of some old 45s when he came across a copy of “Hanky Panky,” purchased it, and liked it enough to want it rereleased. A Pittsburgh deejay was also impressed and started playing the song in steady rotation, fueled by requests from listeners. He then located James, who was out of work at the time, and convinced him to come to Pittsburgh to promote the two-year-old recording. Since the original band had lost interest in the music business, James was paired with a local group called the Raconteurs, who were quickly renamed the Shondells. Three years after it was recorded, “Hanky Panky” became the #1 song in the nation in June 1966.

Because of the changing band members, the Shondells remained a mostly faceless entity while all attention fell on James. The split of rock-and-roll music into two camps—the more serious and mature “rock” and the decidedly not-so-serious or mature “pop”—had widened into a chasm, and James’s label, Roulette, steered him toward the latter. Aiming at the adolescent audience, Tommy James and the Shondells recorded “I Think We’re Alone Now” and “Mony Mony,” among others, which were really quite solid rock-and-roll recordings. Taken together, these songs established him as a star among the teenybopper crowd at a time when a new genre of pop called bubblegum music was on the rise.

**Tommy James  
and the  
Shondells  
recorded “I  
Think We’re  
Alone Now” and  
“Mony Mony,”  
among others,  
which were  
really quite  
solid rock-and-  
roll recordings.**

Bubblegum music was the creation of a few astute businessmen. Producers Jerry Kasenetz and Jeff Katz formed a collection of lightweight and faceless bands, such as the Ohio Express and the 1910 Fruitgum Co., to record disposable novelty songs, including “Chewy Chewy,” “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy,” “1 2 3 Red Light,” and “Indian Giver.” All were issued on Neil Bogart’s Buddah label, and all reached the Top 20. Meanwhile, Don Kirshner, a business-



man and one-time musical director for the Monkees, was not about to stand around idle when there was money to be made. He capped the climax of bubblegum music by forming the ultimate invention of pretend-rock, a band of cartoon characters extracted from the popular *Archie* comic book series. The genre reached its apotheosis when the Archies scored with “Sugar, Sugar,” one of the biggest-selling singles of all time.

Frustrated with his sugar-sweet image, James took matters into his own hands and began to write and produce his own material. The change of image and sound posed a tremendous risk, one that the public most likely would not have accepted if his new sound wasn’t so innovative. A five-and-a-half-minute recording called “Crimson and Clover” features a shimmering melody and inventive instrumentation but is hampered by an overly extended instrumental passage, with a meandering, wah-wah infected guitar solo (a wah-wah pedal is a guitar effect device). A particularly appealing feature of the record is the heavily processed vocal effect at the song’s end, sounding thoroughly modern and unlike anything else that had preceded it. Gratefully, the song was edited for single release and became a compact, concise, tuneful, and irresistible single with a production gimmick that demands attention. In one swift maneuver, Tommy James and the Shondells recorded their biggest hit and moved substantially away from the confining entrapments of bubblegum.

## DECEMBER 1968 #2 I’M GONNA MAKE YOU LOVE ME— THE SUPREMES AND THE TEMPTATIONS

**A** little healthy competition never hurt anybody, and at Motown, competition was the currency. Over the course of the company’s first ten years (1960-1970), the percentage of singles that became hits was stupendous. Motown Records released comparatively few 45s (535), while a full 357 songs qualified as hits, a ratio of more than two out of every three. They were batting more than .667! No other label came anywhere near this figure. One of the factors in Motown’s success was its “quality control department,” which reviewed everybody’s latest work and decided what would be released. Artists knew that if their record wasn’t better than all of the other material that was being screened, it had very little chance of seeing the light of day. In one instance, sixty-eight records were reviewed, and sixty-seven were vetoed. This meant that artists competed directly with one another for the hottest songs, producers, and a chance to release the outcome.

This competitiveness was the rationale behind placing both the Supremes and the Temptations on vinyl together. Two of Motown’s most popular acts would duel it out on vinyl. Besides guaranteeing that it would be released, this ensured that each act would go out of its way to outsize the other. Before Motown, the Temptations and the Supremes used to perform together as the Primes and the Primettes. Since they had known each other for years and had competed in much the same way before they became famous, this seemed like a reunion as much as a challenge.



While Diana Ross, of course, handles the female lead, Eddie Kendricks uses his falsetto to tackle the male role. In a way that might otherwise have been uncharacteristic for these two performers, they ad-lib their phrasing and take liberties with the melody, giving their performance the hoped-for tension that stems from a competitive atmosphere. "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me" stands up to some of the best work that each group had done individually. Subsequent pairings were much less fruitful, both artistically and commercially, but for this first attempt, you can hear the sparks fly.

## DECEMBER 1968 #5 HOOKE ON A FEELING—B.J. THOMAS

**F**rom what I understand, B.J. Thomas was apparently hooked on something a bit more potent than "a feeling" (ouch). Drug problems notwithstanding, he recorded a surprisingly consistent string of hits in a variety of styles for more than a decade. Although he was unable to achieve the superstardom that Florence Greenburg, the president of Scepter Records (his label), predicted for him, he didn't fare so poorly, either.

Born in Houston, Texas, Billy Joe Thomas sang in his school choir and eventually joined a local band called the Triumphs. Together, they recorded a number of regional hits, including a version of Hank Williams's "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." Teenage entrepreneur/producer/promoter/manager and fellow Texan Steve Tyrell worked for Scepter and knew Thomas from his high-school days. He heard "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and was impressed enough to pick it up for national distribution. Scepter helped the song become a national hit and set about establishing the career of its new star.

Thomas proved himself to be a reasonably malleable artist who could conform to the various settings and styles that were thrown at him. He recorded in numerous studios in different parts of the country, and each studio yielded very different results, though all were usually successful. Besides his initial work in Texas at Pasa-

adena Sound Studios ("I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" and "Mama"), he also recorded in New York at A&R Recording Studios ("Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" and "Everybody's Out of Town") and in New York City at Electric Ladyland ("Rock and Roll Lullaby"). There was also a stint at Studio One ("No Love at All") in Doraville, Georgia, with the Atlanta Rhythm Section, but his most artistically successful work took place, not too surprisingly, at Chips Moman's American Recording Studios in Memphis. Each studio produced a different sound for the singer, but American had the most realized vision.

Songwriter Mark James was based in Memphis and managed by Steve Tyrell. Since Thomas had recently moved into town, Tyrell saw it as a great opportunity to unite his songwriter with his singer. James wrote two huge hits for Thomas, "Eyes of a New York Woman" and "Hooked on a Feeling," then went on to greater





fame as the author of Elvis Presley's remarkable comeback recording, "Suspicious Minds." The Memphis musicians had an amazing capacity for finding a sound that was highly commercial, extremely original, and completely soulful. The most inspirational part of this particular recording stemmed from the phenomenal electric sitar playing of studio musician Reggie Young. Young's "guitar-sitar" was a custom-made instrument that produced an instantly identifiable sound, as can be seen by his session work on the Box Tops' "Cry Like a Baby" and Thomas's "Hooked on a Feeling." The descending triplet-within-a-triplet pattern that opens "Hooked on a Feeling" is nothing short of startling. The rest of the recording shines, as well, but by far Thomas's most popular hit was "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head," which Burt Bacharach and Hal David wrote for the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Although they wrote it with Bob Dylan in mind (fat chance), Thomas's recording of the song became a #1 hit for four weeks in the waning days of the '60s.

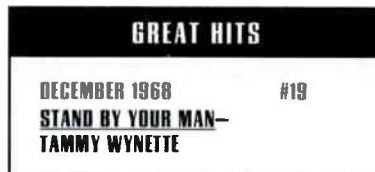
## DECEMBER 1968 #10 SON OF A PREACHER MAN—DUSTY SPRINGFIELD

A change of record labels in 1968 meant some very fundamental changes in Dusty Springfield's approach to recording. Before signing with Atlantic Records, most of her English recording sessions consisted of her singing over prearranged instrumentation. Atlantic producer Jerry Wexler, with engineer Tom Dowd and arranger Arif Mardin, did not work this way and made plans for her to come to the United States to record with them.

For reasons that were more obvious than innovative, it was decided that Springfield would record her Atlantic debut in Memphis. After all, Atlantic had already used American Recording Studios in Memphis for other artists, including Aretha Franklin and Wilson Pickett, and Springfield had a well-established reputation as the most soulful female singer that the U.K. ever produced. Springfield was surprised, however, that the band worked out their arrangements from scratch, and she wondered how she could approach a recording with nothing to rely on but a demo from the songwriter and the band's ingenuity. One such demo was "Son of a Preacher Man," which had already been offered to Franklin, who passed on it. In time, Springfield settled into American's laid-back but rock solid approach to recording.

The pairing worked beautifully. The musicians softened the hard edges of their funky sound to better suit the vocal, and Springfield slowly managed to mesh her work methods with theirs. As a result, she never sounded more relaxed and expressive. After the recording was released, Franklin heard the finished product and later told Wexler that she might want to record the song after all.

While in Memphis, Springfield mentioned some of the session players she knew in England and recommended a certain guitarist by the name of Jimmy Page.





Atlantic, which was primarily an R&B label, was actively looking to expand its roster to include rock acts. Soon after, Page and his band, Led Zeppelin, were signed to Atlantic.

## JANUARY 1969 #1 EVERYDAY PEOPLE—SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE

In retrospect, it seems hard to believe that despite the turmoil, the assassinations, and the lingering but flagrant existence of outright prejudice, the late '60s represented one of the most constructive times for communication between the races. For a while, the youthful ideals that had swept the country took precedence over our racial makeup.

In every way, Sly and the Family Stone was the perfect symbol for this newfound, albeit temporary, brotherhood. Its black and white, male and female members offered not only a literal representation of the time's ideals, but a musical stylization that crossed racial lines effortlessly. "Everyday People" easily topped both the R&B charts (two weeks) and the pop charts (four weeks). The song is not only a plea for racial tolerance, but a plea to accept anybody who appears to be different or non-conforming—"Different strokes for different folks." Sly and the Family Stone played music that was an appealing convergence of black and white styles and took their message full circle by declaring that he, she, we, and "I am everyday people."

Like everything else we thought we had achieved in the '60s, however, things disintegrated in the '70s as an overwhelming cynicism began to take hold, and once again the different segments of society began to go their separate ways. In a few years, the very same people who bought and believed in the sentiments of "Everyday People" would be tagged as members of the "me" generation.

## JANUARY 1969 #1 BUILD ME UP BUTTERCUP—THE FOUNDATIONS

Not all great pop songs are works of art. Some can be downright silly. "Build Me Up Buttercup" is just about as flaky as a pop song can be; yet it manages to be almost impossible to ignore whenever it comes on the radio. If somebody were to chronicle the annals of the most potent sing-along songs of all time, "Build Me Up Buttercup" would have to be right up there at the top of the list with "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Its bright and bouncy beat, when coupled with the limited range of notes that define the melody, marks a perfect combination of attractive simplicity and energy that bridges all genres.

The seven members of the Foundations came together in London but represented a veritable global village of instrumentalists. Jamaica, Ceylon, Barbados, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic, and England were all called home by this diverse band at one time or another, but all members eventually found their way to the capital of Great Britain's commonwealth. They worked as singing waiters in an English coffee bar until they were discovered by Pye Records. "Baby Now That I've Found You" was their first hit and began the formula of unrestrained vocals





and infectious pop rhythms that exemplified both of their huge hits. The song reached #1 in England and eventually moved to #11 in the United States.

A few personnel changes and a flop or two later, the Foundations appeared to be standing on shaky ground. Then Tony Macauley, a principal of Pye Records, and Mike D'Abo from the Manfred Mann group teamed up to compose "Build Me Up Buttercup," and they contributed the song to the group, hoping to give them another hit. Needless to say, it worked. With an arrangement that emulated some of the best characteristics of the Motown sound and the developing Philadelphia sound, the Foundations sounded about as American as apple pie. "Build Me Up Buttercup" became a #3 hit in the states and a certified million-seller that refuses to go away. A few more flops caused the Foundations to crumble, but their legacy lives on every time their songs cause someone to spontaneously burst out and sing along.

#### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1969	#11
I'VE GOTTA BE ME— SAMMY DAVIS JR.	

## FEBRUARY 1969 #2 PROUD MARY—CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

**A**lthough I'm no rocket scientist, I know there is a law in physics stating that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What applies to physics often applies to popular music, as well. For every trend that attempts to take music in a new direction, a counterforce often arises that attempts to do just the opposite. Creedence Clearwater Revival was the counterforce to the San Francisco music scene. Although it was a Bay Area band, CCR had little in common with its geographic peers. While other West Coast bands marched off in the direction of psychedelia and experimentalism, Creedence maintained a rootsy sound that focused on tradition. The urban space-age hippie posturing of the Steve Miller Band, Jefferson Airplane, etc., stood in marked contrast to the rustic country-boy simplicity of CCR. Other San Francisco bands stretched the boundaries (and patience) of popular tastes with meandering rhythms and formless song structures, which would eventually cause the music from this period to become dated. While Creedence could jam endlessly with the best of them, they never left the structural form of the original tune. The group's first single, "Suzie Q," was edited from its nine-minute album version of Dale Hawkins's 1957 swamp-rock classic. Even in its full length, the song never wanders too far from Hawkins's original recording. Despite its utter simplicity and faithful reworking, "Suzie Q" went to #11, becoming the first hit single for the best singles band to ever emerge from the San Francisco area.

Their second album, *Bayou Country*, further enhanced their reputation as straightforward rockers, but it made it almost inconceivable to imagine that they heralded from San Francisco. The traditions of southern blues, boogie, and rock and roll crept into every single one of their recordings; yet songwriter/vocalist/lead guitarist John Fogerty admitted that he rarely ventured far from his hometown.



**It's a song  
about survival,  
that's for sure,  
but the refer-  
ences remain  
personal.**

He proved that the sound of the South was really only a stylization, like a dialect, which could be adapted with careful attention to detail. "Born on the Bayou," "Bootleg," and "Keep on Chooglin'" all had an authenticity that could have fooled the most knowledgeable southern fans.

"Proud Mary" was the single from this album, and it seems to emerge from a time and place that is both vague and mysterious. The very ubiquitousness of this song has elevated it beyond the status of "classic" and into an exclusive league of timeless pop songs written by the likes of

Chuck Berry, John Lennon and Paul McCartney, and Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Each of these artists has written songs that leave modern ears with the impression that they must have existed since the beginning of time. An unfortunate side effect of this is that we rarely listen closely enough to develop a fair impression of the song. When "Proud Mary" or "Jumpin' Jack Flash" or "Maybelline" comes on the radio, our minds usually switch to automatic pilot. It's hard to pay attention to something that you hear constantly. Even if we did, though, I don't know how much meaning we could discern from "Proud Mary." It's a song about survival, that's for sure, but the references remain personal.

Despite the fact that "Proud Mary" has become a staple, it remains a puzzle. Even the hundreds upon hundreds of bar-band and wedding-band versions I've heard have shed no light on the song. Ike and Tina Turner recorded it to good effect, but they decided to abandon meaning entirely and instead turned "Proud Mary" into an overcharged workout. The best version is still the original version. Fogerty's personality made him appear to be an aloof loner, and he stood apart from his contemporaries, unconcerned with misinterpretations of his most popular record. The San Francisco scene was losing its unique identity, and in some ways the huge popularity of Creedence Clearwater Revival may have contributed to its demise.

## **FEBRUARY 1969 #3 TIME OF THE SEASON—THE ZOMBIES**

**T**he Zombies were originally just another amateur English group that played American R&B tunes at their occasional gigs until they won a local talent contest. The prize was an audition for Decca Records, which really was not at all interested in signing a group that performed only cover versions. Fortunately, member Rod Argent had recently begun writing, and the Zombies auditioned with his only two original songs. The second was called "She's Not There," and it impressed Decca enough to sign the group and release it as a single. Its formula of jazz inflections layered on beat-group rhythms was intriguing and unusual for 1964, and almost immediately the Zombies were blessed with an international hit, reaching #2 on America's Top 40.

Because of their newfound success, the group's faces became known, but their image as a bunch of juvenile brainiacs probably did little to assist them in gaining



acceptance from the teenage arbiters of hip. Their next single flopped on both shores, and subsequently the fickle English record buyers abandoned interest in the band altogether. Americans kept tuned in, though, and the Zombies' third single, "Tell Her No," reached #6 in the U.S. while it barely charted at all in England. When their next few singles fared worse, Decca put the band out to pasture, completely abandoning the American market that was developing.

Luckily, CBS Records was not as shortsighted and picked the group up with a contract that allowed them a great deal of artistic freedom. The resultant album, *Odessey and Oracle*, was released at the height of pop psychedelia in 1967. Despite that this group of supposed scholars didn't know how to spell "odyssey," the album was a minor masterpiece of its time. Still, the English continued their unabated ignorance of the Zombies, and the album might as well not have existed. Columbia, CBS's American affiliate, saw no reason to think otherwise and decided to pass on its release until Al Kooper of Blood, Sweat, and Tears (a Columbia act) continually raved about it to Columbia executives. Reluctantly, and hoping that Kooper would finally just shut up about it, they released the album in America and issued two singles. The pressed vinyl sat in warehouses, generating no interest whatsoever. Disgusted and beaten, the Zombies disbanded, vowing to never regroup. Inexplicably, more than a year after the album proved itself to be a dud, Columbia issued a third single called "Time of the Season." More inexplicably, the public suddenly recovered from its somnambulism and heard "Time of the Season" for what it was: a brilliantly conceived and inarguably cool single with a contagious rhythmic hook. Although it had been recorded more than a year and a half earlier, at a time when the half-life of a pop song was about six days, "Time of the Season" was the hippest song on the radio.

Argent's melody and lead singer Colin Blunstone's voice combine to produce a sound that perfectly fit the stoned-out, reflective nature of the developing progressive-rock scene. Argent's words pack a visceral punch, as well, combining dime-store psychology and spooky mysticism with what is probably the best generation gap lyric of all time ("What's your name? Who's your daddy? Is he rich like me?"). The ex-Zombies stood on the sidelines and watched, finally validated but unable to capitalize on their belated recognition. Argent was the only member to continue with any level of success in America, when he reached #5 in 1971 with "Hold Your Head Up."

### GREAT HITS

FEBRUARY 1969 #9  
**MY WHOLE WORLD ENDED—**  
**DAVID RUFFIN**

FEBRUARY 1969 #12  
**GAMES PEOPLE PLAY—JOE SOUTH**

MARCH 1969 #4  
**ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE—**  
**JERRY BUTLER**

MARCH 1969 #6  
**TWENTY-FIVE MILES—EDWIN STARR**

MARCH 1969 #39  
**I DON'T KNOW WHY—STEVIE WONDER**

### GREAT MISSES

MARCH 1969 #15  
**DON'T GIVE IN TO HIM—**  
**GARY PUCKETT AND THE UNION GAP**



## APRIL 1969 #7 THE BOXER—SIMON AND GARFUNKEL

Passive reflection was hardly a widespread occupation among youth culture in the 1960s, but while bands like the Doors and the Rolling Stones represented anarchic lifestyles, however frightening and rudderless, Simon and Garfunkel stared at their navels and postulated. The “Why do I live?” sentiments and the stridency of the politics in Paul Simon’s early writing were often unbearably liberal-minded and reflective. All the while, Art Garfunkel hovered over the proceedings like a male Madonna (No, not *that* Madonna—although the thought of Garfunkel singing in a torpedo bra *is* pretty irresistible), lending the songs a genteel fragility that was almost physically painful. Just picturing Garfunkel with his hands clasped, breathlessly singing about unjust wars and suicide, his curly mop radiating like a halo, is the very essence of fragility. This is not to say that they didn’t release some of the finest material of their genre, but that too often it was oh-so-precious and much too sensitively rendered to be listened to often without playing something like...oh, Steppenwolf, for example, as a tonic.

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1969 GRAZING IN THE GRASS— FRIENDS OF DISTINCTION	#3
APRIL 1969 THESE EYES—THE GUESS WHO	#6
APRIL 1969 ATLANTIS—DONOVAN	#7

Filmmaker Mike Nichols began work on *Catch 22*, his film project after *The Graduate*, and considered that Garfunkel might be a calculated risk in the role of Nately, an overly sensitive waif who has a naive trust in mankind. Perhaps he was typecast, but Garfunkel was game and accepted the role. Originally, Simon was to appear in the film, as well, but his character was written out of the story during one of many rewrites. While Garfunkel hung around Mexico with costars Alan Arkin, Bob Newhart, Charles Grodin, Martin Sheen, Tony Perkins, and others, Simon languished in his apartment

in New York City composing songs for the next record. One song that makes specific reference to these times is the excellent “Only Living Boy in New York,” in which Simon refers to his loneliness while his partner, Tom, flies down to Mexico, a nod to their teenage days as Tom and Jerry.

Another song that Simon recorded almost completely in Garfunkel’s absence was “The Boxer.” Alienation and disaffection were ubiquitous themes for Simon, but here he gives the emotion a name. “The Boxer” tells a more or less narrative story of a down-on-his-luck “poor boy” who has lost his faith through deception (“such are promises”). The singer tells us his life story, through becoming an orphan (or running away), prostitution, and other distinct images of severe loneliness, until he relates his own vision of abandonment and shame: the defeated boxer. Lyrically, the setup is brilliantly clever, like a reflection of a reflection. Hearing the character recount his own loneliness—and then relate a vision as sorrowful as a boxer who needs to quit but by necessity cannot—is infinitely sad. The singer is not only downtrodden, but alert to the allusions of defeat. The





lyric captures the sadness, the loneliness, and yes, even the resolve of the situation. Despite the bombast, the sympathetic production somehow avoids sounding sanctimonious (check out the ridiculously overwrought “Bridge over Troubled Water” for evidence of sanctimonious production) but captures the innate sense of hopelessness that pervades the track.

Simon had his finger on the pulse of disaffection. Soon after this album was completed, he found himself disaffected from his singing partner. Suddenly, once Simon and Garfunkel were dissolved as a partnership, their net worth as conscientious observers of society was more apparent. I missed them. It seems that everybody did, much to their chagrin. Even today, despite somewhat lopsidedly successful solo careers, the tug to reunite haunts them both, and it's their own fault. Old friends. Bookends. When they do reunite, it is treated as a major event. Together, they have created a myth, and whenever one appears without the other, a healthy portion of the audience still harbors the wish that the other might appear from the wings and that they will once again launch into their soothing, comforting harmonies.

## APRIL 1969 #37 FIRST OF MAY—THE BEE GEES

I suppose that hardly anybody even remembers “First of May,” and that's a shame because it is one of the best coming-of-age songs ever written. It *did* sneak its way onto the Top 40, so somebody else must remember how deserving this song was of Top 10 status, even though it never came close to that sort of accolade. I believe that it never received the recognition it deserved because it was buried deep in an obscure and expensive theme album that never sufficiently caught the public's imagination. Regardless of the circumstances, “First of May” is a beautiful song. Its lyrics about losing the innocence of childhood stung me hard at a time when I was most susceptible to its message.

From the very beginning of my consciousness, I was crazy about records. Before I was four years old, a teenage neighbor moved out of town and decided that he no longer wanted his old 45s. Somehow, they found their way into my tiny hands, maybe 200 of them, and they were the best toys I could possibly have. There were so many labels with all different colors, and each had a distinct pair of songs that either did or didn't appeal to me. I would play them constantly and segregate them into piles. Since I couldn't read yet, I scribbled on the ones I didn't like with crayon. The others I treasured. My parents' friends and neighbors saw me getting so much pleasure from the discs that they would donate whatever records they no longer wanted until I had a formidable collection of 45s: three large, long-neck beer-bottle crates filled to the brim. By the time I was ten (1968), I was immersed in hit singles from the past fifteen years and was a fairly knowledgeable fan for my age. Of course, by

### GREAT HITS

APRIL 1969 #22  
STAND!—SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE





Like most other kids my age, I loved the Beatles, the Monkees, and the Rolling Stones, but my personal preferences also included the Bee Gees.

then albums were becoming the most important form of musical currency. But they were usually too expensive for me, and nobody seemed willing to simply give them away. All I could do was painstakingly save my allowance until I had the \$3.99 or so that I needed to buy an album. My parents saw this as problematic and tried to discourage me from throwing all my money away on records, but nothing, not even punishment, could dissuade me.

Like most other kids my age, I loved the Beatles, the Monkees, and the Rolling Stones, but my personal preferences also included the Bee Gees. For whatever reason, I felt I could relate to their sad and imaginative songs about victimization and rejection, and I coveted their first three albums. Then came a serious problem. For some holiday, I remember being given a twenty-dollar bill. To me, it was an infinite amount of money, and my parents warned me about spending it wisely and the importance of frugality. They seemed to be convinced that twenty bucks ought to last me at least six or seven months. The very next day, however, I took a ride to the record shop (my idea of a candy store) and started to browse. My eyes nearly popped out of my head. There on the shelf was not one but two new Bee Gees albums. One was called *The Best of the Bee Gees*. Although I recognized and owned nearly every song on the record, I had to have it. After all, it was a new package, and the pull was irresistible. This was hardly the worst of it. Next to *The Best of the Bee Gees*, in clear shrink-wrap, was a double album covered front and back in red felt. In gold leaf lettering that was embossed into the felt were the words

## BEE GEES ODESSA

Omigod. A *new double* album. What was it? There was no information on the outside save the three cryptic words. It cost almost ten bucks. There was only one thing to do. I grabbed both albums, and in an impulsive move that magnified the sheer lunacy of the moment, I also grabbed *The Best of the Cowsills*. What the heck. My change was about \$1.50.

On the way home, my excitement began to be tempered by the thought of what I had just done. In less than twenty-four hours, I had spent my twenty dollars. Feeling remorseful and frightened, I confessed to my parents what I had done. They more or less shrugged and made me feel monumentally irresponsible, which of course was the worst punishment of all. Sulking, I went off to play my new acquisitions. I didn't even bother to break the seal on *The Best of the Bee Gees*, since it no longer held much interest for me. I played the Cowsills album, and it turned out to be mostly horrible, even to my juvenile taste. Then I opened *Odessa*.



There wasn't a whole heckuva lot of information on the inside either. It averaged about four songs per side. "What a rip-off," I thought.

Side One was full of bombastic and baroque orchestration that made almost no sense to me. Not only did I spend a fortune, but the band no longer spoke to me. Depressed to the point of despondency, I trudged off to bed for a fitful night's sleep. I knew that I had learned something from this experience, but I couldn't figure it out. I just felt sad and, for some reason, a lot older. The next morning, I awoke and tried to finish the album. It seemed to get steadily better, but the feeling of guilt just would not subside. The next to last song on side four was "First of May."

"When I was small, and Christmas trees were tall, we used to laugh while others used to play..."

I cannot even begin to relate how heavily these lyrics hit me. Here I was, trying to deal with my conflicting emotions of guilt and innocence, of carefree youth and the difficulty of newfound responsibility, and along comes this song that perfectly captured how I was feeling.

"...Don't ask me why the time has passed us by. Someone else moved in from far away."

To this day, every time I do something that I ought not to have done, or something in which the consequences are ineradicable, I think of this song...and it makes me feel better.

## MAY 1969 #1 GET BACK—THE BEATLES

The legal, financial, and political nightmares that hounded the Beatles had crept into every aspect of their lives. Apple Corporation was the parent company of Apple Records and it could not have been more screwed up. The battles that ensued between lawyers and accountants became both acrimonious and counterproductive. The Beatles themselves were finding each other unbearable, as well. Their double album *The Beatles* was recorded mostly when each Beatle confirmed that the others would *not* be in the studio. Miraculously, it was an artistic (and, of course, commercial) success, even though it highlighted the lack of interplay among the band members.

The Beatles knew they were falling apart and felt that maybe if they interacted more often, the band could be salvaged. With the residual tension from their last album still in the air, they began work on their next one. Instead of utilizing an infinite number of overdubs and building a song layer by layer, the goal was to record an album with a live feel, similar to their earlier days. It was in this climate that Paul McCartney hired a film crew to document the Beatles as they rehearsed. His intentions were good,

**Their double album *The Beatles* was recorded mostly when each Beatle confirmed that the others would *not* be in the studio.**



**It's a charming, country-styled rocker, and there is no way for a listener to discern that things were as bad as they were.**

hoping that an old-fashioned, sans-overdub project would bring them all back together again. Instead, it only exacerbated the animosity and personal differences. Intended to be an informative documentary on the Beatles' studio and songwriting processes, the film inadvertently bears witness as the band crumbles to bits. Sloppy song fragments and heated conversations are littered throughout the film.

The Beatles couldn't summon the energy to see the project through to completion, so they abandoned it entirely. Reels of film were shelved and, more depressingly, the only song that was considered of sufficient quality for single release was McCartney's intended title track, "Get Back." True to their intentions, the song deliberately avoids special effects and grandiose production methods. It's a charming, country-styled rocker, and there is no way for a listener to discern that things were as bad as they were. The lyrics obliquely address the intention of the music when McCartney sings, "Get back to where you once belonged." The problem was that, as the lyrics imply, they didn't necessarily belong there anymore.

The movie was released much later, in an attempt to salvage the remaining tracks from the band's catalog after they made their split official. The soundtrack album, now pointedly titled *Let It Be*, featured a different version of the song than had appeared on the single. The album version was taken directly from a live performance, which was filmed on the rooftop of the Beatles' recording studio, while the single was recorded properly (i.e., inside the building). "Get Back" stands as the Beatles' noble attempt to put their differences behind them, but the avalanche of nonsense that affected their every move made all attempts at rejuvenation a frustrating endeavor. For a short while, though, the single version of "Get Back" made things seem to be all right.

## MAY 1969 #35 DON'T LET ME DOWN—THE BEATLES

**A**fter John Lennon met Yoko Ono, he made his songwriting as vividly personal as he knew how. His desire to express his emotions, no matter how confusing or unpopular, provided the fodder for his song topics. Often, this gave his vocal performance a sharp, taciturn edge that was miles away from the overt commercialism of his previous work. With the exception of "Julia," almost every song by Lennon on the so-called "white" album reeks of either victimization, recrimination, or accusation. With a gentle combination of confession and vulnerability, "Don't Let Me Down" stands out when compared to the harshness of these compositions.

Ono was the only woman who ever breached the Beatles' studio protocol by planting herself at Lennon's feet while the group recorded. When she felt ill, her bed was moved into the studio. The resentment that the other Beatles felt for this



intruder was unanimous and explicit. McCartney and Harrison, in particular, could not resist the odd barbed comment, and Lennon in turn felt betrayed by their lack of understanding. His obsession inspired his writing, and although the other Beatles did not relate to or sympathize with his single-minded determination, they gave him a wide berth on “Don’t Let Me Down.” Lennon took the opportunity to speak his mind and wrote soul-searching lyrics that portrayed him as somebody who was as emotionally desperate as he was genuinely in love.

“Don’t Let Me Down” was a live performance culled from the “Get Back” sessions and was released thorns and all. Unlike Lennon’s earlier B side, “I Am the Walrus,” which was denied entry onto the Top 40, “Don’t Let Me Down” crept to #35. The immediacy of Lennon’s vocal works to the song’s advantage, since his message of obsessive love and need is so personal. In some places, he breathily whispers his lines so intimately that it sounds as though he may swallow the microphone. Honest expression is more important to him than technical perfection, which is why this song earns the distinction of being perhaps the most soulful performance rendered by the Beatles.

## MAY 1969 #2 BAD MOON RISING—CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

I fancy myself to be a better-than-adequate rock-and-roll drummer, but after years of listening to different players, I’ve come to the conclusion that most percussionists overplay—a lot. Maybe I’m making excuses for my rapidly depleting chops, or maybe age has tempered my tastes to the point of neutrality, but I often find myself wishing that players would display the good taste to stick to basics. By playing in a technically proficient manner, drummers may produce an impressively technical part, but it can often be at the expense of the song. Drummers like Terry Bozzio (of Missing Persons and Frank Zappa fame) or Bill Bruford (of Yes and King Crimson fame) possess a lightning-quick speed and a sense of accuracy that is absolutely stunning to witness. Other drummers are as simple as dirt, such as Charlie Watts or Ringo Starr, but they have personal idiosyncrasies that bring attention to what they do and render them as un-copyable as their more obviously proficient peers. Then there’s someone like Creedence Clearwater Revival’s drummer, Doug Clifford. This guy plays drums in a manner that is so utterly simple and free of idiosyncrasies that it is easy to dismiss his playing as nothing more than functional, but *that is precisely the point of good rock drumming* (or keyboard playing, or bass playing, or guitar playing, for that matter). Stay out of the way and let the song do the talking. As a player, you are a conduit and should not interfere with the message intended by the songwriter. To make my point, imagine if either Terry Bozzio or Bill Bruford played drums on “Bad Moon Rising.”

...(imagine here)...





Its simplicity  
and straightforward  
arrangement make  
"Bad Moon  
Rising" sound  
as good today  
as it did  
twenty-five  
years ago.

See what I mean? Ringo Starr or Charlie Watts could easily get away with it, but it would immediately *sound* like them. Yeah, a lot of drummers could play Clifford's part on "Bad Moon Rising" with one hand tied behind their back, but none would play it *better*—even with two hands. Clifford's performance philosophy is shared by the rest of the band, as well. Stu Cook never plays a single bass note that is unnecessary, and Tom Fogerty (John's brother) strums the chord pattern as simply as his guitar will allow. With playing this simple, the song had better be good, and since it is, "Bad Moon Rising" becomes timeless.

Like Slim Pickens a-hootin' and a-hollerin' as he rides a warhead to Earth in the Stanley Kubrick movie, *Dr. Strangelove*, "Bad Moon Rising" has got to be the happiest doomsday tune ever recorded. The world is coming to an end? YEEE-HAHHH!!! The lyrics are thoroughly at odds with the joyous melody and tempo, that they perfectly capture the fine line between exhilaration and fear. This quality, together with the obvious full moon/werewolf connotations, helped make "Bad Moon Rising" the perfect song for the 1981 comedy/horror film *An American Werewolf in London*. Will this song *ever* get old? I doubt it. Its simplicity and straightforward arrangement make "Bad Moon Rising" sound as good today as it did twenty-five years ago; no adaptation of trendy styles, no flashy instrumentation, just rock and roll played in a way that is unmistakably American. No other rock band before or since has managed to sound as thoroughly American as Creedence Clearwater Revival, except perhaps the Band, and those guys were Canadian! By avoiding frills and letting the song speak for itself, their music has proven to be among the most consistent and longest lasting of the rock and roll era. There is nothing extraneous on a CCR record; every sound is integral. Anything less and the song would seem barren. Anything more would be ornate. By sticking to basics, they have earned themselves a posterity that will linger year after year.

## JUNE 1969 #4 WHAT DOES IT TAKE—JR. WALKER & THE ALL STARS

A lot had changed since Jr. Walker and the All Stars recorded "Shotgun," but you wouldn't know it by listening to their records. Their style remained mostly unchanged throughout the second half of the '60s, despite numerous innovations and shifts in musical taste. Luckily, their appeal remained mostly unchanged, as well. In 1969, trends shifted again when the image of the smooth soul man began to permeate black music trends. Tastes were mellowing from the sharp edge of raucous R&B toward the blunted corners of sophisticated soul. Rather than accept obsolescence, Walker agreed, albeit reluctantly, to tone down his sweaty brand of party music and record a few tracks in the new style. As had happened before, in the earlier days, his friend Johnny Bristol provided the





incentive to alter the direction of his career. Bristol, Harvey Fuqua, and someone named Vernon Bullock wrote and produced “What Does It Take” for Walker, but somehow he remained unconvinced of the song’s commercial potential. It wasn’t until disc jockeys were giving the song airplay from the album it appeared on that it was unanimously approved for release as a single. Once it became available, “What Does It Take” bounded and leaped its way up to position #4, tying with the All Stars’ previous personal best, when “Shotgun” did the same thing back in 1965.

Walker wasn’t an expressive singer, but his sax playing more than made up the difference. Most everybody who hears “What Does It Take” is immediately attracted to the heart-wrenching sax wail that opens the song like a melodious cry of pain. When the subsequent words seem to come up short, Walker simplifies things by saying, “I’m gonna blow for you.” Good idea. The soulful sax playing that follows works its way straight into the listener’s heart. The next verse is not much different from the first, so he sums things up this time by stating, “I’m gonna blow for you again.” Then, with his saxophone doing the talking, he more than aptly proves that he already *knows* the answer to the title’s rhetorical question.

## JUNE 1969 #8 THE BALLAD OF JOHN AND YOKO—THE BEATLES

The documentary film that eventually became *Let It Be* was a formless but fascinating mess that captured the major strengths and weaknesses of the Beatles. Paul McCartney was the only Beatle who showed any real enthusiasm for the project while the others’ reactions ranged from complacent to hostile. John Lennon continually looks distracted and gives the impression that he would much rather be somewhere else. I can venture to say that he probably felt a much more interesting documentary could have been built around the trials and tribulations that he was experiencing with Yoko Ono. “The Ballad of John and Yoko” serves as an aural version of that documentary.

Lennon’s celebrity status was always a problem for him, but at least in the beginning the intent of his fans was benign. Maybe they would get too enthusiastic and pull his hair or hide in his closet, but they didn’t mean to do harm. Once he became aligned with Ono, though, public sentiment turned nasty. While the Beatles found Ono’s presence to be a distraction at best and a destructive influence at worst, the fans were prepared to blame her for virtually everything. If Lennon got weird, it was Ono’s fault. If the Beatles were fighting, it was Ono’s fault. If Lennon

### GREAT HITS

JUNE 1969 #2  
CRYSTAL BLUE PERSUASION—  
TOMMY JAMES AND THE SHONDELLS

JUNE 1969 #4  
MY CHERIE AMOUR—STEVIE WONDER

### GREAT MISSES

JUNE 1969 #1  
IN THE YEAR 2525—  
ZAGER AND EVANS

JUNE 1969 #3  
GOOD MORNING STARSHINE—OLIVER



**Resentful,  
exasperated,  
but ultimately  
humorous,  
Lennon's lyrics  
make no bones  
about the  
persecution he  
and Ono were  
experiencing.**

was arrested for drugs, it was Ono's fault. There is no denying that Ono was quite a provocative character, often deliberately, but it is difficult to justify the enormous hatred that so many people felt for her. As an artist, she specialized in work whose intention was to arouse and challenge the audience's preconceptions with her own occasionally half-baked conceptions—once literally: she staged an exhibit that featured dozens of common objects cut in half. The early albums that she and Lennon recorded are easily among the most unlistenable pieces of vinyl that ever touched a stylus. Regardless of her tactlessness and loony ideas, though, she and Lennon were in love. This doesn't mean that his audience necessarily had to accept her, but abject hatred was not appropriate, either.

Nevertheless, Ono and Lennon became the media's whipping post. It seemed that everybody was going out of their way to make their lives as miserable as possible. "The Ballad of John and Yoko" tells the story of the difficulties they had in obtaining a marriage license. Resentful, exasperated, but ultimately humorous, Lennon's lyrics make no bones about the persecution he and Ono were experiencing. He wrote the song soon after the events that he documents took place, and he wanted to record it right away. Since George Harrison and Ringo Starr were unavailable, Lennon and McCartney recorded the entire song together in a day.

Radio didn't take too kindly to Lennon's casual use of the word "Christ" and the subsequent phrase "They're gonna crucify me," and most markets banned it. To this day, Top 40 and oldies radio stations avoid placing this on their playlists, still assuming that it is controversial. Since the rating system for singles took airplay into consideration when determining chart position, "The Ballad of John and Yoko" never rose any higher than #8. Lennon and Ono didn't have to prove anything, but the endurance of their relationship showed the world that, despite the grief and obstacles that were thrown in their path, love does indeed conquer all.

## **JUNE 1969 #9 ISRAELITES—DESMOND DEKKER**

**T**he influence that Jamaican music has had on American popular music is incalculable, but initially it worked the other way around. Jamaicans got most of their music from America, either from enterprising Jamaicans who brought records to the island, or from late-night AM radio broadcasts that crossed the sea. In the '50s, American big bands and R&B/jump bands inspired Jamaican musicians to emulate what they heard. The resulting Caribbean rhythms were substantially different from the citified jazz stylings of their inspiration, probably caused in no small part by the linguistic differences between the two cultures, and Jamaican music evolved into its own unique sound. This melding of calypso music with American R&B gave birth to a hybrid that hardly resembled either of its parents.



By the early '60s, another factor was wielding a tremendous influence on Jamaican music. The businessmen who were importing American records were finding a new way to bring music to the people and make a little cash in the process. Sound systems, or deejays on wheels, were infiltrating the towns and countryside. Looking like hot dog trucks with turntables, amplifiers, and gargantuan speakers, they would start spontaneous parties by blasting their music and attracting a crowd. Eventually, the individual trucks earned themselves followings, which they jealously tried to protect. Intense competition between the deejays caused them to find the most obscure recordings and scratch off the labels so that others could not readily determine the artists. It became even more complicated when the deejays began to record their own voices on top of the records. This dubbing of ad-libbed vocal lines on prerecorded tracks was called “toasting,” and it is one of the earliest indirect precursors of American rap music.

Because of the competition from the deejays, maintaining a big band in Jamaica was not economically feasible. As more bands formed, the size of the outfits grew smaller until they consisted of little more than core rhythm instruments and perhaps a three-piece horn section. This was the beginning of Jamaica's ska period. Although ska was very influential, it had little impact in America, and when it did, it came via Jamaica's connection to England. Being an independent state within the Commonwealth of Great Britain caused Jamaican culture to become more readily assimilated in England than in its closer neighbor, the United States. Ironically, songs from Jamaica were heard in the U.S. only after they became big hits in England and sneaked back across the Atlantic Ocean under the cover of America's obsession with English culture during the British Invasion.

Eventually, whether because of the oppressive heat or a less-optimistic cultural outlook, Jamaican music began to slow down. By the mid-'60s, Jamaican youths were no longer dancing wildly to the upbeat sounds, but instead were skanking about, looking tougher than their predecessors and playing the part by calling themselves “rude boys.” Rock steady was a mid-period term used to describe the musical pace until it wound down all the way to the laconic pace of reggae. As the music slowed down, the lyrics tended to take on more ominous tones. Often, the songs celebrated the tough-guy image of the rude boys. Desmond Dekker and his producer, Leslie Kong, were among those to incorporate the image of the rude boy into their music, with their hit “007 (Shanty Town).” By mixing the imagery of James Bond, the invincible international spy, with that of Frank Sinatra's rat pack cronies in *Oceans 11*, Dekker became a huge star in Jamaica and had a very popular hit in the U.K., as well. Generally speaking, Americans couldn't understand Jamaican patois for the life of them, and wouldn't have a clue what Dekker was talking about, so the song was ignored wholly in the states.

**Americans couldn't understand Jamaican patois for the life of them, and wouldn't have a clue what Dekker was talking about, so the song was ignored wholly in the states.**



This makes it all the more impossible to understand how a song like “Israelites” ever managed to creep into the American Top 40. Some listeners even felt that the song masked anti-Semitic lyrics. Rastafarian beliefs were hardly common knowledge outside of Jamaica, and even in Great Britain the topic was wholly indiscernible and obscure, so the only rational explanation lies in a faddish obsession for the exotic sound of Dekker’s voice combined with the unique (to America) melody and rhythm. In a nutshell, Rastafarians believe that they are descended from Ethiopians, who are viewed as one of the lost twelve tribes of Israel. Rastafarians sympathize with the plight of the Jews and even consider themselves to be among their descendants as the chosen people. A return to Ethiopia has taken on mythical proportions and gives them cause for identification, as they are (as the Israelites once were) refugees from their homeland. “Israelites” tells a simple tale of trying to maintain respect and dignity in the face of poverty. Of course, in 1969 we didn’t have the slightest clue what Dekker was saying, but “Israelites” was a welcome aberration from the usual Top 40 fare. Jamaican music had finally become truly international.

## JULY 1969 #1 HONKY TONK WOMEN—THE ROLLING STONES

**W**hen Mick Taylor was only fourteen years old, he finagled an audition for John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers and substituted for Eric Clapton, the band’s then-guitarist, when he missed a show. By the age of seventeen, he was a permanent member of the band. Mayall preferred his players to remain somewhat anonymous and didn’t abide any “star” posturing from anyone in his band. His reputation for developing players until they outgrew his autocratic tendencies was near legendary, with both Clapton and Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac moving on to greener pastures after serving their apprenticeships. After four years of steady work with the eccentric taskmaster, Taylor developed a quiet professionalism that belied his young age. His talent was developing to the extent that it couldn’t help but be noticed, and Mayall was beginning to feel that it was time for Taylor to move on. When Mick Jagger put word out that the Rolling Stones were actively seeking a replacement for Brian Jones, one of the first people he called was Mayall. Mayall unhesitatingly suggested his young charge for the spot, and an audition was arranged.

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1969	#4
<u>SWEET CAROLINE</u> —NEIL DIAMOND	

GREAT MISSES	
JULY 1969	#6
<u>RUBY, DON'T TAKE YOUR LOVE TO TOWN</u> —KENNY ROGERS AND THE FIRST EDITION	

Taylor arrived at the Stones’ rehearsal feeling certain that he was only being considered as a temporary studio musician for their new project. But the audition quickly developed into a recording session, and before Taylor could figure out how it happened, he was a member of the Rolling Stones.





He had no time to get used to the idea. Jones had died just three days before the band was scheduled to play a free concert on July 5 at London's Hyde Park. Jones's death put unexpected pressure on the band's performance, since they were no longer simply debuting a new guitarist, but inaugurating an entirely new phase of their career. The band was fully aware that they might no longer be seen in the same light as before and buffered the pressure of the event by portraying it as a memorial tribute to Jones. Although they played awfully, the audience remained friendly and nonjudgmental. Jagger read poetry by Percy Bysshe Shelley, after which the stagehands attempted to release boxes of near-dead butterflies while the Rolling Stones launched into a sluggish version of their upcoming single, "Honky Tonk Women."

Considering the recent personnel change, the recording of "Honky Tonk Women" found the band sounding surprisingly and pleasantly intact. When Jones was alive, the Stones' allure was dark, mysterious, and provocative. Their last recordings together included blatant references to black magic and occultism ("Sympathy for the Devil" and "Jumpin' Jack Flash"), tempered violence ("Street Fighting Man"), and pedophilia ("Stray Cat Blues"). After these intimidating and controversial topics, "Honky Tonk Women" sounded like nothing more or less than a joyful celebration of boozy sex. Jagger playfully describes a sexual encounter with "a gin-soaked barroom queen in Memphis" using his best good-ol'-boy drawl, while Taylor and Keith Richards play off one another to drive the song to its horn-drenched, riff-heavy climax. Taylor was largely responsible for giving what could have been a stereotypical country tune a rocking, bluesy edge, which catapulted it to the top of the charts. Just when they needed it most, the Rolling Stones almost miraculously revived a sense of fun in their music, momentarily dismissing the shroud of darkness that had enveloped them. With "Honky Tonk Women," they cast themselves as bawdy and mischievous troublemakers who were ultimately harmless. For a while, everybody was relieved enough to simply relax, shut up, and dance.

**Jones's death put unexpected pressure on the band's performance, since they were no longer simply debuting a new guitarist, but inaugurating an entirely new phase of their career.**

## AUGUST 1969 #2 GREEN RIVER—CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

**D**espite having heard this song hundreds of times, I never realized until I sat down to write this book that I don't know a single lyric. It's embarrassing, but at least I can take some comfort in knowing that I'm not alone. I know plenty of people who never listen to the words in songs; maybe *you* never listen to the words. I admit that I almost always do, but sometimes they just don't seem to matter as much as what the music is saying. "Green River" has a slinky backwoods groove that manages to convey a message all on its own. It lurks between





the sound of John Fogerty's voice and the sound of his guitar. One is as literate as the other, judging from the directness of each, but it's a hell of a lot easier to understand what the guitar is saying. It's the guitar that gives the song a sense of place, and it's the guitar that gives the song a sense of confidence.

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1969	#1
I CAN'T GET NEXT TO YOU— THE TEMPTATIONS	

Of course, since I have realized my ignorance of the lyrics, I have played this song continually and taken in all of the cryptic words—every last one of 'em—and you know what? My understanding is no clearer than it was before. The guitar already told me that it was a song about

home. It also told me that it was a story of backwoods leisure. Mostly, though, it told me that something frightening was waiting just around the corner. The lyrics set up the same scenario, but I still claim that the guitar says it best.

### AUGUST 1969 #2 HOT FUN IN THE SUMMERTIME— SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE

**O**n the weekend of August 15-17, 1969, an event went down in a rural part of upstate New York that has since come to signify the apogee of the entire youth movement of the '60s. White Lake, in the town of Bethel, Sullivan County, became the gathering place for something like half a million souls to celebrate peace and music. Because the event was named before a permanent site was secured, it became known around the world as Woodstock, after a township nearly a hundred miles away. Although the organizers were thoroughly unprepared for the massive undertaking—in particular, for a crowd size that more than quintupled their initial estimates—things went more smoothly than anyone had a right to expect. All sorts of disasters were predicted—from politically inspired riotous rebellion to drug-crazed riotous rebellion—but in spite of some bad weather and general disorganization, things remained exceptionally calm. There was a very good reason for this.

**White Lake, in the town of Bethel, Sullivan County, became the gathering place for something like half a million souls to celebrate peace and music.**

The people who came to Woodstock had something to prove. The radical changes in youth culture that had occurred during the past few years had caused them to be looked down on by the rest of society. “Long-haired weirdo” and “dirty hippie freak” were phrases commonly used to describe anybody who subscribed to the behavior and dress of the “counterculture.” In light of the seemingly endless series of discomforts that they were exposed to, Woodstock was a golden opportunity to prove to the world that, despite appearances, they were responsible, patient, and peaceful human beings. They did this admi-



rably. From all over the country, like-minded youths gathered for a weekend of fun and music, and together they displayed a sense of love and brotherhood that seemed almost impossible under the trying circumstances. In another time or another place, it either couldn't have happened or would have collapsed into a nightmarish calamity. Maybe the moon *was* in the seventh house and Jupiter *did* align with Mars that weekend, because the harmony and understanding of the predicted Aquarian age was everywhere to be seen. Unfortunately, it wasn't the dawning of a new age, only the single greatest moment of a previously existing one.

As a form of crowd control (i.e., to keep the restless natives pacified and occupied at all times), it was decided midway through that the music ought to be continuous, so many acts were scheduled to appear before sunrise. On Sunday morning at 3 A.M., the festival reached its most populous and spiritual peak. By then, everybody who was going to make it was already there, and the torrential downpour that was going to chase off a large piece of the crowd was still a few hours away. When Sly and the Family Stone took the stage, this swarming sea of humanity saw a musical representation of itself. Black and white, male and female, the Family Stone embodied a microcosm of the Woodstock experience. Sly stood out front dressed like a psychedelic freak, exhorting the crowd through a series of songs about brotherhood, self-respect, and feeling good. The chant of "I want to take you higher!" had both literal and spiritual meaning to this temporary city, and they showed their enthusiasm and approval by igniting a seemingly infinite number of matches in the predawn darkness.

While Sly and the Family Stone were onstage, "Hot Fun in the Summertime" was on its way up the charts. Although it's unlikely that many people in the audience were familiar with it at the time, this song would come to signify the good vibes and overall self-congratulatory optimism that permeated youth culture in the summer of 1969. It would be a short-lived sense of victory, with Kent State and Altamont (the deadly Rolling Stones concert, in which a fan was killed) waiting around the bend, but for a while it all seemed so beautiful. It was 1967 all over again.

The heady optimism of "Hot Fun" captures the simple pleasures of a beautiful day not only in its words, but in its overall feeling. Like Frank Sinatra's "Summer Wind" or the Rascals' "A Beautiful Morning," it conveys the timeless essence of optimism, nostalgia, and euphoria. To feel good, all you need to do is hear it, and a generous dose of endorphins will immediately be launched to the pleasure center of your brain. In 1969, any song that could "take you higher" was bound to attract some attention. With "Hot Fun in the Summertime," Sly and the Family Stone found the key to a natural high by singing about a naturally beautiful day. On the heels of the single most representative event of this generation, the timing was perfect.

**With "Hot Fun in the Summertime," Sly and the Family Stone found the key to a natural high by singing about a naturally beautiful day.**

AUGUST 1969 #7 LAY LADY LAY—BOB DYLAN

Just after completing the most well-received album of his career in the summer of '66, the seminal *Blonde on Blonde*, Bob Dylan cracked up his motorcycle and seriously injured himself. He was forced to convalesce, the length of which began to resemble something more like hibernation. When he finally did reappear, the change in his style, not to mention his singing voice, was so drastic that rumors abounded claiming that the real Dylan had died in the accident and the new guy was actually an impostor planted by the record company. In reality, the chance to recuperate slowly allowed Dylan time to evaluate the direction his music was taking, and he subsequently chose to redirect himself away from the music of the masses.

The years that passed while Dylan whiled away the hours in the town of Woodstock, New York, had seen profound change taking place in popular music. Ornate instrumentation and psychedelia were mostly foreign to Dylan's repertoire but became something of a necessity to anybody who wanted to be current. Instead of embracing the new trend, Dylan spurned it. He reverted to sparse instrumentation and played with country musicians who kept the proceedings simple and direct. His first album after his injury, *John Wesley Harding*, has none of the anger and biting sarcasm that often occupied his previous material. Instead, he sounds tentative and a tad confused. There was obviously still an insightful mind at work, but now he seemed to prefer introspection to confrontation.



His next album, *Nashville Skyline*, is for the most part a disturbing departure. It goes so deep into the bowels of mindless inanity that it makes for difficult listening and is largely indefensible. How could somebody who was once called the voice of a new generation write a song about the

joys of eating pie? Perhaps Dylan despised that moniker so much that he deliberately set out to destroy it. Taken one at a time, the songs are pleasant enough, particularly if seen only as children's songs, but when clumped together, their shortcomings are glaringly obvious. One song that seems to benefit from the proceedings is "Lay Lady Lay." Starting with nothing more than a chord progression and a melody, Dylan sang "la-la-la-la" until it turned itself into the title. The song was originally written for inclusion in the movie *Midnight Cowboy*, but Dylan supposedly missed the deadline (it must have taken a long time to turn "la-la-la-la" into "Lay Lady Lay"). Instead, it was bumped for another song, Harry Nilsson's rendition of Fred Neil's "Everybody's Talkin'."

Around this time, Dylan was experimenting with his voice, so his singing is free of the definitive nasally whine that many of us tried so hard to learn to love (he credited the change to quitting cigarettes). In its place is a deep and smooth tenor that, incredibly, conveys sensuality. He actually sounds good, or at least so different that unknowledgeable listeners would never guess it to be him. Even if Dylan never finished his words, the instrumentation, particularly the pedal steel and the clomping percussion, was evocative enough to convey the song's sexually-



charged-yet-lonely mood. By avoiding complex allusion and utilizing direct imagery, Dylan changed his style of writing from the verbal equivalent of Picasso's cubism to the impressionism of Van Gogh. You can see the brass bed, the dirty clothes, and the clean hands of the male lover. The music completes the image and in some ways speaks with even more eloquence than the lyrics. Far from definitive Dylan, "Lay Lady Lay" is a tremendously evocative song and an oddity at a time when everything about Dylan appeared to be odd.

## SEPTEMBER 1969 #1 SUSPICIOUS MINDS—ELVIS PRESLEY

**W**hen "Suspicious Minds" was released, it showcased a brand new Elvis. No longer the youthful rocker, or the movie star, or the teen idol, he became a thoroughly modern singer of topical, contemporary material. Unfortunately, a touch of the Vegas singer lingered, but not enough to trammel his performance. "Suspicious Minds" was the companion single to the album *Elvis in Memphis*, and it is ironic that the album title signifies a return to Elvis's home, the place of his roots, while the music contained therein bears hardly any resemblance to his previous work.



"Suspicious Minds" went to #1 in September 1969, the first #1 hit for Elvis since March 1962. It was also the last #1 record of his life. Before "Suspicious Minds," Elvis had become a man out of time. By 1969 he appeared to be completely irrelevant to contemporary rock fans. What could possibly be more irrelevant than seeing Elvis sing "Memories" in a white, rhinestone-studded suit while the Rolling Stones, for example, were singing "Let It Bleed"? Elvis appeared to be as likely to have a hit record in 1969 as Spike Jones or Pat Boone, but he did, and the reason is simple. "Suspicious Minds" is a great, great record.

Soon after "Suspicious Minds," the lounge singer aspect of Elvis's personality would dominate most of his work. Most of his subsequent material was fatuous, and then Elvis himself became just plain fat. A downward spiral grabbed hold of him, from which he was not able to recover, and it killed him. In his lifetime, Elvis had 106 Top 40 hits, plus another posthumous single. One hundred and seven hit singles! I probably would not care if I never heard half of them again ("Do the Clam," "Kissin' Cousins," "Bossa Nova Baby," and a number of others are not essential listening experiences, by any means), but that leaves fifty or sixty songs that are entertaining and important enough to remember. Maybe it is because "Suspicious Minds" was his last great record, but to my ears it could also be his best hit record.

## SEPTEMBER 1969 #6 EVERYBODY'S TALKIN'—NILSSON

**H**arry Nilsson was a Brooklyn native whose family moved to California when he was a teenager. With a talent for songwriting and a desire to sing his songs, he eventually began to submit his material to various publishing companies while



**Considering that his initial claim to fame was as a songwriter, it is ironic to note that the two biggest hits of Nilsson's career were interpretations of someone else's material.**

working as a computer supervisor in a local bank. Phil Spector got Nilsson's career rolling when he chose a couple of his songs to be recorded by the Ronettes. Before you knew it, it seemed that everybody wanted to record a Nilsson composition. The Turtles, the Monkees, the Yardbirds, Rick Nelson, Three Dog Night, Glen Campbell, and Blood, Sweat, and Tears all eventually recorded something that he wrote. With the exposure that resulted from being a successful songwriter, Nilsson was able to secure a contract and became a recording artist in his own right. By layering his voice in various interweaving harmonies, he developed a rich and unique sound that was unduplicative, even by Nilsson himself. It was (mainly) for this reason that he never attempted to perform his studio creations before a live audience. His first album, *Pandemonium Shadow Show*, included a montage of eleven Beatles songs that allegedly contained twenty vocal parts. That was enough to impress John Lennon, who referred to Nilsson as his favorite American singer. In the '70s, these two became close friends and were notorious

for their nightclubbing and heavy drinking. Before they met and developed their mutually destructive friendship, Nilsson was continually searching for ways to gain exposure for his recordings. When he heard that songs were being commissioned for the movie *Midnight Cowboy*, starring John Voight and Dustin Hoffman, he determined to write a theme song for it.

Nilsson's first submission was a song called "I Guess the Lord Must Be in New York City," but the film's producers rejected it. Then Bob Dylan submitted "Lay Lady Lay," but it was too late. The producers had already decided to use a recording that had appeared the previous year on Nilsson's second album. "Everybody's Talkin'" was a Fred Neil composition (he's the guy responsible for "Candy Man"), which had been chosen for release as a single but failed miserably. Still, the producers recognized it as an evocative recording with lonely lyrics that somehow suited the pathetically confused characters of the movie, without becoming beholden to the movie. After *Midnight Cowboy* was released, the single got a second chance and rose to #6.

Considering that his initial claim to fame was as a songwriter, it is ironic to note that the two biggest hits of Nilsson's career were interpretations of someone else's material. "Everybody's Talkin'" was Nilsson's only Top 10 hit until he recorded "Without You." This song was composed by Tom Evans and Pete Ham, who recorded the original version of the song with their group, Badfinger. Nilsson's producer, Richard Perry, recognized the missed potential in Badfinger's recording and convinced Nilsson to record an improved version. The song became a #1 hit for four weeks. By the mid-'70s, Nilsson's recording career was running out of steam. In the '80s he was, for all intents and purposes, inactive. He passed away January 15, 1994, of heart disease.





## SEPTEMBER 1969 #1 I'M GONNA MAKE YOU MINE—LOU CHRISTIE

**I**'m Gonna Make You Mine" was the last great unabashed pop record of the '60s. The baby boomers were growing up, and American culture reflected the change. In light of the turmoil that engulfed the country at this time, music was taking a turn toward themes much more complex than first love, lost love, etc. "I'm Gonna Make You Mine" flew in the face of all that. It was nostalgic at the perfect time. For this reason, it took on a relevance that went well beyond the lyrics. Heard at the right moment, it had the power to overwhelm you as only a memory could. "I'm Gonna Make You Mine" was one last look back at a youthful innocence that was slipping away forever.

As the '60s became the '70s, love-ins became sit-ins, Woodstock became Altamont. Our idealism changed to realism. Pop music continued to exist, but it wouldn't feel the same. In the early '70s bands like the Raspberries and Bread released songs that were straight pop records, but for the contemporary audience, it was too late. We had already crossed the threshold. Besides, pop didn't sound quite the same anyway. It was corporate and slick. Maybe the earlier stuff was corporate and slick too, but the difference then was we didn't know it. "I'm Gonna Make You Mine" became the swan song not only for a decade, but for a musical genre that is now long gone.

## OCTOBER 1969 #1 COME TOGETHER—THE BEATLES

**H**ow in the world the Beatles ever managed to overlook their differences and record, with real teamwork, one of the best albums of their career is something that nobody, including the Beatles themselves, can fully explain. For at least two years, ever since the death of their manager, Brian Epstein, they had steadily deteriorated until reconciliation became a bitter joke. Still, all four Beatles, with producer George Martin in tow, put their differences aside, canceled all commitments to their outside distractions, and behaved like a band. It was a miracle, and the Beatles made the most of their last hurrah. A more beautiful and fitting swan song could not have been formulated. Each of the Beatles got to shine in his own way, particularly the *other* Beatles, George Harrison and Ringo Starr, who probably did the best work of their lives on *Abbey Road*. John Lennon seems unwillingly pulled into the team framework. He resisted the idea of stringing the song pieces together for the extended medley on side two, preferring something simpler in which every song would stand (or fall) on its own merit.

For the previous few years, the Beatles' singles releases had always been conceived and released independently of their albums. For this reason, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *Magical Mystery Tour* (the movie, not the al-

**For the previous few years, the Beatles' singles releases had always been conceived and released independently of their albums.**



**Lennon's dark imagery has autobiographical overtones, but the references are so vague that they sound like disjointed phrases linked together for rhythmic purposes only.**

bum, which compiled singles on side two), and *The Beatles* (the double "white" album) had not one 45 between them. *Abbey Road* would have remained autonomous, as well, but Allen Klein, the ruthless and abrasive accountant who juggled the group's finances toward the end, insisted that they release a single from the album for monetary reasons. "Come Together"/"Something" was a double A sided 45. Despite the fact that both songs were readily available on the album, the single sold well enough to reach the #1 position.

Lennon's dark imagery has autobiographical overtones, but the references are so vague that they sound like disjointed phrases linked together for rhythmic purposes only. Each verse starts with Lennon whispering what sounds like "Shoot it to me," then tumbles away on Starr's tom-tom roll. It's a disconcerting start to a disconcerting song. His first lyrics aren't his at all, but a couplet lifted from Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me." This borrowing would eventually cause Lennon additional legal problems when he would be sued by the holder of the copy-

right. The "round" tone of Lennon's early Beatle voice is completely absent here, replaced with a stringy, shrill tone that marked most of his later Beatle work. He sounds bitter, resentful, and paranoid, and his detached expression adds to the overall impact. "Come Together," instead of being a rallying cry or a call to arms, becomes something more sinister when he adds "...right now, over me." Is it a sexual reference? A reference to a burial? It's not a particularly tempting invitation, that's for sure. The band rocks with an assured soulfulness that is focused enough to make Lennon's lyrical shell game ("Which line is really me?") entertaining. Bleak and flippant, moody and taunting, Lennon's oblique imagery tests his audience's faith, tempting them to follow him and interpret the meaning of his confusing self-portrait. In that sense, "Come Together" is a Rorschach test, an invitation to wade through this aural cubist portrait to see Lennon as he saw himself.

## OCTOBER 1969 #1 SOMETHING—THE BEATLES

**F**or the first and only time in his career with the Beatles, a George Harrison composition made the Top 40. If it was any consolation, late was better than never at all. Harrison was resentful of being granted only occasional B-side status on the group's 45s and of not being allowed more than two songs per Beatles album. With a few exceptions, his songwriting was usually too self-conscious and lacked the depth and complexity of his peers'. Some of his later songs were quite good and probably deserved to be included on the Beatles' projects, but the old rules held fast. Mostly because of John Lennon and Paul McCartney's resistance,



Harrison had built up a considerable backlog of first-class material, enough to fill four sides of his excellent triple album, *All Things Must Pass*. It is almost impossible to imagine Lennon and McCartney being something other than songwriters, but not so with Harrison. It is interesting to consider what might have happened if he had not been so close to Lennon and McCartney. Would he have attempted to write his own material if he wasn't in constant contact with the greatest writing partnership of the rock-and-roll era? Chances are it was his proximity to them, coupled with a sense of competition, that inspired him to begin writing in the first place. His early efforts were workmanlike, but still they were enjoyable. Occasionally, he'd write something that was good enough to sit comfortably among the masterpieces that surrounded it. Still, he had to live with the uncomfortable knowledge that his songs would be immediately compared to the Lennon/McCartney compositions.

By the time of their last album together, *Abbey Road*, Harrison's contributions were as integral as anything written by the other Beatles. "Something" and "Here Comes the Sun" are arguably the best songs of his career and two of the best songs on the album. Completely devoid of self-consciousness and without the distractions of Eastern mysticism that often reduced his work to a form of deliberate stylization, both of these songs are perfect miniatures of love and optimism.

"Something" was chosen as a single and was released with "Come Together" on the opposite side at a time when *Billboard's* policy of charting each side of a disk separately was changing. Sales attributed to either side were combined, resulting in a #1 hit record for both titles. "Something" earned the somewhat dubious distinction of being the only Beatles song that was covered by Frank Sinatra, who referred to it, correctly, as one of the greatest love songs of all time. Hundreds of others have performed it also, endowing it with classic status second only to Lennon(?) and McCartney's "Yesterday."

Harrison took the opening phrase, "Something in the way she moves," from a song by James Taylor, who at the time was recording on the Beatles' Apple Records (coincidentally, Lennon's song on the other side also borrowed its opening phrase from another source: Chuck Berry's "You Can't Catch Me"). "Something" moves at a languid, slow-as-molasses pace that is both self-assured and romantic. The atmosphere resonates with the peace of mind and satisfaction that comes after making love. The band's arrangement and George Martin's accompaniment are always supportive and never intrusive, supplying a cushioned bed for the song to rest on. Despite the hundreds of cover versions that have since been rendered, none has come close to the ethereal feeling of the original. Combining the rhythmic and melodic inventiveness of McCartney's bass line with the understated and sympathetic touch of Starr's drums, Harrison's song gets a treatment that is so perfect it leaves no room for improvement.

**"Something" earned the somewhat dubious distinction of being the only Beatles song that was covered by Frank Sinatra.**

OCTOBER 1969 #37 SOMETHING IN THE AIR—THUNDERCLAP NEWMAN

**W**hew! Just made it. On the charts for two weeks in late 1969 and then gone, peaking at a most unimpressive #37. For its time, though, “Something in the Air” was utterly appropriate. The disheveled but self-righteous way of thinking that occupied our consciousness is nowhere better put on display than on this confused classic. For this reason alone, “Something in the Air” was a real *populist* anthem, drifting between the desire for rebellion (“‘cause the revolution’s here, and you know it’s right”) and brotherhood (“We have got to get it together, now”).

In a sense, this song makes a valid argument for the theory that rock and roll was a primary catalyst for the social unrest that defined the ‘60s. Since rock and roll was a popular medium that *thrived* on rebellion (you see, our parents were right), it was only a matter of time before revolution became fashionable—provided, of course, that rock and roll remained fashionable. While the causes and concerns of the anti-war movement (not to mention the anti-racism and feminism movement) was deadly serious, pop/rock music had a way of taking this ideology and sugar-coating it so it could be more easily swallowed. For every band as realistically radical as Detroit’s MC5 there was another dozen as floral as the Youngbloods. Rock and roll also gave rise to a sense of brotherhood through ostracism. That’s to say that those who lived on the fringes of society found it easy to sympathize with others who lived on the fringes of society. “Something in the Air” embraces brotherhood and revolution simultaneously without any apparent sense of contradiction. It *must* have been the ‘60s.

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1969 <b>TAKE A LETTER, MARIA—</b> R.B. GREAVES	#2
OCTOBER 1969 <b>IS THAT ALL THERE IS—</b> PEGGY LEE	#11
OCTOBER 1969 <b>SUITE: JUDY BLUE EYES—</b> CROSBY, STILLS AND NASH	#21

Thunderclap Newman was a short-lived studio project that Pete Townshend of the Who helped put together. The band consisted of three members, if you discount the mysterious bass player with a big nose who went by the name of Bijou Drains. Andy Newman was an art school friend of Drains—I mean Townshend—who convinced him to provide instrumental support and produce the proceedings. Newman’s loony, syncopated keyboards are the instrumental centerpiece of the group, giving it a quirky and identifiable sound. Guitars were the responsibility of Jimmy McCulloch, a teenager who went on to become a member of Paul McCartney’s Wings and was later found dead in 1979 under tragic and mysterious circumstances. Speedy Keen played drums, sang, and also happened to compose the group’s only hit.

“Something in the Air” is as idiosyncratic as it is inventive. Townshend could be an amazingly creative producer when he wanted to be, and he really went to work with Thunderclap Newman. Keen obviously deserves considerable credit for writing (and singing) the song, but Townshend’s talents are certainly responsible for helping the song realize its full potential. As I’m sure George Bush would agree, Townshend had a handle on “the vision thing.” His production was so effective that



it inadvertently did the band a disservice: they could never re-create their songs with the same atmospheric presence. Because they could not sustain their popularity with live appearances, Thunderclap Newman disbanded after only one album. “Something in the Air” appeared in the movie *The Magic Christian*, starring Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr, before becoming a fossilized remnant of the modern era’s most tumultuous decade.

## NOVEMBER 1969 #1 **SOMEDAY WE’LL BE TOGETHER—** **DIANA ROSS AND THE SUPREMES**

**A**fter “Love Child,” the Supremes lost whatever momentum they may have had. Times were changing, and the naive but sophisticated image that defined their early material was completely diffused in the wake of the Florence Ballard debacle and the Holland-Dozier-Holland departure. The public had begun to tire of them anyway; Diana Ross’s announcement that she was going solo was met by most with a big, resounding yawn. Nevertheless, Berry Gordy was determined that the Supremes go out with a bang, in the guise of a #1 hit, and he got it when Motown released “Someday We’ll Be Together.”

On Ross’s swan song to the group that made her a star, fellow Supremes Mary Wilson and Cindy Birdsong were not invited to sing. Instead of the three Supremes singing their good-byes together, as the public must have assumed to be the case, Ross had, in effect, already begun her solo career. Technically, the Supremes were no longer a group anyway, since Wilson and Birdsong had not performed on any of their hit recordings since “Reflections.” On January 14, 1970, the Supremes held their farewell concert at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas. In reality, Wilson and Birdsong were relieved almost beyond words to be free from Ross, and they welcomed her replacement, Jean Terrell. Without Ross, though, Motown had no real commitment to the “new” Supremes, and Gordy put all of his energy into ensuring Ross’s future as a solo star. Despite being ignored, the Supremes maintained a respectable presence on the Top 40 for another year, with hits including “Up the Ladder to the Roof” and “Stoned Love,” both of which cracked the Top 10 in 1970. After these two singles, though, they slipped away into the obscurity that most had predicted would inevitably befall them.

“Cool gospel” is an oxymoron of sorts, but I can’t think of a better way to describe “Someday We’ll Be Together.” Gospel/soul had precious little to do with the music of the Supremes, but here a touch of church peeks through. The song is full of the platitudes that would ruin most of Ross’s solo material, but it was still too early to be as cloying as her later work would become. In the context of her departure, the song took on some unnecessary interpretive baggage and miraculously survived it.







Once again, we have a song that symbolizes the end of pop music's golden decade. The demise of the Supremes coincided with the end of the '60s, as did the breakup of the Beatles. With the void left by the absence of these two groups, pop music would never be the same. It is noteworthy that both of these acts, with virtually nothing in common except that they were contemporaries, broke onto the scene at almost precisely the same moment, went on to dominate separate genres (the Motown sound/virtually everything) for the remainder of the decade, and then simultaneously collapsed. One very exciting era had clearly ended, and a new, very confusing one was about to begin.

### NOVEMBER 1969 #3 DOWN ON THE CORNER— CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

The foursome who made up Creedence Clearwater Revival hailed from Berkeley, California, and had known each other since their junior-high-school days. A few years later, they formed a band called Tommy Fogerty and the Blue Velvets and played mostly as an instrumental outfit. Fogerty had a job as a shipping clerk at Fantasy Records and had the band audition for his boss, Hy Weiss. Weiss took the band on but insisted that they adopt a "Mersey sound" and call themselves the Golliwogs (this was in 1964). For the next few years, the Golliwogs struggled for a hit single, but nothing took hold. Members John Fogerty (Tom's brother) and Doug Clifford were then drafted, which put proceedings on hold for a while. After they returned, they reunited with Stu Cook and Tom Fogerty. They wisely decided to drop their derivative sound and focus on a more natural, rootsy style. John Fogerty had started writing songs, so the band combined his originals with a few well-chosen cover versions, such as Dale Hawkins's "Suzie Q" and Screaming Jay Hawkins's "I Put a Spell on You." Meanwhile, Saul Zaentz, who one day would be a serious thorn in the band's side, had recently become the new owner of Fantasy Records, and he decided to market the group under a new name. After some consideration, the bandmembers chose the unwieldy moniker "Creedence Clearwater Revival," presumably for its sound more than any intended meaning.

After the group scored hits with "Suzie Q," "Proud Mary," "Bad Moon Rising," and "Green River," it further enhanced its career by playing some of the most popular festivals of the late '60s, including the Newport Pop Festival, the Denver Pop Festival, the Atlanta Pop Festival, the Atlantic City Pop Festival, and most notably, Woodstock. Because they never allowed their image or music to be used to promote any of these appearances, there was no officially sanctioned record of their performances at any of these festivals.

Their next single must qualify as one of the best two-sided singles of all time. Taken from their fourth album, *Willy and the Poorboys*, "Down on the Corner"/"Fortunate Son" charted at #3 and #14, respectively. All in all, CCR would have nine Top 10 hits in two-and-a-half years (from February 1969 through July 1971) but none of them would reach #1. Five of them stopped dead at #2. This is quite



odd, considering that Creedence Clearwater Revival almost always qualifies for anybody's list of favorite Top 40 bands. It is even more odd when you consider that such "stellar" titles—pardon the sarcasm—as "Dizzy" (Tommy Roe), "In the Year 2525" (Zager and Evans), "Sugar Sugar" (the Archies), "Love Theme from *Romeo and Juliet*" (Henry Mancini), and "One Bad Apple" (the Osmonds) were responsible for blocking CCR and others from the top spot in that same time period.

"Down on the Corner" represented the strengths of CCR, both as a singles unit and as an album band. Their albums usually compiled a series of recordings that could easily have qualified as singles releases, but they also worked well in tandem with one another. While other bands were trying to impress us with major statements, CCR was satisfied with making a lot of little ones. In retrospect, their singles speak volumes when compared to the bloated exhortations of their competitors. John Fogerty probably likened his band to Willy and the Poorboys, the street-corner buskers who'd play for a nickel if you had one or for free if you didn't. Of course, by then his band was earning tens of thousands of dollars per appearance, but the fantasy appealed, and CCR's down-home sound further enhanced their image. They were obviously professionals who were very much in demand, but "Down on the Corner" kept that image down to earth.

**Their albums usually compiled a series of recordings that could easily have qualified as singles releases, but they also worked well in tandem with one another.**

## **NOVEMBER 1969 FLIPSIDE OF DOWN ON THE CORNER FORTUNATE SON—CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL**

**N**o band did a better job of easing the transition from the remarkable '60s to the not-so-remarkable '70s than Creedence Clearwater Revival. Their status as a premier singles band went thoroughly against the grain of what was considered conventional; yet their singles were the most promising and reliable things that were happening musically at the end of the decade. Single after single, this marvelous band displayed a consistency that could be counted on, so much so that both sides of their releases usually charted in tandem. "Fortunate Son" qualified as the "other half" of "Down on the Corner" at a time when *Billboard* seemed to indiscriminately allow certain B sides to chart autonomously, while others charted in tandem with their A side. In this instance, it appears *Billboard* did both. Sometimes "Fortunate Son" was not assigned its own position, and was noncommittally referred to as a "flip." Other times it is credited as having reached #14. No matter. "Fortunate Son" is a masterpiece, both in content and execution.

From the perspective of performance, John Fogerty has what is probably the most potent rock-and-roll gargle in the business; yet he makes sure you can un-



derstand every word so as not to blur the content of his message. He's enraged, but he's careful in what he says. And he says only what he knows he can defend.

Some folks are born, made to wave the flag,

Ooh they're red, white, and blue.

And when the band plays "Hail to the Chief,"

Ooh they'll point the cannon at you.

He's not saying he's left, he's not saying he's right. He's only saying that he's disconnected from a country that bestows special privileges upon those who are "born (with a) silver spoon in hand." At wartime, that privilege can mean the difference between life and death, so Fogerty's anger is miles away from posturing. Make no mistake, he's really pissed off. Worse, he is screaming from frustration because he knows he cannot change destiny. He is resigned to accept his fate, which is our fate, as well (unless you happen to be a "millionaire's son"). However, just because you know you can't win doesn't mean you have to like losing. With "Fortunate Son," Fogerty offered us the opportunity to go down fighting our hopeless battle, and it felt a whole lot better than surrendering peacefully. After all, this was war.

## NOVEMBER 1969 #6 HOLLY HOLY—NEIL DIAMOND

Neil Diamond was an introverted but determined kid from Brooklyn who made up his mind at a young age that he wanted to be a songwriter. Since he didn't know anybody who was capable of singing his songs properly, he usually also took on the role of vocalist. He shopped his songs tirelessly and recorded a multitude of demos, but his early efforts were mostly met with indifference, partially because his voice was unconventional to a fault. This changed when he was befriended by the songwriting team of Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, who had enough confidence in the full scope of Diamond's abilities to fund a publishing company with Diamond as president. Barry and Greenwich worked as a production team and attempted to establish Diamond as a solo act. He auditioned

Hardly a year  
has gone by  
since he first  
cracked the  
popular charts  
that Diamond  
has not had at  
least one Top  
40 hit.

his songs for Jerry Wexler at Atlantic Records, who was impressed with his long-term potential as a middle-of-the-road performer. At the time, Atlantic was setting up a subsidiary label called Bang, which was to be headed by entrepreneur Bert Berns, and Wexler allowed Diamond to become a charter member of the new label.

In 1966, "Solitary Man" became Diamond's first modest hit (it recharted as a Top 40 single in 1970), but "Cherry Cherry" established Diamond as a viable star when it reached #6 a few months later. Other hits followed, and when Don Kirshner enlisted him to supply a hit or two for the Monkees ("I'm a Believer," "A Little Bit Me, a Little Bit You"), Diamond's reputation as a songwriter of some merit was firmly established. It has been ever since. By

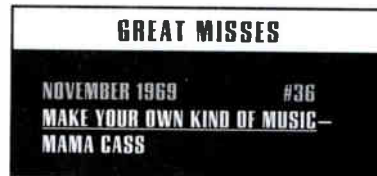


recording his own hits, he predated by five years the singer-songwriter trend that would flourish in the '70s. Hardly a year has gone by since he first cracked the popular charts that Diamond has not had at least one Top 40 hit. He had such a facility for songwriting that he could easily move back and forth between hit records and commercial jingles. While supplying the themes that were intended to sell cars, soft drinks, shoes, and slacks, he was writing such brooding hit songs for himself as "Shilo" and "Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon."

With more than a hint of bad blood, Diamond parted ways with Bang and associated himself with another fledgling label called Uni Records. The new label offered him full creative freedom, so he deliberately began to write intensely personal songs and issued them as singles. The first few attempts didn't fare as well as he had hoped, and it appeared as though Diamond's star might have been fading. It took the magic work of Memphis's American Sound Studios to set him on track again, where he recorded "Brother Love's Traveling Salvation Show" and "Sweet Caroline."

With his refurbished career going strong, Diamond toured and released another single that he recorded in Memphis, with overdubs of a string section and gospel choir done in New York. "Holly Holy" is so intense that it borders on the inspirational. Other than a straight-out gospel song called "Oh Happy Day," which became a surprise hit for the Edwin Hawkins Singers a few months earlier, there was nothing else even remotely like it on the pop charts. "Oh Happy Day" was a transparently religious song while "Holly Holy" was as opaque as obsidian. The simple musical theme builds over a period of almost five minutes and is undeniably moving, but what does it mean? "Holly holy eyes dream of only you. Where I am, what I am, what I believe in—Holly holy" is about as nonspecific as you can get. While appearing to refer to a secular love relationship, the song is rife with religious imagery and tells of miracles. It could refer to the power of belief, whether religious or sexual, or it could mean nothing much at all.

Regardless of, or more likely because of, his vague songwriting, Diamond has crossed just about all demographic boundaries. At various times, he has appealed to rock-and-roll fans and easy-listening fans, to teenagers and their grandparents. Despite the remarkable feat of being continually on the charts for nearly thirty years, Diamond, both as a star and as a songwriter, remains very much an enigma.



## NOVEMBER 1969 #25 UP ON CRIPPLE CREEK—THE BAND

**T**he BAND. THE Band. THE BAND. This could be either the most unassuming or the most pretentious name of all time. The Band members themselves seemed to know it and attempted to avoid either accusation. They claimed the name came about because in their early days they lacked a proper moniker, so whenever they





**"Up on Cripple Creek" was chosen as the token single, and it was an excellent representation of the complex characterizations that inhabited a Band song.**

played, people simply referred to them generically as "the band." Regardless, the name suits them perfectly. They were without pretension because they played as naturally as any modern band possibly could, and yet their overall sound was so astoundingly original that they immediately made comparisons futile. Main songwriter Robbie Robertson invented timeless characters and stories that could refer to ourselves or our grandfathers before us. His music was the aural equivalent of a grainy and wrinkled photograph that could have been taken a century ago.

The Band had enough horse sense to recognize that a gap was forming in popular music, since so many other groups were busy with psychedelia and other spacey trends that were essentially groundless. The new sounds that had developed in the latter half of the '60s were exciting and pointed to a new frontier, but they had drawbacks. By definition, the new music needed to forsake any sense of heritage in order for it to sound modern. The Band capitalized on this by making music that was of the earth—no useless echo or reverb, no feedback, no gender-swapping imagery, just straightforward images of Americana. While other bands were lost in the stars, the Band stood squarely on terra firma. Because of this, they had a sound that was simultaneously archaic and modern. They could gather an entire country's experience and re-create it with a combination of modern and traditional instrumentation. Their songs were working-class tales of ordinary people who normally would brook no relationship with anything as newfangled as rock and roll. Robertson, Rick Danko, Garth Hudson, Richard Manuel, and Levon Helm were intimately involved in many of the major trends that had cropped up in American music since the inception of rock and roll. After Elvis Presley had popularized rockabilly, they started working the honky-tonk circuit in Canada and the American South as members of Ronnie Hawkins's backup band, the Hawks. When Bob Dylan decided to forego his acoustic-folk roots for electrified rock and roll, they were onstage with him. Before it became a haven for anybody with an overactive right side of the brain, they were living in Woodstock and recorded the legendary Basement Tapes with Dylan during his hermit stage. Like Forrest Gump, they seemed to have a talent for being in the right place at the right time.

In 1969, the right place was a big pink house in upstate New York, where they lived together (with the exception of Robertson) and rehearsed the material for their early albums. *Music from Big Pink* was their critically acclaimed first album, and it had a profound effect on popular music. More than any other record, this album tolled the death knell for the psychedelic '60s and started the '70s trend for American bands to play in decidedly American (read traditional) styles. The press called the Band the founders of the "country-rock" movement, but this seemed to be a woefully inadequate tag. The Byrds, Poco, the Eagles,





the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Pure Prairie League, and a host of others would hone a sound that fit neatly into the country-rock category, but the Band was too expansive and ambitious to be labeled so simply. Their second album drove the point home. Simply titled *The Band*, it contained some of the richest lyrical imagery to appear on record. “Up on Cripple Creek” was chosen as the token single, and it was an excellent representation of the complex characterizations that inhabited a Band song. Good lyrics might allow you to identify or sympathize with the protagonist; “Up on Cripple Creek” is so sonically perfect that not only do you get an accurate portrayal of the characters, but you can envision the entire scene. You can see their clothing. You can see the wooden table with a half-empty whiskey bottle and the windup Victrola in the corner. Heck, you can even see the ’52 Hudson in the driveway and the landscape that surrounds the rustic shack. These aren’t characters in a song lyric at all; they are tangible people who live inside a short story. You can almost *smell* them.

With the possible exception of Creedence Clearwater Revival, nobody else was recording anything even remotely close to this in 1969. Within a year’s time, country rock would become ubiquitous.

## DECEMBER 1969 #1 I WANT YOU BACK—THE JACKSON 5

**K**atherine and Joe Jackson settled in Gary, Indiana, and started a family that would eventually number nine children. Maureen (also known as Rebbie), Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, La Toya, Marlon, Michael, Randy, and Janet were born in succession, with the eldest being sixteen years older than the youngest. Joe had wanted to be an entertainer in his younger days but failed to make his mark, so he settled into a steady job at a local steel mill. When he noticed that his children had musical ability, he began to instill in them a discipline that would require them to dedicate as much energy as they could into developing their talent.

The Jacksons rarely socialized outside the family, since Joe discouraged their associating with “hoodlums” and street toughs, so they naturally began to rehearse music as a family. The three eldest boys—Jackie, Tito, and Jermaine—practiced regularly but were shocked when they witnessed their six-year-old brother, Michael, singing along with a strong voice and mimicking their most intricate dance steps. It didn’t take long for them to determine that even at his young age, Michael had a precocious personality and enough talent to be the lead voice of the group. As the Jackson Brothers and, later, as the Jackson 5 (after adding Marlon), they began to win talent contests all over their home state and even took first prize at New York City’s notoriously competitive Apollo Theater.

Joe Jackson was a strict taskmaster and not above raising his hand to the boys whenever he thought it was appropriate, particularly Michael. This would cause

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1969 #4  
**WHOLE LOTTA LOVE—LED ZEPPELIN**



a rift between father and son whose repercussions would continue into Michael's adulthood. With the discipline of terrified privates operating under the auspices of a particularly cruel drill sergeant, the Jackson 5 were intimidated into doing as good a job as they possibly could. Since Motown was the place to go if you were black, from the Midwest, and had your sights set on stardom, the Jacksons found themselves auditioning on July 23, 1968. Michael was nine years old. By then, Berry Gordy was spending most of his time on the West Coast, so the audition was filmed and sent to him for his appraisal. He didn't hesitate. Contracts were drawn, and the Jackson Five were asked to go to Hollywood so they could take advantage of Motown's new recording facilities. Under Gordy's influence, Diana Ross hosted a "coming out" party for the group, and the Motown promotion team went into overdrive, crediting Ross with "discovering" the Jackson 5 and shaving a year off their ages.

As usual, Motown preferred its artists to be somewhat aloof from the songwriting process so that they could be molded into the image Gordy wanted to project. Although this was becoming increasingly unfashionable, the Jackson 5 were too young and unfamiliar with the details of show business to raise any objections. This suited Gordy just fine, and it suited the Jacksons, as well. Since the hit songwriting team of Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland had left Motown, a suitable replacement was desperately sought. In the trio's place, Gordy formed a production/songwriting team in his Hollywood studio, which became known as The Corporation. It became their responsibility for penning new material for the Jackson 5. This would help Gordy to realize many of his ambitions simultaneously, mostly because it meant he could keep his organization functioning according to his will, but also because it meant he could use his West Coast organization as a viable replacement for the Detroit studios.

"I Want You Back" was originally intended for Gladys Knight and the Pips with the title "I Want to Be Free," but Gordy thought it would be a perfect song to introduce his new group. The writers reworked the song with the Jackson Five in mind and began intensive rehearsals. Working grueling hours, they arranged the song to the point of perfection. Hardly a nuance was left to chance, but nobody could have predicted the passion and conviction that nine-year-old Michael would bring to the lyrics. As far as debut singles go, this was a beaut. The unsuspecting public was amazed by the talented family, particularly Michael, and Gordy was as pleased as a proud (corporate) parent could be. Motown appeared as though it would make a seamless move to California, and the Jackson 5 were suddenly thrust into the role of becoming the flagship artists for the "new" Motown.



**Chapter  
Six**

**1970-1972**







## JANUARY 1970 #1 THANK YOU (FALETTINME BE MICE ELF AGIN)— SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE

**S**ylvester Stewart was born March 15, 1944, in Dallas, Texas, but was raised in the San Francisco Bay area from the age of nine. While a teenager, he received some modest regional recognition with a slew of bands that played in a variety of styles. Soon after, he found himself working as a disc jockey for a San Francisco radio station. Since the station owner also owned a recording studio, Stewart's disc jockey connections led to production work, which occasionally included writing songs for his clients. In this capacity, he contributed to hits by the Mojo Men, Bobby Freeman, the Beau Brummels, and the Great Society, featuring Grace Slick. Frustrated with supplying hits for others, he formed his own band and called it the Stoners. Stewart invented an alter ego to suit the group and changed his name to Sly Stone. After a few changes, he eventually settled on his brother, Freddie Stewart (guitar); his sister, Rosemary Stewart (keyboards); Cynthia Robinson (trumpet); Jerry Martini (saxophone); Greg Errico (drums); and Larry Graham (bass) as bandmembers. This lineup combined black, white, male, and female members and functioned like a close-knit family. It hung together for virtually all of the band's monster hits.

Sly Stone was not interested in being marketed solely as a black act, so the band developed a style that reflected its diverse membership. Sly and the Family Stone combined equal parts of rock, soul, and psychedelia, added some doo-wop and gospel for spice, and then stirred it up in a giant cauldron for a blend that was thoroughly unlike anything else at the time. Over time, their music would have a profound impact on such later artists as War; George Clinton and the Parliament/Funkadelic family of groups; Earth, Wind, and Fire; Prince; and Arrested Development. In their own time, they were unique and trendsetting.

The first album didn't do much commercially, but their second album, *Dance to the Music*, yielded a Top 10 hit with the title track. A rocking, funky beat holds the song together while the band exchanges solos, introducing themselves to an unsuspecting world in a way that was both startling and memorable. "Life," their next single (as well as the title of their third album), hardly scratched the Top 100, but "Everyday People" proved to be the song that everybody was waiting for when it held the #1 position for four weeks. The title track from their fourth album, "Stand!," came next (#22), followed by their fantastic and funky summer lullaby, "Hot Fun in the Summertime" (#2).

Always optimistic and infectious, Sly and the Family Stone could be relied on for releasing either a scorching dance track or a sweet celebration of life—that is, until "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)." For a number

**Sly Stone was not interested in being marketed solely as a black act, so the band developed a style that reflected its diverse membership.**





The lyrics are delivered with deadpan flatness, but most of us missed the point anyway.

of reasons, the cultural climate had changed drastically during the waning days of 1969: Vietnam became an overwhelming obsession, and protests were now openly violent and antagonistic, aimed at a government that turned a deaf ear; despite endless promises, the advancement of minorities was going nowhere fast; the Beatles broke up; and we lost our leaders—Bobby Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Would it never end? We had been euphorically high, but now we were coming down. It was going to be one hell of a hangover, too.

Collectively, it was as though we no longer wanted to fraternize but preferred to stay at home and sleep it off. Our unity splintered, and we all started to go our own ways. Stone not only sensed it, but irradiated it. Cocaine addiction (one of the first symptoms of the “me” movement), extensive pressure from black power organizers to politicize, pressure from his record company to produce-produce-produce, and interpersonal conflicts within the band all caused him to crawl into his own cocoon and hope that he would wake up the next day feeling better. Since that didn’t happen, his creativity turned dark and brutally honest.

“Thank You” is probably the harshest riff Stone ever devised. To guarantee that nobody would miss the fierceness of his alienation, he didn’t sweeten the groove with extraneous harmony or melody. The lyrics are delivered with deadpan flatness, but most of us missed the point anyway. Stripped down to basics, the audience contented itself with the hypnotic rhythm driven by Graham’s “slap and pop” bass. It eluded us that, because he was suddenly free from the shackles of pretense, Stone was telling everybody to go to hell and then sincerely thanking us for letting him be himself again. There was no more need to fake it. Stone wasn’t being remarkably selfish; he was only ahead of his time. Within a few years, this attitude would dominate the mind-set of the entire nation.

## JANUARY 1970 FLIP SIDE **EVERYBODY IS A STAR— SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE**

Depending on how you interpreted *Billboard’s* new policy of charting both sides of a single together, “Everybody Is a Star” either shared in the #1 status of “Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin),” or it deserves only honorable mention. Nevertheless, “Everybody Is a Star” is a B side, and it’s a pretty darn great one, too. Sly Stone had already asked us all to accept everybody into our extended human family, in “Everyday People.” Now, he takes that concept one step further and states that “Everybody Is a Star.” Like Andy Warhol’s concept of everybody being famous for fifteen minutes, Sly and the Family Stone grasped the idea and ran with it. But instead of interpreting Warhol’s statement as a vainglorious, self-serving means for voyeuristic observation and entertainment, Stone inter-



prets it more literally. The song shares the same uncynical message as Ray Stevens's "Everything Is Beautiful," except that it is clever, funky, and soulful in ways that Stevens could never hope to be. In what is arguably one of his most interesting and moving vocal arrangements, Stone has all the members of his troupe interweave vocal lines like some transcendental game of telephone. The "bow ba-ba-ba bow" harmony line is ingenious, particularly for the way that it breaks up the anthem-like quality of the verse without ever sounding out of place. Considering the unusual and new sound offered on the A side, it might have made a few people wonder what Sly and the Family Stone were up to, but the B side serves as a comforting confirmation that things just might not be all that different after all.

## JANUARY 1970 #4 RAINY NIGHT IN GEORGIA—BROOK BENTON

**B**rook Benton's streak of hit recordings for Mercury Records came to an end in 1964. He subsequently changed labels, signing with RCA Records, but he remained a nonentity on the Top 40 and usually barely cracked the Top 100. He had affiliations with other labels, such as Harmony and Reprise, but sales-wise, the results were about the same. By 1969, it appeared to anyone who was still interested that Benton's tenure as a recording artist had come to an end. Just when he was about to be forgotten completely, an Atlantic Records satellite company called Cotillion picked him up and recorded him in earnest. Tony Joe White wrote "Rainy Night in Georgia," and Benton recorded it in Miami's Criteria Studios. With his sound substantially updated, he returned to the pop charts for the first time in more than five years.

With his deep baritone voice, Benton makes the down-on-his-luck protagonist sound respectful and dignified. He renders a genuinely soulful performance that certainly must be considered the most expressive singing he has ever done. Although "Rainy Night in Georgia" signified his return to the pop charts after a long hiatus, it also represented his swan song on the Top 40. His subsequent releases, including the ill-advised follow-up single, "My Way," all failed to dent the Top 40, and he soon faded once again from the limelight. Benton passed away on April 9, 1988, from complications following an illness.

## FEBRUARY 1970 FLIP SIDE WHO'LL STOP THE RAIN— CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

**T**here was just no stopping John Fogerty and Creedence Clearwater Revival. Not only were they recording some of the best and most consistent hit singles of their era, but they were able to add content to the equation. With so much competition, it's difficult to achieve hit status when writing fluff or love songs, and it's harder to do when writing about subjects that can potentially alienate more people



than they attract. To the best of my knowledge, Fogerty never wrote a straightforward love song in his life, so his topics (or form) had to be either universally appealing or powerful enough to attract a sympathetic ear. Creedence Clearwater Revival usually played it safe and allowed their nonpolitical hits to be listed as the A side while those songs that could be construed as even remotely controversial were plopped on the B side. Considering the popularity of the band and their records, it hardly mattered what the label designation was. For the third straight time, both the A side and the B side reached the Top 40. “Green River”/“Commotion,” “Down on the Corner”/“Fortunate Son” and “Travelin’ Band”/“Who’ll Stop the

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1970	#1
<b>BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER— SIMON AND GARFUNKEL</b>	

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1970	#2
<b>THE RAPPER—THE JAGGERZ</b>	

Rain” were consecutive double-sided hits. With each release, the B side was considered less and less of an inferior counterpart, until “Who’ll Stop the Rain” thoroughly outclassed its A side. With all due respect to “Travelin’ Band” as a Little Richard-inspired (in other words, a screamingly wild and enjoyable) romp about life on the road, it’s as light as cotton candy when compared with the antiwar sentiments expressed on “Who’ll Stop the Rain.” By the way, Little Richard’s publishing company sued Fogerty for copyright infringement with “Travelin’ Band,” but the case was later dismissed.

On the group’s previous single, “Fortunate Son,” Fogerty, himself a veteran, lodged a complaint against a specific aspect of the mechanics of war—namely, the draft. “Who’ll Stop the Rain” serves as an allegorical reference to the utter inhumanity of man raising weapons against man. Coming at the height of America’s outrage over the horrible loss of life that was taking place in Vietnam, the song was vague enough to remain inoffensive and transparent enough to retain meaning. With these records, Creedence Clearwater Revival was no longer only a popular singles band, but a voice that was willing to address populist causes. “Popular” music took on new meaning simply by accepting Fogerty’s desire to express opinion, thus adding depth to the entire concept of popular expression.

## FEBRUARY 1970 #7 HE AIN’T HEAVY, HE’S MY BROTHER—HOLLIES

**A**fter Graham Nash left the Hollies to join up with David Crosby and Stephen Stills, most bets were that the Hollies would soon fade into oblivion. Nash’s departure due to artistic differences wouldn’t be considered acrimonious, but afterward Allan Clarke, the group’s vocalist and spokesperson, was quoted as saying, “All of Graham’s songs are very slow and very boring. He wants to go all sappy, artistic, and beautiful.” Clarke’s next release with the Hollies was “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother.” Go figure.

Considering the plethora of sappy “save the world” songs that we’ve been inun-



dated with, it may be difficult to keep the lyrical content of “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother” in proper perspective. Most songs about brotherly love have lyrics that tell us how we should behave. “We Are the World,” “The Greatest Love of All,” “Save the World,” etc., all conspire to make the listener feel stupid. I know that I should love my brother. Of course the children are our future. You don’t need to be a genius to know this, and I don’t need to be told in a song that racism is bad. These “behavior modification” songs usually set you up for emotional blackmail. If you don’t like the song, then you must be evil.

This is why “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother” is the best of the genre. It doesn’t tell us to do anything. It tugs at our heartstrings without being demeaning. At its best, this song can give you a tangible sense of your own mortality and an awareness that we all, ultimately, have to judge our own actions. The sentiment of the title is developed in the verses. “So on we go, his welfare is my concern, no burden is he to bear, we’ll get there” perfectly expresses concern and brotherly love without condescension or platitudes.

The song takes its title from an expression that was immortalized in the 1938 film *Boys Town*, about a shelter for homeless boys. After “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” the Hollies went on to record two of the most successful singles of their career: “Long Cool Woman (in a Black Dress)” in 1972 and “The Air That I Breathe” (in 1974).



## MARCH 1970 #1 LET IT BE—THE BEATLES

The other Beatles might have considered Paul McCartney a real drag to work with, but there is no denying his instinctive sense of melody. I also firmly believe that he initially had the best interests of the band in mind while he was subtly driving everyone else crazy, but dozens of other factors should be taken into account when considering the breakup of the band. In short, it was a four-way divorce that was messily contested. After the group collapsed, the song “Let It Be” gained a relevance that wasn’t truly visible until the dust settled. It’s hard to say if I am reading meaning into McCartney’s performance here, but in light of the events under which it was recorded, his singing sounds truly soulful.

McCartney had one of the most diverse voices in rock-and-roll history. He probably still does, although you can’t tell from his recent solo work. He could move from the sweet gentility of “Blackbird” to the screaming insanity of “Helter Skelter” in a heartbeat, and this broad palette of colors helped him find the proper voice to suit the mood that his songs called for. Unfortunately, this would some-

After the group collapsed, the song “Let It Be” gained a relevance that wasn’t truly visible until the dust settled.



**"Let It Be" is an excellent song on its own terms, but if you were a Beatles fan, it was terribly depressing in its finality.**

times cause him to sound forced or phony, as though he were reaching into his bag of tricks simply for effect. Occasionally, though, he'd write something that would demand more than a deliberate stylization, something that would require a deeper commitment than mere affectation. "Hey Jude" was such a song, and so is "Let It Be." By singing simply and letting his emotion determine the intensity, he not only gets the point of the song across, but pulls his audience into it, as well.

McCartney uses his frail voice on the verses and waits until the chorus gains momentum before he adds deeper overtones to his singing, giving the impression that he is gaining strength as the song progresses. Since "Let It Be" addresses the need to accept fate, this approach is not just suitable, but soulful. He alludes to the memory of his mother, Mary (and thus cleverly invokes religious imagery as well), as a source of strength and comfort, thus personifying what would otherwise be a universal sentiment. McCartney had a right to feel that he had done all he could to resuscitate the Beatles, but now that they resisted his help, he sang "Let It Be" the only way that he could: with a resigned sense of surrender.

"Let It Be" is an excellent song on its own terms, but if you were a Beatles fan, it was terribly depressing in its finality. It was well nigh impossible to escape the implicit meaning of the title. For fans, it was not at all easy to accept the fact that the band that had led the way through the socially turbulent '60s had come to a grinding halt with the onset of the '70s. George Harrison would address the same topic on the title song of his first post-Beatles solo album, *All Things Must Pass*, and John Lennon would also do his best to destroy the myth that plagued him, with his song "God." Even Ringo Starr would get in his few cents' worth with the song "Early 1970," on the B side of his hit single "It Don't Come Easy." McCartney, though, had the temerity to say it while they were still together and, perhaps unwittingly, wrote what was to become the epitaph for the greatest band of all time.

## **MARCH 1970 #1 ABC—THE JACKSON 5**

**A**t its beginning, Motown Records was quite literally its own cottage industry, operating out of a number of small houses in a residential section of Detroit. After the race riots of 1967, Berry Gordy felt vulnerable and moved most of his operation into an unattractive high-rise office building in the center of the city. Also, since his label had become the single most successful black-owned enterprise in America, he began to mingle in social circles that had previously been off-limits to him. This meant that he was spending more and more time on the West Coast, trying to align his business interests with those of Hollywood and Las Vegas. When he eventually did move his entire organization to California, it was the end of an





era for Motown, a company whose very name was a contraction for the motor city that spawned it.

Relocation wasn't the only factor that led to the eventual demise of the Motown spirit. Gordy's inability to accept that times had permanently changed didn't do the label a whole lot of good either. By the 1970s, recording artists were becoming self-contained, autonomous entities that routinely remained artistically independent from the record companies that released their product. At Motown, that didn't hold very much water. Gordy liked to involve himself in every aspect of the business and saw artistic freedom as a threat to his power. Although he was right about this, no amount of manipulation was going to turn back the hands of time. Artists were wising up. Marvin Gaye and then Stevie Wonder both refused to toe the corporate line. Without Gordy's precious and tight-fisted control over every decision that was rendered, the "family" corporate image was no longer believable. Motown was disintegrating.

The Jackson 5 must have been exactly what Gordy was praying for. Here was a supremely talented group of individuals who were so grateful for a recording contract that they had no problem doing as they were told. They were so used to the rough style of their father that, if anything, Gordy appeared about as benevolent and caring as a guardian could be. With everybody in this new super-group saying, "Yes sir, Mr. Gordy" and "No sir, Mr. Gordy," he must have felt that it was just like old times. Even better, things were going exactly as he had hoped. With a reasonable amount of publicizing, "I Want You Back" became a #1 hit and was undeniably an artistic windfall, particularly in light of the fact that it was the group's debut recording.

"ABC" was written by the same team that wrote "I Want You Back" and had an equal amount of attention lavished upon it. The juvenile lyrics were unnecessary and perhaps even patronizing, considering that Michael, now all of eleven years old, was capable of bringing an actor's plausibility to more adult subject matter. Still, the song fit the band well and became their second #1 outing in two attempts. The synchronous arrangement is extraordinarily tight while the syncopated rhythm shifts keep the song bubbling along at an energy level that was light years away from the world-weary trends that were becoming so common among pop music veterans. The Jackson 5 brought new blood to the Top 40, and like a good transfusion, it re-instilled a sense of life that was becoming all but forgotten.

**Here was a supremely talented group of individuals who were so grateful for a recording contract that they had no problem doing as they were told.**

### MARCH 1970 #3 INSTANT KARMA—JOHN ONO LENNON

The Plastic Ono Band started as John Lennon's outlet for musical projects that the Beatles would have found unacceptable. "Give Peace a Chance" wasn't even considered for release as a Beatles song, since it featured only Lennon and Yoko



Ono during a spontaneous performance in a hotel room full of curiosity seekers. His next single, "Cold Turkey," was dismissed out of hand as being utterly inappropriate for the Beatles because of its unambiguous references to heroin withdrawal. As the Beatles became more reluctant to use Lennon's ideas, the Plastic Ono Band became his primary means of musical expression. He quickly organized and recorded a sloppy live concert in Toronto, featuring Eric Clapton and Klaus Voorman as last-minute recruits, but in reality, the Plastic Ono Band was a faceless conglomeration of whoever was available. For "Instant Karma," Lennon opted to use his own name to aid the single commercially. He also asked Phil Spector to produce it.

"Instant Karma" was written, recorded, produced, and released inside of four days. Spector found a perfectly suitable tone for Lennon's message by drenching everything in a dry echo, giving the song a paranoid but vibrant atmosphere. The drum sound, in particular, is much heavier than anything recorded by Lennon, the Beatles, or anybody else for that matter. Lennon was suitably impressed with Spector's work on "Instant Karma" and also had a great deal of respect for his past work. Sometime after this single, he asked Spector to "clean up" the reams of tape left over from the "Let It Be" sessions. This turned out to be a controversial decision, since McCartney (and most everybody else) hated the orchestral and choral sweetening that he dumped onto what other-

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1970	#3
SPIRIT IN THE SKY— NORMAN GREENBAUM	

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1970	#2
WHICH WAY YOU GOIN', BILLY?— THE POPPY FAMILY	

wise were simple, unadorned recordings.

Lennon wrote "Instant Karma" in early 1970 as a pointed message to all the wheelers and dealers who had surrounded him, Ono, and the Beatles. Maybe Lennon himself wasn't powerful or determined enough to see that they got what they deserved, but he felt that their onerous deeds would soon catch up with them anyway. He wanted to remind them that what goes around often comes around, but this was a strange misuse of the precepts of karma as a theory. If he was embracing karma as a means of enacting revenge, then all that he could have achieved was more "negative" karma for himself. Still, the message suited Lennon perfectly, who had by now become a walking mass of self-contradiction. His own anger is tempered by a sense of enlightenment, which places him on the same plane as his audience. The song yielded instant results when it rose to the #3 position, kept from the top by the Beatles' "Let It Be." Perhaps it was karma.

### MAY 1970 #3 BAND OF GOLD—FREDA PAYNE

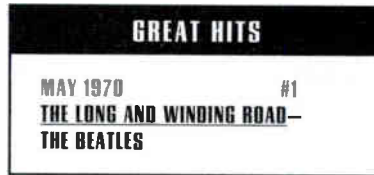
For those of you who thought (as I did) that producer/songwriters Eddie Holland, Lamont Dozier, and Brian Holland sailed off the ends of the earth after leaving Motown, think again. Although they were no longer privy to the promotional lar-



gess of a company that had profited handsomely from their work with the Supremes, the Four Tops, and others, they didn't just roll over and die, either. Their first ambitious project was to challenge Motown by forming their own Detroit-based record companies right in Motown's backyard. They called their new enterprises Invictus, which was to be distributed by Capitol Records, and Hot Wax, which was to be distributed by Buddah. Berry Gordy, Motown's president, must have figured, "Well, there goes the neighborhood," so he moved his business to the sunny clime and upwardly mobile territory of Los Angeles.

For a while, it looked as though Holland-Dozier-Holland just might create their own microcosm of a mega-industry by finding clone acts to replace their Motown charges. By incorporating their four-on-the-floor rhythm flourishes heavily enough to rattle the reptilian part of the human brain, they were sticking to what they did best. "Band of Gold" updates the pounding rhythm of "You Keep Me Hangin' On" and sets it to some incredibly silly lyrics.

The female-as-victim bit pushes the threshold of credibility, particularly when we are asked to accept that she didn't know her relationship was on the rocks until her honeymoon night. Freda Payne's lackluster performance would ordinarily stop a hit record dead in its tracks, but the Holland-Dozier-Holland bulldozer had such momentum that it would not be halted, even by commonplace singing. It's not that Payne wasn't talented, only that her vocal style was lacking the personality of someone like Diana Ross. In its own way, though, it may have helped give the dumb lyrics an almost believable edge.



The Holland-Dozier-Holland bulldozer had such momentum that it would not be halted, even by commonplace singing. It's not that Payne wasn't talented, only that her vocal style was lacking the personality of someone like Diana Ross. In its own way, though, it may have helped give the dumb lyrics an almost believable edge.

These guys continued to boost mediocre artists with their undeniably infectious production style, creating a #1 hit for an unknown group of session vocalists called Honey Cone, who scored big with "Want Ads." Payne even displayed staying power with a genuinely moving performance of a now-dated antiwar anthem called "Bring the Boys Home." It's too bad that these hits weren't enough for the production trio to gain permanent footing as independent producers. Instead, they found themselves on shaky financial ground, made worse when some of their artists, including Payne, initiated lawsuits against the label. After a run of only a few short years, the companies were disassembled. In 1973, Dozier left the Holland brothers and recorded a few solo records. *Then* they fell off the face of the earth.

## MAY 1970 #4 UP AROUND THE BEND—CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

**W**here was it that John Fogerty was in such a hurry to get to? What exactly was "up around the bend"? A roadside juke joint? Paradise? What? If there's a band there that can play with this much authority and if your attitude is properly adjusted, then the answer is yes to both possibilities. Occasionally, Fogerty could lapse into awkward phraseology and silly imagery ("Lookin' Out My Back Door"



GREAT HITS	
MAY 1970 <b>RIDE CAPTAIN RIDE— THE BLUES IMAGE</b>	#4
MAY 1970	FLIP SIDE OF <b>UP AROUND THE BEND</b>
<b>RUN THROUGH THE JUNGLE— CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL</b>	

and “Ramble Tamble” are good examples of slightly embarrassing lyrics), and “Up Around the Bend” falls into this category, as well. “You can ponder perpetual motion, set your mind on a crystal day. Always time for good conversation. There’s an ear for what you say” is hardly engaging poetry, but the sheer confidence of the performance renders everything else irrelevant. Listen to that opening guitar riff! It screams out of the speakers at you, demanding your attention and riveting you to your seat. What is just as amazing is that Fogerty’s howl is the aural equivalent of his guitar part. For a man who displayed a considerable amount of restraint and

poise during his career as a public figure, there is nothing tempered about this performance. He leans into the song as if he saw God and was in hot pursuit of the afterlife. It’s sure nice of him to invite us along.

**MAY 1970 #6 LAY DOWN (CANDLES IN THE RAIN)—MELANIE**

For a number of reasons, it seems as though the solo acoustic acts that performed at Woodstock have since become unavoidably associated with the event, often to the detriment of their post-festival careers. Melanie, John Sebastian, and Richie Havens have all felt a backlash of recognition since that weekend, mostly because they cannot seem to outgrow the image of being spokespeople for the “Woodstock Nation.” Considering that they had been used to playing to small crowds and coffeehouses, it’s no wonder that the event left an indelible impression on their psyche.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1970 <b>QUESTION—THE MOODY BLUES</b>	#21

Melanie Safka was one of the more obscure performers to appear at Woodstock and apparently even had some difficulty in getting backstage. To walk onstage alone in front of a city of people who don’t know you but are paying rapt attention while you perform can be a harrowing and humbling experience. Melanie must have felt grateful for the nonjudgmental nature of the

assemblage, who were relaxed and responsive despite the torrential downpours that continually plagued them. She came onstage as evening fell, just after a particularly horrendous squall, and watched amazed as the hills slowly lit up with thousands upon thousands of candles. From her vantage point, it must have been one sight to see, particularly from the perspective of an amateur folk artist who happened to be the focal point of their attention.

Moved by the experience, Melanie authored “Lay Down (Candles in the Rain),” in which she attempted to capture the spirituality and magic of that moment. To



convey a sense of the warm crowd, she envisioned hundreds of voices joining her on the chorus. The Edwin Hawkins Singers had recently hit the charts with “Oh Happy Day” so she asked the gospel group if they would be interested in accompanying her. She “auditioned” the song before the congregation, and once they decided that it was sufficiently spiritual in content, they agreed.

Melanie’s vocal style combined flaky camaraderie with captivating passion and acted as a catalyst for the Edwin Hawkins Singers, who sing with all the controlled abandon that you would expect from a first-rate gospel group. Controlled abandon is also an apt description for what took place on that wet August weekend. By capturing the optimistic ideology and the powerful sense of love that was pervasive at Woodstock, Melanie’s first hit record became a moving homage to a once-in-a-lifetime event.

## JUNE 1970 #1 THE LOVE YOU SAVE—THE JACKSON 5

**B**y chipping away at the cornerstone of the Jackson 5’s previous two hits, the songwriting team known as the Corporation was able to provide the group with their third consecutive #1 hit record. This marked the first time that any Top 40 act had their first three releases become chart toppers and made the Jackson 5 the first true superstars of the new decade. By emulating the Holland-Dozier-Holland hit-making formula of Motown’s golden days, the Corporation was able to produce equally successful results. Songwriters/producers Deke Richards, Freddie Perren, and Fonce Mizell deliberately set out to do this, which must have endeared them to bossman Berry Gordy, who abhorred unnecessary change. Upon signing the Jackson 5, Gordy predicted that his organization would supply them with three #1 hits. It wasn’t clairvoyance on his part, just intensive drive.

Although it may have been possible to write hits by formula, there was no way anybody could have predicted the consistent quality of performance put out by the band’s star, Michael Jackson. He relished performing and was already becoming more comfortable onstage than off. Child stars from the past, such as Shirley Temple or Jackie Cooper, were certainly cute and quite talented, but Michael Jackson’s ability to grasp such adult concepts as total performance and emotional delivery led many to think that he might actually have been a midget *posing* as a pre-teen. Anybody who saw Michael at this stage of his career witnessed a precocious and confident artist with the single-minded ability to pour everything that he knew into every performance. During his free time, which was rare, he’d long to play the same games as other children, but

**Although it may have been possible to write hits by formula, there was no way anybody could have predicted the consistent quality of performance put out by the band’s star, Michael Jackson.**





once he went onstage, he became the consummate professional. With a verve that could only come from total dedication, Michael Jackson interpreted the songwriters' intent with crystal clear accuracy. The Corporation did an excellent job of providing choice material for the Jackson 5, but the astounding talent of Michael Jackson gave these songs widespread appeal.

## JUNE 1970 #3 BALL OF CONFUSION—THE TEMPTATIONS

By now, the so-called dawning of the age of Aquarius had reached its twilight, and the encroaching darkness didn't look half as appealing as the dawn had promised. Most artists and producers at Motown, not to mention company head Berry Gordy, preferred to avoid controversy at all costs, but producer Norman Whitfield deliberately sought contemporary issues to use as subject matter. He began to tackle them with regularity, using the Temptations as his (somewhat resistant) creative outlet. As a result, his work became the most modern of all Motown acts. "Cloud Nine" marked the Temptations' first foray into social issues, with its obvious references to drug use as a form of escapism from inner-city woes. Run-

aways ("Runaway Child, Running Wild"), rampant consumerism ("Don't Let the Joneses Get You Down"), and psychedelia ("Psychedelic Shack") were all referenced to varying degrees of critical appeal but continually good commercial success. "Ball of Confusion" took the format another step farther by layering virtually every contemporary complaint that could fit into the lyrics and spewing them out in rapid-fire succession. The song didn't bother to offer any solutions, but it sure was one hell of a gripe-fest.

Considering the confused state of affairs and the pessimistic outlook that had descended on the country, disillusion was justifiable. Listening to this lyrical rant today, it's hard to believe that the country didn't collapse completely into a police state or a racial civil war. I can't say whether

the circumstances of conception have any effect on the resulting child, but if they do, then I can only wonder how many disaffected souls from the so-called Generation X were conceived while their parents listened to songs like "Ball of Confusion."

Along with the consciousness-raising lyrics came a new and updated approach to instrumentation for Motown. Wah-wah pedals and distortion were suddenly commonplace, as were electronically synthesized sounds and wildly exotic and self-indulgent arrangements. The post-hippie wasteland was grim indeed, but the music somehow didn't collapse—yet. The most remarkable aspect of the Temptations' sudden embracing of social issues was how drastically different it was from their graceful past. It was as though they had been pulled forward through

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1970 <u>DDH CHILD</u> —THE FIVE STAIRSTEPS	#8
JUNE 1970 <u>TEACH YOUR CHILDREN</u> —CROSBY, STILLS, NASH, AND YOUNG	#16

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1970 <u>GIMME DAT DING</u> —THE PIPKINS	#9



a time warp, yet their sound remained recognizable. Strange days required strange measures, and in the hands of Whitfield, the Temptations were plunged gracefully into a time that spurned grace.

## JULY 1970 #3 **SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED, I'M YOURS—** **STEVIE WONDER**

By the time Stevie Wonder began work on “Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours,” the Motown empire was faltering. Benny Benjamin, the drummer who supplied the Motown pulse, had died in an automobile accident. Smokey Robinson was in semiretirement, and many of their other acts were in drastic need of being revamped. Independent artists with their own visions were in vogue, and much of Motown’s roster suffered from being too affiliated with the manipulative and corporate nature of Berry Gordy’s organization. To Motown, pop was showbiz...the Copa Cabana Club, Las Vegas, with backing bands and extravagant costumes. Rock music was now outdoor free festivals and artistic expression. Stevie Wonder was better poised than anyone else at the label for the transition. In fact, he didn’t need to do a thing to adapt. He simply continued to follow his muse, and his popularity remained consistent. Since 1966, he had had at least three singles in the Top 40 each year. 1970 was no different.

“Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours” was his most enthusiastic record since “I Was Made to Love Her.” An electric sitar supplies the rhythm while the horn charts, which just keep getting better and better, slip the song into overdrive. Wonder collaborated with a blind musician friend named Lee Garrett, his love interest and soon-to-be wife, Syreeta Wright, and his mother, Lula. They casually bounced ideas back and forth until they completed both “Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours” and “It’s a Shame,” which the Spinners recorded. Wonder’s recording abilities had become deft enough for him to handle the production chores on both tracks. His work gave the Spinners their biggest hit yet while his own recording went to #3. Wonder was getting around, and his talent seemed limitless. When he inadvertently supplied Smokey Robinson and the Miracles with their only #1 hit, “Tears of a Clown,” it was a clear sign that the student was surpassing the instructors.

With all of his recent successes, Wonder still felt unappreciated at Motown. Knowing that his recording contract was due to expire on his twenty-first birthday, and sensing his frustration, Gordy conceded creative control for Wonder’s upcoming album project. *Where I’m Coming From* was a

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1970	#1
<b>WAR—EDWIN STARR</b>	

**“Signed,  
Sealed, Deliv-  
ered, I’m Yours”  
was his most  
enthusiastic  
record since “I  
Was Made to  
Love Her.”**



dense collage of occasionally strident lyrics and heavy-handed arrangements that didn't fare as well commercially as they had hoped, but it nevertheless established the direction Wonder would follow for most of the next decade.

## JULY 1970 #7 TIGHTER, TIGHTER—ALIVE AND KICKING

**A**dmittedly something of a sleeper, this song has one of the catchiest melodic hooks of its time and has aged well, but for some reason, it doesn't get the airplay that a song of this caliber deserves. It has a sound that is suitable for easy listening, classic rock, and alternative tastes, and yet it is rarely heard on the radio. Perhaps this is because Alive and Kicking were unrecognizable one-hit wonders, or maybe it's because the song isn't immediately recognizable from the title. Most people recall this classic when they hear the chorus, though: "Hold on just a little bit tighter now, baby. I love you so much, and I can't let go, no, no, no."

Sometimes all you need to have a hit record is a lot of talent, a great song, a famous producer, adequate airplay, and excellent distribution. That about covers it. Other than that, the rest is luck. Just ask the members of Alive and Kicking, who were lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.

Tommy James and the Shondells had come a long way from their days as a bubblegum act. After "Hanky Panky," "I Think We're Alone Now," and "Mony Mony," they began to dabble in psychedelia. For James, this change wasn't a matter of

posturing. He had developed something of a passion for drugs and, as a means of subterfuge, began incorporating subtle references to his expanded consciousness in his material. "Crimson and Clover" was his first "enlightened" single, while "Crystal Blue Persuasion" was his most blatant. Unfortunately, his experimentation caught up with him, and in the early '70s he collapsed

while onstage. His condition was critical—at one point he was pronounced dead—but he slowly managed to recover.

While convalescing, James wrote "Tighter, Tighter" with a friend and planned to sing it as his comeback single, but he had developed a paralyzing fear of performing. Instead, he enlisted the aptly named group Alive and Kicking to record the song for him. Alive and Kicking came from Brooklyn and consisted of five men and one woman. James acted as producer, and he arranged for the record's release on his label, Roulette Records. The group's intelligent harmonies enriched the song's naturally melodic tendencies and gave hope to the state of pop music at the outset of the '70s.

James eventually regained his confidence, boosted by the success of "Tighter, Tighter." Instead of continuing work with Alive and Kicking, he concentrated on reviving his own career. Without the support of their producer/songwriter, the group floundered and, eventually, kicked the bucket. From there, James went on to have his first solo hit record with "Draggin' the Line."

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1970

#14

OHIO—  
CROSBY, STILLS, NASH, AND YOUNG



## AUGUST 1970 #1 AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH—DIANA ROSS

**A**fter leaving the Supremes, Diana Ross and Motown had incredibly high hopes for her career, so the disappointment they felt when her first single, “Reach Out and Touch (Somebody’s Hand),” stalled at #20 was palpable. They needn’t have been concerned. Her next release, “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” rocketed to the #1 position and stayed there for three weeks. Ross, with producers/songwriters Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson, did what was seemingly impossible. They took a song that was so firmly identified with Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell that, at first, it must have seemed foolish to attempt a rerecording, particularly as a means for Ross to develop an independent image. Instead, the grandeur and dynamics of this artful rework completely transcend and utterly reinvent the original.

Ashford and Simpson wrote “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” and deserve credit for being malleable enough to bend their composition so completely away from its original structure. It is so thoroughly rewritten that it is hardly recognizable. The only portion of the first version that remains is the title phrase and the melody that supports it, and even then they are no longer used together. Instead of keeping the original chorus intact, Ross sings it wordlessly. In this manner, it becomes a central theme that frames her spoken-word passages.

Any astute listener could sense that Ross’s sentiment is empty rhetoric, but the song and orchestral arrangement are just too good to let that interfere. The gigantic production, including what must be at least an eighty-piece orchestra, swallows Ross almost completely—quite ironic considering that it was also her grandest moment as a solo performer.



## AUGUST 1970 #3 CANDIDA—DAWN

**T**ony Orlando’s professional career dates back to the early ’60s. He worked at Aldon music as a demo singer, whose job was to interpret a songwriter’s intentions for the recording artist (the “star”). He sang the original demo versions of such megahits as “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” and “Take Good Care of My Baby,” both Gerry Goffin-Carole King compositions. On “Halfway to Paradise” (also Goffin-King), Aldon Music chief Don Kirshner liked Orlando’s demo recording enough to market it as a finished product, and a #39 hit resulted. His next single, “Bless You,” did even better, reaching #15 in September 1961, but it was his last Top 40 entry. By 1970 his recording career was long forgotten, and he was working as a music publisher for CBS.

In the course of his job, Orlando came across a recording of “Candida.” He didn’t think the song was right for his own company so he suggested that it be taken to Bell Records, which specialized in flagrantly popular material. Bell passed



on the tune, as well, citing an unimpressive lead vocal. On the basis of Orlando's early hit singles, Bell executives suggested that he replace the lead vocal by dubbing his own voice onto the original instrumental track. He acceded but did not want his name associated with the single for fear of insulting his employer. The generic-sounding "Dawn" was chosen for the artist's tag, the record was released, and whaddya know. Bell Records and Dawn had a #1 hit on their hands.

Orlando left his job and hastily assembled a group made up of session singers Telma Hopkins (one of the girls on "Theme from *Shaft*") and Joyce Vincent. Together, they recorded the blatantly commercial "Knock Three Times" and en-

joyed another #1 hit. A few critics attempted to suspend their doubts concerning Dawn's artistic credibility, but the sickeningly saccharine sweetness of "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree" was more than any serious music lover could bear. By the time they recorded "Say Has Anybody Seen My Sweet Gypsy Rose," discerning listeners were running for cover.

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1970	#2
LOOKIN' OUT MY BACK DOOR—	
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL	

Dawn had become so sweet that nine out of ten dentists recommended avoiding their music entirely. In retrospect, these songs make it difficult to admit that "Candida" is actually quite good. Before Orlando started prancing around in tinted glasses and a spangled suit in front of two perpetually smiling women, he was simply a good singer with a real talent for R&B-like phrasing. A singer of well-written pop songs was reduced to an interpreter of bad bubblegum music and ill-chosen cover songs. At his best, though, Orlando had a voice that could be compared with that of Ben E. King. The string arrangement adds to the illusion that "Candida" is what might have resulted if the Drifters had continued their string of hits into the '70s.

## AUGUST 1970 #1 DON'T PLAY THAT SONG—ARETHA FRANKLIN

**A**fter a spate of hits that established her as the figurehead of popular music, Aretha Franklin started to relax a bit and sang music that she deliberately aimed in a less commercial direction. *Soul '69* was a jazz-based album that allowed her to experiment with personal interpretations of material from a variety of genres. Although it yielded no hits, it was a credible attempt to stretch out and diversify. At the turn of the decade, Franklin's recording output slackened considerably, when personal difficulties in the form of a divorce from Ted White intervened. Her creativity remained as strong as ever, but the driven intensity that fueled her best recordings was missing. The album *This Girl's in Love with You* was moody and bluesy, and for the first time since her stardom, Franklin sounded a half-step removed from the material she chose to sing. The power of her voice was no less, but a mood of resignation hung over her like a cloud. Also, a gap was becoming noticeable between the unrestrained Franklin that we heard on her records and the more uptight Franklin we saw in her live performances. Only





rarely would she allow herself to display the unbridled passion of her best recordings. When she did, it was sublime. When she didn't, it was disappointing.

For all the heated gospel fervor of her delivery and the confessional themes of her music, Franklin appeared to be strangely aloof and guarded. While the records burned, she seemed to stay cool. Instead of making her music seem less personal, the inverse happened. Since she wasn't talking to the press, all that her fans could do was interpret her songs for clues. Under her outer reserve, they found a deeply pained and expressive woman. The palpable romanticism of her #1 R&B hit (#13 pop) "Call Me" concealed a vein of sadness that was undeniably a subtext to the lovey-dovey lyrics.

"Don't Play That Song" was even more revealing. For a change of pace, Franklin discontinued recording in New York and traveled south to Florida's Criteria Studios, where James Brown had recorded "I Got You (I Feel Good)." The result was a lasting relationship with a new set of musicians and the highly personal and revealing album entitled *Spirit in the Dark*. In light of Franklin's ability to make any song her own, it is easy to forget that Ben E. King recorded the original version of "Don't Play That Song," and that it reached #11 in 1962. King's version is overly reminiscent of "Stand by Me," his earlier and bigger hit, and the song benefits immensely from Franklin's interpretation. It was written by Ahmet Ertegun and Benjamin Nelson (aka Ben E. King), but it didn't truly come to life until Franklin sang it almost ten years later. Once again, she seems to be using musical devices to disguise the intensity and personal relevance of the lyric's topic. A casual shuffle beat gives the appearance of an upbeat mood, but the contrast only highlights the loneliness in her voice. The dichotomy adds depth to her interpretation and makes the song three-dimensional. By distancing herself from the world, Franklin adds a whole new level of expression to her vocals. Her work at this time could qualify as being some of the most soulfully lonely singing she has done in her career.

#### GREAT HITS

AUGUST 1970 #14  
IT'S A SHAME—THE SPINNERS

AUGUST 1970 #15  
GET UP I FEEL LIKE BEING A SEX MACHINE—JAMES BROWN

#### GREAT MISSES

AUGUST 1970 #5  
JULIE, DO YA LOVE ME—BOBBY SHERMAN

## SEPTEMBER 1970 #1 I'LL BE THERE—THE JACKSON 5

**J**ust look over your shoulders, honey! OOOOHH!" As spontaneous as it may have sounded, Michael Jackson's performance on "I'll Be There"—indeed, on all of his Motown singles—was actually carefully planned and arranged. Even the line quoted above was carefully lifted from Levi Stubb's ad-lib on "Reach Out (I'll Be There)." Michael's singing was special, but it wasn't simply an innate talent for spontaneous expression that made him so valu-



**"I'll Be There"  
was a risk in  
the sense that  
it was a  
departure from  
the previous  
Jackson 5  
singles, but it  
was a neces-  
sary risk if the  
band was  
to establish  
any type of  
longevity.**

able to his record label. No, it was more complicated than that—and more difficult. What made him an extraordinary performer was his ability to maintain such a profound level of vivacity and freshness after innumerable rehearsals and takes. An average child would become bored and distracted. Even most adults would object to such an intensive workout, but Michael simply worked until he (and everybody else) knew it was perfect. His brother Jermaine was responsible for singing the bridge and, although less spectacular, his vocals also contain the polished sheen of professionalism that results from exhaustive attention to detail. The proof is in the level of believability that their vocals carry. Even though they were both still children, they sound utterly sincere in their presentation. This is what hampers the later cover version by Mariah Carey. Although her vocal pyrotechnics are astounding, her delivery doesn't convey the same sense of sincerity that a twelve-year-old's did.

After three consecutive #1 records for the Jackson 5, Motown decided to take a chance. "I'll Be There" was a risk in the sense that it was a departure from the previous Jackson 5 singles ("I Want You Back," "ABC," "The Love You Save"), but it was a necessary risk if the band was to establish any type of longevity. Their upbeat-rhythm workouts were excellent records, but it was important to prove that they also had enough talent to deliver the occasional potent ballad. Once again, Michael proved himself to be an invaluable secret weapon. His moving performance on "I'll Be There" is rendered so sensitively that it is almost impossible to accept that a twelve year old could convey this much emotional depth and substance.

Instead of relying completely on the Corporation, as he had on the previous Jackson 5 singles, Berry Gordy solicited other writers and found what he was looking for when he heard "I'll Be There." Bob West wrote the song in its original form, but Gordy enlisted producer Hal Davis, who in turn got the help of songwriter Willie Hutch, to "polish up" the track. In other words, a second "Corporation" was invented to substitute temporarily for the original team. The gamble paid off royally when "I'll Be There" moved into the #1 position and stayed there for five weeks, becoming the best-selling single in Motown's history. This also meant that the Jackson 5's first four single releases all went to #1—an unprecedented statistic for any artist on the Top 40. As far as debuts go, the Jackson 5 was the closest thing to an overnight sensation that pop music had to offer. More importantly, they also proved that they were not only capable of danceable energy, but were equally adept at sublime and graceful eloquence.



## SEPTEMBER 1970 #9 LOLA—THE KINKS

The initial flurry of hits that the Kinks enjoyed during the British Invasion soon proved difficult to sustain. By most accounts, their live shows were often atrocious. The Kinks' stage dress of red hunting jackets and Ray Davies's limp-wristed singing style combined with brother Dave's unusually long hair to give the appearance of blatant effeminacy. Their campy appearance and name notwithstanding, they were as famous for their brawling as for their music, but it appeared that America intended to remain aloof from the Kinks' brand of showbiz. Their role in the British Invasion ended promptly when they were asked to leave the country by the American Federation of Musicians, who claimed they were not cleared to perform musical engagements in the United States. This rather abruptly ended their love affair with America. Directly or indirectly, it had a significant effect on their popularity, and their next few singles did not perform as well as expected.

All the while, Davies was becoming increasingly withdrawn and introspective. This manifested itself in his songwriting, which was steadily improving. Unfortunately, it seemed that the better the songs were, the less they sold. By August 1966, the group had its last Top 40 hit of the '60s ("Dedicated Follower of Fashion"). For the next few years, the Kinks could barely get themselves arrested, and judging from the stories of drunken behavior and violence that followed them wherever they went, it wasn't from lack of trying. The band harbored a tendency toward self-destruction that, paradoxically, seemed to be the primary force holding them together.

Then suddenly, in September 1970, an unsuspecting audience heard the chord cluster that opens "Lola." The song bluntly announced its arrival, and we were immediately drawn in. Besides a melody that is unshakable, Davies's droll delivery gradually unfurls the story of an encounter with a presumed transvestite. Initially, Lola seems to be a "forward" woman, but soon enough things start (or stop) smelling fishy, when he sings, "Well, I'm not the world's most physical guy, but when she squeezed me tight, she nearly broke my spine." By song's end, he finds himself questioning his own sexuality, singing, "Girls will be boys, and boys will be girls. It's a mixed up, muddled up, shook up world—except for Lola."

This wasn't normal subject matter for Top 40 radio, but it seemed that everybody loved the song. The Kinks were back, but only for a short while. The band's penchant for self-destruction once again took hold. They changed labels, from Reprise to RCA. They fought incessantly, including a stabbing incident between brothers

### GREAT HITS

SEPTEMBER 1970 #2  
**WE'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN—**  
**THE CARPENTERS**

SEPTEMBER 1970 #5  
**INDIANA WANTS ME—R. DEAN TAYLOR**

Besides a melody that is unshakable, Davies's droll delivery gradually unfurls the story of an encounter with a presumed transvestite.



Ray and Dave Davies over some french fries. Ray Davies underwent an emotional collapse onstage. Although their albums would continue to charm their fans, they disappeared from the pop charts as quickly as they returned and would not appear again on the Top 40 for nearly a decade.

## OCTOBER 1970 #1 TEARS OF A CLOWN— SMOKEY ROBINSON AND THE MIRACLES

**T**ears of a Clown” was originally written as an instrumental by Stevie Wonder and his producer, Hank Cosby. Later, Smokey Robinson added lyrics and recorded the song with the Miracles. It was released as an album track on their 1968 LP *Make It Happen* and was promptly forgotten. Around this time, Robinson was growing tired of the ritual of touring. His wife, Claudette, had once been a member of the Miracles but no longer toured with the band. After an unfortunate series of miscarriages, she thought it would be best to leave the group and stay at home. With the discomfort of never-ending bus rides and ungodly hours

behind her, she gave birth to two children. Robinson, inspired by his wife’s example, wanted to be home with his family, so he announced his intention to leave the Miracles to concentrate on songwriting and production.

While this process was being formalized, Motown’s English offices were desperate for another single from the group. Robinson’s popularity in Great Britain was enormous, and fans were clamoring for something new. With no new product on hand, they rummaged through the band’s back catalog looking for a potential single. Even though it was almost three years old, they culled “Tears of a Clown” from the *Make It Happen* album and, not too surprisingly, it reached #1 on the British charts. Of course, the American branch of Motown then felt compelled to release the single as well, and it performed the same feat, reaching #1 for two

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1970 MONTEGO BAY—BOBBY BLOOM	#8
OCTOBER 1970 CRY ME A RIVER—JOE COCKER	#11
OCTOBER 1970 SUPER BAD—JAMES BROWN	#13

GREAT MISSES	
OCTOBER 1970 LUCRETIA MACEVIL— BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS	#29

weeks. Years after it was first released, it became the biggest hit of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles’ career.

Now, Robinson was in a dilemma. The other Miracles were not songwriters, and they derived most of their income from performances. If he quit, whatever money the band could earn by touring would be lost. The Miracles had been together without personnel changes (excepting Claudette) since their junior-high-school days, and Robinson felt compelled to stay with the group for a while longer. With typical aplomb, Robinson agreed to stay for one last go-around. In



1972, when the tour ended, he quietly made his move. Finally and formally, he left the Miracles.

## NOVEMBER 1970 #8 NO MATTER WHAT—BADFINGER

People who were pining for the days when the Beatles were an active recording unit had precious little to comfort them. The music that the solo Beatles were releasing had shown occasional flashes of brilliance, but often did little more than point out their weaknesses when compared with their work as a team. If you were a full-fledged Beatles fan, it was difficult not to imagine how many of their individual records could have been vastly improved if only the others could have contributed to the creative process. This opened up a huge void in pop music that was practically begging to be filled. The band that came closest to filling the gap was another four-man act named Badfinger. By replicating the smart harmonies, tasteful arrangements, and intelligent songwriting that marked most Beatles' recordings, Badfinger showed sufficient promise as the Beatles' musical heirs apparent. Somewhat coincidentally, two of the bandmembers hailed from the Beatles' hometown of Liverpool, while the remaining members came from Wales. They also happened to record for the Beatles' record label, Apple.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1970 <u>ONE LESS BELL TO ANSWER</u> — THE FIFTH DIMENSION	#2
NOVEMBER 1970 <u>BLACK MAGIC WOMAN</u> —SANTANA	#4

Badfinger had originally existed as a pub band called the Iveys when they were spotted by Mal Evans, a manager/assistant to the Beatles. It was right around the same time that, in response to the death of their manager, Brian Epstein, the Beatles were formulating their Western-communism ideals into a very loosely structured business venture called Apple. Apple was intended to be a multimedia, multifaceted business and included forays into electronics, publishing, retailing, and clothing design, as well as film and record production. Just about everything Apple affiliated itself with resulted in either mayhem or nothing of consequence, with the one very obvious exception being the record label. Besides the fact that the Beatles themselves were recording for Apple, other signings included James Taylor, Mary Hopkin, and Badfinger.

As Apple became an accountant's worst nightmare, the Beatles began to fracture under the pressure. Badfinger found itself in the unusual predicament of recording for the Beatles' label while the Beatles ceased to exist. Even more odd was the manner in which they became proxy spokesmen to vent the frustration and disillusionment that haunted the Beatles, particularly Paul McCartney.

**Badfinger found itself in the unusual predicament of recording for the Beatles' label while the Beatles ceased to exist.**





McCartney had written a slightly playful but mostly bitter song called "Come and Get It," with lyrics that referenced the dismantling of the Beatles' fortunes through Apple's gross mismanagement and the outright thievery that caused the corporation's eventual demise, but he thought better than to have the Beatles record it. Recorded (duplicated, really) from a McCartney demo tape, "Come and Get It" became Badfinger's first hit and also served as a soundtrack recording for a film starring Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr, titled *The Magic Christian*. Seven months later, Badfinger once again reached the pop charts, but this time with a song the band wrote and arranged themselves. "No Matter What" proved that Badfinger members were no slouches and were capable of writing songs that were just as melodic and engrossing as the material of their super-famous label mates. Although the Beatles self-destructed, Apple Records continued to exist (barely) and released Badfinger's new single. Badfinger portrayed all the ingredients you would expect from a group that was truly unified and secure in its identity. While rock music was splintering into hundreds of subgenres, Badfinger held fast and true to the notion that good music did not need to be dressed up and repackaged in some image-making process. "No Matter What" is as straightforward as any pop song can be. It has a great hook, a well-thought-out melody, even better harmonies, clever structure, relatable words. All in all, it's an ideal example of a thoroughly unpretentious and highly enjoyable pop song. No other band since the Beatles had displayed such a facility with all of these characteristics.

## DECEMBER 1970 #8 YOUR SONG—ELTON JOHN

**E**lton John could be said to be the patriarch for the third generation of rock and roll. The pioneers had the tough job of clearing the way for their new music while the next generation—the English settlers, so to speak—had the job of establishing the community of rock music. By the time of Elton John's rise to prominence, rock music was firmly entrenched in our popular culture. No longer was it seen as a threat to decent citizenry and the American way of life. Quite the contrary, rock and roll was as American as apple pie. It could still be shocking, but it no longer seemed subversive. The high camp, frills, and theatrics of the upcoming glitter rock movement were tame when compared to the threatening images and deadly earnestness that defined the image of so many '60s bands. In the '60s, the Rolling Stones, Dylan, the Doors, and the Velvet Underground all seemed *real*. In the '70s, most of the bands were, by definition, theatrical and phony. They were openly playing a role and reveling in it. Elton John rose to the top of his class because he augmented his tremendous melodic talent with some of the most outrageously kitschy stage designs and costumes that were imaginable. He wasn't dangerous at all. Instead, he was a pudgy teddy bear dressed in a tutu. He was playfully outrageous and self-mockingly campy while acting the role of the sensitive singer/songwriter through the confusing playlets that were provided by his lyricist, Bernie Taupin. The distance that



Taupin provided Elton John from direct personal attachment to the words of the songs allowed him to perform these sensitively rendered melodies while dressed as a banana. By putting space between the performer and the song, he was able to be just as theatrical as his most outrageous peers, even when singing a sensitive love song. In perfect glitter-rock fashion, this made him even more of a poseur than his competitors, such as David Bowie and Marc Bolan, who usually had to sing their own lyrics.

No matter how incongruous the image was, Elton John remained thoroughly believable, perhaps even overly sensitive. He may not have written the words, but it was hard to imagine that he wasn't singing from personal experience. "Your Song" sounds as though it is emanating straight from his heart, right down to the self-effacing chuckle that he adds to the line "If I were a sculptor...but then again, no." His performance is so convincing that I sometimes need to be reminded that he didn't pen these words. Perhaps it is the beautiful melody that makes the song so real. The words may be winsome and childlike, but the melody helps them sound truly sincere.

Before he was bitten by the glitter bug, Elton John mostly resembled the other early '70s sensitive singer/songwriters, such as Gordon Lightfoot, James Taylor, and Jackson Browne. The '60s concerns of universal brotherhood were being replaced by personal songs of pain and experience. Elton John's inability to write intriguing lyrics of his own prevented him from remaining in that mold. By setting Taupin's poems to his own melodies, he stretched their interpretability to suit his own personality. Because of Elton John's phrasing and sympathetic interpretation, "Your Song" becomes his song. It was a challenge that he would continuously prove himself equal to, time and time again, right to the present day. Two rock-and-roll generations have come and gone since, and he is no longer rock music's designated leader; but Elton John remains one of popular music's most consistent, respected, and beloved elder statesmen.

No matter how  
incongruous  
the image was,  
Elton John  
remained  
thoroughly  
believable,  
perhaps  
even overly  
sensitive.

## DECEMBER 1970 #9 DOMINO—VAN MORRISON

**D**omino" is a riff-heavy and remarkably contagious example of Van Morrison's desire to pay tribute to his well of inspiration. Melodically and structurally, the song is purely his own, with horn charts and a syncopated riff that keep it continually exhilarating. Instead of relying on Fats Domino's style to make his point, he maintains his own sense of musical originality while singing of the rock and roll forefather who set him on a journey of discovery. He would pursue similar topical turf in the remarkable "Jackie Wilson Said (I'm in Heaven When You Smile)," but that song would be denied its commercial destiny by never



## GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1970 #33  
**ONLY LOVE CAN BREAK YOUR HEART—**  
 NEIL YOUNG

JANUARY 1971 #4  
**I HEAR YOU KNOCKIN'—**  
 DAVE EDMUNDS

JANUARY 1971 #5  
**IF YOU COULD READ MY MIND—**  
 GORDON LIGHTFOOT

## GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1971 #33  
**1900 YESTERDAY—**  
 LIZ DAMON'S ORIENT EXPRESS

gaining entry to the upper echelons of the singles charts, a fact as unacceptable as it is inexplicable.

Considering that Morrison grew up in Belfast before the days of rock and roll, it is important to remember just what his sources of inspiration were. Anybody who has ever been there would agree that Ireland wears its culture proudly. No matter how immersed in American blues he was, the ingredients supplied by his home country must have been equally influential. From a distance, Irish music and American blues seem to be worlds apart. Upon closer examination, though, the experiences of black Americans and the colonized Irish bear comparisons that are more than superficial. Musically, the similarities are fundamental. Both rely on simple structure to express complex emotions. But while Irish music tends to be congregational, the blues tends to be private. Gospel, then, is the interface that links Negro blues to Irish bal-

lady. The sense of community that gospel music nourishes shares common ground with the spirituality of Celtic music. This is why Morrison can be both a great Irish singer and a great blues singer without any compromise toward either. It also explains how he can sing one of the most effective and authentic tributes to R&B while maintaining his own inimitable style.

## FEBRUARY 1971 #1 JUST MY IMAGINATION—THE TEMPTATIONS

It is ironic to note that while Eddie Kendricks's voice was caressing the airwaves with his dreamy falsetto, the Temptations were actively seeking his replacement. Ever since David Ruffin was booted from the band, Kendricks had second thoughts about the circumstances of his friend's departure and harbored some resentment toward the other bandmembers. Anger and tension reached a boiling point just as the band was scheduled to record "Just My Imagination." Otis Williams was never more than a background singer for the Temptations, but he was the group's spokesman and Berry Gordy's confidant. Kendricks was a figurehead of sorts and felt that the band was being slighted by Motown. Slowly, he ostracized himself from the other bandmembers until they all felt it necessary to take action. Kendricks and the Temptations mutually decided that he should leave the group. "Just My Imagination" became his swan song and, ironically, featured the most mesmerizing and relaxed performance of his career. It also became the group's third #1 hit single.

The tempered pace of this song is perfectly matched to the daydreaming fan-



tasy of the lyrics. After the pointed topicality and angry tone of their past few releases, “Just My Imagination” could not have offered a starker contrast. It was a dreamscape made in heaven. With the most sublime music to watch girls by, it is so languid that you can almost smell the heat rising off the sidewalk. It’s the musical equivalent of a lazy Sunday afternoon with nowhere to go and nothing to do. It’s amazing what thoughts one beautiful woman can inspire. All the ingredients of a happy and satisfied life are imagined, only to be deflated when the chorus betrays the fantasy. Oh well, that’s alright. Maybe someone else will happen by, and you’ll drift away again. The Temptations will provide the soundtrack.

Kendricks’s departure set the scene for his solo career and eventual reunification with Ruffin. Considering the hard times that eventually befell them, it was a predictable pairing and was commandeered by their protégés, Daryl Hall and John Oates. The pair of pairs came together in 1985 for a live recording from the recently renovated Apollo Theater. They continued with appearances at a series of shows and reached their commercial zenith at Bob Geldof’s remarkably wonderful charity-concert-to-dwarf-all-others, Live-Aid.

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1971	#4
<b>PROUD MARY—IKE AND TINA TURNER</b>	
FEBRUARY 1971	#8
<b>HAVE YOU EVER SEEN THE RAIN—CREDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL</b>	

## FEBRUARY 1971 #15 TEMPTATION EYES—THE GRASS ROOTS

**B**y the ’70s, the Grass Roots were something of an anachronism. All of their pop music cronies from the ’60s had fallen from favor, and only those acts that successfully adapted to the more serious demands of album rock were able to survive into the new decade. The Turtles, the Mamas and the Papas, the Monkees, and the Byrds either broke up or were no longer interesting to record buyers. They were all relics of a past age. The bands that survived—such as the Who, the Doors, and the Rolling Stones—did so through the sale of albums, with singles being only an incidental part of their output. Replacing the old bands was a new generation of introspective singer/songwriters, who discussed mature and personal themes in their songs. Paul Simon, James Taylor, Cat Stevens, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, and dozens of others were all pursuing their personal muses of self-awareness and had little in common with pop in its traditional form.

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1971	#36
<b>D.O.A.—BLOODROCK</b>	

The Grass Roots did not fit into either of these categories; yet they managed to flourish amid a sea of changes. “I’d Wait a Million Years,” “Temptation Eyes,” “Sooner or Later,” and “Two Divided by Love” were all Top 20 singles between 1969 and 1971. Some seemed corny, now that the average rock fan had become older, less optimistic, and more serious. “Sooner or Later” was particularly grat-





**The Grass Roots were lucky to hold on as long as they did, particularly in light of the fact that they lacked an image and their music was so light and frothy.**

ing, with its thorough disregard of current trends, yet it became a Top 10 hit. When “Sooner or Later” charted in the summer of 1971, I can remember wondering, “These guys are still around?”

The record that preceded “Sooner or Later” was “Temptation Eyes,” and it was the best thing the Grass Roots did since 1968’s “Midnight Confessions.” Singer Rob Grill’s vocal similarity to Burton Cummings of the Guess Who was enough to make some people think this was a great and unpretentious Guess Who single, but the lack of pretension is what should have made it obvious that this could never be a Guess Who tune. In the absence of songwriter P.F. Sloan (who appears to have abandoned the music business entirely soon after he left the Grass Roots), the band relied heavily on songs provided by music publishers and often came up with commercial winners. Considering their access to material as good as “Temptation

Eyes,” and their professional approach to accruing sales through quality recordings, it becomes quite understandable how the Grass Roots survived in spite of the overwhelming social upheavals between 1968 and 1971.

In rock and roll, a full generation usually lasts about eight to ten years. Sure, a few acts have survived much longer than that, but none have remained influential. Even the Rolling Stones, about whom Keith Richards has said “String us up and we still won’t die,” saw their image become seriously devalued after a decade. The Grass Roots were lucky to hold on as long as they did, particularly in light of the fact that they lacked an image and their music was so light and frothy. They too would soon succumb to the next wave of pop bands, such as the Doobie Brothers, America, Chicago, and Three Dog Night. As inevitably as the turning of the tide, another cycle completed itself, and a new one began.

Since 1971, the pace of this cycle has slowed considerably. Like an aging athlete, pop culture takes a lot longer to cover the same ground. Nowadays, it isn’t unusual to wait three years for an artist like Peter Gabriel or Steve Winwood to release a follow-up hit that, in the final analysis, bears a striking resemblance to his previous record. While six months used to represent a rock-and-roll half-life, the ’90s have seen it expand indefinitely. Lately, change is either superficial or a regression to past ideas and styles. This is true not only in music, but in film, television, and fashion, as well. At the risk of sounding like a curmudgeon, perhaps the creative renaissance of pop culture has already (and finally) reached its nadir.

## **MARCH 1971 #2 WHAT’S GOING ON—MARVIN GAYE**

**M**arvin Gaye spent the first few years after singing partner Tammi Terrell’s death withdrawn and depressed. To the ultimate frustration of Motown head Berry Gordy, he had no desire to record or tour, and instead he attempted to





pursue the rather absurd ambition of becoming a professional football player. Believe this or not, he trained for the Detroit Lions and increased his girth by nearly fifty pounds in the process. When this pipe dream reached its inevitable conclusion, Gaye returned to recording and began work on a song written by Al Cleveland and the Four Tops' Obie (Renaldo) Benson. Gaye invited some friends, including two of his buddies from the Lions, Lem Barney and Mel Farmer, into the studio to record "What's Going On."

The record opens in the midst of a party, but the despair and ambiguity of "What's Going On" become obvious the second the music starts. The inanity of the party atmosphere, which carries through the recording, contradicts Gaye's intense, humorless performance. The result is a singer who sounds utterly alienated by his surroundings and desperately needs a link to the rest of the world. He sees no more sense in the mindless babbling of the party revelers than he does in the tragedies of life. With Gaye handling his own production, this vision is presented unhampered by any outsider's distractions. When he sings, he seems so deep in thought that verbalization is incidental. Could this possibly be the same man who just three years earlier sang uplifting love songs with Tammi Terrell?

Motown completely missed the point and deemed the recording unfit for commercial release. To be fair, "What's Going On" featured a performance and production that were so idiosyncratic they seemed destined to fail. Judging from the nearly ridiculous noncommerciality of some of Gaye's past projects, it wasn't hard to sympathize with the label's point of view, but times had definitely changed. Gaye was insulted by Motown's pedantic attitude and issued an ultimatum: if they wouldn't release "What's Going On," he would no longer record for the label. Reluctantly, the single was issued and reached #2 on the pop charts. The American public immediately sensed the relevance of "What's Going On." The heady optimism of the '60s was dead. Ambiguity and confusion were its byproducts, and "What's Going On" indirectly captured the spirit of a nation wounded by political divisiveness. Gaye, because of his honest pursuit of art, became a seer.

*What's Goin' On* was the name of the album that linked Gaye's triptych of hits ("What's Goin' On," "Mercy Mercy Me," and "Inner City Blues"). Throughout the album, Gaye redubs his vocals layer upon layer, in effect creating an atmosphere of spirituality. He was supposedly attempting to overcome an inferiority complex concerning the power of his tenor, but in the process he invented vocal multitracking. To be sure, for years artists had been recording their vocal parts in layers using a process known as doubling. The point of doubling was to duplicate the base vocal as closely as possible, to give the impression of one voice with the presence of more than one. Gaye was unconcerned with following the lead vocal. He would harmonize, ad-lib, or echo a phrase as he pleased. The effect was a chorus of scattered Marvin Gayes, each one apparently rendering a dif-

**"What's Going On" featured a performance and production that were so idiosyncratic they seemed destined to fail.**



ferent subconscious thought. By escaping the lineal vocal line concept, he expressed a depth of emotion that was beyond the reach of straight singing. He could answer or question his own phrasing, and this helped make the album a tour de force in expressiveness for popular music.

### MARCH 1971 #19 YOU'RE ALL I NEED TO GET BY—ARETHA FRANKLIN

Most of the time (despite a few exceptions), it's a safe bet that an original version of a song will outshine all subsequent attempts at remakes, whether they stick closely to or stray wildly from their source of inspiration. With Aretha Franklin, however, you can throw that theory out the window. She sings 'em similarly ("I Say a Little Prayer") or she sings 'em differently ("Don't Play That Song"). Either way, she wins.

The slinky rhythm that Franklin and her band create for Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell's gorgeous classic does so much for the song that it miraculously overwhelms the original, making it sound staid in comparison. As written, the melody is unbeatable, so Franklin keeps that intact but adds a dynamic touch and some syncopated sixteenth-note phrasing—"As long as I got ya, then baby you know that you got me, OH!"—followed by "cause makin' our lovin's some r-e-s-p-e-c-t, OH!" That last phrase is astounding in its creativity, as well as a clever reference to her biggest hit. The strings are sharp enough to cut through flesh while the reassuring power of Franklin's voice licks the wounds. The hits may

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1971 <u>ANOTHER DAY</u> —PAUL McCARTNEY	#5
MARCH 1971 <u>WHAT IS LIFE</u> —GEORGE HARRISON	#10
MARCH 1971 <u>WILD WORLD</u> —CAT STEVENS	#11
MARCH 1971 <u>EIGHTEEN</u> —ALICE COOPER	#21

not have been coming as hot and heavy as they were a few years ago, but Franklin had lost none of her interpretive abilities and, with renewed confidence, was prepared to branch out into a newer, more experimental direction.

### APRIL 1971 #2 NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE—THE JACKSON 5

Michael Jackson and his brothers offered something to the public that hadn't existed since the early days of Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers. Black teen idols were in short supply, mostly because black musical styles demanded a certain level of maturity for their songs to be performed and interpreted properly. The Jackson 5 solved the problem by presenting themselves as a pop act, and then by surprising everybody with the level of soulfulness that they were capable of conveying. For the first time in music history, black performers were being used as models in an advertising campaign that included lunch boxes, watches, and dolls. It was a questionable step forward as far as progress is



concerned, but at least it leveled the racial playing field a bit more. What nobody expected, though, was that a family of (very) white Mormons who sang as a barber-shop quartet would ape the Jackson 5 style and go head-to-head with them on the charts.

The Osmond Brothers are a shining example of what can happen when opportunism goes awry. A songwriter named George Jackson (no relation to the group) wrote a song called “One Bad Apple” and sent a copy to Motown with hopes that it would be considered for release by the Jackson 5. Berry Gordy rejected the tune on the grounds that it was too juvenile (this from the man who approved “ABC” and “The Love You Save”), so Jackson was forced to shop it elsewhere. Meanwhile, Mike Curb at MGM Records became aware of the Osmond Brothers and immediately saw the potential for money—a *lot* of money. He signed the group, and Jackson was rather fortuitously able to supply the Osmonds with a custom-made composition. The brothers were trucked to Muscle Shoals, Alabama, and there they made a recording that was frighteningly suggestive of their target. With a song that easily could have been sung by the Jackson 5 and a sound that was so close it could have fooled their own parents, the Osmonds attained the #1 record in the nation for five weeks.

Then, like a bad dream, they refused to go away. Even worse, they began to proliferate. First, Donny Osmond launched a solo career. Then sister Marie appeared as a pseudo-country star. Donny and Marie next teamed their blinding smiles for their own television show. The capper was when Little Jimmy Osmond was thrust upon us. That should have been the last straw, but the Osmonds maintained an active presence until the late '70s, when it finally appeared as though they may have overstayed their welcome. Boy, those were scary times.

While this was going on, the Jackson 5 were caught in a state of flux. Their string of #1 hits was broken when “Mama’s Pearl” was halted at #2. This could hardly be deemed a failure, but after four #1 records, it provided food for thought. Perhaps, with the Osmonds moving onto the Jackson 5’s turf of adolescent R&B, it might be a good idea to abandon that slot altogether and focus on a more adult-oriented sound. After all, they weren’t getting any younger. “Never Can Say Goodbye” was a mature love song written by songwriter Clifton Davis. It almost single-handedly put an adult slant on the boys’ image—so much so that it frightened Motown’s A&R department and caused them to withhold its release. It wasn’t until Gordy got personally involved that “Never Can Say Goodbye” was finally sent out and quickly went to #2 on the pop charts and #1 on the R&B charts. It caused enough of a sensation to spawn two additional hit versions, first by Isaac Hayes (his reached #22 before the Jackson 5’s had even fallen from the charts) and later by Gloria Gaynor (#9 in 1975).

The mature subject matter and confident performance poised the Jackson 5 for entry into a career as mature interpreters of first-class material. Instead of

**The mature subject matter and confident performance poised the Jackson 5 for entry into a career as mature interpreters of first-class material.**



capitalizing on the obvious superiority of the Jackson 5, Motown decided to counteract Donny Osmond's solo career by launching Michael Jackson as a solo artist. By following the Osmonds' lead, Motown showed that it was now willing to place the cart before the horse. Although Michael's solo career was inevitable, the timing for his "coming out" was unfortunate because it implied that Motown was conceding its place as a leader in the pop market. With their main attraction now soliciting attention on his own, the bloom was off the flower for the once fresh-faced Jackson 5.

### APRIL 1971 #4 I AM, I SAID—NEIL DIAMOND

Throughout the '60s, popular music seemed to stay one step ahead of the industry moguls who tried to contain it. By the '70s the industry had caught up and learned how to package its product so seamlessly that any expression of honesty was suspected to be nothing more than a highly subversive means of manipulation. Neil Diamond was a particularly suspicious character since he had never

been aligned with the hipper segment of the music industry and because any analysis of his lyrics often could discern no specific point of view. Still, somehow his songs were oddly inspirational. Almost without exception, his hits managed to draw listeners in, sometimes even when they didn't want to be. So many of his songs were almost hypnotic in their appeal—"Sweet Caroline," "Cracklin' Rosie," "Holly Holy," or "Stones," for example. "Song Sung Blue" is particularly relentless in its attempt to make you sing along. Occasionally, Diamond's lyrics would reveal a distinctly personal message, which would yield a distinctly powerful song. "Brooklyn Roads" was such a song, but it never reached the Top 40. "I Am, I Said" is simultaneously his most hypnotically rhythmic song and his most

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1971	#6
<u>BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER</u> —	
ARETHA FRANKLIN	

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1971	#9
<u>CHICK A BOOM</u> —DADDY DEWDROP	
APRIL 1971	#17
<u>TIMOTHY</u> —THE BOOYS	

blatantly personal song, resulting in an overall effect that is emotionally wrenching. The slow burn as the melody builds toward the climactic chorus manipulates the listener like sonic candy. Diamond's voice fits the song like a glove, and the dynamics make it irresistible. All the while, he fumbles through some of the most fundamental questions of existence.

*"I am," I said  
To no one there.  
And no one heard at all  
Not even the chair.*



I think, therefore I am. If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, does it make any sound?

*But I got an emptiness deep inside.  
And I've tried, but it won't let me go.  
And I'm not a man who likes to swear,  
But I've never cared for the sound of being alone.*

Would life be more meaningful if we were less lonely? If we were happier, would life have more meaning?

This is simplified (or simple-minded) profundity at its best. The words work magically to make you identify strongly with the sincere personality singing the lyrics. The melody can convince you even further that the song could be *about* you, or *for* you; it could even be *your* story. It is a brilliant moment when fundamental lyrical passion is joined seamlessly with an inspirational arrangement. "I Am, I Said" is just such a moment.

## MAY 1971 #1 BROWN SUGAR—THE ROLLING STONES

The supposedly carefree days of the rock-and-roll festival crashed and burned on December 6, 1969, at the free concert the Rolling Stones sponsored at San Francisco's Altamont Speedway. The homegrown hippies who thought of San Francisco as the home base for the entire alternative lifestyle movement watched in horror as their dream collapsed into an uncontrollable orgy of violence. In one evening, the lingering optimism of the '60s came to a grinding halt. In retrospect, one thing made no sense at all. The San Francisco scene that thrived on peace and love had precious little in common with the androgynous and evil image of the Rolling Stones. Although it was purported to be an opportunity for the biggest love-in of the year, there *must* have been some inkling that the Rolling Stones were an inappropriate means to invoke feelings of mass brotherhood. The political mood of the time also played into the violence. The innocence of the 1967 love children was long over. In its place were the Weathermen, the Black Panthers, and violent protesters of all shapes and sizes. Socially, things were drastically changed, as well. Charles Manson showed quite terrifyingly just how twisted the times could be. Pressure was building until, at Altamont, the balloon simply burst. The Stones had commissioned a film, titled *Gimme Shelter*, to document their tour of America that would end with their free performance in San Francisco. Inadvertently, it captured the events of that day with vivid clarity, and now, at the very least, serves as the most effective antidrug film ever made.

Tainted drugs and overcrowding combined with haphazard planning for what can only be described as disastrous results. At the suggestion of the Grateful







**In a manner  
that only  
Jagger could  
pull off, the lyrics touch upon  
interracial oral  
sex and flagellation between  
a white  
slaveholder  
and his  
dark-skinned  
"property."**

Dead, Hell's Angels were selected to act as "buffers" between the stage and the impatient, exhausted, abused, and drug-crazed crowd. The effect was like putting piranhas into a bowl of sick goldfish. Long before the show started, things were already obviously out of control. When the Hell's Angels arrived late, they parted the already packed crowd by riding their motorcycles headlong into the throng, showing little regard for the well-being of the people they were purportedly "controlling." The crowd grew to gargantuan proportions and surged forward until movement became impossible, except for the flailing lunacy of the sickened acidheads, who were becoming more numerous as time wore on. By the time Jefferson Airplane took the stage, hundreds of unauthorized personnel were milling about with the bandmembers. Skuffles were breaking out everywhere, and even the stage proved unsafe when singer Marty Balin was knocked unconscious by a marauding Hell's Angel.

When the Stones finally took the stage at nightfall, things had brewed to a boiling point. It was unthinkable for them not to go on, since nobody knew what this maddened cauldron of human beings was capable of. Although the stage was cleared when they began their set, it took very little time for it to become overrun once again with drunken, drugged, and violent "buffers." The rage and disdain that certain Angels felt toward the prancing effeminacy of Mick Jagger was fearfully plain, and it is a wonder that he or Keith Richards weren't slaughtered like Christians in a Roman coliseum. The pitiful attempt of the musicians and staff to maintain their '60s idealism only exacerbated just how irresponsibly run and anarchic these events were. The violence culminated in a brutal stabbing at the front of the stage, which left its victim, Meredith Hunter, dead. The spirit of an entire generation symbolically died with him.

The reports of the underground press—notably the new magazine that shared the band's name, *Rolling Stone*—were quick to indict the Stones as being ultimately responsible for the day's events. The band lost its luster and was cast as conceited, callous, and greedy, with no regard for the safety of the audience. The feud between the Rolling Stones and *Rolling Stone* magazine had begun. After the furor settled down, the band retreated into the recording studio to record its next single, a typically rowdy rocker called "Brown Sugar," but delayed its release for more than a year. In a manner that only Jagger could pull off, the lyrics touch upon interracial oral sex and flagellation between a white slaveholder and his dark-skinned "property." Now the Stones were not only controversial, but tactless, racist, and sexist. Everybody loved it. Such debauchery was anything but surprising, and since everybody was aware of the band's reputation, the song was somehow accepted as good-natured fun.



## MAY 1971 #4 IT DON'T COME EASY—RINGO STARR

The well-worn maxim “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” was never more true than it was with the Beatles. The solo careers of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and George Harrison fell so far short of their promise that it is mind-boggling to consider the effect they must have had on one another while they were an ensemble. Ringo Starr is the only Beatle who surpassed all expectations, simply because nobody expected much. His two compositions with the Beatles, “Don’t Pass Me By” and “Octopus’s Garden,” hardly suggested that he might be a capable songwriter, and the limitations of his interpretive abilities certainly didn’t leave much room for promise, either. His first two solo albums, *Sentimental Journey* and *Beaucoups of Blues*, only made it more apparent that, with the Beatles defunct, Starr probably should have retired from record-making. Who, then, could have predicted that he would write one of the most memorable post-Beatle singles of the four? It was uncanny, so uncanny that it needed to be attributed to something or someone else. That person was probably none other than his ex-groupmate George Harrison, who both produced and played on “It Don’t Come Easy,” providing both the hook-laden guitar line and the memorable solo.

Harrison was at his creative zenith from 1969 to 1971. *Abbey Road* contained two of his best songs ever, and his own triple album, *All Things Must Pass*, was chock-full of memorable songs, many of which were left over as rejects from his Beatle days. Freed of Lennon and McCartney’s claustrophobic restrictions and lack of support, he found musicians who appreciated his talent, and for a while at least, he flourished. Harrison had rather unpredictably become the most promising songwriter of the band, and with “It Don’t Come Easy,” Starr was giving him a sportsman-like run for his money. It even surpassed Harrison’s excellent singles, “My Sweet Lord” and “What Is Life,” for melodic content and originality. Soon, Lennon and McCartney got into the act of supporting Starr’s solo career, with both of them contributing pieces to his eponymously titled album, *RINGO*. Two #1 hits came from the album (“Photograph” and “You’re Sixteen,” with neither Lennon’s nor McCartney’s involvement), causing a bemused and slightly jealous Lennon to remark, “You should write one for me!” Never a true solo artist, Starr usually relied on the input of others, and he was at his best when showing just how much could be achieved with a little help from his friends.

### GREAT HITS

MAY 1971 #3  
TREAT HER LIKE A LADY—  
 CORNELIUS BROTHERS & SISTER ROSE

JUNE 1971 #2  
MR. BIG STUFF—JEAN KNIGHT

JUNE 1971 #15  
HERE COMES THAT RAINY DAY  
 FEELING AGAIN—THE FORTUNES

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1971 #7  
SWEET AND INNOCENT—  
 DONNY OSMOND

MAY 1971 #37  
BATTLE HYMN OF LT. CALLEY—  
 C COMPANY FEATURING  
 TERRY NELSON



## JULY 1971 #9 WHATCHA SEE IS WHATCHA GET—THE DRAMATICS

The Dramatics sprang to life in 1964 as the Dynamics, a talented Detroit-based group that somehow (miraculously, really) escaped recording for Motown Records. They did become affiliated with other micro-labels, but their career was going nowhere until Stax/Volt opted to sign them in 1969. Even then, it took another two years to get their career off the ground. They took off with “Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get,” which rose all the way to #9. The Dramatics were an extremely versatile quintet but relied too heavily on their producer,

Tony Hester, who also took responsibility for writing their original material. Once they stopped using his songs, their status as hit makers subsided considerably. Until then, however, they earned their reputation as interpreters of such soulful ballads as their biggest career hit, “In the Rain.” You’d have been hard-pressed to predict this, though, based on the intuitive funk sound of “Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get.”

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1971 <b>HOW CAN YOU MEND A BROKEN HEART</b> —THE BEE GEES	#1
JULY 1971 <b>SMILING FACES [SOMETIMES]—UNDISPUTED TRUTH</b>	#3
JULY 1971 <b>MERCY MERCY ME [THE ECOLOGY]</b> —MARVIN GAYE	#4
JULY 1971 <b>SWEET HITCH-HIKER</b> —CREEDEnce CLEARWATER REVIVAL	#6

The song represented a fairly radical departure from the sound that Stax/Volt had built its reputation upon. Gone was the behind-the-beat soulfulness that made most of the label’s output instantly identifiable. In its place was a playfully sharp, funky rhythm that was executed with pinpoint precision, while the free-form vocals were as percussive as they were tuneful. The R&B market was changing. Tastes

were moving away from the southern good ol’ boy “grits and soul” sound that made Stax/Volt so famous and began to favor the more sophisticated urban dance-floor sounds that were coming out of Philadelphia. By creating a rhythmic stew that helped to inspire the Philadelphia sound, the Dramatics helped keep Stax, the progenitor of southern soul, alive. Despite the fact that the label was falling apart internally, Stax/Volt refused to say “uncle” and go down quietly.

## JULY 1971 #22 DOUBLE BARREL—DAVE AND ANSELL COLLINS

For the life of me, I can’t figure out how the American pop charts gauged the popularity of Jamaican music. After all, neither Bob Marley nor Toots and the Maytals ever had a hit single in America. Not even a song as universally well-known as “The Harder They Come” or “Many Rivers to Cross” charted. Neither Jimmy Cliff nor Desmond Dekker could propel a song as infectiously danceable and lively as “You Can Get It If You Really Want” onto the American pop charts. Despite the massive popularity of the film *The Harder They Come* at late-night



cinemas, and the seemingly omnipresent songs from its soundtrack, none of these tunes cracked the Top 40. So how is it, then, that one of the goofiest, silliest, weirdest Jamaican records, a song that had absolutely no significance at all to America, managed to reach #22?

I doubt that you remember ever hearing this strange song, but in 1971 it was played and purchased in sufficient quantities somewhere in America to make it a hit single. So what were we thinking when we first heard “Double Barrel”? It had a fun-sounding and thoroughly weird rhythm track that resembled some of the Jamaican instrumental hits that were popular in the U.K. at that time, such as “Return of Django” and “Liquidator.” But these songs weren’t readily known in the U.S. Furthermore, the vocals were the most bizarre thing imaginable, totally alien to American culture. With an echo that lasts five seconds per syllable, the voice brags incoherently, “I am the magnificent. I’m blegh-buggashuckuva so boss, most churnin’, stormin’ sound of soul. I am W-O-O-O. And I’m stee-ew heeahgin. OWW!” It then veers off into the most totally indecipherable rant ever recorded, even judging by the standards of Jamaican roots-radic toasters (roots-radic toasters being the guys who would ad-lib vocal lines over pre-recorded tracks, usually in an English dialect that was impossible for standard English speakers to understand). Who, other than me, bought this? I was absolutely fascinated by this song and memorized the whole thing phonetically, although for all I knew I was mimicking Martians. There’s no doubt about it: this record was nuts. But was Jamaica nuts for producing a sound like this on vinyl, or was America nuts to embrace it while ignoring the more traditional sounds of Jimmy Cliff, Bob Marley, and Toots and the Maytals? I don’t know, but I’m grateful for it because it eventually led me on a loving search through the many obscurities and odd gems that make up popular Jamaican music.



## JULY 1971 #28 **WILD HORSES**—THE ROLLING STONES

In a very untypical and surprising move, the Rolling Stones temporarily lowered their shield of pretense and mock-horror fantasy to release the most straightforward song of their career. It was also their mellowest since “Lady Jane” or “As Tears Go By.” Recorded at the end of 1969, “Wild Horses” was held back from release until the band straightened out the legal and financial problems that continuously plagued them. Their manager, Allen Klein, had recently become involved with the Beatles’ Apple Records debacle and was no longer placing emphasis on his business with the Rolling Stones. Soon afterward, the Beatles broke up, leaving the Stones to comfortably claim the role of “the greatest rock-and-roll band in the world.” Meanwhile, though, the Stones were unwilling to take a back seat while they waited for Klein to sort out other people’s affairs. As with seemingly everything else that Klein touched, the relationship ended in an



**"Wild Horses" stands out, as it would on any recent Rolling Stones album, simply because it avoids the decadence that surrounds it.**

avalanche of lawsuits and suggestions of business improprieties. Things were further complicated by the much anticipated expiration of their recording contract with Decca Records. To make a very long and complicated story very short and simple, things were worked out. The Stones found new management and started their very own Rolling Stones Records, to be manufactured and distributed by Ahmet Ertegun's Atlantic label. *Sticky Fingers* was their long-awaited new album, and "Wild Horses" was the single culled from the album after the first choice, "Brown Sugar," ran its course.

The album's cover was designed by Andy Warhol and featured a man's torso in jeans with an actual zipper that revealed a pair of white jockey shorts when opened. Even upon casual listening, the record was up to its belt buckle with drug references and shows the band straining to maintain the outlaw image that had carried them this far. Also seen for the first time was the Rolling Stones' new logo, a pair of lasciviously gaping and lubricious lips that are parted fully to allow a lapping tongue to dangle suggestively. This image would accompany just about any official release or mention of the band from this point on. "Wild Horses" stands out, as it would on any recent Rolling Stones album, simply because it avoids the decadence that surrounds it. Instead, the song plays it straight and

benefits by being the best love song that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards ever wrote. Although it was never his forte, Jagger truly sounds convincing as he sings with heartfelt panache about past regrets and a yearning for a future that exists only in his dreams. It was a one-shot deal, but the Rolling Stones hit it right on target.

This is as good a time as any to reflect on the Rolling Stones' recordings that never made the Top 40. All of these songs deserved to be hits but for one reason or another never were. Early raves and covers that could easily have quali-

fied include "Route 66," "I Just Want to Make Love to You," "Around and Around," and "Little Red Rooster" (somehow, this was a better vehicle for Jagger than it was for Sam Cooke). Original songs that were never singles but should have been include "Under My Thumb," "Sympathy for the Devil," "No Expectations," and "Gimme Shelter." The songs that were singles but never reached the Top 40 include "Play with Fire" (#96), "Let's Spend the Night Together" (#55), "We Love You" (#50), "Street Fighting Man" (#48), and "You Can't Always Get What You Want" (#42). Any one of these songs could easily have qualified as being among the best singles of their time. Tellingly, they were also all recorded before the onset of the '70s.

GREAT MISSES	
JULY 1971 I AIN'T GOT TIME ANYMORE— THE GLASS BOTTLE	#36
JULY 1971 LOVE MEANS YOU NEVER HAVE TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY—THE SOUNDS OF SUNSHINE	#39





## AUGUST 1971 #1 UNCLE ALBERT/ADMIRAL HALSEY— PAUL & LINDA MCCARTNEY

Toward the latter part of his career with the Beatles, Paul McCartney hit upon a useful songwriting method. Bits and pieces of unfinished songs were lying around that had never gelled into any unified vision. Rather than toss them off and start with something fresh, he began to compile these fragments into something that resembled a complete song. The tactic was far from new. Often he and John Lennon would combine pieces of their ideas to create a song that transcended the mundanity of the ingredients. Since McCartney and Lennon were not cooperating as much in the Beatles' later years, this happened less and less frequently. One obvious example from their later period was "I've Got a Feeling" from the *Let It Be* sessions, which featured verses by McCartney with a bridge by Lennon. McCartney began to do the same thing using his own unfinished ideas. On the Beatles' last album, *Abbey Road*, the results were startling. Not only did he come up with the musical collage that became "You Never Give Me Your Money," but he assembled the "Sun King" medley by combining bits and pieces from his own and Lennon's backlog. Rather than sounding like a collection of half-baked, unfinished compositions, the fragments blend to imply a connection that otherwise simply didn't exist. Tiny snippets became a broad, interpretable vision, and the Beatles once again were perceived as geniuses.

"Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey" is a similar, although much more trite, pastiche. On *Abbey Road*, McCartney had Lennon to add a touch of vinegar to the mix. Left to his own devices, he produces pointlessly meandering lyrics and a character who seems to be extracted from a Popeye cartoon. The obvious lack of relation between song fragments is anything but boring, though. The atmosphere and production techniques change so rapidly that the song holds your interest while McCartney's impeccable melodic sense pulls us in further.

After the "do it yourself in the bathroom with one microphone" approach of his first solo album, the rich structure of "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey" seemed huge. To record it, he returned to a proper recording studio and used top-notch session players throughout. The sessions resulted in *Ram*, his now classic and, in retrospect, probably best solo effort. At the time, it appeared to be nothing more than an almost passable approximation of his ability as a solo performer. He seemed to be coasting, waiting for the right moment to release his grandiose statement. It never came. Critics were merciless and definitely overly critical of *Ram* and the single "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey." They never could have dreamed that it was probably the best album and single that McCartney would ever make. Not until "Band on the Run" would he receive even a modicum of respect. Twenty years later, he still hasn't been able to do much better.

Critics were  
merciless and  
definitely  
overly critical  
of *Ram* and the  
single "Uncle  
Albert/Admiral  
Halsey."

AUGUST 1971 #1 MAGGIE MAY—ROD STEWART

Isn't it interesting how in the '60s, nearly every record seemed to exude a sense of anticipation or optimism for the future while in the '70s, regret and nostalgia seemed to preside somewhere below the surface? The '60s were a decade of construction, invention and searching for solutions to universal problems, but it crumbled before the '70s could get a grip on any type of continuity. Just a listing of what ceased to exist as the '70s set in is telling; first the Beatles, then Sly and the Family Stone, then Simon and Garfunkel, then Creedence Clearwater Revival, and then virtually every major Motown artist self-destructed rather than face the oncoming decade. In their place we got the Osmonds, Three Dog Night, Elton John, and Grand Funk Railroad. The '60s had everybody trying to coexist and find a cause worthy of our energy. The '70s made us sober up, reflect on what the hell we were doing with our lives and decide to watch after our own interests. "Maggie May" served as a perfect metaphor for the times, and its status as a #1 record for five weeks reflects just how many people related to the sentiment portrayed by the lyrics. Lester Bangs, perhaps the best rock critic of the '70s, sensed the narcissistic sangfroid of the lyrics and wrote a short story based on his impressions of the song's two characters. His writing seriously colorized the lyrics, but it got me thinking that the song's protagonist could have been any one of us. Had I been that age at that time, it is very possible that I too could have been susceptible to a relationship like the one described here. I actually might have known someone like Maggie May. . . .

Maggie was the experienced lover who made me feel bigger and stronger than I did before. With her, I outgrew my inadequacies and my innocence, and she played along as I developed into a self-assured and cocky near-adult. She was older, but she was no crone, even though I sometimes might have made her feel older than she really was. With her around, I felt confident in life. I probably even became a little selfish and misused her sometimes. I wanted to believe that I was all-powerful, but I knew that was just an illusion. Of course, I would never admit that it was me who was leaning heavily on the relationship, maybe even using her, because that would have offended my fragile sense of masculinity. Besides, *I* had the gift of youth, and she was the one tapping into *my* energy, right?

**"Maggie May" served as a perfect metaphor for the times, and its status as a #1 record for five weeks reflects just how many people related to the sentiment portrayed by the lyrics.**

Well, after living with Maggie for a while, things began to change. First of all, she wasn't treating me with any sort of respect—not that she ever did, mind you, but after spending so much time together, you'd think she'd learn to be grateful to me for having her around. Sometimes it seems like she disdains me outright, but then she always lapses into these crying jags for no reason at all. She used to be a real gas to have around, but now



she's starting to bother me. Work makes her so tired that she never wants to go out anymore. She doesn't even take care of herself any longer. She just sits in front of the damned television with a drink in her hand. With all of these birds hanging around who are closer to my age and giving me the eye, why should I be stuck baby-sitting for her? It's time I told her. We can't coast any longer. That's it, my mind is made up.

"Wake up, Maggie, I think I got something to say to you..."

Welcome to the '70s.

## AUGUST 1971 #1 TIRED OF BEING ALONE—AL GREEN

**C**ontrol and release. This is the essence of the best soul music, and nowhere is it put to better use than on "Tired of Being Alone." Al Green has a voice powerful enough to move mountains; yet he reels in all of his intense energy and contains it within the confines of his suppressed singing. When he whispers, you can sense the passion sneaking through the edges, but it *always* remains in control, until the last possible moment. Where other singers would burst, Green contains himself. Wilson Pickett, Percy Sledge, even Otis Redding would have vented some steam long before Green lets go. While Pickett burns, Sledge wails, and Redding cooks, Green simmers. By holding back, he builds tension until the moment of release is unavoidable, and by then it is so welcome that it is almost soothing. The mostly ad-libbed bridge takes on classical proportions in its perfection.

"Yeeee-aaah, BAAA-BY! I'm tired of being alone here by myself, now. I tell ya, I'm tired baby. I'm tired of being all wrapped up in the night, in my dreams nobody but you, baby."

Here, a near burst of ecstasy is reined in just enough for him to sing/preach about his obsessive state and loneliness. Without hesitation, he then breaks down to a whisper: "Sometimes I wonder...(long pause)...if you love me like you say you do. You see, baby, I-I-I...I been thinkin' about it, yeah. And I been, I been wantin' to get next to you, baby. See, sometimes I fold my arms and say 'MM-MMMM-MMMM-MMMMMMM-MMMMM-MM,' oooh, oh, baby, hey!"

Here, he is capable of breaking down his passion to its simplest, most expressive form. He is as vulnerable as a singer can be, simultaneously lapsing into a fantasy vision of love and sounding like a child who can't find the words to express how he feels. The longer he sings, the more he whispers, until he—and the music—become almost inaudible. Then comes the climactic moment of perfection, the moment that sums up everything that he needs to say and finally allows him to release all of the built-up tension.

"Needin' you has proven to me to be my greatest dream, yeah. AAAAAA-OOW! I'M TIRED OF BEING ALONE!"

GREAT HITS	
AUGUST 1971 <b>SPANISH HARLEM— ARETHA FRANKLIN</b>	#2
AUGUST 1971 <b>AIN'T NO SUNSHINE—BILL WITHERS</b>	#3



I've heard it a million times, and it still makes my skin shiver every single time. Every nuance, every breath, every stuttered word, every pinched syllable, every outburst is pure bliss. Soul simply doesn't get any better than this.

## AUGUST 1971 #15 WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN—THE WHO

**W**on't Get Fooled Again" is a great song—it's astounding, really—only it belongs on the Top 40 about as much as I belong at a MENSA convention. Edited to three minutes and change, the 45 version of "Won't Get Fooled Again" is little more than a miniaturization of the full-length masterpiece. As a single, its appeal is minimal, but at its gloriously dynamic full length of 8:31, it is one of the most important songs of the post-'60s generation. Technically, though, it was a hit single, so as I said, here it is.

"The change, it had to come. We knew it all along."

Although they had been a hugely influential band throughout the revolutionary period of the late '60s, the Who had never really fallen prey to the peace and love crowd. Being a product of England's Mod era, which had to be one of the most narcissistic trends in the history of pop music, the Who tended to be more exclusive than inclusive in their disposition. This leant their music a self-obsessed thrust, which was completely at odds with the "brotherhood of man" approach that was standard currency for the times. For the most part, this added to the Who's unique appeal as a vocal outlet for alienated and frustrated youth. At times, though, they could appear to be outright hostile, so it would have been difficult to deny that the Who was definitely out of touch with the platitudes of the hippie movement. While others were singing "All you need is love," "We can change the world," or "Smile on your brother," the Who railed against conformity by singing "Hope I die before I get old" and "Substitute you for my mum. At least I'll get my washing done," and "It's only a teenage wasteland."

Songwriter Pete Townshend seemed to be genuinely disaffected not only from the older generation but from his own as well. While most people of the younger generation vowed never to trust anyone over thirty, Townshend made it his business to not trust anyone who was *under* thirty either. The band's appearance at Woodstock only exacerbated Townshend's hostility toward hippie politics when he forcibly removed a ranting Abbie Hoffman from the stage so his own band could begin their set. Some were offended by his inability to lay back and accept the hippie agenda at face value, but time may have proven Townshend to be the wiser. Once the smokescreen of rhetoric and posturing dissipated, the politics of youth were revealed to be as one-dimensional and muddled as the values they were rallying against. In 1967, the dream was fresh and new, but by 1970 it had become little more than a deceitful memory. The incident at Kent State Uni-

**Songwriter  
Pete Townshend  
seemed to be  
genuinely  
disaffected not  
only from the  
older genera-  
tion but from  
his own as well.**



versity that left four students dead was only one of many that could have sparked an honest to goodness revolution, and God knows that plenty of political activists attempted to capitalize on the fallout for exactly that purpose. Unfortunately, a lack of clarity in the hippies' overall vision made unification all but impossible. Since a large part of the unwritten hippie manifesto had to do with pacifism, revolution seemed to be in direct contradiction to their inherent beliefs. Furthermore, despite outward appearances, most hippies preferred to remain apolitical (read "indifferent"). Like an influenza virus, something was in the air that infected the mind-set of the Western world, leading us to believe that some combination of communism, socialism, democracy, and outright anarchy would save the day and result in worldwide peace and brotherhood, but since no consistent ideology came into focus, the youth movement collapsed into a morass of self-contradiction and confusion.

If you ever wondered what could have caused the mind-set of the socially conscious '60s to degenerate into the political indifference of the '70s, then here is where your answer probably lies. If the Nixon/Agnew/Kissinger administration wasn't enough to launch a thorough and permanent counterforce, then it is only fair to say that the agenda of the youth movement failed at its most basic intention. Yes, the war in Vietnam did stumble to an end, mostly due to the efforts of demonstrators, but the quantifiable force of dissension dissipated almost immediately afterward. With no righteous agenda, the movement was dead. Goals that were once lofty became as directionless as the music that was the byproduct of the times. To most people, the failure of the hippie generation to live up to its intentions was a disappointment, but to Townshend the whole thing was an insult to his intelligence— "Pick up my guitar and play just like yesterday, and then I'll get down on my knees and pray that I won't get fooled again."

Townshend had every right to say "I told you so," and that's exactly what he did with "Won't Get Fooled Again." It was easy to fool ourselves into thinking that things were different than they were, and Townshend was annoyed by the proclivity of youth to blindly endorse an agenda that was as rudderless as it was optimistic—"Cause I know that the hypnotized never lie...do ya?" Worse, he noticed that a healthy portion of these ideals had somehow managed to penetrate his own consciousness, despite his efforts to remain inured, and felt it necessary to purge them. Townshend was ready to kick himself for being swayed, and made it his business to let us know that he no longer had "faith in something bigger." In the end, everything changes nothing.

"Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss."

## SEPTEMBER 1971 #6 DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN—LEE MICHAELS

Lee Michaels was a California kid who played organ like Ray Charles and had a singing voice that sounded like a surf dude. The juxtaposition was interesting, because nobody ever gave surf dudes credit for having any soul, but Michaels pulled it off easily. At times, he could be as convincing when singing the blues as





**Although  
Michaels is a  
talented multi-  
instrumentalist,  
the organ  
dominates his  
recordings.**

someone like Robert Plant. At other times, he would just run with it, and the results would be hilarious. "Do You Know What I Mean" has Michaels exaggerating the "Oh wow, man" aspect of his voice until it imbues the lyrics with the loose attitude of his character. Although the lyrics tell a tale about losing his lover to his best friend, he seems to be hovering somewhere between disbelief and confusion. If Sean Penn's character in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* got dumped, he'd probably sound a lot like Michaels does on "Do You Know What I Mean." He doesn't scream or cry. Instead, he just seems dumbfounded

when he sings, "I just saw her yesterday. I just saw her, had nothing to say. Do you know what I mean?" The result is a feel-good song about losing your girlfriend. Anybody who can accurately portray such a goofy character and diffuse the pain as well as Michaels does on "Do You Know What I Mean" is OK in my book. The unique instrumentation only adds to the song's one-off appeal. Except for the really cool drum part and the occasional overdub of piano and harpsichord, the record is virtually an organ orgy. Although Michaels is a talented multi-instrumentalist, the organ dominates his recordings, and "Do You Know What I Mean" is no exception.

After his big hit, Michaels did a disappearing act quite unlike anything I have ever seen. Although most people might assume he was a one-hit wonder, this was not the case. He released four albums previous to "Do You Know What I Mean," and all of them featured an eclectic blend of pop and blues, mostly with the same sparse instrumentation. His only regular sideman was a drummer who went by the name of Frosty and later formed Sweathog. (Remember "Hallelujah"? It went to #33 in 1971, but it's probably long forgotten by now.) *Lee Michaels's 5th* contained "Do You Know What I Mean," as well as his only other Top 40 single, a reworking of Marvin Gaye's "Can I Get a Witness," and introduced him to the pop audience. With Michaels's fan base now greatly increased, Columbia Records bought his contract from A&M, obviously assuming that his career had only just begun. They were wrong. None of his Columbia releases sold anywhere near what was expected, and after a few failures, he vanished completely from the music scene. It seems unlikely that he will surface again, particularly since time must have destroyed the appealing youthful naïveté of his voice, but who knows. There's always room for another good blues singer, particularly one who plays keyboards as well as Michaels.

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1971 <u>THIN LINE BETWEEN LOVE AND HATE</u> — THE PERSUADERS	#15
SEPTEMBER 1971 <u>THE STORY IN YOUR EYES</u> — THE MOODY BLUES	#23
SEPTEMBER 1971 <u>ALL DAY MUSIC</u> —WAR	#35

GREAT MISSES	
SEPTEMBER 1971 <u>YO-YO</u> —THE OSMONDS	#3



## OCTOBER 1971 #1 THEME FROM “SHAFT”—ISAAC HAYES

*They say that cat Shaft is a baa-aad mutha...  
Shut your mouth!  
But I'm talkin' 'bout Shaft!  
Well, we can dig it.*

So can I. Just exactly what part of left field Isaac Hayes pulled his inspiration for this song from is uncertain, but it worked well enough for him to build his entire career on variations of this theme. It is much easier to interpret what trends this song inspired than to determine what trends influenced it. Orchestration became a standard ingredient in soul music as a direct result of “Theme from *Shaft*,” as did extended arrangements and the smoldering red-light-in-the-bedroom sexuality that was later perfected by Barry White and Teddy Pendergrass. The high-hat rhythm that opens the song and continues throughout just may have been a germination point for the entire disco genre, which would dominate popular music a few years later. That’s a lot of trends for one song to inspire. So, in light of all its notoriety and remarkable influence on soul, it’s surprising to note that although “Theme from *Shaft*” held the #1 position for two weeks on the pop charts, it failed to top the soul charts. It would also be the only single Hayes would ever get into the pop charts’ Top 10.

Although it may have spawned quite a few offshoots of an artistically questionable nature, “Theme from *Shaft*” is one cool composition. The song demands your attention immediately with the simple but engaging high-hat rhythm and the highly reverbed wah-wah scratch (which also became something of a cliché, by the way). Then it takes its time, building slowly over almost two full minutes before the vocals enter—and that’s after considerable editing of the full-length version. While most other pop songs would be winding their way down by this point, “Theme from *Shaft*” is just getting started. Hayes then talk-sings his way through a profile of the “private dick who’s a sex machine to all the chicks” (he really says that—unbelievable, I know). The song also includes the discourse that I noted above. This stereotypical characterization led the film it was written for to become known as the first major blaxploitation flick (a genre of films that featured pimps and cons with guns, versus detectives and love men with guns)—yet another trend this song inspired.

Before “Theme from *Shaft*,” Hayes’s work was a bit more conventional though no less captivating. His career began as a session musician at Stax Records in Memphis, where he played keyboards and occasional saxophone on hit records by the likes of Otis Redding and Eddie Floyd. He soon began collaborating with wordsmith David Porter, and they eventually supplied the label with a seemingly endless stream of hit records. Besides writing for Carla Thomas (“B-A-B-Y”); her father, Rufus Thomas; Johnnie Taylor; and Mable John, the sister of the legendary Little Willie

### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1971 #1  
GYPSYS, TRAMPS, AND THIEVES—  
CHER



Although it may have spawned quite a few offshoots of an artistically questionable nature, "Theme from *Shaft*" is one cool composition.

John ("Your Good Thing Is About to End"), they wrote most of their biggest hits for Sam and Dave. "Soul Man," "Hold On, I'm Comin'," "When Something Is Wrong with My Baby," "I Thank You," and "Wrap It Up" are only a few of the well-known hits they penned.

Stax began the Enterprise label as a vehicle for Hayes to begin a solo career, but it wasn't until the unlikely success of his *Hot Buttered Soul* album in 1969 that his recording career began to get under way. As the story goes, Stax's corporate parent, Gulf-Western, commissioned a study to compare the profitability of albums as opposed to singles. As a direct result of this, it immediately sanctioned Stax to concentrate on album releases. Stax issued no fewer than twenty-eight albums simultaneously. For a number of reasons, *Hot Buttered Soul* was considered to be the least likely to sell. It contained only four titles, all

of which were alternate versions of familiar material recorded with leftover studio time, and it lacked star appeal. Instead, it blew the other albums away and became one of the most popular records in Stax history. An eighteen-plus-minute recording of "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" was chosen for single release, and both this song and its B side, "Walk on By," reached the Top 40 in severely edited form. It was a strange and surprising phenomenon, but their unique combination of middle-of-the-road pop, extended soul rapping, and rhythmic orchestration made them stand out as thoroughly different from anything else on the charts. "Never Can Say Goodbye" repeated the formula, though it was released only weeks after the Jackson 5's smash version, and reached #22. "Theme from *Shaft*" cemented Hayes's popularity and forever cast him as the bald and bearded black love man extraordinaire, always shirtless and draped in chains. In time, the image of singer as sex god/white slave trader would be reduced to parody, but in 1971, it was both provocative and titillating. Hayes would go on to become the self-proclaimed "Black Moses" before filing for bankruptcy, a complication that seemed to bring his career to a grinding halt, until it was once again revived in the '90s.

## OCTOBER 1971 #3 IMAGINE—JOHN LENNON

The "walking mass of self-contradiction" that I referred to earlier in describing John Lennon's post-Beatles frame of mind seems to have been caused by an unwillingness to accept the complexity of his problems. Although he possessed a complex personality, this didn't prevent him from seeking out simple solutions. Whether the answer was to be found in LSD, Eastern mysticism, heroin, primal scream therapy, or even true love, he wanted to believe that each would somehow provide a key to happiness and peace of mind. He always seemed to throw himself headlong into his latest obsession, only to be bitterly disappointed when it didn't deliver the expected results.



“Imagine” was Lennon’s unimpeded vision of just how great a place the world would be if only we could all learn to accept his worldview on politics and religion. Images of a society without borders and no promise of an afterlife would, in this utopian vision, bring out the humane side of our behavior and result in world-wide peace. He is trying to tell us that wars are caused by the means which we use to define who we are. The things that separate us into groups, or subsets of human beings, such as citizenship and organized religion, are seen by Lennon as the exponent of war. It is a wonderful vision, but it also relies heavily on faith in the basic nature of human beings. Lennon chooses not to consider that man himself could be responsible for his own horrific deeds, and that “God” and “country” are nothing more than righteous shields to justify our own self-serving violence.

While Lennon expressed his hope for a blissful world as the title track of his latest album, he didn’t seem particularly capable of extending his goodwill to everybody. He used other segments of this song collection to launch some of the most vitriolic diatribes imaginable at his ex-partner, Paul McCartney. Songs like “Crippled Inside” and, particularly, “How Do You Sleep?” relentlessly harangue the ex-Beatle with personal accusations and mockery. Of course, since Lennon’s assassination, “Imagine” has taken on extraordinarily visionary overtones. To even suggest that there could be something inherently contradictory in his dream for peace would now seem malevolent. Either way, it doesn’t matter so much whether or not you agreed with him, so long as you believe that he meant what he said.



## OCTOBER 1971 #9 **INNER CITY BLUES (MAKE ME WANNA HOLLER)**— MARVIN GAYE

“Inner City Blues” completed Marvin Gaye’s trilogy of hits from the album *What’s Going On*. His syncopated, multitracked harmonies express more emotion on this song than was previously considered possible. His interweaving vocal lines—at one moment an octave apart, then moving within and around one another—bathe the listener in a mood of tangible despair that is so pure it liberates. He focuses his negative energy with a clarity that ultimately becomes a profoundly positive statement about insecurity and frustration. Gaye proves that to care this much about problems that are both deeply personal and widely universal is not a contradic-





tion. Whether your problem is an unjust war or an inability to pay your tax bill, the difference is moot when taken on a strictly personal level. With one lyrical coupling, he makes this point uncomfortably obvious: “Bills pile up sky high. Send that boy off to die.” What’s the connection here? That’s life, but “this ain’t living.”

Inequity...irrationality...bad breaks...setbacks. Deal with it, or don’t. It’s your life.

## NOVEMBER 1971 #1 FAMILY AFFAIR—SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE

**W**ith all the time that elapsed between this single and his previous hit (“Thank You”/“Everybody Is a Star,” in January 1970) a lot of things started to go very wrong for Sly Stone. Financial problems, drug problems, confidence problems, personal problems, reliability problems, you name it. It seemed a demon haunted him, and all he wanted to do was run away. Who could blame him? Facing up to responsibility was one of his most dogging hang-ups, and eventually he found it difficult even to appear onstage. Between 1970 and 1971, he failed to turn up for a full third of his scheduled appearances. No doubt about it, Stone was strung out, but just whose business is it if a celebrity falls on hard times?

Wait a minute, wait a minute, this is America. It’s *everybody’s* business. Inquiring minds want to know! He’s hooked on drugs? How juicy! He’s got problems being creative? Tell me more! It’s part and parcel of our society to use the lives of famous people for our entertainment, in every sense of the word. Well, that is precisely what Sly and the Family Stone are protesting in “Family Affair.” Forget hearsay, this is personal.

“It’s a family affair,” they said.

“Well, sure,” America replied, “but aren’t *we* a part of your extended family? Aren’t we all everyday people? Everybody is a star, right? So then, tell us all about it.”

It was a tough time for Stone. His band, the *Family Stone*, tried hard to hold things together, but it just wasn’t possible. Stone had changed—a lot. By God, listen to his voice! Dropped a full octave and croaking like an old drunk at four in the morning in desperate need of a drink of water, he sounds infinitely more lachrymose and resigned than optimistic. Larry Graham, the bass player and bass singer, was the first to leave the fold. He went on to form Graham Central Station, which rose in the charts as Sly and his family plummeted like a stone. Sly Stone would never regain his footing. Graham, however, would have a huge solo hit in 1980 with “One in a Million You.”

## NOVEMBER 1971 #4 GOT TO BE THERE—MICHAEL JACKSON

**S**ung by a less talented or older male singer, this could be one heck of a migraine-inducing melody. The way “Got to Be There” is written, it forces the singer to inhale and belt out a high note (D sharp) for at least two full measures





every time the chorus ends. This sets the singer up to sound either bloated and pretentious or utterly incompetent. Michael Jackson's God-given sense of pitch and dynamics saves the song from its inherent abrasiveness and brings a freshness that would have been almost impossible for anybody else, except perhaps a talented woman. An older singer would have trouble singing (and holding) the high notes without sounding false or foolish while a less talented kid (think Donny Osmond, who was no slouch when it came to technical ability, if truth be told) would squeak his way through this like a rodent trapped in a vise. Too young to sound effeminate and packed with the raw talent to pull it off, Jackson breezes his way through the melody. He makes his extended range seem effortless: no falsetto, no dramatic, breathy pauses, just a performance that is as straightforward as it is engaging.

While Jackson's solo career began its two-decade ascension to his status as "king of pop," the Jackson 5 were floundering. They released "Maybe Tomorrow" in July 1971, and it ran out of steam at #20. It marked the first time that a Jackson 5 song did not reach the Top 10, a fact made all the more dramatic when compared to their previous releases, all of which climbed at least as high as #2. Add to this the fact that Donny Osmond held the #1 spot at this time for three weeks with "Go Away Little Girl," and it made the Jacksons' slip in the charts look like a full-blown crisis.

"Got to Be There" was Motown's way of responding to Osmond's solo success. Maybe because it failed to chart as well as "Go Away Little Girl" (it stopped at #4), the label's executives decided that Jackson should avoid such mature-sounding material. His next singles were "Rockin' Robin" and "Ben," songs that were either mindlessly inappropriate (the former) or mindlessly bizarre (the latter). They might have been artistically shallow choices, but sales-wise, they reinstated Jackson's place in the top two chart positions. With a dull-witted blandness that would define the decade, shallow songs were now outselling their more substantive counterparts.

The combination of a decline in record sales and a realization that they were beholden to unusually restrictive terms soured the relationship between the Jackson 5 and Motown. Although the label had launched and promoted the band to the status of superstars, the friction between Berry Gordy and the band's father/manager, Joe Jackson, was growing. Besides, much better terms were available. Epic Records offered the group advances and royalties that positively dwarfed its numbers at Motown. One significant problem with the new deal revolved around whether all of the brothers would abandon the label that had nurtured them. All opted to leave except one. Jermaine, who had married Berry Gordy's only daughter, Hazel, was torn between loyalty to his family by blood and his family by marriage. In the end, the Jacksons went on to become recording artists for Epic Records, and Jermaine began a career as a solo act for his father-in-law's record label.

**With a dull-witted blandness that would define the decade, shallow songs were now outselling their more substantive counterparts.**



## NOVEMBER 1971 #9 ROCK STEADY—ARETHA FRANKLIN

Times had changed considerably since the mid-'60s when Aretha burst onto the popular scene. Like a dropped pane of glass, pop music had splintered into an endless number of shards, each with their own faction of fans, but each only a fraction of their previous scope. By definition, these sub-groups often caused separatism, since what appealed to one group would alienate another. Surprisingly, and although it was short lived, soul music was moving closer to the mainstream. In a surprise reversal of past trends, black music was not only the hippest but also the most commercial thing happening. Aretha Franklin, the “queen of soul,” was a pivotal figure at this time. She displayed great pride in her culture and began emphasizing it in her music. Although superficially it would seem like a contradiction, she appealed to a broader audience by getting in touch with her blackness. Instead of touring with a Vegas-style band and appearing onstage in a bouffant hairdo, she emphasized the contemporary and cultural sound of her material and wore her hair in a natural Afro style. Her live album, *Aretha at the Fillmore West*, appealed to aging hippies, teenagers who longed to be hippies, and the entire black audience that never forgot how exciting she could be.

As soul became funk, black pride remained unified and popular. Franklin's next album, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, was straightforward in its intent and highly effective in its deployment. Combining soul-injected versions of rock numbers, such as “Border Song” and “The Long and Winding Road,” with soul standards and heavily funkified originals, she compiled an album that was as diverse and yet unified as anything she had previously done. “All the King's Horses” and “Day Dreaming” were both powerful original compositions that were extracted for singles and reached the Top 40, but the centerpiece of the set was “Rock Steady.” With no hesitation, Franklin decides to “call the song exactly what it is.” The groove laid down by the masterful support musicians is state-of-the-art funk. The song features Chuck Rainey on bass, Donny Hathaway on keyboards, Cornell Dupree on guitar, and Bernard Purdie on drums, while one of blackest white men of all time, Dr. John, plays percussion with Robert Popwell. The rhythm is unstoppable, and Franklin knows it, so she sings a song with words about itself. With a band cooking this hard, a funky and low-down feeling was certainly something to celebrate. Times had indeed changed, and once again Franklin was at the heart of contemporary trends.

## NOVEMBER 1971 #12 RESPECT YOURSELF—THE STAPLE SINGERS

The most intense fans of heavy metal music and its subgroups (hardcore, speed metal, death metal, etc...), with their stage diving, fist pounding, and slam dancing rituals, are downright superficial when compared to the physical and emotional involvement that is displayed by the average gospel music audience. The old folks and families who make up the core fans of this genre could teach these young'uns a thing or two about intensity and “getting into” the music. A



headbanger's reactions are coarse and immediate, while gospel's proselytizers embody their music and absorb it into their souls. It's not just a form of expression, it's a *religion*.

The Staple Singers are a gospel group that has chosen to communicate with a broader audience. The religious aspect of their hit records exists only for those who care to hear it. Otherwise, the message is broad and generic: respect yourself, and spiritual awakening is apt to follow. Respect your mind and your body, and it is easier to find your soul. God (or, more accurately, Jesus) is only an implicit presence—a fact that is resented by gospel purists who view the Staple Singers as sellouts. Still, their music exposed many a person to a spiritual message who otherwise may have missed it.

The Staple Singers have been performing and recording together since the early '50s. Their career has been marked by a significant number of label changes and almost as many stylistic adjustments. They've continually tried to keep one foot in the gospel camp and the other in a blues-based R&B camp, but often veered too much in one direction to be accepted by the other. Their move to Stax Records in the late '60s proved to be advantageous for both artist and label. Stax was floundering after the unexpected death of Otis Redding and needed the boost that the Staple Singers could provide. The Staples, quite simply, wanted a hit. Al Bell was a longtime employee who had taken control of the label and was struggling to find an appropriate direction for it. No less a person than the Reverend Jesse Jackson suggested that he make the Staples the label's driving force, and Bell could not help but agree. "Heavy Makes You Happy" became their first crossover hit, and then "Respect Yourself" dramatically raised expectations. It was a seamless blend of self-righteous funk, combining gospel stylizations with shoot-from-the-hip straight talk. When it reached #12 on the pop charts, they knew they had a formula worth sticking to. Their next release, "I'll Take You There," became the #1 song in the nation on both the R&B and the pop music charts. Middle America had opened its hearts and minds to the message of love and righteousness that the Staple Singers professed.



## NOVEMBER 1971 #24 (I KNOW) I'M LOSING YOU—ROD STEWART

**W**hen the Temptations originally performed "(I Know) I'm Losing You," the song had an almost terrifying quality that wasn't even remotely lighthearted. The love triangle theme gave the song all the atmosphere of a vacuum chamber, and the ominous musical support certainly offered no relief. While another song with a similar theme, "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" by the Righteous Brothers, eloquently expressed its emotion in a vulnerable and nearly cathartic manner, "(I Know) I'm Losing You" portrayed a confused soul who sounded as though he might go mad with fear and grief. He was simultaneously "hurt, downhearted, and wor-



**With a version  
that thrives on  
its spontaneity  
and reckless  
abandon,  
Stewart stole  
the song's  
thunder from  
its rightful  
owner.**

ried" by his woman's behavior, but you couldn't tell if he was going to break down and cry or come at her with a weapon.

With his blow-away cover version, Rod Stewart sidesteps the unpleasant violence that the lyric implies by drowning it in a raucous rock-and-roll arrangement that disperses the inherent tension. Because he sounds more like an emasculated punk than David Ruffin ever could, the song becomes more about strung-out tension than rage. The foot-stomping rhythm supports this by sounding like the musical equivalent of a temper tantrum. To my taste, Stewart's best work occurred around 1970-72, which saw the release of his third solo album, *Every Picture Tells a Story*, which contained "(I Know) I'm Losing You," and the remarkably trashy, gonzo rock of *A Nod Is As Good As a Wink...to a Blind Horse*, originally by the

Faces. Although "(I Know) I'm Losing You" appears on his solo album, it is mostly a Faces track, with the notable exception of Mick Waller, who plays the bone-crunching, pummeling drum part that must have rattled the walls of the recording studio. Then again, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe this *is* the Faces' Kenny Jones after a steroid injection, in which case a) sorry, Kenny and b) so sue me.

Sometimes, Stewart's penchant for covering somebody else's material is artistically questionable. Often, he stays so close to the original that it's hard to figure why he even bothered. His rendition of "This Old Heart of Mine" and virtually all of his Sam Cooke copies stand as testament to this. On the other hand, he sometimes does just the opposite. On "Street Fighting Man" and "Shapes of Things," he veers so far from the original that it's unrecognizable—or unlistenable. "(I Know) I'm Losing You" falls comfortably between these two extremes. Stewart keeps the melody and structural riff intact, but he and the band alter the arrangement so substantially that they ought to get writing credit for coming up with such a clever reinvention. The main (and perhaps only) fault with the Temptations' original is that it passes too quickly to properly build on the repetitive vocal line. The original structure seemed fast and loose, so it suffers none when Stewart and the band dissect it and then throw it back together with a couple of extra pieces.

The song builds by repeating line after line until it has to break under the force of its own weight. The a cappella humming that follows comes off as a stiff and toneless nod to the Temptations' original, but once Stewart and the piano reenter, the band is itching to jump back in. Like a roller coaster that has climbed to the top, things pick up almost immediately. The song sounds as though it is rollicking out of control and on the brink of collapse. Waller pounds the downbeat so relentlessly hard that the band moves into double time just to keep up with his energy level. One by one, the other instruments fall away until the drums are left alone for a superhuman display of timekeeping that is almost moronic in its intensity. From here on out, Stewart seems to be flying by the seat of his pants. He sings over the drum solo, which signals the band to reenter. Only now, the song is mov-



ing at such a breakneck pace that it is both stupefying and glorious. Suddenly and miraculously, the song comes in for a landing on a wing and a prayer, downshifting to its original tempo. They hold on just long enough to spew out the title before the whole thing collapses in a nearly silent heap. Whew, what a ride. “(I Know) I’m Losing You” would never be the same. With a version that thrives on its spontaneity and reckless abandon, Stewart stole the song’s thunder away from its rightful owner.

## NOVEMBER 1971 #28 WILD NIGHT—VAN MORRISON

It’s a strange contradiction that Van Morrison’s best singles come from his weakest albums. Both *His Band and Street Choir* and *Tupelo Honey* are rambling, directionless affairs, and Morrison himself has since expressed disinterest in these albums and their tendency to leave “a bad taste in (his) mouth.” Even still, no Morrison album is a “bad” album, and the highlights of these records signify some of the high points of his career. “Domino” was plainly infectious, and “Wild Night” exhibits an extraordinary ability to sound as contemporary as anything presently on the radio. A faithful reworking of the song by John Mellencamp and Me’Shell Ndegeocello so accurately re-creates Morrison’s original that it leaves me with the impression that Morrison’s own version could have achieved hit status once again had he been willing to actively market his past work. It’s difficult enough to get him to discuss his current recordings, though, without expecting him to expound on his past. Even the thought of him actively participating in promotion is absurd. Paradoxically, Morrison has always carefully guarded his personal life, even though his appeal as a singer is greatly due to the autobiographical nature of his work.

“Wild Night” is full of impressionistic wordplay and snapshot imagery that establish a different mental picture for each listener. This is why I feel that videos can often provide a disservice to the songwriter—and why the Mellencamp/Ndegeocello video works only as a performance film. Despite Morrison’s continual presence as one of contemporary music’s most important vocalists, “Wild Night” marked the last time he entered the U.S. Top 40. For the most part, he is now marketed exclusively as an album artist in America and has almost completely eschewed singles since 1976, when “Wavelength” failed to chart any higher than #42.

## DECEMBER 1971 #1 LET’S STAY TOGETHER—AL GREEN

No doubt about it, this is the most well-known Al Green song, and it also qualifies as one of his best, notwithstanding his own opinion on the matter. Sometimes singers are the least qualified to judge what they do best, particularly at the early stages of their careers. For instance, it is common for singers who feel they need to make a name for themselves to throw every vocal trick that they





The partnership of Mitchell and Green continued to yield some of the most consistently satisfying singles of the '70s, each of them featuring a marvelous balance of relaxation and tension.

know into their early songs in order to make an impression. This usually entails overwrought emoting and deliberately impressive technique, all at the expense of honesty and subtlety. Before he was famous, Green wasn't so different. He railed against producer Willie Mitchell, complaining that his singing on "Let's Stay Together" was much too thin (read "effeminate") for public consumption. Green wanted to bowl us over with the strength of his voice, but Mitchell heard the reserved genius in his style. Mitchell knew that with the best soul music, less often is more. He insisted that *he* was right and released the song as a single, against Green's wishes. When it became a #1 hit, Green reconsidered his thoughts about holding back. Practically every recording they have made together since "Let's Stay Together" features Green's smooth and soothing style, with just the right amount of grit to keep things fascinating.

The partnership of Mitchell and Green continued to yield some of the most consistently satisfying singles of the '70s, each of them featuring a marvelous balance of relaxation and tension. With what became a standard operating procedure for this team, Mitchell provided the music, and Green made up his words while rehearsing the song. Drummer Al Jackson (previously with Booker T. and the MG's) provided a groove so comfortable that he often got (and deserved) writing credit. His behind-the-beat style and de-tuned snare drum allowed the rhythm to be rock solid while not interfering with the melody. Together, this core team of musicians and producers proved that you didn't have to be heavy in order to be funky. Their records became the standard by which southern soul operated, featuring a perfectly seamless blend of gritty funk and lilting soul.

It is worth mentioning that when an artist as down and funky as Tina Turner decided to record a cover version of "Let's Stay Together," she copied virtually every single vocal inflection that Green employed on his original recording, only in an exaggerated manner. Ironically, this meant that a woman added the muscle that Green was afraid his version lacked when he complained that his recording "didn't sound like no man singing." Depending on your viewpoint, Turner's version is either a respectful tribute or a carbon copy. Either way, it is Green's original that continues to influence yet another generation of soul singers.

## DECEMBER 1971 #4 DAY AFTER DAY—BADFINGER

**B**adfinger, particularly bandmember Pete Ham, was quite adept at writing poignant and catchy love songs, as can be proven by his beautifully composed hit "Day after Day." The song was as simple and uncomplicated as it was melodic,



and the band's execution, with some help from George Harrison, was well-nigh perfect. It was their biggest hit but deserved more recognition than it received, even considering that it rose to #4 on the American charts. Recognition was Badfinger's biggest problem, and it haunted them for their entire career. Even when they were at their peak (around the time of "Day after Day"), they struggled against indomitable odds to maintain their existence. Today, history has all but forgotten that they ever existed.

The story of Badfinger is one of the saddest and most unfair tales in rock and roll. Other artists may have struggled, been ripped off, suffered needless pain, and gone unrecognized for their talents, but rarely did one artist (or group) have to withstand all of this at the same time. When the Beatles brought Badfinger into their fold, it seemed like a dream come true. Just as they were getting themselves off the ground, however, their dream was transformed into a nightmare. Apple Corp., the business the Beatles began to help struggling artists, began to strangle them instead. The Beatles' finances were a complete disaster, and Badfinger had the horrible misfortune of being contractually bound to the company at the worst possible time. Even the Beatles lost any semblance of control over the situation, with various lawyers and accountants attempting to discern who owed what to whom. Under these circumstances, Badfinger had little choice and no power to enact a change.

"Day after Day," along with another hit single, "Baby Blue," appeared on Badfinger's best album, *Straight Up*, which they squeezed out just before Apple put the squeeze on them. Their previous album, *No Dice*, included a germinal version of a composition called "Without You," written by Ham and Tom Evans, which was about to become a #1 hit for four weeks when it was covered by Harry Nilsson. Badfinger was hot, but their record label was losing its pulse. With little warning, they found themselves embroiled in the litigation that they had once helped Paul McCartney satirize, with their recording of "Come and Get It."

Financially abandoned and with little money to promote their records, let alone record them, Badfinger languished. They strained to pull the plug that attached them to Apple, but when they finally did, they lost any connection to the material they had recorded there. Because of the litigation, many of the label's assets were placed in receivership, and Badfinger's catalog was considered to be a particularly valuable asset. As a (stupendously stupid) result, the lawyers bit the hand that was feeding them. By freezing Badfinger's material, they effectively crushed the band's ability to generate income, for themselves or their label. Badfinger's entire catalog was no longer in print, and Apple Records was no more.

Ostracized from their best material (and, just as painfully, from their allotted royalties), the group suffered an almost immediate financial burden. Worse, with

**Ostracized  
from their best  
material (and,  
just as  
painfully, from  
their allotted  
royalties), the  
group suffered  
an almost  
immediate  
financial  
burden.**



no records in the stores, no contemporary airplay, no advertising, no touring, no label affiliation, and no income, in the public's eye they ceased to exist. Ouch.

An almost equally humiliating affiliation with Warner Brothers didn't help matters. Warner had advanced the band money for touring and recording, but somehow it disappeared. The band's management remained deathly quiet about the incident, so Warner sued them and immediately withdrew the group's latest release, "Wish You Were Here." The plug was pulled even as the band was touring to promote the album, which happened to be their best record in years. Understandably, bandmember Joey Molland grew disenchanted and quit. By 1975, Ham had become deeply depressed over the apparent hopelessness of his situation. In April, he was found hanged.

The remaining members split up, but not for good. If possible to imagine, the new entity became even more obscure, and the bad luck continued. By 1983, they had gone absolutely nowhere and had degenerated into little more than a footnote in music history books. Meanwhile, their songwriting royalties were still being withheld, and their hit catalog was still out of print. For nearly two full decades, their best material languished. Their albums and hit singles were available only as collector's items; a hit single like "Day After Day" could fetch as much as \$25 while the album *Straight Up* could be sold for \$50 if it was in pristine condition. Of course, the band saw none of this money. Evans, the man who cowrote "Without You" with Ham, also abandoned all hope and committed suicide under circumstances chillingly similar to his songwriting partner's.

## DECEMBER 1971 #34 BEHIND BLUE EYES—THE WHO

If I could have, I would have picked "My Generation," if only to hear Roger Daltrey stutter "I hope I die before I get old," but it stalled at #74 in America. Somehow, while everything else that came from England got the red-carpet treatment on our side of the Atlantic, the Who missed the magic bus. Early English hits that were neglected in America include "I Can't Explain" (#93), "Anyway,

Anyhow, Anywhere," "The Kids Are Alright," "Substitute," "I'm a Boy," and "Pictures of Lily" (#51), not to mention the fabulous LP cuts *So Sad about Us*; *Our Love Was, Is*; and *I Can't Reach You*. Although they were a singles band for years in their native U.K., they didn't chart on America's Top 40 until 1967's "Happy Jack."

This was probably because they started too late

to catch the English wave, and the "mod" movement that they represented—along with the group Small Faces—had no American equivalent. Also, the Who's message of resentment and revolt was ill-timed for a country that was high on the euphoria of flower power. The frustration and aggression that Pete Townshend visualized by smashing his guitar to bits looked sensational to Ameri-

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1971 #6  
CLEAN-UP WOMAN—BETTY WRIGHT



cans, but most of us missed the emotional message of his “auto-destruction” and just considered it a fantastic show.

The Who wasn't the only English supergroup whose early singles didn't translate properly in America. Pink Floyd initially suffered a similar fate, but they did eventually drag English pop kicking and screaming into the “rock” era. Most Americans familiarized themselves with this English phenomenon only when Townshend composed the self-indulgent, pretentious, but remarkably innovative “rock-opera” *Tommy*. Suddenly, the Who were international superstars with an important and exciting message, and Americans needed to catch up. The group obliged when it released the album *Live at Leeds*, a showcase of their live performance at full impact and volume.

Somewhat stymied by the overwhelming popularity of *Tommy*, Townshend went to work on his next ambitious project, tentatively titled *Lifefhouse*. When this surrealistic project never got off the ground, the Who gathered up the musical pieces and released an album that they considered to be haphazard and ordinary, simply titled *Who's Next*. In actuality, it was a masterpiece. Literally every song on the album lives on in constant, steady rotation on classic rock radio stations, almost to the point of ruin. The climactic song, “We Won't Get Fooled Again,” was their latest anthem of disillusionment with the misguided optimism of the youth movement. It may very well have been the best song of their career at its full length of nearly nine minutes, but it was shortened for release as a single. Although this version reached #15, it is edited so poorly that it sounds as though the master tape was blindly hacked with razor blades.

I suppose what I'm doing here is making excuses for picking “Behind Blue Eyes” when so many other Who songs might have been more worthy, had the circumstances of their releases been different. This is unfortunate, though, because although it may not be the best Who song of all time, “Behind Blue Eyes” certainly is an excellent composition. The lyrics are a character study told from the point of view of a criminal who senses that he has been dehumanized by his crimes. People no longer see him as a person, but as a soulless thing with no compassion, who in turn deserves no compassion. Townshend's lyrics of alienation are gripping and three-dimensional, not overly romantic but full of imagery that captures the combination of hatred and desire that such a character might feel. Instrumentally, the Who are at their most dynamic and cut to the bone with the power of their playing, particularly through the instinctive bass and drums interplay of John Entwistle and Keith Moon.

*Tommy* and *Who's Next* established the Who as a band that required the space afforded by long-playing albums. As much as anyone else, the group is responsible for inspiring the movement away from hit singles and toward albums. This was driven home with unquestioned certainty when the Who released its next

**Instrumentally, the Who are at their most dynamic and cut to the bone with the power of their playing, particularly through the instinctive bass and drums interplay of John Entwistle and Keith Moon.**





album project, another two-record “rock-opera,” this time about the schizophrenic life of a mod, called *Quadrophenia*. Although it contained remarkable music from beginning to end, not one hit single could be culled from the project. Afterward, the band’s albums began to steadily deteriorate. Plagued by constant rumors of a possible breakup and their internal strife, the Who struggled on, even after the not too unpredictable death of wildman drummer Keith Moon. After recording a terribly lackluster album called *Face Dances* with replacement drummer Kenny Jones, they finally did break up. Does anybody care to remember how many times they have since reformed and disbanded? Me neither.

## JANUARY 1972 #10 BANG A GONG (GET IT ON)—T. REX

Here’s a good example of how things began to get really weird in the ’70s. No sooner had a series of new trends begun to remove rock and roll from its original intention (spontaneous anarchy and fun) and toward a more cranial approach (the singer/songwriter trend, the progressive rock trend) than a series of backlashes took things thoroughly too far in the opposite direction. Marc Bolan, the mastermind of T. Rex, gave new meaning to the word “dumb.” If you were a hyperactive teenager who needed to rebel against all these sensitive singers with sad eyes and acoustic guitars, or bands whose only goal was to get thoroughly lost while jamming, then Bolan was your cup of meat. Just try to recite

any of his lyrics aloud without breaking into hysterics: “I got stars in my beard, and I feel real weird, for you,” or “Rocking in the nude, I’m feeling such a dude, it’s a rip-off,” or “Just like a car, you’re pleasing to behold. I’ll call you Jaguar if I may be so bold.” Need I extract more? If truth be told, though, his lyrics are so phenomenally dumb that they transcend themselves and manage to be quite entertaining (in a dumb sort of way). The thing is, his riffs are so mind-suckingly good (and simple) that it is easy to convince yourself that he really was heavy after all.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1972 WITHOUT YOU—NILSSON	#1

GREAT MISSES	
JANUARY 1972 DOWN BY THE LAZY RIVER— THE OSMONDS	#4

In 1971, more than a few fans thought Bolan’s ideas could hold up not just for a few hits, but for an entire career. Times have changed. Judging from the sobering distance of twenty-odd years, I’d say that his albums sound painfully dated and that his material lacks any sense of variety. Over the years, his musical ideas (all three of them) have become transparently threadbare. His songs all share similar rhythmic ideas and lyrical thrust, while his singing never varies from the double-tracked, whispering frenzy technique that he developed.

“Bang a Gong (Get It On)” was his only American Top 40 hit. As on most T. Rex material from this period, including Bolan’s endless series of English hits, that’s





Mark Vollman and Howard Kaylan (aka Flo and Eddie) from the Turtles who are moaning delightedly in the background. With a heavily pedaled bass line and strutting guitar riff, “Bang a Gong” represents Bolan’s most powerfully driving rhythm.

Did I say driving? That reminds me, what exactly was it with this guy and his *auto-erotic* imagery? “You’re built like a car, you got a hubcap diamond-star halo. You’re built like a car, oh yeah” is only a sample lyric from his catalog of songs that use the automobile as a metaphor for sex.

Before his chrome-finish fetish became public knowledge, Bolan’s music was actually quite different. Originally, he was a folkie from Donovan’s School of Outer-Space Sensitivity and called his partnership with a bongo player Tyrannosaurus Rex, because he expected to become the biggest thing on earth. When this slightly pudgy and inarticulate guy with luminescent blue skin decided to drop his sad-eyed, acoustic guitar act and trade it in for electric glamour and a new bongo player, T. Rex was born. From that point on, English critics treated Bolan as though he were a treasonous phony. The kids loved him. American critics had trouble putting him into perspective. Seemingly out of nowhere, here comes this supposedly sensitive guy dressed in the most campy attire, wearing heels and women’s mascara while singing to teenagers. The unisex styles of the ’60s, such as love beads and long hair, had begun to develop into the androgyny of the ’70s, and Bolan was intelligent enough to aim it at the kids who were open-minded and eager to develop their *own* identity separate from the hippies. It took American kids a while to catch on. “Bang a Gong” was a hit in America almost a full year after it topped the English charts. By then, Bolan had opened the door for other acts who subscribed to the decidedly English phenomenon of glam-rock, such as Sweet, Slade, Gary Glitter, and Mott the Hoople. Over the years, David Bowie would be elevated to superstar status as he developed glam-rock into a futuristic amalgam of sex and theater. Overshadowed by these later acts, Bolan’s popularity decreased, despite his attempt to remain in the spotlight. While riding in a car driven by his girlfriend, Gloria Jones (“Tainted Love”), he was killed in a crash on September 6, 1977.

It took American kids a while to catch on. “Bang a Gong” was a hit in America almost a full year after it topped the English charts.

## JANUARY 1972 #15 BLACK DOG—LED ZEPPELIN

Led Zeppelin took the blues, gave it a lobotomy, ran about 40 million volts of current through it, and then set it loose on an unsuspecting public. The Frankenstein monster that the group created lives on in the much more frightening guise of heavy metal, but age has rendered this monster as harmless and pointless as a toothless dog. The legion of headbangers who have fallen under the spell of bone-crunching guitar riffs and ear-piercing howls can point to Led Zeppelin as being the great-granddaddy of the genre, but today the group’s material sounds



**They were not a singles band, by any stretch of the imagination, but "Black Dog" was unignorable, even on Top 40 radio.**

infinitely more fresh than the avalanche of imitators who followed. Led Zeppelin *was* heavy, but it also had a subtlety that gave its songs staying power.

Robert Plant's bloodcurdling and effeminate howl, when paired with his overtly sexual image and vaguely sensitive lyrics, gave him the image of a sex god from another time. Somehow, the band's mostly male fans did not find this offensive and were thoroughly awed by the aura Plant exuded. John Paul Jones was a musician's musician who, besides providing rock-solid bass and keyboard work, fleshed out the band's ideas in a manner that was almost always innovative and interesting. John Bonham was an animal. His thunderous drumming was so loud that it could shake calcium deposits from the ceiling. Thousands upon thousands of drummers have since attempted to imitate his power, but they usually miss his hair-trigger

ability to shift tempo, play through sudden time changes, and turn a beat completely inside out. Lastly, of course, is the requisite guitar hero. When Led Zeppelin was in its prime, Jimmy Page's inventiveness knew no bounds. His approach was so thoroughly creative and technically proficient that it is all but impossible not to be awed by his playing. Arrangements would shift wildly in tempo and run through some truly bizarre time-signature changes, but always in service to the riffs he created, not vice versa. His guitar ideas resembled nobody else's, but they immediately redefined the idiom and established the instrumental language for most hard rock guitarists who followed.

"Black Dog" is a definitive Led Zeppelin track. It has all the ingredients of their sound: an a cappella vocal break, a bastardized blues form, insanely difficult time shifts, a drum pattern that defies logic, and a guitar part that defines it. They were not a singles band, by any stretch of the imagination, but "Black Dog" was unignorable, even on Top 40 radio. The fanatical loyalty of so many high-school and college-age males made them *the* album-oriented radio staple of the '70s and *the* classic-rock radio staple of the '80s and '90s. Their most well-known song, "Stairway to Heaven," is solely an album track. Even with little output as a singles band, they still managed to squeeze six songs onto the Top 40 ("Whole Lotta Love," "Immigrant Song," "Black Dog," "D'yer Mak'er," "Trampled Under Foot," and "Fool in the Rain").

An aspect of the Led Zeppelin legacy that was impossible to miss was their wholesale tendency to treat all preexisting blues songs as if they were part of the public domain. Depending on your perspective, their reworking of classic blues numbers, and then assuming writing credit (such as Willie Dixon's "You Need Love" becoming "Whole Lotta Love"), was either very imaginative or criminally suspect. Despite even the most hateful criticisms that painted Led Zeppelin as deranged plunderers of a traditional music form, it is impossible to deny that, for better or worse, they altered not only the blues, but the entire rock genre in a manner that has remained unsurpassed.



## JANUARY 1972 #17 STAY WITH ME—FACES

**G**od, did I love the album that this song came from, and I still do. *A Nod Is As Good As a Wink...to a Blind Horse* has got to be one of the most hellacious rock-and-roll albums of all time. While most other acts were pursuing sensitive singer/songwriter rock, Faces revitalized rebellious rock and roll. The music sounds as though it is bouncing off the walls while the bandmembers sound like they are counting on the same walls to hold them up.

“What did I do with my drink?”

“Stop fooling around, where is my underwear?”

“What’s that yer smokin’? Never mind, give me a hit.”

“Can you tune my guitar for me, I’m having trouble finding the neck?”

“Help me, I’ve fallen down, and I can’t get up.”

Considering the good-natured recklessness of the music, any of these quotes could summarize the nature of the band, but most of their songs are intelligent enough to convince me that they must have been sober when they were writing. Rehearsals, recording sessions, and live performances were something else altogether, however. On this album, they sound tanked—and proud of it. The result is an accidental work of genius. At their worst, they were boring, uninspiring, and tepid. At their best, they were magnificently sloppy, loud, rude, and fun. “Stay with Me” has everything that made Faces a great band: careening slide guitars, powerhouse rhythms that shift restlessly from chugging to rollicking, and the craggy-voiced Rod Stewart howling over the amplifiers with all the charm of a schoolboy caught misbehaving. They may have been bad boys, but they were really good at being bad.

All the members of Faces were stars of some sort before they came together. When Steve Marriott decided to abandon his mid-’60s mod outfit called Small Faces so that he could form Humble Pie with Peter Frampton, remaining members Kenny Jones, Ronnie Lane, and Ian MacLagan were left holding the pieces of an obsolete band. “Itchycoo Park” and a few others were great songs in the mid-’60s, but by the ’70s they seemed about as dated as a Sonny and Cher tune. At the same time, Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood were leaving the Jeff Beck Group and decided to join forces with the remains of the Small Faces. To signify the change, they simplified the name to Faces.

They labored together for a few years until the band deconstructed, one member at a time. MacLagan went on to become a noted session musician, and Lane became a songwriter, sometime partner of Pete Townshend (“Rough Mix”), and recipient of a superstar benefit show to aid him after he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Jones joined the Who, Wood became a Rolling Stone, and Stewart became...well, he became Rod Stewart. MacLagan’s laborings were usually anonymous, though, and Lane was forced to work much less than he would have liked. Re-

**At their worst, they were boring, uninspiring, and tepid. At their best, they were magnificently sloppy, loud, rude, and fun.**



placing the deceased Keith Moon was like filling in for a legend, so by the time Jones joined the Who, they were barely an adequate parody of their former selves. Wood has done his best with the Glimmer Twins, but his revitalizing energy can only go so far, leaving the glory days of “the world’s greatest rock and roll band” rooted firmly in the past. As for Stewart, he became a dandified tabloid star whose music grew even worse than his obscene image.

Once upon a time, though, these five geezers were just mates out to have some fun and raise a little hell. They lived the life that every rebellious schoolboy dreamed of. Groupies, bawdiness, loud amplifiers, and a supply of Kentucky Bourbon made boys’ night out a way of life. Their lack of consistency and strong individuality eventually doomed them, but “Stay with Me” proved that Faces at its best could be a cohesive band, even when behaving like incoherent lunatics.

## JANUARY 1972 #24 LEVON—ELTON JOHN

**H**e was born a pauper to a pawn on Christmas Day..”

Reginald Dwight was born March 25, 1947, in a characterless London suburb of postwar England. His father was a Royal Air Force officer whose acquired upper-class mannerisms and brusque manner caused him to become completely alienated from his son. The familial discomfort spread until his parents were divorced when the boy was fourteen years old. As could be expected from an only child caught in the middle of a strained marriage, he suffered the consequences, becoming introverted and obese. His only real pleasure was derived from his personal record collection, which he meticulously kept filed in protective bags, and his piano playing.

Reg Dwight had displayed a facility for the piano since he was four years old, and he showed promise as a student of the traditional art forms. But his heart was

in the popular music styles of Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis. His desire to be near the music industry was so great that he abandoned school altogether to become a shipping clerk at a music publishing house. He also moonlighted as a lounge pianist and rehearsed with a blues/jazz outfit called Bluesology. The group was eventually co-opted by vocalist Long John Baldry, who

hired them as his backing musicians. Unfortunately, this pushed Dwight farther into the background, where he languished as a second-string session player. He was dissatisfied enough to audition as a solo performer for Liberty Records. Although his creative and interpretive talents were impressive, there wasn’t much of a market for short, stocky piano players who played lachrymose love songs. His pudgy, conservative appearance and self-proclaimed inability to write lyrics almost thwarted him, until Liberty’s savvy A&R man had a brilliant notion. He had received a package of lyrics from somebody named Bernie Taupin, who lived in the English countryside. Perhaps he could set these odd words to music? The results were good enough to attract the attention of music publisher Dick James, who also







happened to handle the Lennon/McCartney songbook. Dwight and Taupin were signed to a publishing contract and began recording demos of their material so they could be shopped to various pop artists. With regularity, the recording artists rejected the material for being too idiosyncratic, but most everybody expressed interest in the voice on the demos. For this reason, Dwight was offered a solo recording deal and changed his name to the flashier sounding Elton John.

It wasn't until his second attempt at recording an album that Elton John found the appropriate style and team of musicians and producers that would catch the public's fancy. *Empty Sky* was a commercial failure while the second album, *Elton John*, was received as an instant masterpiece.

With the English beat groups and psychedelia fading into the distant past, American "roots" music and confessional singer/songwriter styles were all the rage. Taupin's lyrical obsession with Americana was seen as hip, and Elton John's ability to imbue his partner's lyrics with personal expression was ideal for the time. "Your Song" perfectly fit the bill and became the pair's first bona fide hit single. The third album, *Tumbleweed Connection*, clearly betrayed Taupin's passion for American folklore, while Elton John's casual style (believe it or not, he wasn't always an upstaging dandy) and remarkable workmanship brought him to an even greater level of popularity. With the addition of a live album (*11/17/70*) and a soundtrack (*Friends*), Elton John had five albums competing against one another for market share.

For his next album, he deliberately slowed his pace and let his previous albums run their commercial course. When it was finally released, *Madman Across the Water* sounded alternately brilliant and tiresome. The album showed occasional signs of excessive self-consciousness and overindulgence while the best songs were among the most fully realized compositions of his career. The first two songs, "Tiny Dancer" and "Levon," were both singles (#41 and #24, respectively) and justified the price of admission. The fifteen-second piano introduction to "Levon" is enough all by itself to guarantee immortality for the song. It contains some of the most hauntingly beautiful and evocative piano chords ever recorded. By the time Elton John sings the first lines ("Levon wears his war wound like a crown. He calls his child Jesus..."), the song has completely enraptured the listener. It hardly matters that the words are difficult, if not impossible, to interpret. (Who on Earth is Alvin Tostig?) Just because they're opaque doesn't mean that they're meaningless—at least not when Elton John sings them. The words are confusing, vague, and pretentious, but he somehow makes them sound as though they hold the secrets of the universe. Taupin could not have had a more sympathetic arranger for his words. At its best, the unique combination of their individual talents somehow results in a unified, personal vision. "Levon" is certainly one of their finest moments, in which musician and poet unite to create a masterpiece of mood and imagery that allows the listener to discover meaning where it might not even exist.

**The fifteen-second piano introduction to "Levon" is enough all by itself to guarantee immortality for the song.**





## JANUARY 1972 #33 FEELIN' ALRIGHT—JOE COCKER

**B**y the '70s, blue-eyed soul—i.e., black-styled music by white performers—was fairly commonplace. Joe Cocker, however, transcended the term entirely and made singing some type of out-of-body experience. His debt to Ray Charles was fairly obvious, perhaps even derivative, but his innovative reworking of already popular songs was usually highly imaginative. In his hands, songs as well-known as the Beatles' "She Came in through the Bathroom Window," Julie London's "Cry Me a River," and the Box Tops' "The Letter" were completely reinvented. All three became Top 40 singles for Cocker. His soulful arrangements usually feature solidly driving rhythms, punctuated by funky brass riffs, but it is Cocker's vocals

that stand squarely at the center of attention. With a voice so rough and gravelly he makes Rod Stewart sound like Art Garfunkel, Cocker brings a sense of gritty realism to his singing. His bloodcurdling screams (remember that yowl during "With a Little Help from My Friends"?) sound like they emanate from a demon that he cannot suppress. With his writhing and spastic contortions onstage, it's easy to imagine that he is in dire need of an exorcist, but the only thing that possesses Cocker when he sings is the emotion of the music.

"With a Little Help from My Friends" was Cocker's first U.S. single. Although it was a #1 record in Great Britain, America missed the point, and the song stalled at #68. "Feeling Alright," an impassioned cover of a Dave Mason song that was originally recorded while he was a member of Traffic, became the second U.S. single but fared no better than its predecessor, stalling at #69. This seemed to be his fate, since his third single, "Delta Lady," also peaked at #69. At least he was consistent. Cocker was apparently in a commercial rut, but his appearance at Woodstock soon changed all that. After this,

GREAT HITS	
FEBRUARY 1972 <u>HEART OF GOLD</u> —NEIL YOUNG	#1
FEBRUARY 1972 <u>MOTHER AND CHILD REUNION</u> —PAUL SIMON	#4
MARCH 1972 <u>ROUNDAABOUT</u> —YES	#13

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1972 <u>THE WAY OF LOVE</u> —CHER	#7
FEBRUARY 1972 <u>JUNGLE FEVER</u> —THE CHAKACHAS	#8
MARCH 1972 <u>PUPPY LOVE</u> —DONNY OSMOND	#3

Cocker scored with the above listed Top 40 singles.

One side effect of his American success was that he became ostracized from his band. His most recent album featured session musicians, while his steady group was used exclusively for touring. This situation caused the band to quit in exhaustion and disenchantment. Unfortunately, Cocker's management had already rescheduled a series of concert appearances. Hearing of his plight, session musician Leon Russell almost instantly rounded up a model group of backing musicians to support Cocker. The event was filmed and became one of the most interesting and enjoyable rock-and-roll concert documentaries ever filmed. Titled *Mad*



*Dogs and Englishmen*, the film features Cocker and Russell sharing the spotlight. The resultant double album was a smash hit, reaching #2 on the charts.

For some reason, Cocker's record company decided to rerelease the 1969 recording of "Feelin' Alright," perhaps the best of his soulful reworkings, as a single in 1972, and this time it crept its way into the Top 40. It could be said that Cocker stole the song from Dave Mason almost as handily as Aretha Franklin stole Otis Redding's "Respect." "Respect" belongs to Franklin, and "Feelin' Alright" belongs to Cocker. Even though they only interpreted the material, they both brought a new life to their respective tunes and added a dimension that previously didn't exist.

Cocker has since had great difficulty sustaining his career. Through remarkable high points (the sales and airplay he enjoyed from Billy Preston and Jim Price's "You Are So Beautiful" and his duet with Jennifer Warnes on the middle-of-the-road staple "Up Where We Belong") and disastrous or frightening low points (he has often been so inebriated onstage that he was unable to stand—or sing), he manages to lumber on. One amusing albeit bizarre high point came in 1978 when Cocker appeared on *Saturday Night Live* and duetted with John Belushi during "Feelin' Alright." Belushi did a mean Joe Cocker. Lately, Cocker has returned to form and is singing his heart out once again with a crack bunch of support musicians. Here's hoping that he remains healthy and can regain the level of inspiration and momentum that instigated his initial success.

It could be said that Cocker stole the song from Dave Mason almost as handily as Aretha Franklin stole Otis Redding's "Respect."

## APRIL 1972 #1 OH GIRL—THE CHI-LITES

The Chi-Lites struck me as a fairly unusual name for a vocal group, so I thought that it might be interesting to investigate where the name came from. Well, brace yourself. They originally called themselves the *Hi*-Lites but needed to change their name when they discovered that another band had beaten them to it. Since they came from Chicago, the problem was solved by adding a "C" in honor of their hometown.

The group's history dates back to 1960, but it wasn't until their affiliation with Brunswick Records in 1969 that they gained national exposure. Their first few releases for Brunswick were mostly conventional ballads, which became hits on the soul charts with little or no impact on the pop charts. This changed when they decided to tackle social issues, à la the Temptations, with a song called "Give More Power to the People." It became their first top 40 hit and introduced the Chi-Lites to a career as crossover artists. Because lead singer Eugene Record was also responsible for writing and producing the song, his role became crucial to the band. He continued to write material and produce the group's recording sessions, as well as becoming their chief instrumentalist. After "Give More Power to the



**In 1972, the Chi-Lites had become overwhelmingly popular and assumed the charge in reestablishing R&B as the driving force in contemporary pop.**

People,” they reverted back to what they did best and proceeded to release the two most popular ballads of their career.

With Record squarely at the helm, “Have You Seen Her” is an unflinchingly romantic ballad that combines heart-breaking narration with airy harmonies. It’s old-fashioned in form but contains a freshness and innocence that guaranteed its success among practically any audience, including the white-based pop charts. “Have You Seen Her” wasted no time climbing to #3 while simultaneously topping the R&B market. Rock and roll was losing its sense of direction and heading toward decadence and nihilism while straight pop music was becoming unbearably light and meaningless, but R&B retained its purity of essence. For the first time in pop music history, black artists were beginning to dominate America’s pop market. In 1972, the Chi-Lites had become overwhelmingly popular and assumed the charge in reestablishing R&B as the driving force in contemporary pop.

Their next single only proved that this was so. It was another irresistible ballad, but this time it raced all the way to the #1 position on both charts, aided by an impressive appearance on TV’s *Flip Wilson Show*. “Oh Girl” has all the appeal of its predecessor, but it exaggerates the sadness of the lyrics by adding a lonesome harmonica into the mix. Lush strings push the song even further toward the lachrymose, as do the marvelous harmonies of the Chi-Lites, who were fast becoming little more than vocalists for the Eugene Record Show.

As the masters of overwhelming melancholy, the Chi-Lites seemed to have staying power. Instead, they faltered. Only two of their 1973 single releases reached the Top 40 (“A Letter to Myself” and “Stoned Out of My Mind”), and a restlessness seemed to overtake the band. By the following year, the band began to disappear altogether. Record grew frustrated and quit the group in 1975, but had very little luck in his pursuit of a solo career. The rest of the group trudged on a while longer, but as nobody seemed to take notice, they eventually stopped recording. Interestingly, the Chi-Lites may have ceased to exist as a presence on the charts under their own name, but the pop audience refused to forget the songs that made the band famous. In 1990, both “Have You Seen Her” and “Oh Girl” once again became tremendous hits, but this time for M.C. Hammer and Paul Young, respectively.

## **APRIL 1972 #1 I’LL TAKE YOU THERE—THE STAPLE SINGERS**

**F**ew singles can breathe on their own as well as “I’ll Take You There.” Then again, few singers can breathe as effectively as Mavis Staples. She gives the song a sense of motion that is as reflexive and natural as inhaling and exhaling. Like breathing, it works best if you don’t concentrate on the mechanics of it. If



you pay attention to the song too closely, it becomes both fascinating and disconcerting: fascinating because of the simple beauty of the loping rhythm and effortless playing, and disconcerting because it is hard to stay completely aware of the laid-back authority that is inherent in the music without getting hung up on the details that make it work. For example, the song never breaks away from the repetitive structure of the opening bars and continues its call-and-response pattern from beginning to end. It moves with a grace that is so natural it becomes almost invisible.

Roebuck “Pops” Staples plays like that. Although his roots are in the blues, his style is much too comforting for that genre. Gospel suits him fine, and popular songs with a bent toward the spiritual suit him just as well. His is an authoritative and reassuring presence, radiating an aura of calm, respect, and well-being. Daughters Cleotha and Yvonne only add to the equation. Every note they sing sounds as natural and inevitable as drawing your next breath. They stick to their lines as though they were dictated from God. Only Mavis ad-libs, and again, it’s a matter of breathing. Much of her bassy contralto emanates from her nose, while she moans and cries in a state not unlike spiritual ecstasy. While we all must wait for the rapture, she gives us a glimpse of what it must be like. She *will* take us there. Meanwhile, we can only wait...and patiently continue to breathe.

### GREAT MISSES

APRIL 1972 #1  
**THE CANDY MAN—SAMMY DAVIS JR.**

## APRIL 1972 #13 **BABY BLUE—BADFINGER**

If it hasn’t already become obvious, I happen to be a big fan of Badfinger’s music. Their records are straightforward and unadorned affairs that either sink or swim purely on the merit of the material. If the song is below par, then there is no elaborate image or extraneous production techniques to hide its shortcomings. When they stink, they really stink. Fortunately, the same holds true in reverse. Their singles became popular simply because they were great enough to become addictive. By the early ’70s, this was becoming the exception, not the rule. I’m not claiming that all pop music was adulterated (although this would soon be the case), only that it was becoming increasingly difficult for anybody to make music without a carefully sculpted identity and an inordinate amount of production.

Another factor that set Badfinger apart was its (short-lived) ability to exist as a popular singles band while maintaining respectability among album-rock fans. In 1972, the year Three Dog Night (“Black and White”), Neil Diamond (“Song Sung Blue”), Mac Davis (“Baby Don’t Get Hooked On Me”), Gilbert O’Sullivan (“Alone Again Naturally”), and Looking Glass (“Brandy”)

### GREAT HITS

APRIL 1972 #4  
**LOOK WHAT YOU DONE FOR ME—  
 AL GREEN**

APRIL 1972 #8  
**DOCTOR MY EYES—  
 JACKSON BROWNE**



**Badfinger was a very uncomplicated band that was forced to reckon with amazingly complicated circumstances.**

were changing pop music's target audience while celebrating #1 hits, Badfinger traveled against the grain. The above acts were usually scorned or, at best, tolerated by the now-mature ex-hippies who had played such an important role in the previous redefinition of popular music. This older audience, which was growing increasingly (and understandably) skeptical with the overt commerciality of Top 40 music, had no quarrel with Badfinger. The band so profoundly lacked an easily identifiable image that it couldn't be judged by anything other than its music, and the music was usually good enough to suit most tastes while offending no one.

"Baby Blue" was destined to become the last Top 40 single Badfinger would release. Arguably, it was also their best. There's no orchestra, no fancy production techniques, no super-famous guest stars, and no gender-bending imagery, just a straightforward rock-and-roll love song played with conviction. While the band concentrates on supporting the gorgeous melody with soaring harmonies and an engaging instrumental arrangement, lyricist Pete Ham sings with convincingly genuine affection about a personal relationship gone south. That's it. No hidden subtext, no unnecessary complications. Badfinger was a very uncomplicated band that was forced to reckon with amazingly complicated circumstances. It eventually lost the battle to survive, but a song like "Baby Blue" proves that had the world been perhaps a little bit kinder, Badfinger might have become a rock-and-roll legend.

## MAY 1972 #7 TUMBLING DICE—THE ROLLING STONES

English tax laws can be brutal for anybody who earns a great deal of money. At the onset of the '70s, the Rolling Stones learned this the hard way. They found out that more than 90 percent of their income was the legal property of England, and a hefty bill for past taxes owed only made matters worse. The only way they could legally avoid paying the exorbitant tax bill would be if they left England and lived abroad. One by one, the Rolling Stones and most of their entourage packed up and moved to the south of France. It was while living in tax exile that the band, using a mobile recording unit, began recording new material in the basement of Nellcote, Keith Richards's French residence.

<b>GREAT HITS</b>	
MAY 1972	#6
<b>ROCKET MAN—ELTON JOHN</b>	

The effect of recording at Richards's house was twofold. First, it solved the problem of wondering whether he would show up for rehearsals. His heroin addiction had reached a harrowing state, but the album project helped him keep his focus. Second, Mick Jagger's recent marriage to Bianca Perez Mora Macias and the birth of their daughter, Jade, meant that his input to this project would be





sporadic. With Richards's sprawling (or sprawled out) vision dominating the proceedings, the results are a messy masterpiece. Just before the Stones sank into an artistic oblivion that would dog them for most of their remaining years, they kicked out one last blast of sloppy greatness. *Exile on Main Street* was a double-dose blend of loosely rollicking rhythm and the infamous Rolling Stones attitude, which had a stick-to-your-ribs satisfaction about it. The music mapped a haphazard course of disparate styles but was unified by a sense of freshness that has since been lacking in nearly all of their subsequent recordings.

From the eighteen tracks that had been accumulated, "Tumbling Dice" was chosen for single release. With the momentum of a freight train, the rhythm chugs along under the force of its own weight while Jagger yells incoherently over the din. The track is so loud and forceful, and the vocals are mixed down so low, that only a few phrases emerge audibly. Although the dense and muddled production originally left most listeners confused or indifferent, it has since emerged as a classic, perhaps the last truly great Rolling Stones 45.

So why, I must ask, did Linda Ronstadt see fit to cover this song? Her cloying versions of Smokey Robinson or Chuck Berry tunes left something to be desired, despite her vocal chops, but none are more bothersome than her version of "Tumbling Dice." One of the main reasons that this song appealed to me in the first place is because I could ignore Jagger's apparently deliberate string of rhetoric and platitudes, and groove on the oxymoronic charm of hearing a drug addled gospel group testify incoherently. With all the words slurred and jumbled, it's easy to maintain this perception and rock out on another classic Stones groove. Covering "Tumbling Dice" was akin to spoiling one of life's riddles, exposing it only to find it barren. It was the ultimate disservice, and I can't help but hold a grudge. Her version was both improbable and unnecessary, like listening to Jerry Vale sing "Brown Sugar" or Dean Martin croon "Mother's Little Helper." The world didn't need more than one version of "Tumbling Dice," and the Stones built the original to last.

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1972

#5

SYLVIA'S MOTHER—

DR. HOOK AND THE MEDICINE SHOW

## MAY 1972 #25 **SOMEDAY NEVER COMES—** **CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL**

For all the fame and fortune that had come to Creedence Clearwater Revival during the group's heyday, they weren't a particularly happy lot. John Fogerty later said he believed the seeds of dissension were sown as soon as they released their first record. "I was not popular in my own band," he confessed in a 1993 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine. "There's an old war movie where the guy says, 'When you put on the clothes of the general, you cannot be popular with your men.'"



If ever a person was qualified to offer blisteringly honest advice about the music industry, it was Fogerty.

By 1971, there was some grumbling among the ranks. Fogerty's older brother, Tom, was the first to jump ship, leaving the others to carry on as a trio. His departure reopened a long-festering wound brought on by John Fogerty's self-appointed role as general. Bassist Stu Cook and drummer Doug Clifford now demanded equal representation. Worn down by their ceaseless resistance and resentment, Fogerty was compelled to cede his power. In a move that has since been referred to as Fogerty's Revenge, Creedence Clearwater Revival went from an autocracy to a democracy almost overnight. With equal writing, singing, and veto power, the restructured CCR released a ten-track album with only three songs that were credited to their previously most famous spokesman.

Taken as a whole, *Mardi Gras* is an unlistenable, amateurish disaster that embarrassed all participants. At this point, with bad blood and worse a record, the band had no option but to split up.

One track from the proceedings that was not only listenable but moving, perhaps even prophetic, was Fogerty's "Someday Never Comes." I wonder if his bandmates caught the same message as I did. "Take it while you can find it because he who hesitates is last." "Nothing lasts forever." "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." "Wake up and smell the coffee." "Why can't you guys just leave a good thing alone and enjoy the ride?" Well, that's the message *I* got out of it.

Each member sought a solo career, but none even came close to the glory days they enjoyed as America's best singles band. Even Fogerty's solo records were haphazard and unfocused. Disillusioned with the state of the music business, he retreated from the music scene from 1975 to 1985. When he finally reemerged with his highly acclaimed solo album, *Centerfield*, he probably wished he had never pulled his head up. First of all, he somehow lost ownership of the copyrights for all the material he wrote while a member of Creedence Clearwater Revival. Ongoing litigation with Fantasy Records' president Saul Zaentz over copyright ownership and royalty payments caused Fogerty to vow that he would never perform any of his most-loved material again. Things escalated when Fogerty included a hateful track on his record called "Zaentz Can't Dance." Perhaps vengefully, Zaentz instigated yet another lawsuit, claiming that the hit single from the album *The Old Man Down the Road* infringed on the Zaentz-owned copyright of the Fogerty composition "Run Through the Jungle." Fogerty was forced to amend the title of his venomous song and allegedly incurred \$400,000 in legal fees from attempting to protect his copyright, even though a jury found him to be not guilty. The last I heard, the case had gone to the Supreme Court, which overturned an appellate court decision, thus allowing Fogerty to seek recoupment for his legal expenses. Ain't we got fun?

Besides the obvious lunacy of having to defend himself against the possibility of plagiarizing his own song, Fogerty was mired up to his neck in complications



and ill will. The music that he had created became secondary to the economic interests of the people who had bought him out. If ever a person was qualified to offer blisteringly honest advice about the music industry, it was Fogerty.

## JUNE 1972 #7 SCHOOL'S OUT—ALICE COOPER

*Uncorrected personality traits that seem whimsical in a child  
may prove to be ugly in a fully grown adult...*

*The spoiled baby grows into...the escapist teenager who's...  
the adult alcoholic who's...the middle-aged suicide. Oy!*

The above is an excerpt from a bizarrely comic a cappella song written by English musician Robyn Hitchcock. Needless to say, very often there is a substantial amount of truth in humor.

I didn't choose the above quote for its relevance to Alice Cooper (aka Vincent Furnier), but rather for its relevance to the life of rock and roll. In the '50s, rock and roll was the spoiled baby. Rebellious mannerisms and adolescent desires to show off were packaged for mass consumption and resulted in seemingly limitless fame. The whimsical personality traits of "rock and roll" not only went uncorrected, they were handsomely rewarded. Finally and miraculously (thought its practitioners and fans), youthful rebellion was providing a key to immortality. All you had to do was learn how to play the guitar. Every rebellious teenager leapt at the opportunity to become a rock and roll star—and many did become stars.

After a few years of incredible creativity and growth, reality began to set in. Disaffection and dissatisfaction once again became common themes in rock and roll, only this time they contained the morbid underpinnings of a mid-life crisis. The horrible truth soon revealed itself. Immortality and eternal youth are not the same thing. Immortality only implies that you won't die. It doesn't promise anything about remaining forever young (another rock and roll concept). The faces of our most well-known rock-and-roll stars were becoming plump and lined with age. Rock music was similarly transformed (such a self-delusional state of paranoia ensued that it could no longer be referred to as "rock and roll"). The whimsical traits of "rock" certainly did prove to be ugly in the fully grown adult. Alice Cooper was poised and ready to take full advantage of destiny. Rock had entered its decadent adult phase, with nihilism and hedonism as its only valid options.

Cooper was both. He was also a phony, a poser, a schlocky shock-master, an unapologetic show-off, a manipulative prestidigitator, a destroyer of preconceptions, and he was fantastic. His outrageousness captivated an audience that had

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1972	#2
<b>TOO LATE TO TURN BACK NOW— THE CORNELIUS BROTHERS &amp; SISTER ROSE</b>	
JUNE 1972	#3
<b>(IF LOVING YOU IS WRONG) I DON'T WANT TO BE RIGHT—LUTHER INGRAM</b>	



The lyrics are both funny and mildly outrageous: "Well, we got no class, and we got no principles..." Not "principals"—get it?

come of age during a time when cynicism was rampant. In retrospect, it wasn't his eye makeup that was outrageous. Even his androgyny, both in name and dress, was conventional for the times. It was his stage antics that forced people to pay attention while his deliberately controversial lyrics kept them tuned in. His records could hardly have been more indicative of the corrupt state of affairs. The Tubes, Kiss, Black Sabbath, et al. eventually capitalized on what would become the "rock-and-roll circus," but Cooper arrived early and pushed himself into the center ring.

His first album, *Pretties for You*, dates from 1969-70 and is tied for first place, along with the Shaggs' *Philosophy of the World*, for the most sublimely naive album ever recorded. The second, *Easy Action*, was neither as definitively horrible as its predecessor, nor did it show any promise of what was to come. It wasn't until his third album,

*Love It to Death*, that Cooper found his stride, mostly because of the intuitive production genius of Bob Ezrin. Ezrin's attention to detail helped Cooper record some of the best straightforward rock of the early '70s while simultaneously defining the grotesque image that would make him a star. Besides the ultimate anthem to teenage confusion, called "I'm Eighteen," *Love It to Death* also contained a disturbing ode to insanity and another to black magic. Cooper's next album, *Killer*, raised the stakes further. Ezrin's production was sharpened to perfection while Cooper sang about "Dead Babies" and malicious manslaughter. The stage was set, and the identity of the players was now clearly defined.

Without a doubt, *School's Out* was the cast's crowning achievement. First of all, the album jacket, which was designed to unfold like a schoolroom desk, opened to reveal a record encased in a pair of pink panties. If you were twelve or thirteen years old, then you probably can remember just how embarrassing and difficult this was to explain to anybody who didn't get it—namely, your parents. Parents may have been questioning the sanity of their children, but the record more than justified the gimmickry. If you liked either of Cooper's previous albums, then you loved *School's Out*. The title song was the rockiest song on the Top 40. The lyrics are both funny and mildly outrageous: "Well, we got no class, and we got no principles..." Not "principals"—get it? But what rhymes with 'principles'? Oh hell, forget it; "We can't even think up a word that rhymes." Ezrin, meanwhile, made certain that the album would retain its appeal by formulating it into a trendy masterpiece that legitimized the hokum. Despite the record's theme of juvenile delinquency and teenage violence, he sheared the rough edges and polished it until it shined. Cooper became a superstar.

By their next record, Cooper had become too famous for his own good. *Billion Dollar Babies* used his excessive fame as its overriding theme, and it became a stratospheric success, but the controversial edge had become blunted. His themes veered from the predictably outrageous ("I Love the Dead," about necrophilia) to the numbingly dumb ("Unfinished Sweet," about a trip to the dentist), but Ezrin's





production kept the proceedings lively and professional. *Billion Dollar Babies* became Cooper's best-selling record and yielded three Top 40 singles ("Hello Hurray," "Elected," and "No More Mr. Nice Guy"). These songs eventually proved to have a limited shelf life, but "School's Out" retains its relevance. It's funny to think that the adolescent kids who listened to "School's Out" and "I'm Eighteen" are now fully grown and have kids of their own. The rock-and-roll fountain of youth has kept the genre as twisted and rebellious as ever while the rest of us continue to age. Perhaps we ought to break out our old Alice Cooper records and play them for our kids. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, right? Chances are good they'll like it, too, but it's still going to be embarrassing as hell when they ask you why the album is wrapped in a pair of pink panties.

## JUNE 1972 #10 LAYLA—DEREK AND THE DOMINOS

**P**op music has never embraced the blues, and yet, almost every popular music movement since the birth of rock and roll can claim the blues as an integral part of its lineage. Inarguably, the blues has informed popular music more profoundly than any other form. How could the blues be so obscure and yet so popular at the same time? It depends mostly on what you call "the blues." By definition, authentic blues is anti-commercial. Purists know whether or not the blues they are listening to has been adulterated or bastardized. Any commiseration with popular styles waters down the emotion and weakens the impact. It's as if the blues has some kind of connection to the human spirit that isn't meant to be toyed with.

In the early '60s, England was swarming with aficionados of American culture. London in particular had developed an obsession with the blues that bordered on religion. Middle America meanwhile, remained blissfully unaware of its own culture, not recognizing the Negro art forms for the indigenous (and ingenious) inventions that they were. In an atmosphere that was overflowing with innate bigotry and racism, the blues didn't stand a snowball's chance in hell. English kids, meanwhile, romanticized the blues and imitated its progenitors. Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Robert Johnson, and anybody else whose records crossed the Atlantic were elevated to the status of demigods. The English kids who bought these records redefined rock and roll in the early '60s and caused the British Invasion to crush everything that stood in its path. American popular music had become rootless and was standing on a shaky foundation in the first place. The blues were as rooted as a musical form could be and America could not hope to withstand England's attack, particularly since the raw material of their weaponry was made in America. Eric Clapton was one of those English kids who

### GREAT HITS

JUNE 1972 #12  
**TAKE IT EASY—THE EAGLES**

### GREAT MISSES

JUNE 1972 #38  
**LONG HAIR LOVER FROM LIVERPOOL—LITTLE JIMMY OSMOND**





**Perhaps it was a slight exaggeration, but Clapton's status as a spiritual voice of the gods only grew after he formed Cream.**

attempted to storm our shores. Playing lead guitar for the Yardbirds, he emulated every blues lick he heard and developed a local reputation as one of the best white interpreters of the blues. International fame was just around the corner for the Yardbirds, but Clapton had become suspicious of the band's dedication to the blues as a pure art form. When they started to record pop music whose connection to the blues was tenuous at best, Clapton quit the band. It was a gutsy thing for a young guitarist on the brink of stardom to do, but he didn't want any part in compromising his purist ideals. His fans couldn't have agreed more and applauded him for upholding his ideology. Some went further than that. When Clapton started playing guitar with the less famous but critically respected John Mayall's

Bluesbreakers, his cult status compounded. Fans were in such awe of his expressive and technical talents that graffiti began to appear stating "Clapton is God."

Perhaps it was a slight exaggeration, but Clapton's status as a spiritual voice of the gods only grew after he formed Cream. Oddly, though, Cream's free-form, extended jamming was an abomination of the art form that Clapton was claiming allegiance to. By cranking up the volume and meandering aimlessly for twenty minutes at a clip, he was actually distancing himself from the essence of his calling. Until the (mostly English) white guitarist contingent got hold of it, the blues had little to do with self-indulgence and extended solos. In the hands of this new generation, the blues was redirected into something completely different from what it was originally intended to be. By the mid-'60s, the black audience had almost completely abandoned the blues in favor of R&B or soul. White kids, meanwhile, thought the blues meant any progression that could sustain hour after hour of limitless soloing.

It wasn't necessarily Clapton's fault that much of his audience misunderstood what he was trying to accomplish, but Cream was pulling in too many directions simultaneously. Amid much acrimony, the band broke up, leaving Clapton with hopes of escaping the limelight. Nevertheless, his every move continued to attract attention. His short-lived association with Blind Faith, besides producing some fine work, only caused his rabid fan base to hound him more. Clapton was frustrated by the absurd emulation and decided to go on tour as a sideman with Blind Faith's warm-up act, Delaney and Bonnie. More low-key work as a session guitarist—with George Harrison, Stephen Stills, and others—followed. His first solo album from this time featured Clapton as little more than a bandmember, offering further evidence that he was uncomfortable with taking center stage. These diverse projects had put Clapton in touch with a veritable army of musicians, and he began to formulate a band that would afford him the relative anonymity that he craved.

Carl Radle, Jim Gordon, and Bobby Whitlock formed the basis for Clapton's new project. They were all talented players who, unlike the members of Cream, did not need bombast for their ideas to come across—which is not to say that the



band was quiet. Quite the contrary, these guys could jam as loudly as anyone, but they at least maintained a modicum of dynamic sense. Calling themselves Derek and the Dominos, they toured small halls and clubs, where the audiences were not initially aware that Clapton was “Derek.”

After a chance meeting in America with Duane Allman of the Allman Brothers Band, the two began to jam together. They formed a mutual admiration society of sorts, and Clapton invited Allman to perform on the band’s recording sessions, which he eagerly accepted.

Unfortunately for Clapton, his state of mind at this time was less than stable. A failed love affair with George Harrison’s wife, Patti, had left him distraught and emotional. He also had developed a heavy dependence on heroin, as had most of the other Dominos. Clapton used his prolonged pain as inspiration and wrote a series of songs about his estrangement from his lover. One of his ideas was to write a song based on the Eastern tale of Layla, a woman who drives her courtier to a state of insanity. “Layla” came to life sounding something like the version that appears on *MTV Unplugged*, but the Dominos and Allman drove the song as hard as it could be pushed. Almost claustrophobic in its energetic drive, the song needed a vent to release the incredible tension that the band created. Drummer Jim Gordon had been working on a piano coda that Clapton thought would work well, and Gordon acceded. What could have been an unchecked noise-fest became a wrenching declaration of pain.

The album *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs* was released late in 1970 and, inexplicably, it fell on deaf ears. Containing both conventional blues and the modified stylization that Clapton helped formulate, the record is a masterpiece of personal expression. Despondent from the lack of sales and numbed from his addiction, Clapton lost interest in his band, and they broke up in the midst of recording a follow-up. The unexpected deaths of both Allman and Jimi Hendrix only deepened his depression. He withdrew from the public eye and went deep into seclusion for three full years, prompting rumors of his deteriorating physical condition. Because his reputation as a premier blues man was undiminished, the record company continued to release (and rerelease) his products. “Layla” was issued as a single for the second time, this time unedited, and radio stations jumped on it. Within weeks, it was a Top 10 recording, regardless of the fact that it was two years old. As an inadvertent result of his personal traumas, Clapton had reinvented an age-old musical form, then popularized it in America in a manner that was previously unthinkable.

## JULY 1972 #3 I’M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU—AL GREEN

**H**i Records dates back to the ’50s, when it was a label known mostly for its rock and roll instrumentals (Ace Cannon’s “Yakkety Sax” and the Bill Black Combo’s “Smokie-Part 2” were two of its most significant hits). Willie Mitchell was a trumpet player who recorded instrumentals for the label for a few years but displayed enough acumen to be offered a position on the other side of the recording console.



One of his first priorities was to broaden the scope of Hi Records from a novelty-type instrumental house to include vocal music. Memphis, where the label was based, had no shortage of capable musicians and singers, so Mitchell became a very busy man, producing artists both for Hi and for other labels that offered him production deals. The first vocal hit records he produced were for a singer named Ann Peebles, whose popularity would eventually land her on the Top 40. Mitchell also continued to record as a bandleader and had a significant hit with an instrumental he wrote called "Soul Serenade" (originally a crossover hit for saxophonist King Curtis). While touring to support the single, Mitchell met a vocalist named



Albert Greene. Greene was struggling to remain active in the music business after recording a minor pop hit called "Back Up Train," but he was quickly losing ground after his follow-up releases performed poorly. Mitchell realized that Greene's soft-spoken style would fit perfectly into his plans to develop a type of soul music that would appeal to both black and white audiences.

Greene, who lived in Michigan, balked at the idea of relocating to Memphis and following Mitchell's game plan, which included an estimated eighteen months of hard work, but the promise of being a star (and a \$1,500 advance) eventually broke down his resistance.

Al Green's arrival in Memphis (yes, he dropped the "e") signaled a considerable change in the state of southern soul music. He and Mitchell worked on developing a mellow soul sound that featured sensuous vocals, heavy bass, wet thudding

**With a falsetto-based whisper that drifts along lighter than the air that carries it, Green's recording team took the gritty Memphis soul sound and turned it on its ear.**

drums, a string section, and the lazy, behind-the-beat sound of the Memphis horn players; in essence, they merged Northern Detroit gospel with Southern Memphis funk. The alchemy resulted in soul music in its purest form, in which the secular nature of the words naturally takes on religious overtones.

Eighteen months later, Green was a star. "Tired of Being Alone" was followed by "Let's Stay Together," which was followed by "Look What You Done for Me." All were pop hits, and each record was gentler than the one preceding it. Almost as if to prove that he could sing more gently than anyone had previously attempted, Green's next recording was "I'm Still in Love with You." With a falsetto-based whisper that drifts along lighter than the air that carries it, Green's recording team took the gritty Memphis soul sound and turned it on its ear. Through their work, Memphis soul became a style of breathtaking elegance. Miraculously, Mitchell's deliberately bottom-heavy production never interferes with Green's fragile, almost ethereal, vocals. Instead, it lends them a validity that defined their work together as the new pioneers of Memphis soul.



## JULY 1972 #22 HAPPY—THE ROLLING STONES

**H**appy” is the first Rolling Stones single that features Keith Richards on lead vocals. Among the dense and turgid mix of rip-roaring rock, gospel, soul, warped country, and boogie jamming that constituted *Exile on Main Street*, “Happy” stood out as an unadorned and (surprise of surprises) *optimistic* rocker. With none of the patented pretense or deliberate posturing that defined the wordplay of nearly every previous Rolling Stones single, Richards sings with reckless abandon while the band cruises along in overdrive. Having a song as great as “All Down the Line” on the flip side didn’t hurt, either. The Stones would not even come close to recreating this energy level until 1978’s *Some Girls* album.

*Exile on Main Street* signaled the completion of the Rolling Stones’ first decade as recording artists. Although they’ve survived for another twenty-something years since then, the quality of their subsequent output could best be described as sporadic. The material they’ve recorded since the mid-’70s has never approached the magnificence of their previous work, although there have been moments when they almost recaptured the feel of their best material. In the ’70s, they survived through disco, punk, and new wave by assimilating these styles without embracing them. By remaining contemporary through various stylistic changes, they moved into the ’80s as the premier stadium attraction, which is where they remain in the mid-’90s. Today, they exist solely on the momentum of their massive career, often overcompensating by pushing their older material to the breaking point.

The Rolling Stones are rock’s elder statesmen. Unless they blow it, they could be as relevant in their old age as the geriatric bluesmen who initially inspired them. I think the main obstacle the Stones face today is, paradoxically, Mick Jagger’s fountain of youthful energy and his unwillingness to incorporate his age and experience into his stage persona. The Stones may rise again, but only if Jagger stops wriggling about onstage and writes appropriate material with Richards that they can perform both convincingly and honestly. In their time, the Rolling Stones were always controversial, at times falling victim to both the establishment (the numerous drug busts) and their old fan base (the post-Altamont backlash), but they were also always one hell of a show. The time has come for them to finally cut away all pretense and just be themselves, or they will continue to suffer from comparisons with earlier years, when their best material still sounded fresh. Back then, the Stones had an innate ability to shock the world. Today, the only thing that is shocking is that they still exist. Jagger alluded to this, perhaps unknowingly, when he made his acceptance speech at the band’s induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Quoting French author and artist Jean Cocteau, he said, “Americans are funny people. First you

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1972

#5

GO ALL THE WAY—THE RASPBERRIES

### GREAT MISSES

JULY 1972

#28

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB—  
PAUL McCARTNEY





shock them, then they put you in a museum.” I hope the band sees the underlying wisdom of those words and finds a way to avoid being put on a shelf without becoming a parody of their former selves. It certainly would become them, particularly if they think they might stick around for a few more years.

### AUGUST 1972 #3 BACKSTABBERS—THE O’JAYS

Just like Chess had passed its crown to Motown ten years earlier, it was now time for Motown to surrender its star to Philadelphia International. After losing its identity following its move from Detroit to California, and with its corporate tentacles spread much too wide for any type of musical consistency, Motown was on the decline. Stax Records had never properly recovered after the death of Otis Redding, so it too was out of the running. While these labels were sinking or shifting their fan bases, Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff were on the way up. After working both together and alone as songwriters and session musicians, they eventually began to do freelance production work for some Philadelphia-based R&B artists. Their success compounded until, by 1970, their roster included the Three Degrees, the Vibrations, Billy Paul, and longtime veterans of the R&B/doo-wop scene Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes (including Teddy Pendergrass) and the O’Jays.

GREAT HITS	
SEPTEMBER 1972 <u>BURNIN’ LOVE</u> —ELVIS PRESLEY	#2
SEPTEMBER 1972 <u>USE ME</u> —BILL WITHERS	#2
SEPTEMBER 1972 <u>EVERYBODY PLAYS THE FOOL</u> — THE MAIN INGREDIENT	#3
SEPTEMBER 1972 <u>YOU WEAR IT WELL</u> —ROD STEWART	#13
SEPTEMBER 1972 <u>THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS</u> — ARLO GUTHRIE	#18

Gamble and Huff named their creative venture Philadelphia International Records. Updating the sound of their highly talented but (mostly) dated acts was their unenviable task, but boy, oh boy, did they ever get the job done. The Blue Notes and the O’Jays had both enjoyed years of modest success before their affiliation with Philadelphia International, but their signing with Gamble and Huff caused them to be among the hottest acts in the country. In 1972 and 1973, each band enjoyed a pair of Top 10 hits.

A good deal of credit must go to the studio-musician collective known as M.F.S.B. (for Mother-Father-Sister-Brother—or maybe for something a bit raunchier). The team of creative minds who worked at P.I. made sure that the material was good, the arrangements strong, and the production solid. Besides producing,

Gamble and Huff were also talented songwriters. Gene McFadden and John Whitehead were producers who got the writing bug after watching Gamble and Huff work. They would later become recording artists in their own right. Thom Bell was another resident genius who, along with Linda Creed, was busy writing and producing the retro-soul of the Stylistics and the Delfonics, bands that developed a gentle, falsetto-based sound that owed a debt to doo-wop and was popular





as both mellow soul and easy listening. Bell's usual responsibility was to write the lush accompaniment for each production. For "Backstabbers," the whole gang chipped in to give the label and the O'Jays their first big hit. Huff, McFadden, and Whitehead wrote the song (it was the first tune that McFadden and Whitehead had ever written), the O'Jays sang, Thom Bell arranged the strings and horns, and Gamble and Huff produced.

Dance rhythms, orchestral arrangements, and topical lyrics defined the typical P.I. hit. "Backstabbers" had all three, with a clean, precise production that was an astonishing update from earlier O'Jays recordings. Upbeat, slick, and soulful, Philadelphia International almost single-handedly laid the groundwork for the upcoming disco craze. By exaggerating the first two characteristics and ignoring the third, disco would virtually take over popular music during the mid-'70s. A song like "The Hustle" by Van McCoy would utilize the rhythms and arrangement methods that the P.I. staff typically incorporated while sticking to the innocuous phraseology of dance music: "DO THE HUSTLE!" Paradoxically, disco fans would eventually dismiss much of the Philadelphia International material as being too old-fashioned while people who despised the new style lumped most of the P.I. artists into the often misunderstood and much-maligned disco category. To this day, it is hard for some fans to delineate between what was innovative, such as "When Will I See You Again" by the Three Degrees, AND what was derivative, like "Fly, Robin, Fly" by the Silver Convention.

Eddie Levert, Walter Williams, and William Powell were the O'Jays until 1975, when Powell was replaced by Sammy Strain. With fourteen years of experience before "Backstabbers" (they formed in 1958), it was fair to say that the O'Jays were no spring chickens at the time of their first monster hit. Amazingly, they beat the obsolescence that other P.I. acts suffered as disco developed, and they continued to enjoy a hit-studded career all the way into the '90s. As tenacious as they are talented, the O'Jays are a musical institution with four decades of history and ten #1 hits on the R&B charts to prove it.

GREAT MISSES	
AUGUST 1972	#9
<u>POPCORN—HOT BUTTER</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1972	#1
<u>MY DING-A-LING—CHUCK BERRY</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1972	#39
<u>EASY LIVIN'—URIAH HEPP</u>	

## OCTOBER 1972 #1 PAPA WAS A ROLLING STONE—THE TEMPTATIONS

**D**espite losing both of their lead singers, David Ruffin and Eddie Kendricks, to personal differences, and their spiritual leader, Paul Williams, to alcoholism, the Temptations remained mostly unruffled. Self-appointed leader and spokesman Otis Williams made sure that everybody, particularly the new members, toed the company line and cooperated with Motown as often as possible. Dennis Edwards was doing fine as Ruffin's replacement, and new members Richard Street and Damon Harris had acclimated themselves as well. What is really amazing is



how little the band's identity suffered, even though they lost their three most famous voices.

Cooperating with Motown was all well and good, but after a while even Williams began to question the state of affairs. In his opinion, the Temptations were fast becoming nothing more than a creative vassal for producer Norman Whitfield. Williams and the others were growing tired of the social topicality and political poignancy of the songs written by Whitfield and Barrett Strong, and they longed for simpler material. They'd all had more than their share of controversy, and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone" must have been the last straw. They complained bitterly when Whitfield presented the song. Lead singer Dennis Edwards resented the opening lyrics—"It was the third of September...the day that my daddy died"—because his own father had passed away on that date, and he was uncomfortable with the miserable portrait the song's lyrics painted. The stereotype of a shiftless, good-for-nothing, philandering crook and womanizer was played to the hilt in a manner that was more than a little demeaning to blacks. Worse, the song went on for twelve mind-numbing minutes. Granted, it would be edited for single release, but still it would exceed six minutes, which just wasn't commercial and...well, it wasn't Motown. The vocals didn't even make an entrance until well over a minute into the arrangement. Things got even worse when the Temptations began to be perceived as pawns; the band went crazy when some critics described them as "The Norman Whitfield Singers."

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1972	#1
<b><u>I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW—</u></b>	
JOHNNY NASH	
OCTOBER 1972	#3
<b><u>IF YOU DON'T KNOW ME BY NOW—</u></b>	
HAROLD MELVIN AND THE BLUE NOTES	
OCTOBER 1972	#3
<b><u>I'LL BE AROUND—THE SPINNERS</u></b>	

GREAT MISSES	
OCTOBER 1972	#1
<b><u>I AM WOMAN—HELEN REDDY</u></b>	

ceived as pawns; the band went crazy when some critics described them as "The Norman Whitfield Singers."

For his part, Whitfield could not care less. While he remained obstinate, the Temptations sang the song through clenched teeth and silently hoped for its doom. Three Grammy awards, a #1 hit record, and two million units later, the Temptations began to soften their stance. Other songwriters followed their lead. Everywhere, they were seen as the latest and the greatest. Before you knew it, the orchestral work and blaxploitation styles of Isaac Hayes and Barry White had redefined the state of black soul music. Go figure.

## NOVEMBER 1972 #3 YOU OUGHT TO BE WITH ME—AL GREEN

**A**l Green started singing gospel before he was ten years old in a quartet with three of his brothers, but his taste for the "profane" caused him to abandon gospel in search of a career as an R&B singer. He teamed up with some high-school friends to work on a rhythm they called "Back Up Train." Green sang on



the record, and the song became a surprise hit, rising to #41 and earning them an appearance at New York's Apollo Theater. Unfortunately, they were less lucky at producing a backup hit, and the band broke up. Green continued to perform as a solo singer, but recognition was becoming harder to come by—until he met bandleader Willie Mitchell. After considerable work on their production and material choices, the hits began to score. A cover of the Temptations' "I Can't Get Next to You" opened the gate, followed by "Tired of Being Alone" and "Let's Stay Together." From that moment on, everything Green released made an impact. "Look What You Done for Me," "I'm Still in Love with You," and "You Ought to Be with Me" were released consecutively in 1972, and all three broke the pop Top 5, with the last two becoming back-to-back #1 hits on the R&B charts. It wasn't only the hits that were remarkable, though. "Love and Happiness," "Love Ritual," and "Take Me to the River" (the same song the Talking Heads later covered) are only a sampling of the extraordinary material on Green's albums that never made the pop charts. His albums featured enough sound material to be consistently satisfying and provided him with an entire alternative career, something that was unusual for soul and R&B artists at that time.

Consistency was no accident. With the same producer, drummer Al Jackson, and trio of brothers (Leroy Hodges on bass, Charles Hodges on keyboards, and Teenie Hodges on guitar) appearing on virtually every recording, repeating the hit formula was a cinch. "You Ought to Be with Me" was simply another great single in a line of great singles. It followed the pattern established on "Let's Stay Together" while maintaining its own sense of freshness and vivacity. Green may have been predictable, but he was never redundant or boring.

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1972	#1
<b>ME AND MRS. JONES—BILLY PAUL</b>	
NOVEMBER 1972	#37
<b>ALL THE YOUNG DUDES—MOTT THE HOOPLE</b>	

## DECEMBER 1972 #1 YOU'RE SO VAIN—CARLY SIMON

The school of narcissistic songwriting had come to a head in the early '70s. James Taylor, the man who eventually became Carly Simon's husband, can claim the lion's share of responsibility for popularizing the laid-back, self-centered concerns that defined the singer/songwriter phase, but other writers—such as Gordon Lightfoot, Jackson Browne, and Don McLean—also contributed their share. Even Carole King joined the fray. The cover photo on her *Tapestry* album updated her image as one of the premier Brill-building songwriters of the previous decade by picturing her as a tattered and homespun hippie. Joni Mitchell also became popular by singing starkly revealing and autobiographical tales to an audience who had come to expect lyrics that were both confessional and cranial. Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young formed a singer/songwriter supergroup that actually worked, allowing each member to retain his own identity while writing highly personalized songs to which the others lent their harmonies.



**If it was intended as vengeance for a lover who spurned her, it did the trick, particularly considering that it was a #1 hit for three weeks.**

The troubadour style was mostly an album-oriented phenomenon, so few good singles resulted. When they did, they were usually viewed (correctly) as being inferior to the more serious work that appeared on the albums. Taylor was the first artist of the genre to become popular, and he jumped to the front of the herd with two early hit albums, but he seemed to run out of ideas. Ironically, his marriage to Simon may have provided him with the personal solace he needed, but it seems to have wreaked havoc on his insightful nature. His expressiveness never went beyond the one-dimensional range of his voice, and once he began to sing of things other than his own experiences, he sounded trite and ordinary. King was unable to duplicate the success of *Tapestry*, and McLean entered a self-imposed exile. Browne broadened his interests to include human rights and politics while Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young disintegrated. Mitchell and Simon remained as two of the best surviving purveyors of heartrending self-analysis and observation.

Most of the major players in the singer/songwriter mold knew each other well and coexisted in various permutations as friends and lovers (Crosby-Mitchell, Nash-Mitchell, Browne-Mitchell, Taylor-Mitchell, Simon-Taylor, Stills-Collins) like a hippie-fied cast of *Knots Landing*. It was a small world in which each of the players knew each other well and often wrote songs about their relationships. They had become a privileged and elitist club of few members who seemed to be writing songs under the premise that their love lives were universally appealing, convinced that the record-buying public would remain tolerant of their self-indulgence.

Simon had a unique perspective on the whole phenomenon. Born into a wealthy family who controlled one of New York's most successful publishing houses, she was familiar with society life and the conceits that are peculiar to the rich and famous. Her songs reflect her observations and often betray the propriety that her family's lifestyle demanded. She could be just as topical and scathing when singing about her peers. "You're So Vain" is the ultimate put-down of a conceited hedonist (Warren Beatty? Mick Jagger? Who knows?), and it drew attention to the cannibalistic nature of the singer/songwriter circle in the early '70s. For its time, it was a perfect piece of analytical criticism. It contained perceptions that were all the more powerful because they were sung by a woman who sounded eager to make transparent the conceits of her male protagonist. If it was intended as vengeance for a lover who spurned her, it did the trick, particularly when considering that it was a #1 hit for three weeks. Getting Mick Jagger to supply backup vocals made the song even more provocative. While "You're So Vain" was one of the biggest hits of the troubadour/rock star era, it also drove a stake through the heart of the beast, by drawing attention to the contradictory nature of sensitivity and self-obsession.





## DECEMBER 1972 #1 SUPERSTITION—STEVIE WONDER

On his twenty-first birthday, Stevie Wonder's contract with Motown became null and void. Rather than align himself with another label, he decided to take the million-plus dollars that Motown was holding in trust for him and sit back. During this hiatus, substantial offers came in from most of the major labels, but Wonder remained unmoved. Instead, he ensconced himself in a Manhattan hotel room to write and develop ideas, relishing the newfound creative control that he could enjoy while free from any label association. His fascination with electronic instruments led to a fruitful collaborative relationship with two experts in synthesizer technology, Robert Margouloff and Malcolm Cecil. At various Manhattan recording studios, the trio worked fanatically on countless musical ideas, racking up a studio bill that totaled more than \$250,000. The effort was worthwhile, since nobody had previously been able to extract so many warm and expressive tones from the notoriously cold and mechanical-sounding instruments. With enough material in the can to last him a few years, he re-approached Motown and negotiated one of the most lucrative and artistically advantageous record deals in existence. Of course, the label initially balked, but Motown's executives soon came to realize that Wonder was no longer the twelve-year-old kid who required tutoring and artistic direction. From this point on, it was Wonder who provided Motown with a sense of direction.

Wonder forced Motown to accept that albums were the proper medium for his new work. With a measure of doubt, Motown signed Wonder and then stood aside to bear witness as his career grew by leaps and bounds. The first album under his new contract was called *Music of My Mind*, an ambitious project musically but lacking in commercial singles. *Talking Book* was his next project, and it immediately corrected the problem of its predecessor by containing "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" and "Superstition." It became Wonder's first platinum album.

An unfortunate situation arose around this time between Wonder and guitarist Jeff Beck, who previously had been a friend of his. Beck approached Wonder about recording one of his songs, "Maybe Your Baby," but Wonder wanted to save it for himself. Instead, he offered to write Beck another song from scratch and came up with "Superstition." Beck was delighted and recorded a somewhat lackluster version, but a row started when he discovered that Wonder recorded a better version of the song for his upcoming album and had it slated for release as a single. Although Wonder claimed that he requested the song not be chosen for single release, his version was just too good and couldn't be suppressed.

A funky clavinet (a keyboard instrument) and a horn chart that sounds almost satanic in its ferocity made "Superstition" a linchpin recording for its time. Syncopated rhythms bounce around frantically without ever crossing over into ca-

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1972	#3
<u>OH BABE, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY—</u> HURRICANE SMITH	
DECEMBER 1972	#6
<u>DO IT AGAIN—STEELY DAN</u>	



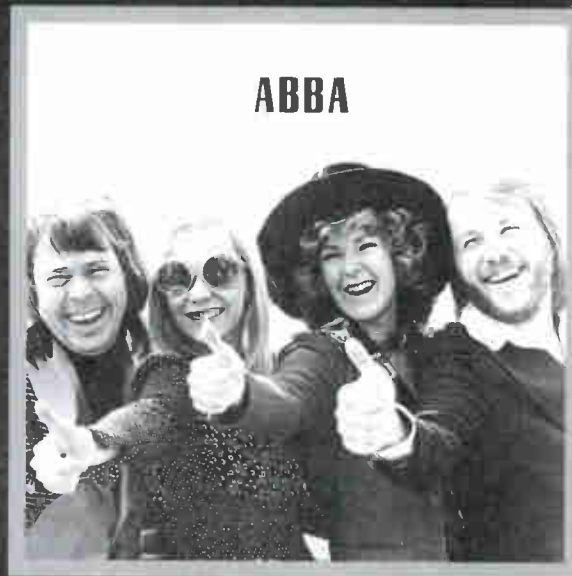


cophony. The song is a dynamic wonder that rises in pitch and volume as the verses proceed. Sounding unhinged and angry, Wonder sings convincingly about letting foolish beliefs get in the way of clear thinking, making it plain that he has no intention of being anybody's fool. On tour with the Rolling Stones, Wonder was exposed to a broader (i.e., whiter) audience, which helped elevate his status as *the* crossover artist of the '70s. "Superstition" subsequently became a staple on both R&B/soul stations and album-oriented radio stations, a feat that he has continued to straddle for most of his career.



**Chapter  
Seven**

**1973-1979**







## MARCH 1973 #5 DRIFT AWAY—DOBIE GRAY

**D**obie Gray never had the consistent recording career that, judging from his output, he surely deserved. Poor promotion, contract difficulties, bankrupt record labels...something always seemed to creep up and crush his career in its tracks. But with indefatigable energy, he kept on pushing, with the net result being only three Top 40 songs spanning fifteen years. “Drift Away” was the kind of song that *had* to make it, no matter how many curveballs it needed to dodge, simply because it was such a great record. Other great records of his fared much worse, but “Drift Away” was tenacious enough to float to position #5 on the strength of its lingering melody and Gray’s melancholy but soulful voice.

For some reason, a lot of people were writing music about music at a time when music wasn’t particularly good. “Killing Me Softly with His Song” (Roberta Flack), “Last Song” (Edward Bear), “Sing” (the Carpenters), “Song Sung Blue” (Neil Diamond), “The Guitar Man” (Bread), “Listen to the Music” (the Doobie Brothers), and “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing” (either the New Seekers or the Hillside Singers) were all contemporaries of one another, but few rose above the simpleminded notion of their lyrical themes. Gray sings about how a good song can help us temporarily forget our problems. The lyrics cut right to the audience’s desire to personalize a song and lose themselves in the rhythmic drive of the beat. When times are hard, music is a means of escape, helping us ease our worries by transcending them. This is no small matter, and the beauty of “Drift Away” is that it enacts exactly what it is celebrating. When it comes on, we drift away.

Gray survived during his off years by doing a few acting stints and recording demos for songwriter Paul Williams. It was through this association that he met Williams’s brother, Mentor, who was also a songwriter and, more importantly, a record producer. On the strength of his relationship with Mentor Williams, Gray obtained a contract with MCA Records and recorded an album in Nashville that is now considered to be a minor classic. “Drift Away” was the title song and was both written and produced by Mentor Williams. Although his subsequent records were also topflight and memorable, Gray drifted

### GREAT HITS

MARCH 1973 #1  
YOU ARE THE SUNSHINE OF MY LIFE—  
STEVIE WONDER

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1973 #1  
TIE A YELLOW RIBBON ROUND THE OLE  
DAK TREE—DAWN

FEBRUARY 1973 #20  
HUMMINGBIRD—SEALS AND CROFT

MARCH 1973 #1  
THE NIGHT THE LIGHTS WENT OUT IN  
GEORGIA—VICKI LAWRENCE

“Drift Away”  
was the kind of  
song that *had*  
to make it,  
no matter  
how many  
curveballs  
it needed  
to dodge.



away from the public eye and into obscurity. He would resurface again six years later with his last minor hit (#37), “You Can Do It.”

### **MARCH 1973 #10 CALL ME (COME BACK HOME)—AL GREEN**

**A**l Green had come a long way since, as the story goes, his dad kicked him out of the family gospel group for listening to Jackie Wilson records. According to those who know him, Green marches to a different drummer. When gospel music would have been the easier path for him, he worked hard to become a pop singer. Then, just as he was beginning to settle in as a soul legend, he fought his way out of pop music to become a minister. The odd thing was that before he became the Reverend Al Green, he was singing inspirational pop music (in a broad sense) while his gospel music was generic enough to qualify as pop (also in a broad sense). His fans, though, couldn’t forget that Green’s pop recordings had happened. In some ways, they provided us with a sense of awakening—a



peaceful moment of respite from the carnality and negativity that were the subject of so much popular music. “Call Me (Come Back Home)” invoked purity, kindness, faithfulness, peace of mind, trustworthiness, and forgiveness. In short, it was beautiful. Green made it sound easy to sidestep our anger and concentrate on what was right. His songwriting and vocal style

remained consistent ever since “Let’s Stay Together,” causing some critics to think of him as a one-trick pony, but they were looking in the wrong places. Green’s music is about emotion, not about being a stylistic chameleon. Like “Let’s Stay Together,” “Call Me” was written by drummer Al Jackson, producer Willie Mitchell, and Green. Jackson was shot dead in October 1975 when an intruder broke into his home. Mitchell continues to produce records in Memphis and was later reunited with Green to work on a gospel album called *He Is the Light*. Green continues to follow his muse. May it bring him as much joy and peace as his wonderful music has brought to others.

### **MARCH 1973 #16 WALK ON THE WILD SIDE—LOU REED**

**I**n the early ’70s, David Bowie had become such a (boy?) wonder that he was able to freely bestow his Midas touch upon other artists who interested him. Bowie gave “All the Young Dudes” to Mott the Hoople, and their flagging career was instantly revived when the song became an anthem of sorts for the glam-rock fans. Iggy Pop, who had come to resemble little more than a burnt-out loony, saw his career revitalized as well when Bowie took the production reins for a series of albums that once again placed Pop on the cutting edge. Bowie also contacted Lou Reed, whose work with the Velvet Underground was one of Bowie’s most potent





early influences. Reed was seeking direction for his solo career around this time. After Reed's failed first attempt at a recording in Europe, Bowie came aboard to help him cross over to the flourishing style of glitter and glam-rock.

While Bowie wrote word collages that suggested dadaism and surrealism, Reed was much more literal in his word play. With "Walk on the Wild Side," he continued to do what he had always done, which was to artfully document the decadence of the New York City underground. All Bowie could do was dress up Reed's droll, deadpan delivery to make it more palatable to a mass audience. Narcissism was a key ingredient of glitter music, and Reed had plenty to spare—perhaps too much. He sounds as though he has barely enough strength to stay awake till the end of the record. Also, the subject matter of transvestitism, oral sex, and drugs was hardly typical for a pop record, making Reed's laconic delivery all the more odd and disconcerting. "Walk on the Wild Side" paints such a vivid picture of deliberate decadence

**The subject matter of transvestitism, oral sex, and drugs was hardly typical for a pop record, making Reed's laconic delivery all the more odd and disconcerting.**

that it can still be shocking twenty years later—perhaps even more so in light of AIDS and the "family values" debate. The gentle strings that weave through the verses help romanticize the loneliness that lurks below the surface of Reed's characters. When he invokes the "colored girls" to sing "do do-do do-do, do-do-do" and their voices fade into the lush atmospheric sound of a lazy baritone sax solo, the music suggests the atmosphere of a New York City subway station at three in the morning—an experience I'd just as soon have by proxy, thank you. Although Reed would come close with his wordy and topical theme album *New York*, a more chillingly stark portrait could hardly have been painted of America's largest and darkest city.

## APRIL 1973 #11 REELIN' IN THE YEARS—STEELY DAN

**H**ow's my little girl?"

What happens when rock and roll gets to be too smart for its own good? Well, instead of just screaming its head off with rage and frustration or revolting against the machine, it pauses, seethes, and then calmly lets loose a torrent of pithy and convoluted insults at whoever is standing in the line of fire—and then notes the irony of it all.

Steely Dan was too smart for its own good, or maybe just too smart for rock and roll. Its exacting attention to the finest details of its recordings was second to none. The miracle of Steely Dan stemmed from its ability to maintain an imperfect veneer, despite the excessive polishing. Smoothness connotes lack of depth, but these well-rubbed compositions somehow remain as unfathomably deep as a blind ravine. Maybe it's the curled-lip delivery of vocalist Donald Fagen, or the



## GREAT HITS

APRIL 1973	#2
<b>DANIEL—ELTON JOHN</b>	
JULY 1973	#1
<b>LET'S GET IT ON—MARVIN GAYE</b>	
JULY 1973	#2
<b>LIVE AND LET DIE—WINGS</b>	
JULY 1973	#10
<b>FEELIN' STRONGER EVERY DAY—CHICAGO</b>	
SEPTEMBER 1973	#12
<b>KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR—BOB DYLAN</b>	
SEPTEMBER 1973	#15
<b>CHINA GROVE—THE DOOBIE BROTHERS</b>	
OCTOBER 1973	#28
<b>FUNKY STUFF—KOOL AND THE GANG</b>	
NOVEMBER 1973	#1
<b>SHOW AND TELL—AL WILSON</b>	
NOVEMBER 1973	#2
<b>GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD—ELTON JOHN</b>	
NOVEMBER 1973	#5
<b>HELLO, IT'S ME—TODD RUNDGREN</b>	
NOVEMBER 1973	#8
<b>LIVIN' FOR THE CITY—STEVIE WONDER</b>	

elliptical density of the songs' wordplay, or maybe it's the crusty characters who inhabit their song-stories, but the music of Steely Dan has easily survived the past twenty years with hardly a scratch.

Another far more obvious reason for the band's continued relevance is the quality of musicianship in its recordings. Using only the finest available session musicians, and even then torturing these hapless instrumentalists by having them run through take after take after take, they compiled each song as an end unto itself. Considering the band's passion for jazz improvisation, this was a rather improbable way to work. A typical jazz session might consist of a series of live "takes," each one a variation on a fundamental theme. Steely Dan's method was akin to choosing the best bits from each take and then meticulously compiling them into one irrefutably seamless whole.

Although the process was time-consuming, expensive, frustrating, and exhausting, it bestowed their recordings with a self-respect that was uncommon for pop music. They worked tirelessly to obtain exactly what they had in mind, knowing full well that if their vision was flawed, then the entire ordeal would have been an exercise in futility. Fortunately, the ends usually justified the means. The net result is one of the most consistently gratifying bodies of work that any modern group of musicians has ever assembled.

Originally (and finally), Steely Dan was Walter Becker and Donald Fagen. In the beginning, they had an assemblage of musicians

that resembled a band, but in the final analysis, this pair of songwriters thwarted any pretense of democracy. The first Steely Dan album did a superb job of disguising this arrangement. No fewer than three bandmembers shared the lead vocal chores, while the intoxicating guitar work of Jeff "Skunk" Baxter and Denny Dias seemed to be integral to the recording process. Becker and Fagen supplied the vision, but the input of the other bandmembers seemed to be absolutely essential to bringing these rather idiosyncratic ideas to life.

The album *Can't Buy a Thrill* provided us with our first glimpse at Steely Dan. Its ten songs were written, structured, arranged, and produced with a level of precision that was uncommonly cranial for popular music. Some critics



dismissed the work for being too coldheartedly calculated. Ironically, each subsequent album was progressively more precise. In light of the cynically calculated approach to recording that has pervaded much of corporate pop throughout the '70s, '80s, and '90s, I wonder if these critics now blame Steely Dan for this trend. Suffice to say that strict attention to detail and manipulative calculation are far from synonymous.

"Reelin' in the Years" is very much a typical Steely Dan recording in that it reflects a perfectionist's attention to detail, but it also contains some of the finest guitar work ever to appear on a hit single. Creative phrasing, lightning-fast licks, and perfectly executed hooks weave back and forth between Baxter and hired gun Elliott Randall. Baxter supplies the melliflously repetitive phrase that sets up Randall to launch into the distorted overdrive of his solos. Baxter was probably every bit as creative as Randall, but song sculptors Becker and Fagen were clever enough to know that Randall's fiery brand of soloing would contrast brilliantly with Baxter's techno-cool approach, yielding six-string kismet in four-and-a-half minutes.

Irony has played an important role in Becker and Fagen's writing, and I'm not sure if it is appropriate now to view their songs from a post-ironic perspective. "Reelin' in the Years" raises this very point, since its lyrics hector an ex-lover for glancing sidelong at the past. Today, the song inspires its listeners to glance backward in the much the same manner, to the heady days when this song represented something new and exciting. Although anything is possible, I doubt that Becker and Fagen could have foreseen the inherent irony of the song one day inspiring fans to behave in much the same manner as the song's antagonist, but then again....

## DECEMBER 1973 #3 UNTIL YOU COME BACK TO ME [THAT'S WHAT I'M GONNA DO]—ARETHA FRANKLIN

The black pride movement had such momentum in the early '70s that Aretha Franklin was able to propel a four-sided gospel album, with no hit single and only a modicum of airplay, onto the Top 10 album chart. The power of soul music,

### GREAT MISSES

APRIL 1973	#9
<u>HOCUS POCUS—FOCUS</u>	
JUNE 1973	#4
<u>SMOKE ON THE WATER—DEEP PURPLE</u>	
JULY 1973	#1
<u>THE MORNING AFTER—</u> <u>MAUREEN MCGOVERN</u>	
JULY 1973	#1
<u>DELTA DAWN—HELEN REDDY</u>	
JULY 1973	#3
<u>WHO'S IN THE STRAWBERRY PATCH</u> <u>WITH SALLY—DAWN</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1973	#1
<u>HALF BREED—CHER</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1973	#3
<u>HEARTBEAT, IT'S A LOVEBEAT—</u> <u>THE DeFRANCO FAMILY</u>	
OCTOBER 1973	#21
<u>WE MAY NEVER PASS THIS WAY</u> <u>AGAIN—SEALS AND CROFT</u>	



particularly Franklin's brand, seemed unstoppable. Unfortunately, it would shortly lose direction and be overrun by the disco craze. Timelessly talented artists like Franklin would find themselves unceremoniously displaced by computer-generated beats and hypnotically repetitive rhythms with absolutely no sense of dynamics or emotional shading (except for the reptilian mindlessness of lust). Although her songs would continue to appear on the R&B charts for a while longer, "Until You Come Back to Me" would mark Franklin's last appearance in the Top 10 until 1985's "Freeway of Love."

Stevie Wonder, one of the few artists from the old school who would comfortably survive the onslaught of disco without compromise, composed the song with Clarence Paul and Morris Broadnax. Although Wonder had recorded it in 1967, during his early Motown tenure, his version was never tapped for single release. It is an unusually restrained performance for Franklin and is as noteworthy for its lush production as it is for her vocal work. As for her opening phrase on the piano—whew. She sets the mood with a gorgeously succinct touch and then lets the melody and production speak for themselves. It would be her last great recording for Atlantic Records.

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1973 LOVE'S THEME— LOVE UNLIMITED ORCHESTRA	#1

GREAT MISSES	
DECEMBER 1973 SMOKIN' IN THE BOYS ROOM— BROWNSVILLE STATION	#3

In an attempt to remain current, Franklin took on a regrettably tacky, disco-fied image of a sex queen and, worse, allowed her music to lapse into some of the more stereotypical elements of disco. Quality of performance and soul-

fulness took a backseat to slickness and processed rhythms. In 1975, her long-time producer Jerry Wexler left Atlantic for Warner Brothers. With nobody to watch the store, Franklin's music suffered further. For a short while she teamed up with songwriter/producer Curtis Mayfield for a significant improvement in the quality of her output, but she soon regressed once again to the mindlessness of disco until her Atlantic contract lapsed. Her subsequent association with music mogul Clive Davis and Arista Records would eventually revitalize her popularity and place her with such sympathetic producers as Luther Vandross. She even had an artistic rebirth on some of her recordings, but to date none has had the impact of her best work at Atlantic.

## DECEMBER 1973 #38 I CAN'T STAND THE RAIN—ANN PEEBLES

**P**roducer Willie Mitchell was a consummate professional who worked for years at developing a soul sound that would be authentic enough to appeal to blacks and yet smooth enough to attract a white audience. His success with Al Green proved him to be quite capable of achieving his intended goal. His sound was distinctive and instantly identifiable, with the only drawback being that all the





vocalists who worked with him had the same core sound backing them up. Green was by far the most popular, so naturally all the others would be compared with him. Ann Peebles was singing for Mitchell before he even met Green, but Mitchell's consistent production sound caused most later listeners to view her as Green's female counterpart.

Peebles never achieved a tremendous amount of recognition from the public, but quite a few famous (or soon to be famous) artists were paying close attention. John Lennon raved about her, as did Bonnie Raitt. Many have borrowed a title or two from her impressive catalog and have since become identified with her songs, but a look at the songwriting credits (most often Peebles and her husband, Don Bryant) will usually reveal who the actual source was. Whether it was Graham Parker, Paul Young ("I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down"), Lowell George of Little Feat ("I Can't Stand the Rain"), or Bette Midler ("I Feel Like Breaking Up Somebody's Home Tonight") who was paying homage, Peebles's vocals had a distinct influence on the way other artists would approach her songs.

"I Can't Stand the Rain" was her only Top 40 single, and believe me, it's worth searching out. Peebles possessed an understated intensity that comes through loud and clear on her biggest hit. Her vocals display a sense of despair that is barely kept in check while the fat Memphis rhythm section grinds along beneath her, tempting her to lose any sense of self-control. She holds back, but the tension becomes palpable. Her restraint is admirable and ultimately shifts the emotional baggage from the singer to the listener. By proxy, it is the listener who must bear the burden of the lyrics and share in her sense of unease. All the while, the music imitates a steady rainstorm with the potential of becoming a full-force gale. The rain is both taunting and hypnotic—despicable but impossible to ignore. The wet window pane is a tired metaphor for tears, but here it is easy to imagine how it catches the steam from her breath while displaying a prismatic pattern that skews any hope of accurate perception. Is it loneliness or rage that lodges itself into the mind of the listener? Peebles's greatest talent is her ability to make us feel good while becoming willing participants in her painful anger. Both universal and timeless, "I Can't Stand the Rain" captures the essence of what makes soul music such a powerful medium.

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1973	#19
<u>LIVIN' FOR YOU</u> —AL GREEN	
JANUARY 1974	#19
<u>MIDNIGHT RIDER</u> —GREG ALLMAN	

### GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1974	#12
<u>I LOVE</u> —TOM T. HALL	
JANUARY 1974	#25
<u>JIM DANDY</u> —BLACK OAK ARKANSAS	
FEBRUARY 1974	#1
<u>DARK LADY</u> —CHER	
FEBRUARY 1974	#1
<u>SEASONS IN THE SUN</u> —TERRY JACKS	
MARCH 1974	#1
<u>HOOKEE ON A FEELING</u> —BLUE SUEDE	
MARCH 1974	#1
<u>THE LOCO-MOTION</u> — GRAND FUNK RAILROAD	





## APRIL 1974 #16 DON'T YOU WORRY 'BOUT A THING—STEVIE WONDER

Stevie Wonder was certainly prescient when he stated that albums would become his dominant format. His LPs from this period are so thematically and musically linked that it is difficult to extract a single without losing some of the context. “Boogie on Reggae Woman” (#13) and “You Haven’t Done Nothin’” (#1) are pivotal songs on LP but lose something when programmed away from non-single tracks like “Creepin’,” from 1974’s *Fulfillingness’ First Finale*. Likewise, “Living for the City” (#8) and “Higher Ground” (#4) are brilliant pieces of work but sound better in the company of “Golden Lady” and “He’s Misstra Know-It-

All,” from the 1973 album *Innervisions*. By just about anybody’s standard, *Innervisions* was one of the best albums of the ’70s. It combines an interesting blend of bleak and foreboding predictions with a fairy-tale vision of hope. Song after song, Wonder’s lyrics express a pessimistic optimism that somehow never seems contradictory. The world is portrayed as a dangerous place where awful things are bound to happen, but a spirituality hovers over everything, which renders the harsh realities impotent.

One song that stands out as a playful comic relief is “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout a Thing.” A half-salsa, half-funky groove gives the rhythm a slippery bounce while Wonder ad-libs some crazy Spanglish until he settles on the word “chevere.” Grooving on how fun it sounds rolling off of his tongue, he repeats the word while haranguing the listener with boasts that he speaks “very fluent Spanish.” This odd and humorous intro sets up a gorgeously constructed melody that floats

all around the rhythm, sounding as loose and carefree as the lyric. Wonder’s voice adds to the relaxed atmosphere by savoring the sounds of each word as he sings them, softening the hard edges of the consonants and rolling the words together. By song’s end, his voice is up a full octave, the band is grooving, and a background chorus of overdubbed Stevie Wonders repeats the phrase “cheeeeh-vere.” Both fun and danceable, “Don’t You Worry ‘Bout a Thing” performed the worst of the singles from *Innervisions*, stalling at #16. Que será será. Tal vez este disco no fue popular como los otros, pero con seguridad, es “chevere.”

## JUNE 1974 #4 RIKKI DON'T LOSE THAT NUMBER—STEELY DAN

In the ’70s, an awful lot of bands were singing about an awful lot of things, but most were pretty much consistent in their themes. At the end of the day, we all

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1974	#1
<u>BAND ON THE RUN—PAUL McCARTNEY/WINGS</u>	
MAY 1974	#32
<u>LET'S GET MARRIED—AL GREEN</u>	

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1974	#1
<u>THE STREAK—RAY STEVENS</u>	
MAY 1974	#1
<u>BILLY, DON'T BE A HERO—BO DONALDSON AND THE KEYWOODS</u>	



knew that Robert Plant wanted somebody to squeeze his lemon, that the Allman Brothers were ramblin' men, that Pink Floyd was desperately neurotic, that David Bowie was a karmic chameleon, that Fleetwood Mac changed partners a few times too often, and that Alice Cooper was deliberately attempting to shock us. These were some of the monster bands whose careers were peaking when Steely Dan established itself on the scene.

Who knew what Steely Dan was singing about? Practically every song was veiled in mystery or contained personal references that meant nothing to the listening audience. If not personal, then the references were often scholastic in nature and required a college degree in Western literature to discern the melodic insights. Also, the group hardly ever addressed the same topic twice—that is, *when* you could determine just what the topic was. The only thing a listener could consistently expect from Steely Dan was inscrutability. How could you *not* be nonplussed by a pair of guys who would pen the following lyrics?

Walk around collecting Turkish Union dues. They will call you sir and shine your shoes.

Greek...medallion...sparkles...when you smile. Sorry...angel...I get hungry...like a child.

When Black Friday comes, I'll fly down to Muswellbrook. Gonna strike all the big red words from my little black book.

Five names I can hardly stand to hear, including yours and mine and one more chimp who isn't here.

Even Cathy Berberian knows there's one roulade she can't sing.  
Maybe he's a fairy? You know I'm through with Buzz.

As clever as this conglomeration of words might be, **WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?** Granted, I chose them at random and dropped them here completely out of context, but I've slowly discerned meaning from enough other Steely Dan song-stories to be relatively certain that these aren't just nonsense syllabics. Like a cryptogram, they at least make you want to understand them. Compared with the slew of contemporary vague-sters who would have us believe that their words are more than cosmic hogwash, Steely Dan was downright earthy. Think of Yes; or Emerson, Lake, and Palmer; or Nektar (remember Nektar?); or Kansas; or even Peter Frampton (the most incredible compiler of non sequiturs I've ever heard). A fragment of a generation was coming of age listening to lyrics that were deliberately constructed to be indecipherable.

"Rikki Don't Lose That Number" seems to possess a soul all its own, and this is true of most Steely Dan compositions. Becker and Fagen's writing was so complex that it provided a landscape for the song's characters to inhabit, granting them their own universe. Maybe we don't understand their culture or their dialogue, but they become as real and tangible as the notes themselves. Only with repeated listenings do we begin to fathom the personalities and idiosyncrasies of these "people." Very few writers are capable of this. Usually, a pop song attempts to construct a mood or a personal reflection that causes us to relate to the vocalist. Becker



and Fagen went well beyond this and captured the characters' universe in full perspective. This type of writing is a talent that transcends mere artisanship and defines Walter Becker and Donald Fagen as diverse and visionary artists.

## JUNE 1974 #6 WATERLOO—ABBA

**S**ay what you will about Abba, they did the best job of representing what was *good* about mid-'70s pop. Their music might have been as rootless as a Chia Pet

but, also like that bizarre animal/plant, it could grow on you. In the mid-'70s, America was already awash with such popular non-rock acts as the Carpenters, Barbra Streisand, Barry Manilow, Anne Murray, and Olivia Newton-John, so why not add a sweet-sounding, exotic band from Sweden? All of the above acts had plainly discernible talent (some more obviously than others), not to mention well-honed and carefully maintained images, which made them the pop phenomena of the mid-'70s. The music these artists created was aimed at a slightly older age group than rock and roll's target audience, so it was geared to reflect the sophisticated tastes and more mature lifestyles that an older audience presumably possessed. An older audience also implied a more conservative demeanor and less musically adventurous tastes. Unfortunately, this also meant that the material, although crisply produced, was deliberately lacking in innovation or controversy. As a result, a cycle developed that stunted the growth of pop music. Abba embraced the homogenized lack of topicality that defined most middle-of-the-road artists but geared its material to a more sprightly audience. The typical teenage rock-and-roll fan and the typical mid-40s housewife might not have cared for Abba, but virtually everybody between these two extremes found something to like. The unprecedented appearance of a Swedish pop group on the American charts notwithstanding, Abba's first American single was catchy enough to become instantly familiar.

"Waterloo" was produced with the deliberate intent of crossing all cultural and age barriers. Since the early '60s, most European nations have

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1974	#32
<u>ANOTHER PARK, ANOTHER SUNDAY—</u> THE DOOBIE BROTHERS	
JULY 1974	#2
<u>DON'T LET THE SUN GO DOWN</u> <u>ON ME—ELTON JOHN</u>	
AUGUST 1974	#1
<u>YOU HAVEN'T DONE NOTHIN'—</u> STEVIE WONDER	
AUGUST 1974	#8
<u>SWEET HOME ALABAMA—</u> LYNYRD SKYNYRD	
AUGUST 1974	#22
<u>FREE MAN IN PARIS—JONI MITCHELL</u>	
OCTOBER 1974	#1
<u>I CAN HELP—BILLY SWAN</u>	
OCTOBER 1974	#22
<u>WHEN WILL I SEE YOU AGAIN—</u> THE THREE DEGREES	
NOVEMBER 1974	#1
<u>CAT'S IN THE CRADLE—</u> HARRY CHAPIN	
NOVEMBER 1974	#3
<u>BOOGIE ON REGGAE WOMAN—</u> STEVIE WONDER	
NOVEMBER 1974	#7
<u>SHA LA LA (MAKE ME HAPPY)—</u> AL GREEN	



competed in something known as the Eurovision Song Contest. Without going into detail about how material is chosen or how songs are judged, the contest usually breeds thoroughly disposable ditties that attempt to prove the creative superiority of their respective cultures while simultaneously appealing to judges from many cultures. In an attempt to mean something to everybody, the songs are usually trite and meaningless. “Waterloo” was Sweden’s entry in 1974 and has the distinction of being praised as the best song ever to come out of this rather dubious event. By targeting the broadest of audiences, Abba inadvertently discovered a huge fan base that the music industry had overlooked. America had always been oblivious to the outcome of the Eurovision Song Contest, but Abba appealed to a large piece of the public that had grown indifferent to pop music trends. Bull’s-eye. “Waterloo” was internationally huge and, in turn, the American record industry was astonished to discover that Abba had discovered a market demand that they hadn’t known existed.

Speaking of taste, what were we thinking of in 1974? I realize that my song selection for each year starts to slim down considerably starting in 1973, and I’ve been racking my brain trying to determine if this is directly attributable to my own personal prejudices. Of course, to an extent it is, but I don’t really think that explains things sufficiently. You see, 1973 to 1976 happens to have been my high-school years, my “golden age.” All previous generations seem to be able to reminisce about the music that accompanied them to adulthood, so why is it that I feel robbed of this pleasure? I’m not alone, either. Most of my contemporaries agree that popular music was atrocious when we were in high school. I’ll let the titles bear this out. Here’s a list of ten top-selling #1 songs from just five years earlier, 1969:

- 1) “Get Back”—The Beatles
- 2) “Honky Tonk Women”—The Rolling Stones
- 3) “Everyday People”—Sly and the Family Stone
- 4) “I Can’t Get Next to You”—The Temptations
- 5) “Crimson and Clover”—Tommy James and the Shondells
- 6) “Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye”—Steam
- 7) “Come Together”—The Beatles
- 8) “Something”—The Beatles
- 9) “Someday We’ll Be Together”—The Supremes
- 10) “Suspicious Minds”—Elvis Presley

### GREAT MISSES

JULY 1974 #1  
 (YOU'RE) HAVING MY BABY—  
 PAUL ANKA

JULY 1974 #1  
 THE NIGHT CHICAGO DIED—  
 PAPER LACE

AUGUST 1974 #4  
 BEACH BABY—FIRST CLASS

OCTOBER 1974 #2  
 DO IT [TIL YOU'RE SATISFIED]—  
 B.T.EXPRESS

OCTOBER 1974 #5  
 MY MELODY OF LOVE—BOBBY VINTON

OCTOBER 1974 #12  
 I'VE GOT THE MUSIC IN ME—KIKI DEE

NOVEMBER 1974 #1  
 KUNG-FU FIGHTING—CARL DOUGLAS



Now, here's a list of ten top-selling #1 songs from 1974:

- 1) "Seasons in the Sun" – Terry Jacks
- 2) "The Streak" – Ray Stevens
- 3) "(You're) Having My Baby" – Paul Anka
- 4) "Kung Fu Fighting" – Carl Douglas
- 5) "Billy, Don't Be a Hero" – Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods
- 6) "The Loco-Motion" – Grand Funk
- 7) "Hooked on a Feeling" – Blue Swede
- 8) "Angie Baby" – Helen Reddy
- 9) "Dark Lady" – Cher
- 10) "The Night Chicago Died" – Paper Lace

Now you tell me. In the '70s, it seems as though somebody took the charts, turned them upside down, and then shook like hell until all the garbage fell into the highest positions. Is it my taste that has skewed things unalterably toward the '60s, or is there just cause in labeling most mid-'70s pop music as terrible? The truth is, Top 40 music was hijacked in the mid-'70s and delivered into the hands of heathens who had no respect for our musical heritage. Through mergers, power plays, and buyouts, the industry was reduced to only six major players who together wielded enough power to seriously hamper the army of independent labels that had once defined the rock-and-roll spirit. At the same time, these mega-labels weren't equipped to replace the music the independents had produced with anything of equivalent quality. An unfortunate consequence of these circumstances is that the Top 40 declined in significance. What did big business know about rock and roll? Apparently nothing. The industry deliberately catered to the lowest

common denominator of generic tastes and waited to make a bundle. The struggle between artist and business interests was over (for the time being), and business clearly had won.

**In the '70s, it seems as though somebody took the charts, turned them upside down, and then shook like hell until all the garbage fell into the highest positions.**

Or so it seemed. The truth is that record companies were suffering from a decrease in sales for the first time in decades. These huge conglomerates were reeling from bloated expense accounts and top-heavy management costs. A combination of fear and greed skewed the judgment of executives who would throw something at the wall only if they were sure that it was gooey enough to stick. Complacency also played a role, now that the market was less competitive. The major labels innately knew that it was much easier to duplicate a proven formula than to take risks. With fewer choices, were we beholden to choose from the dearth that was presented? As far as I can tell, the answer is that the best mid-'70s music was to be found elsewhere (i.e., off the pop singles charts), and happened almost accidentally. In the mid-'60s, you would trip over a





good song whichever way you turned. In the mid-'70s, good music was still there for anybody to find, but you had to be (very) selective. Albums were now a welcome refuge from the Top 40, since artists at least had some artistic control over their long-playing product.

Meanwhile, a reactionary underground culture was fomenting that would soon cause the industry to rethink its methodologies, but punk would take years to develop. When it did, independent labels would experience a resurgence that would shake the very foundations of corporate music. In the meantime, we would have to wait.

## JANUARY 1975 #9 #9 DREAM—JOHN LENNON

**A**fter the initial burst of soul-wrenchingly honest creativity that highlighted John Lennon's first real solo record (the *Plastic Ono Band* album), he began to drift off into an artistic abyss. His albums, both artistically and commercially, slipped from better than ordinary (*Imagine*) to dreadful (*Mind Games*). His next album, *Walls and Bridges*, turned Lennon's slide around and yielded his first post-Beatles #1 single with the dance-oriented Elton John duet titled "Whatever Gets You through the Night." The song was light years away from his previously intense material, and although it was catchy, it still seemed slight coming from Lennon. It was the follow-up single from the same album that not only hearkened back to his best solo efforts, but also brought to mind some of his work with the Beatles. "#9 Dream" is unusually spiritual for Lennon and, most amazingly, it captures him at a moment of peaceful reflection.

"#9 Dream" deserves a place among Lennon's best compositions simply because of the sheer beauty of the music. Never as melodic as his ex-writing partner, Paul McCartney, Lennon's strength was usually in his rhythms and his lyrics. It's almost odd to hear him suddenly being so unabashedly tuneful, reveling in the lushness of his melody. Lennon was always the Beatle whose music took on added relevance because of his constant autobiographical soul-searching. As a solo artist, his material gained added depth simply because it was *John Lennon* who was singing. With "#9 Dream," it was such a pleasant surprise to hear this troubled character sound at peace. If it was sung by someone else, it might not have had the same effect, but Lennon brought a *history* (and *quite* a history at that) to the proceedings, which lent the song gravity. It was rooted firmly to the earth while the melody and production soared through the clouds.

After this album, Lennon retired from music to become a full-time house-husband and father. Only the disappointing tapes of his oft-delayed *Rock and Roll* album saw the light of day in the interim. After five years, he and Yoko Ono

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1975 #1  
HAVE YOU NEVER BEEN MELLOW—  
OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN

FEBRUARY 1975 #3  
THE NO NO SONG—RINGO STARR



returned with *Double Fantasy*, their promising and, of course, autobiographical update. Lennon in particular seemed to be artistically rejuvenated, healthy, and happy. He was pointlessly murdered shortly after the album's release by a disturbed gunman whose thoughtless act was as unimaginable as it was horrible. Lennon's assassination shocked the world and deeply touched anybody who had ever listened to his music. Always perceived as an idol and a (reluctant) leader, he was now seen to be vulnerably human, as well. Lennon has since become the martyr that rock and roll never had and never hoped for.

### MARCH 1975 #13 L-O-V-E (LOVE)—AL GREEN

It used to be that gospel singers became pop stars. That's just the way that it was—with the exception of Little Richard, of course, who vacillated back and forth for most of his career. Al Green is one singer who completely reversed the trend. He sang gospel in his younger years as a member of his family group but when forced to choose between singing in a church and the allure of being a star, it was no contest. He struggled for years, but his affiliation with producer Willie Mitchell elevated him to the status of the #1 soul-singing love man of the early '70s. Two events led Green toward a conversion, one in his sound and the other in his religious conviction. Since you don't mess with perfection, Green's singing and Mitchell's production remained static for their ongoing series of hits. The team of backup musicians remained essentially the same as well, so a sameness began to overtake the proceedings that, by the mid-'70s, frustrated Green. For this reason, he began to consider handling the production chores by himself. It was around this time that he was attacked by a female acquaintance. A girlfriend, frustrated at Green's refusal of a marriage offer, became blindingly jealous of his adoring female fans. She poured a skillet of searing grits over him while he was in the bath, causing severe burns over most of his body. She then took her own life with a gun that belonged to Green.

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1974	#1
<u>SHINING STAR</u> —EARTH, WIND, & FIRE	
MARCH 1975	#31
<u>TANGLED UP IN BLUE</u> —BOB DYLAN	
APRIL 1975	#1
<u>SISTER GOLDEN HAIR</u> —AMERICA	
APRIL 1975	#37
<u>LIVING A LITTLE, LAUGHING A LITTLE</u> —THE SPINNERS	

During his lengthy healing process, Green became more attuned with his religious nature. Afterward, he was ordained a non-denominational minister and bought a church. In 1977 he returned to recording, but without his longtime associates. The results lacked the commercial impact of his earlier recordings but were emotionally charged, and contained significant references to his religious conversion. A truly amazing recording of "To Sir with Love" from this time displayed his innate ability to transform secular material into a gorgeous religious offering without any adjustment to the songwriters' original intentions. The *Belle* album and *Truth 'N' Time* (which contains "To Sir with



Love”) show Green successfully finding compatibility between his secular music and his religious beliefs, but he soon decided that his dedication to God should not be compromised. A bad fall from a stage reinforced that thinking. By 1980, he emerged as a full-blown gospel artist and has since released a series of highly satisfying records in this style.

Green’s recent gospel recordings are as artistically sound as his most popular soul recordings, but they lack the crossover appeal of his earlier hits. Although his new records have been exclusively gospel, at concerts he still sings many of his fans’ old favorites. At one such show in Louisiana, I chanced to see him perform with a number of gospel stars. This appearance made it apparent to me just how much religiosity there was in his early records. On reflection, almost all of his songs display an underlying decency and sense of human kindness that is actually quite compatible with religious music.

Although he was a soul-singing pop star, Green’s songs never allude to the rebelliousness that is common to a great deal of popular music. In fact, there is hardly any negativity at all in his writing. Even the lustful intensity in his smooth and silky voice is constantly filtered through a sense of true emotion. With no exception that I know of, Green’s songs continuously use L-O-V-E as their driving force. Just look at the titles: “Let’s Stay Together,” “I’m Still in Love with You,” “Living for You,” “Call Me (Come Back Home),” “Let’s Get Married,” and, of course, “L-O-V-E.”

A more generous and all-consuming song about the power of love is unimaginable, even when considering the mother lode of songs that have attempted to do the same thing. Thousands of artists have sung about the redeeming power of love, usually with cloying and annoyingly sentimental results. “L-O-V-E” avoids this by being personal and universal at the same time. Green is not preaching the obvious (i.e., “Love is a good thing”). Instead, he is celebrating the joy that love has brought to him and tries to apply it to everybody else. Recorded before his conversion, “L-O-V-E” is a beautiful celebration of life that can easily be interpreted as a simple yet profound celebration of faith.

## **JUNE 1975 #2 I’M NOT IN LOVE—10 C.C.**

**B**y the mid-’70s, rock music was beginning to show its age. For the first time since its invention, rock was being created by musicians who never knew a time when there was no such thing as adolescent-based music. Interestingly, instead of maintaining this youthful liveliness, the musical form matured as steadily as its practitioners. Rock was twenty years old, and so was the median age of its target audience.

GREAT MISSES	
APRIL 1975	#1
THANK GOD I’M A COUNTRY BOY— JOHN DENVER	
MAY 1975	#18
I’LL PLAY FOR YOU— SEALS AND CROFT	



A factor that contributed greatly to rock music's maturation was the technological development of the recording process. At its inception, recordings were usually made live and were little more than an accurate reproduction of a group's performance. The introduction of stereophonic recording in 1957—in which two microphones and two transmission channels were used to simulate the sound separation of live hearing—stimulated creative engineers to develop intriguing ways to utilize this two-track innovation. Musician/inventor Les Paul laid the groundwork in the early '50s by artfully using multitracking techniques in his recordings, freeing him to record parts of a song individually and then “mix” the results. Soon, his ideas became commonplace. In the '60s, Phil Spector managed to cram scores of sounds onto his recordings with only three tracks, then mix them down to mono. Later, the Beatles' overactive imaginations forced producer George Martin to develop creative solutions to the limitations presented by their equipment. With his

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1975	#37
<b>BLACK FRIDAY—STEELY DAN</b>	

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1975	#1
<b>RHINESTONE COWBOY— GLEN CAMPBELL</b>	
JUNE 1975	#3
<b>PLEASE MISTER PLEASE— OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN</b>	

help, they combined basic instrumentation and vocals with orchestration and special effects, allowing them to create something as complex as the *Sgt. Pepper* album with only four tracks. Four-track recording led to eight-track, then sixteen, then twenty-four, then the sky's-the-limit, each time simplifying the basic problem of accurately recording a potentially infinite number of sounds, but seriously complicating the process of combining these sounds into a clarified whole.

None of this was done cheaply. Mixing all these sounds now accounted for a full half of the allotted studio time for the typical recording session. Although, to be sure, studio musicians were always a part of the recording process, their roles increased greatly as the recording process grew more complicated. Costs for studio time grew exponentially. More than ever, producers demanded professional players to ensure a technically correct

performance with a minimum of wasted time. Since the process now allowed remarkably strict standards to apply, recordings were capable of becoming airtight technical wonders with perfected performances. This was great for enriching the aural nature of the recording, but it wreaked havoc on any sense of spontaneity that once made rock-and-roll music so interesting. By the '70s, technical experimentation with recording equipment flourished while instrumental performances became freeze-dried and homogenized. The claustrophobic sameness would frustrate younger listeners and play a large role in older bands which were viewed as boring and clumsy behemoths—the “dinosaurs.” In only a few more years, punk would noisily revolt against this free-spending, antiseptic method of recording and would eschew “perfection.” Meanwhile, though, it was business as usual.

10 C.C. came to the attention of the record-buying public well after this technology was established, and they took it to its logical extreme. The members'





backgrounds as art-school graduates and professional songwriters combined to give them an insider's perspective on the industry, as well as a studiously wry view of pop music history. Knowing full well that rock and roll was no longer as innocently naive or as waif-like as it once was, they set out to embellish pop music with intricately clever and self-absorbed musical parodies. They possessed the technical talents and the recording experience to produce their own work, and layered their music with lyrically self-conscious metaphors.

This confusing yet clever *modus operandi* made it possible to interpret their songs from a number of different angles. From one angle, "I'm Not in Love" is a beautifully crafted song that captures a scorned lover in a state of tormented denial. From another angle, the song is a parody of itself, mocking the extroverted romanticism of the lush recording. Emotionally engaging or coolly farcical, the literate wordplay and impeccable production allow these alternate impressions to coexist.

Just as 10 C.C. seemed ready for a huge commercial breakthrough, two of its four members decided to jump ship. Lol Creme and Kevin Godley had been moonlighting, working on a multipurpose guitar effect that they called the "gizmo," until it began to overtake most of their working hours. What had begun as a 45 RPM demonstration disk evolved into a triple album (in perfect mid-'70s fashion), forcing them to leave the band. Remaining members Graham Gouldman and Eric Stewart were determined to continue, and they achieved success with commercially viable but less artful releases, such as "Things We Do for Love." Meanwhile, Creme and Godley continued as a duo with a series of thoroughly artful but commercially hopeless albums. They eventually evolved into video producers of the highest order and had a moderate hit in 1985 with a song called "Cry."

Emotionally  
engaging or  
coolly farcical,  
the literate  
wordplay and  
impeccable  
production  
allow these  
alternate  
impressions to  
coexist.

## JULY 1975 #4 SOMEONE SAVED MY LIFE TONIGHT—ELTON JOHN

Elton John's ever-increasing penchant for bizarre stagewear caused him some critical backlash. Occasionally, it seemed as though he was making a mockery of his own material. It may have been entertaining, but it was also distracting. Instead of sounding as though he was singing from the heart, he developed a glossy and stylized slickness. In actuality, Elton John truly enjoyed the spectacle, and was relieved by not having to handle the writing all by himself. The only problem was that he was becoming aloof from the lyrics. Taupin's words were increasingly becoming character studies ("Tiny Dancer," "Rocket Man," "Candle in the Wind," and "Daniel"), which further allowed Elton John to distance himself from a personal rendering of the material. Although artful, well-executed, and





**The song clearly conveys the story of a man who discovers the truth about his own feelings and the subsequent shock at his newfound awareness.**

phenomenally popular, most of his hit material from this period sounds more like contrived product than heartfelt performance. For example, “Crocodile Rock” is nothing more than a silly fifties pastiche, “Bennie and the Jets” is a ludicrous and campy send-up of the glitter rock that Elton John himself was then espousing, “Philadelphia Freedom” is a deliberate adoption of Thom Bell’s production sound, and “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” is a thoroughly unnecessary revision of the Beatles’ classic. All four became #1 hit singles, providing further proof that superficiality was more effective for sales in the ’70s than substance.

When Taupin supplied words of depth instead of superficial nonsense, Elton John’s musical input almost always reflected the maturity of his partner’s words. “Daniel” (#2), “Goodbye Yellow Brick Road” (#2), and “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me” (*also* #2) all captured Elton John at his sympathetic best, even if the words were not his own ideas or impressions. This made it all the more interesting, then, when Taupin supplied him with words that quite obviously concerned themselves with the piano player’s personal experiences.

Before the pair had become famous, when Elton John was still the conservatively dressed Reggie Dwight, he was engaged to a woman considerably older than he was. Everybody except him seemed convinced that the relationship was doomed, but he hadn’t yet owned up to the truth of his sexuality. His then-bandmate and boss, Long John Baldry, took him out drinking and told him in no uncertain terms that he was going to ruin his life, but Dwight felt trapped by the circumstances. His subsequent depression—including a melodramatic attempt at suicide by putting his head in the oven with the gas on low and the windows open—and his eventual breakup served as excellent material for Taupin’s imagination and a sensitive topic for Elton John to interpret.

With such a highly stylized partnership, it is often difficult to determine whether the songs had any personal significance. It was something of a game for fans to listen closely and attempt to discover (or invent) the relevance of a song to the life of its creator. “Someone Saved My Life Tonight” was different. It was obvious that the words existed for more than their phonetic flow. Sometimes they seemed downright awkward, so there was no escaping the obvious references to Elton John’s doomed engagement. Even without knowing the autobiographical connection, the lyrics still work wonderfully. The song clearly conveys the story of a man who discovers the truth about his own feelings and the subsequent shock at his newfound awareness. In the process, he loses someone he loves, but gains enough personal insight to offset the sadness of the moment. Sympathetic, well-written, and honest, “Someone Saved My Life Tonight” gave Elton John something to relate to directly, and his emotional performance seeps through every line.



## JULY 1975 #12 THAT'S THE WAY OF THE WORLD—EARTH, WIND, & FIRE

No band was more representative of the ultraslick sheen that enveloped late '70s pop music than Earth, Wind, & Fire. Perfectly synchronized horn charts layered with acute perfection over a brilliantly executed rhythm track was ordinary stuff for these guys. With Philip Bailey's keen falsetto drifting all around the disciplined arrangement, they were the sharpest outfit going. Most R&B from the mid-to-late '70s was heading straight for the disco dance floor, but Earth, Wind, & Fire kept their options open by trying to appeal to everybody. Their incorporation of both jazz and rock-inflected rhythms broadened their appeal considerably beyond the traditional R&B market, though it was at the risk of alienating what they originally perceived to be their core audience.

Technical proficiency and a mastery of various styles may be impressive, but perfection tends to have its price. Sometimes virtuosity thrives at the expense of feel. E.W.F. scrubbed all the grit out of their brand of funk, making it unrecognizably clean to traditional fans of the genre. To paraphrase Ray Charles, real funky R&B is a matter of dirtying up a song with your own particular brand of stink. E.W.F. played an antiseptic type of funk that helped them bridge racial barriers more effectively than most others, while their avoidance of disco's most offensive trappings helped keep them in good graces with a widely diversified audience. E.W.F. fans ran the gamut from middle-aged, African-American housewives to seventeen-year-old, white metal-heads.

Bandleader Maurice White's penchant for embracing practically every cosmic doctrine that came down the pike was a telling sign of his personal philosophy of positivity. Astrology, numerology, yoga, vegetarianism, ancient Egyptian culture, transcendental meditation, and Buddhism bear no direct correlation with one another, except perhaps on the cover of a typical Earth, Wind, & Fire album. Rather than limiting the scope of the band's audience, this bouillabaisse of beliefs displayed an open-minded optimism that warmly welcomed all comers. Earth, Wind, & Fire was about positive vibes and magical transformations in a universe filled with love and acceptance. It was difficult to deny this warmhearted greeting, and the group's musicianship only made the package all the more palatable.

Earth, Wind, & Fire was the extended vision of White, a percussionist and vocalist whose Memphis roots were definitely of this Earth. He attended high school with such future luminaries of the Memphis music scene as Booker T. Jones, David Porter, and Isaac Hayes. When his family moved to Chicago, it could have crushed his musical ambitions, but he adapted quickly and landed the enviable job of session drummer for Chess Records. While there, he obtained a musical education that all the money in the world could never have bought. Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Wa-

Most R&B from the mid-to-late '70s was heading straight for the disco dance floor, but Earth, Wind, & Fire kept their options open by trying to appeal to everybody.



ters, Buddy Guy, Ramsey Lewis, and practically anyone else who passed through Chess's doors counted on White's impressive ability with drums. His reputation also led to session work at Motown (that's White playing drums on "Heat Wave"). A stint as one-third of the Ramsey Lewis Trio led White to form his own group, albeit with significantly more members. Warner Brothers took an immediate interest, but after two albums was unable to capitalize on Earth, Wind, & Fire's strange brew of funk for the Aquarian Age. Warner Brothers' loss was Columbia's gain when the band went on to become the first black group in the history of Columbia Records to reach #1 on the pop charts.

"That's the Way of the World" was excerpted from a movie of the same name, starring Harvey Keitel and featuring the band as a struggling version of themselves. The song caught Earth, Wind, & Fire in a mellower mood than usual but contained all of the other essential ingredients that made up a typical E.W.F. single. With its gorgeous horn lines and well-sung melody, it further broadened the group's appeal and should have boosted the film's marketability. Intended to be an exposé of the seedy practices employed by most record labels, the movie instead remained a first-class secret. Although most film critics recognized it, everybody else ignored it, and it disappeared rather quickly. To avoid any problems that might have arisen from their affiliation with a box-office disaster, White decided to name the group's upcoming album *Shining Star*. Postscript from the "Yer damned if you do, yer damned if you don't" department: when "Shining Star" became a #1 hit, the movie's producers had a revelation and rereleased the film, this time under the alternate title of *Shining Star*. Earth, Wind, & Fire reversed the process with their next single, "That's the Way of the World," but it proved to be only partially as successful as its predecessor when it stalled at #12.

## JULY 1975 #36 SWEET EMOTION—AEROSMITH

I've said it before, and since 1975 was hardly any better than 1974, I'll say it again—a not too surprising result of including only "classic" top 40 songs in this book is the mother lode of titles from the golden decade of pop music (the '60s) and the inevitable thinning of entries as the list progresses towards the present. One particular reason for this is simply because it is much easier to maintain objectivity

after a substantial amount of time. Saying that "Jumping Jack Flash" is classic is pretty much a no brainer. Saying the same thing about "Love in an Elevator" isn't yet quite as clear cut (but I'm willing to take bets). Since I have no inclination toward clairvoyance, I think that it is smarter (and safer) to err on the side of caution. Another factor, upsetting but undeniable, is that the mid-seventies hosted a much more deliberate and manipulative method of commercializing pop mu-

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1975	#36
[ALSO NOVEMBER 1977	#19]
<u>SEND IN THE CLOWNS—JUDY COLLINS</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1975	#2
<u>LYIN' EYES—THE EAGLES</u>	



sic, a process that continues to this day. Record labels (and by association, most of the artists who worked for them) started to aim their product at the lowest common denominator—demographic studies. As a result, pop music became bland and lacked attitude; music without a discernible attitude is music that lacks perspective, and music that lacks perspective is essentially pointless. Just a glance at some #1 hits will reveal the mush that we were being forced in 1975: “Mandy,” “Love Will Keep Us Together,” “Laughter in the Rain,” “Listen to What the Man Said,” “Thank God I’m a Country Boy,” and “Rhinestone Cowboy.”

In the '70s, it's not that music stank as much as the top 40 would suggest. Heaven forbid. It's only that so many of the talented artists of the time were either embarrassed by or feigned indifference to the overtly commercial nature of the top 40. Ignoring it was probably the closest that they could come to upholding whatever idealism was still lingering from the '60s, so they saved their best bits for album release. Some ideology. While the artists could self-righteously claim to be noncommercial, their audience was now buying six dollar albums instead of a pair of ninety-nine cent singles. What does this have to do with Aerosmith? Good question. As I said, attitude in pop music is not only a good thing, but essential for it to retain any semblance of validity. Without attitude, music has no spark, and in the '70s a spark was definitely needed. Aerosmith was loaded with attitude, so it was fully capable of re-instilling rock and roll with plenty of what it lacked. They weren't embarrassed when the record company wanted to release a good hit single either and, like the Rolling Stones before them, they found a way to be pop stars without destroying their bad boy image. Aerosmith was a welcome hybrid of Rolling Stones raunch and Led Zeppelin swagger. Mick Jagger and Jimmy Page saw their personas mirrored by Steve Tyler and Joe Perry, respectively, but Aerosmith was more than a hard-rocking band of copyists. In the '70s, it was a perfect amalgam of familiar styles and future promise. As the sexual nature of pop music boiled to the surface (another result of the “lowest common denominator” syndrome), Steve Tyler was prepared. Androgyny, glam-rock, bedroom soul, and hard rock—with its cocksure mannerisms and codpiece hardware—were all the rage, and Tyler could master them all. Because of his unabashed willingness to embrace '70s sexual hedonism, wine, women, and song became sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

### GREAT MISSES

AUGUST 1975 #4  
RUN JOEY RUN—DAVID GEDDES

AUGUST 1975 #6  
FEELINGS—ALBERT MORRIS

SEPTEMBER 1975 #1  
BAD BLOOD—  
 NEIL SEDAKA AND ELTON JOHN

SEPTEMBER 1975 #4  
MR. JAWS—  
 DICKIE GOODMAN

**Mick Jagger and Jimmy Page saw their personas mirrored by Steve Tyler and Joe Perry, respectively, but Aerosmith was more than a hard-rocking band of copyists.**





Rising from one of the hardest-working bar bands in their native New England to headliners before a crowd of a quarter-million at 1977's California Jam, Aerosmith earned its success the hard way. The band kept a grueling tour schedule, but hard work aside, Perry's killer guitar riffs and Tyler's attitude made them impossible to ignore. On songs like "Sweet Emotion," Perry stacks riff upon riff while Tyler does exactly what he does best: shows off his own bad self and struts his stuff. Most pop rock had lost direction in the '70s, but Aerosmith was doing its part to keep things on track. By fine-tuning mid-'70s hedonism into a commercial package that was as irresistible as it was unavoidable, Aerosmith became the cornerstone of a new genre called "Stadium Rock" that is still holding strong today.

## OCTOBER 1975 #7 LOW RIDER—WAR

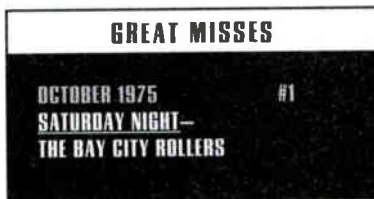
**W**ar was a band with an unusual early history. Football fans may remember a defensive end for the Los Angeles Rams named David "Deacon" Jones, but I doubt that they recall his singing. Back around 1969, Jones was performing in nightclubs with a backup group known as Nite Shift. It was at one of these shows that Eric Burdon, an ex-Animal, and Danish harmonica player Lee Oskar caught their act and spent the evening jamming. Although the band already contained a powerful array of voices (just listen to "All Day Music"), they realized that Burdon offered them a ticket to record company connections. So, when Burdon asked Nite Shift and Oskar to join forces with Burdon at MGM, they decided to bill themselves as Eric Burdon and War. Soon after, they released the compellingly weird single "Spill the Wine." The drug-induced lyrics were as opaque as mud, but the song's

cross-pollination of hippie culture and African-based rhythms raised more than a few eyebrows and lifted the record to #3 on the pop charts. Burdon remained with War for two albums (tell me if you can believe these titles: *Eric Burdon Declares War* and—brace yourself—*The Black Man's Burdon*) before leaving the band in mid-tour, allegedly because of physical exhaustion.

War finished the scheduled shows without its

front man and then renegotiated a record contract of its own with United Artists.

After years of experience in the service of others, War was eager to break out and had no problem developing its own material. "All Day Music" was their second single, and it proved them to be a formidable outfit with sufficient talent of their own. The well-crafted and mellow 45 cracked the Top 40 at #35, and War was on its way. From this point on, the group pulled out all the stops and released single after single that featured a relentless funk groove with Latin underpinnings. "Slippin' into Darkness," "The World Is a Ghetto," "Cisco Kid," and "Gypsy Man" are uncompromising in their rhythmic appeal and made War one of the top-selling funk/crossover acts of the decade. The band's material was often the result of intensive jamming, and its singles all exhibit a live feel that







captures the spontaneous energy of their ensemble playing.

Surprisingly, “Low Rider” was the only War 45 to reach #1 on the R&B charts. Written about the West Coast Latino subculture that lived to cruise the boulevards, this song is about as stylishly cool as the culture it describes. Pieces of funk, Latin, and rock rhythms all blend together under an astoundingly simple melody, forcing the groove to stand out front and center. The funky minimalism that was pioneered by James Brown is on display here in a locked-down rhythm that instantly captivates. By 1975, the steady deconstruction of soul music had reached its minimalist peak, as soul was about to be completely snuffed out by the looming disco machine. “Low Rider” marked the end of an era, a point made all the more obvious when its replacement at #1 on the R&B charts was “Fly, Robin, Fly” by the Silver Convention.

## OCTOBER 1975 #21 BLUE EYES CRYING IN THE RAIN—WILLIE NELSON

**C**onsidering that country music had always prided itself on being the forum of choice for the common working man, it is strange to realize just how elitist the country music establishment had become. Ever since its early days as hillbilly music, on through its country-western phase, and even until the simple term “country” music would suffice, the subject matter never strayed far from tales of personal experience. The music was full of working-class stories of hard-drinking, hard-living people who would often find themselves caught up in various types of extramarital intrigue. The stars who sang these songs were often seen as anything but ordinary, however. Over time, they developed a condescending attitude toward their audience, sometimes acting as though they were royalty who were deigning the masses with their graceful presence. This was true of most musical genres, of course, but it seemed more ironic when music that was intended for the salt of the earth developed its own class system.

Country music established itself as a Southern institution through radio broadcasts and live shows from the Grand Ole Opry, and the music reflected the conservative values of the American South. Like anything that considers itself to be an institution, country music became very set in its ways and demanded uniformity from its performers, but country music, like most all-American genres, was anything but pure. It developed from a hodgepodge of sources, including Celtic folk songs, Mexican mariachi music, and Cajun music. Paradoxically, it derived its most identifiable sound, the pedal steel guitar, from an instrument that was invented thousands of miles away in the Hawaiian Islands. The standard operating procedure for a typical country artist was to homogenize these ingredients into a recognizable formula.

**The music was full of working-class stories of hard-drinking, hard-living people who would often find themselves caught up in various types of extramarital intrigue.**



Whether heard in the context of the album or standing alone, Nelson's performance of this song is one of gentle grace and understatement.

Willie Nelson perpetuated this uniformity during his early years as a Nashville songwriter. His talent made him quickly famous with such compositions as "Funny How Time Slips Away," "Hello Walls," "Night Life," and "Crazy." By then, the Nashville establishment was so powerful that it controlled many of its stars as a farmer would steer a team of obedient plow horses. It wasn't until the bridle that controlled him became uncomfortably painful that Nelson decided to rear up. Nashville wanted him to stay in line as a songwriter to the stars, but he had other plans. He recorded his own material using his own band, and he returned to his home state of Texas to do it. Away from Nashville, his naturally expressive talents flourished, and he began a series of recordings that would eventually make him a crossover star.

"Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" was excerpted from his theme album *Red-Headed Stranger*, a sort of cowboy opera that combined original songs and covers that, when taken together, tug effectively at your heart. The story is melodramatic and defies credibility, but the romantic notion of a man who was "wild in his sorrow" is undeniably moving. As a case in point, the title song tells of a man who kills his wife for running out on him and then begins to regret it. The character's mental state is so fragile that he next shoots another woman who playfully tugs at a horse that once belonged to his ex. Murdering somebody for touching your horse is usually not justifiable cause for homicide (at least not in my neck of the woods), but the Red-Headed Stranger had one heck of a broken heart. "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain" is a pretty and very lonely love song that, in the context of the album, is sung by this broken-hearted killer on the lam. Whether heard in the context of the album or standing alone, Nelson's performance of this song is one of gentle grace and understatement. It became a huge hit for him, an ironic situation considering that it was written decades ago by an old-time Nashville songsmith called Fred Rose.

Shortly afterward, RCA records released a compilation album called *The Outlaws*, which united tracks by Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Tompall Glaser, and Jessi Colter. Since all four were viewed as operating outside the country mainstream, the title was both deliberate and appropriate. It became one of the biggest crossover country hits of the early '70s, providing the hit single "Good-Hearted Woman," and it served notice that there was much more to country music than the hackneyed formulas of Nashville.

## OCTOBER 1975 #23 BORN TO RUN—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

It was very easy for me to distrust Bruce Springsteen's intentions around the time of "Born to Run." In the mid-'70s, there were just too many bombastic rock bands whose overproduced product came seeping through the compressed sig-



nals of FM radio stations. Jefferson Starship, Journey, Foreigner, Styx, and Boston were all touting “big” rock with a sound that was about as huge and impenetrable as a granite wall. Once I heard the glockenspiel on “Born to Run,” I assumed Springsteen was as guilty of destroying the straight-forward essence of his work as all the others had been, and I consciously started to avoid his music. Granted, this wasn’t a particularly easy thing to do if you lived in New York. Springsteen was a Jersey kid, and certain regional radio stations were elevating him to the status of demigod. Every morning, WNEW-FM would play a Springsteen track and refer to it as “the morning Bruce juice.” Besides the completely disgusting connotations that this brought to mind, it also struck me as juvenile, so I would change stations as soon as the scheduled moment would roll around. Another problem was the unabashed praise Springsteen was receiving from the music press. With only a few albums to his name, each of which displayed only a fraction of his true potential and had less than stellar production values, he was being hyped beyond recognition. The Bob Dylan comparisons were a particularly annoying and transparently manufactured campaign, the relevance of which completely eluded me after his first album. As far as I was concerned, the whole thing added up to little more than macho posturing and blather. Boy, was I wrong.

My ignorance caused me to miss the potency of Springsteen’s first four albums. While my contemporaries were going to his concerts and seeing some of the most fulfilling and energetic live shows that anyone had ever staged, I continued to dismiss him as an overrated overachiever. Slowly (verrrrrrry slowly), I began to come around. I think it was the Bo Diddley slam of “She’s the One” that got to me first. (“Bo Diddley,” besides being a person, is also a beat.) As time passed, I began to notice that my opinions of Springsteen’s songs were changing with startling regularity. “Racing in the Streets” sank in next, then “4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy).” I even succumbed (finally) to the infectious overdrive of “Rosalita.” By the time Springsteen released his fifth album, *The River*, I was forced to face down whatever prejudices I was harboring. When I heard the painfully rendered (and, more importantly, subtly understated) power of songs like “Wreck on the Highway,” “Stolen Car,” and “Fade Away,” I knew I’d been dead wrong about this guy.

When I began comprehending one slice of Springsteen’s nature, his whole body of work came into focus for me. Even his joyful rockers were impressing me, now that I appreciated this complex personality who could imbue innuendo into his compositions with direct and powerful imagery. It might have taken me forever, but it eventu-

### GREAT MISSES

NOVEMBER 1975 #1  
FLY, ROBIN, FLY—SILVER CONVENTION

NOVEMBER 1975 #5  
FOX ON THE RUN—SWEET

NOVEMBER 1975 #18  
THE LAST GAME OF THE SEASON (THE  
 BLIND MAN IN THE BLEACHERS)—  
 DAVID GEDDES

**Springsteen was a Jersey kid, and certain regional radio stations were elevating him to the status of demigod.**



**Springsteen is living proof that the positive energy of rock and roll is not only captivating, but can set you free.**

ally sank in that Springsteen embodied everything that was transformational about the spirit of rock and roll. I was now a receptor for his message: if you believe in something hard enough, it can save you. His dark songs often capture the somber mood of self-reflection and the sobering awareness of life's difficulties, while his rockers practically brim with life-affirming self-confidence and positive energy.

"Born to Run" is the ultimate anthem for the pursuit of a new life. Nearly every line is an overwrought metaphor, but the message is as plain as the guitar slung over Springsteen's shoulder. The character's need to break out of his cloistered world and run headlong into the expanse of the future is as desperate as it is palpable. To the song's narrator, the future, freedom, and "space" are all confused as the same thing, while the present is only a "death trap" that must be escaped at all costs. For a generation of post-adolescent kids who were staring down the future as though it were the barrel of a shotgun, this was a powerfully uplifting message. After all, in one year's time, a generation of kids who missed (or, like I once did, *chose* to miss) Springsteen's message of deliverance would be pogoing to the Sex Pistols while howling about "no future." A dead-end present allows only two options: blithe resignation and the abandonment of your dreams, or a willful determination to fight your way out of the crowd and find a place, or a person, or a belief, that can rejuvenate you, invigorate you, and maybe even save your soul. Springsteen's song kicked down the walls of complacency and reached a veritable army of kids who were inspired enough by his message to find their own reasons to believe. Rock and roll offered Springsteen the power to transform his own life. Rather than abuse the privilege, he in turn dedicated his career to transforming the confusion of his audience into determination and a sense of hope that was uniquely theirs. Springsteen is living proof that the positive energy of rock and roll is not only captivating, but can set you free.

## DECEMBER 1975 #20 OVER MY HEAD—FLEETWOOD MAC

**W**ill the real Fleetwood Mac please stand up?  
In 1975, it did.

Throughout its career, Fleetwood Mac would sport eleven different lineups (and counting). Bass guitarist John McVie and drummer Mick Fleetwood were the only constants, and provided the rhythms that supported the various permutations of the band through four decades. The first incarnations rotated around guitarist and leader Peter Green, an amazingly fluid player who was haunted by his own success. After penning a few hits for the group, including "Albatross" and "Oh Well," he retired from the music business, shunning both his reputation and his wealth. In his place, Fleetwood Mac played host to a series of additional front





persons, including Christine McVie (then the wife of John McVie and longtime songwriter/vocalist/keyboardist for the band), Jeremy Spencer, Danny Kerwin, Bob Welch, and others until, in 1975, Lindsey Buckingham and his girlfriend, Stevie Nicks, were invited into the fold.

By 1975, styles were veering all over the place, causing audiences to align themselves with one trend or another while abandoning the remainder. Also, the rock-and-roll audience that came of age in the '60s was refusing to relinquish its hold on musical trends, despite the fact that it was growing older and becoming complacent. By the mid '70s, record labels were upping the target age of their releases, and making a lot of money in the process. Fleetwood Mac's personnel changes caused them to change direction as often as a telltale in a crosswind, each time allowing them to reevaluate current trends and modify their sound accordingly. Through this process, they were soon targeting their material to older audiences, but Fleetwood Mac were destined to become superstars. Sporting two female songwriters, in addition to the boundless creative talents of lead guitarist/vocalist/songwriter/producer Buckingham, Fleetwood Mac evolved into the band of the decade. It included two couples, and its songs exposed the personal nature of their increasingly difficult relationships. An eponymously titled album and in particular its follow-up, *Rumours*, served as real-life soundtracks for a generation that was totally screwed up on love. The experimentalism that had defined '60s sexuality entered the '70s with a serious hangover. Sexual freedom meant open relationships, a slackening of commitment, and a general acceptance of hedonistic tendencies. Fleetwood Mac's songs of sexual betrayal, uncertainty, and desire were perfectly suited to the confusion and insecurity that pervaded these times.

The 1975 album *Fleetwood Mac* was a remarkable success, both commercially and artistically, leaving the record company clamoring for more. While it slowly ascended to #1, the bandmembers were bombarded by the media, becoming superstars to a

### GREAT HITS

FEBRUARY 1976	#9
<u>BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY</u> —QUEEN	
FEBRUARY 1976	#30
<u>LOVE IS THE DRUG</u> —ROXY MUSIC	
MARCH 1976	#11
<u>BHANNON</u> —FLEETWOOD MAC	
MARCH 1976	#15
<u>I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO</u> —ABBA	
MARCH 1976	#25
<u>GOD HEARTED WOMAN</u> —WAYLON AND WILLIE	
APRIL 1976	#3
<u>FOOLED AROUND AND FELL IN LOVE</u> —ELVIN BISHOP	

### GREAT MISSES

DECEMBER 1975	#1
<u>CONVOY</u> —C.W. McCALL	
DECEMBER 1975	#8
<u>BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO</u> —NEIL SEDAKA	
DECEMBER 1975	#14
<u>BABY FACE</u> —THE WING AND A PRAYER FIFE AND DRUM CORPS	
FEBRUARY 1976	#6
<u>SHANNON</u> —HENRY GROSS	
APRIL 1976	#1
<u>SILLY LOVE SONGS</u> —WINGS	
APRIL 1976	#4
<u>MORE, MORE, MORE</u> —ANDREA TRUE CONNECTION	





**For its problems  
as much as for  
its music,  
Fleetwood Mac  
was a band that  
everyone could  
relate to.**

nation but alienated from one another. Meanwhile, their next album took ages to complete. Amid personal strife, including the breakup of both couples, horrendous studio difficulties, and numerous distractions caused by their sudden high profile, the five bandmembers found it next to impossible to nail down a final product. All the while, the public waited and waded through a sea of rumors while anticipating the record's release. By the time it came out, *Rumours* was guaranteed to be huge. Still, it transcended even the most optimistic expectations when it took control of the album chart's #1 position in May 1977 and remained there for the rest of the year, garnering a total of thirty-one weeks at the top position. For its problems as much as for its music, Fleetwood Mac was a band that everyone could relate to.

"Over My Head" was the first single issued by the three-men, two-women lineup. Looking back from today's perspective, it stands out among their other singles simply because it isn't hindered by their personal problems. It is also unhampered by Buckingham's overwrought constructivism (unlike the album *Tusk*) and Nicks's good-witch, bad-witch antics ("Sisters of the Moon," "Gold Dust Woman," etc.). Christine McVie's songwriting is as smooth as her voice, and "Over My Head" bubbles along with a realistic optimism and a rhythmic lilt that resembles flowing water.

## MAY 1976 #1 KISS AND SAY GOODBYE—THE MANHATTANS

**Y**ou know, it's really a shame that doo-wop got saddled with such a stupid name. Hardly anybody wants to be affiliated with something that sounds so juvenile and dated, but the truth is that group-vocal-harmony music (OK, doo-wop) is just about as indestructible as rock and roll. Before it even had a name, doo-wop was thriving and even elevated R&B to a level of cross-cultural notoriety that was as profound as it was profitable. Today, it maintains credibility through bands such



as Boyz II Men, who keep doo-wop's basic tenets alive while breaking sales records and raking in numerous Grammy awards. The Manhattans had a tough role in carrying the doo-wop torch from its beginnings in the '50s to its place in present-day music. Not to flog a dead horse, but the disco era could hardly be described as being conducive to historical music forms. Even

so, the Manhattans' hits were so phenomenally good that an audience as jaded as the Studio 54 crowd stopped dancing long enough to take notice.

It was mostly by fluke that the Manhattans reached their peak of popularity during the disco era, but the group's laconic pace deserves a great deal of the blame for the lack of progress. After meeting in the late '50s, it took songwriter/



lead vocalist Blue Lovett and his partner Wally Kelly something like four years to find adequate partners for harmonizing (Sonny Bivins and Richard Taylor), and then another two years before an independent label released their first efforts, which flopped miserably. A decent amount of time and energy elapsed while the band chose to break in an additional lead singer named George “Smitty” Smith, and they finally did crack the lower regions of the Top 100. Smith passed away in 1970, and more time passed before they found a replacement, another sweet-voiced tenor named Gerald Alston. Two years later, a major label finally took notice. Against all odds—after all, this was in 1972, a full decade after the popular demise of doo-wop—Columbia invested a reasonable amount of attention in the band, and in no time (ha!) they became the country’s leading anachronistic hit makers. After a crack at the Top 40 with a song called “Don’t Take Your Love,” the Manhattans went all the way to the top with “Kiss and Say Good-bye.”

After a crack at the Top 40 with a song called “Don’t Take Your Love,” the Manhattans went all the way to the top with “Kiss and Say Good-bye.”

Maybe it was the Barry White-style intro. Maybe it was the modernized production values that made them sound as *au courant* as a mid-’70s doo-wop group possibly could. Maybe it was the distribution power of Columbia Records. Or maybe, just maybe it really was the gorgeously rendered vocal arrangement. The popular string sound of Philadelphia’s MF50 (see “Backstabbers” section) organization, as well as Lovett’s patently manipulative intro rap, grounded the tune firmly in the present tense. It eventually became the second certified platinum single (sales of two million), just weeks after label mate Johnny Taylor earned the first for “Disco Lady.” Their next million-seller was another gorgeous ballad, “Shining Star”, which coincidentally happened to share the same title as another hit song by Earth, Wind, & Fire, also a Columbia group. Columbia Records was finally promoting its R&B-based acts and reaping the financial rewards of its belated diversification.

## MAY 1976 #2 LOVE IS ALIVE—GARY WRIGHT

Somehow, this song seems to have fallen through the cracks of our collective memories. I’ll bet that you don’t recognize it by the title. If not, you’re not alone. Virtually nobody I asked could identify the melody or the artist from the title alone, but they immediately remembered it once I placed it on the turntable (I’ve got the 45). After recognizing the melody, reactions were usually along the lines of “I used to love that song” or “Boy, how could I have forgotten that?”

But you still don’t remember it. It might be more easily recognizable if it were titled “My Love Is Alive,” but odds are it would still elude you. This leaves me with a problem. Here I am writing away about a song that you probably don’t recall offhand. If you don’t remember it, then why on earth would I expect you to



want to read about it? Wait a minute, give me a chance here. After all, it was a huge hit in its time. I could hum a few bars (actually, according to my wife I couldn't), but the melody is only a fraction of what would cause you to recognize "Love Is Alive." Quoting the lyrics probably wouldn't do much good either, since the words aren't particularly memorable. The production, which singer Gary Wright also handled, is integral to the overall impression that this single makes, but that doesn't do me a whole lot of good now either.

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1976 <b>TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS— THE DOOBIE BROTHERS</b>	#13
JUNE 1976 <b>GOT TO GET YOU INTO MY LIFE— THE BEATLES</b>	#7
JUNE 1976 <b>MAMA MIA—ABBA</b>	#32

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1976 <b>AFTERNOON DELIGHT— THE STARLAND VOCAL BAND</b>	#1
JUNE 1976 <b>PLAY THAT FUNKY MUSIC— WILD CHERRY</b>	#1

Hmmm, let's see. I know! You probably have no problem remembering Wright's other big hit, "Dream Weaver," right? You know, the futuristic-sounding tune that tries to make you feel as though you're drifting through space in some really bad television program? For some reason, everybody remembers that and forgets this. Well, "Love Is Alive" sounds nothing at all like "Dream Weaver." Does that help? No, I didn't think so. Does it help to know that Wright was a cofounder of the group Spooky Tooth (don't ask me who Spooky Tooth was—one point of confusion at a time, please) or that this group's alumni include Ariel Bender (aka Luther Grosvenor), later with Mott the Hoople, and Mick Jones, later with Foreigner? Maybe I should tell you that it sounds an awful lot like the band Traffic, with Wright doing a superb Steve Winwood impression, and instrumentation that crosses "Empty Pages" with a slowed-down version of "Gimme Some Lovin'." Still no memory, huh? That might have been my best shot, folks.

Wright was born and raised in New Jersey but moved to Europe to attend college. While there, he formed Spooky Tooth, and the group lasted on and off for maybe five years. He then returned to the States, got a contract with Warner Brothers, and began work on his first solo effort. His first release was "Dream Weaver," a song that everybody and his brother seems to remember with no particular fondness except perhaps to smile at its spacey sensitivity. He followed that up with "Love Is Alive," a much superior track that elicits blank stares at the sound of the title. Jeesh. Oh, I give up. Here's a lyric or two:

My heart is on fire. My soul's like a wheel that's turning.  
My love is alive. My love is alive. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Well, I tried. If you still care, buy a copy somehow. It's on the *Dream Weaver* album, and there are few examples of mid-'70s pop that are quite as palatable (or as neglected) as this. I suppose you'll have to take my word for it.



## JULY 1976 #3 LOWDOWN—BOZ SCAGGS

**B**y the mid-to-late '70s, rock music came very close to becoming almost exclusively white, male, and sexist. The cross-dressing glitter acts that were so popular in the early '70s either metamorphosized into "real" men or were overrun by rock and roll's not-so-silent majority. They weren't the only ones forced to the sidelines, either. Whatever social progress had supposedly taken place since the onset of rock and roll had either vanished or was thrown into the dustbin. Unless you fit into the above category, you were forced to exist on the periphery of rock's newly accepted formula. This limitation disenfranchised a whole hell of a lot of people. Women, blacks, and gay men in particular were shunned, sometimes even openly mocked, by the lobotomized breed of macho rockers who dominated rock's turf, causing them to look elsewhere for a musical forum that would embrace them.

While this was happening, soul music was undergoing a significant change. The Philadelphia producers had modernized soul by applying a heavy rhythm and orchestrated production, and a few New York-based entrepreneurs saw fit to capitalize on the new sound. All in all, the atmosphere was perfect for escapist music that allowed city dwellers to forget about their troubles. Infrastructures were crumbling while economies were collapsing, making urbanites desperate to find a means of escapism. New York in particular became a breeding ground for the new style of dance music. Soon afterward, a busload of male European producers joined the convoy. As could be predicted, these foreign stylists had no clue as to the roots of America's indigenous music forms and no particular reason to care about them, either. Giorgio Moroder (Donna Summer), Jacques Morali (the Village People), Michael Kunze (Silver Convention), and Eumir Deodato (himself, Kool and the Gang) took a one-from-column-A, one-from-column-B approach to producing their music, believing that they had invented a rock-and-roll/soul hybrid. What they really did, though, was forcibly tear R&B and rock and roll up by the roots. By applying their own interpolated impressions of what American music was, they inadvertently created a monster. Thus, borne of ignorance and necessity, flowered a new, rootless brand of music that was destined to be known as disco.

At any other time, something as genetically damaged as disco wouldn't have stood a chance of survival. In the '70s, it thrived. With rock music struggling for direction and soul music already headed toward the mirrored ball, circumstances

### GREAT HITS

JULY 1976	#2
<u>YOU'LL NEVER FIND ANOTHER LOVE</u> <u>LIKE MINE</u> —LOU RAWLS	
AUGUST 1976	#7
<u>SHE'S GONE</u> —HALL AND OATES	
SEPTEMBER 1976	#13
<u>FERNANDO</u> —ABBA	

### GREAT MISSES

AUGUST 1976	#40
<u>TEDDY BEAR</u> —RED SOVINE	
SEPTEMBER 1976	#1
<u>DISCO DUCK</u> —RICK DEES	
OCTOBER 1976	#4
<u>MUSKRAT LOVE</u> — THE CAPTAIN AND TENILLE	





**A touch of  
sophistication  
never hurt  
anyone, though,  
and it worked  
wonders when  
Boz Scaggs  
applied it to the  
disco formula.**

were perfect for a vacuous brand of youthful music that could draw together those groups that otherwise would have been left out. Soul music surrendered immediately to the dance-floor rhythms, while a good percentage of the rockers felt sufficiently threatened to incorporate disco into their acts. In only a few short steps, rock singers stopped rebelling and started asking if we thought they were sexy, while black music was cut off from its roots by being taken completely out of the church and pumped exclusively onto polished dance floors.

Critics, of course, despised disco. To those who had spent their lives analyzing musical progression, disco was an assault on the senses with no proper lineage to ground it.

In time, everybody was forced to accept disco on its own terms. Although it was mostly mechanized, faceless, and shallow, some disco-era music stood out. Donna Summer had a plaintive quality to her voice that often rose above the efforts of her producers to keep things generic, and the Bernard Edwards/Nile Rodgers production team formulated rhythms for Sister Sledge and their own group, Chic, which actually retained their funkiness on the dance floor. For the most part, though, disco maintained a rigidity that denied the humanity of its recording stars, causing the more sympathetically human work of disco's fringe artists to stand out.

Rhythms, production methods, and topics were fairly consistent for disco. Either a heavily processed beat throttled the song along, or a real drummer played a rhythm based on a constantly opening and closing hi-hat. Tweedling synthesizer sounds and harshly clipped string sections (later sampled *ad infinitum*) were regularly employed, and for some reason flute parts were common as well. Dynamics were out of the question, while tempo changes would have been outright sacrilege. Any break from the heavy  $\frac{4}{4}$  rhythm pattern would, by definition, declassify the song as disco. As far as topics, there was "Boogie, Oogie, Oogie," "Shake Your Booty," "Get Down Tonight," "I Love the Nightlife"—you get the idea. Follow the formula, and chances were reasonably certain that your song would be accepted by the boogie-mad masses.

A touch of sophistication never hurt anyone, though, and it worked wonders when Boz Scaggs applied it to the disco formula. With his biggest hit, "Lowdown," he played by the rules but added an insidiously charming sense of class into the mix. The flute riff was there, the hi-hat beat, the tempo, and even the sexually based theme of nightlife was there (sort of), but Scaggs never sounds even fractionally as mechanical as his roboticized competition. "Lowdown" managed to qualify as legitimate disco material, and yet it had a sense of dynamics and an ebb and flow that made it sound positively natural, both on and off the dance floor.

Scaggs came from the Texas dance band scene, where he and guitarist Steve Miller formed a variety of local groups. In 1965, he move to Europe, where he recorded a now-rare solo folk album. Then he returned to the states, where he





once again joined up with Miller, who was now in San Francisco. He remained with the Steve Miller Band for its first two albums and then, once again, set out for a solo career. With the help of *Rolling Stone* magazine's Editor in Chief, Jann Wenner, Scaggs obtained a contract with Atlantic Records. He moved south to record an album in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, only to be dropped because of insufficient sales. He moved back to California, formed the Boz Scaggs Band, and began touring regularly with the backing of his new label, Columbia. His record sales started off slowly but began to surge in 1974 with the release of *Slow Dancer*. His next album, *Silk Degrees*, hit the shelves in 1976 and burst everything wide open, remaining on the album charts for more than a hundred weeks and earning platinum status. Three singles—"It's Over" (#38), "Lowdown" (#3), and "Lido Shuffle" (#11)—achieved Top 40 status and further propelled him into the limelight, a place that made him uncomfortable. His subsequent releases fared well commercially, but Scaggs announced his retirement from the music industry in 1983, choosing the more subdued life of operating a restaurant. Persuaded by his record label to resume his music career, he emerged five years later to record one album (*Other Roads*) and a single ("Heart of Mine," #35 in 1988) before opting for a return to low-profile life.

## DECEMBER 1976 #1 I WISH—STEVIE WONDER

**S**oon after completing the *Innervisions* album in 1973, Stevie Wonder was almost killed by a serious car accident that crushed his skull and caused brain contusions. After lying in a coma for a while, he regained consciousness and slowly began the healing process. Amazingly, he suffered little permanent damage and in time was able to begin working on music. *Fulfillingness' First Finale* was his first album after the accident, and it removed any doubt that his ability may have been affected since it challenged, perhaps even surpassed, the quality of his previous masterpiece.

For most of his adulthood, Wonder has had a tendency toward the mystical, combined with occasionally strident social and political observations, but his accident must have heightened his appreciation for daily living. His polemics weren't halted—as can be vividly seen on his paean to the shamefully departing Richard Nixon, pointedly called "You Haven't Done Nothin'"—but most of the rest of the album hinges on a thoughtful appreciation for the small things in life. The year it was released, 1974, Wonder earned five Grammy awards. In 1975, he won another five, and in 1976, he took home four more.

1975 brought some changes to Wonder's life. First, his relationship with Yolanda Simmons produced their first child, a baby girl called Aisha Zakia. Secondly, he was once again due to renegotiate his recording contract with Motown. If the first

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1976 #10  
WALK THIS WAY—AEROSMITH

DECEMBER 1976 #37  
KEEP ME CRYIN'—AL GREEN



contract was considered remarkable, his renewal was absolutely mind-boggling by the standards of the recording industry at that time. Guarantees of thirteen million dollars and even more creative control than he already had were the major settling points. This raised eyebrows throughout the industry. One unfortunate side effect of Wonder's notoriety was the termination of his relationship with Malcolm Cecil and Robert Margouleff, the programmers and organizers of his material during his past four album projects. Too many people were advising Wonder and eventually led him away from his collaborators. This was artistically unfortunate because his music has never again been as focused. *Songs in the Key*

*of Life* was his first album without the pair, and it is a rambling, four-sided affair with an additional E.P. (extended play single), which, in total, certainly could have withstood some thoughtful editing.

Even so, Wonder's genius emerges, albeit sporadically, on certain key selections. "Sir Duke," a tribute to Duke Ellington, and "I Wish" both sport similarly brilliant arrangements and astounding horn charts (particularly the complex bridge of "Sir Duke"); but to my taste, "I Wish" has a funky edge that makes it the superior

track, if not the best of his career. The percolating progression is enough to make you bounce right out of your seat, while the spectacular horn chart is so razor-sharp it could tear the top of your head off. Wonder sounds so gleeful singing about his childhood that it is easy to picture him at the microphone, smiling broadly with his beaded head thrown back and bobbing back and forth, while clapping along. The rest of *Songs in the Key of Life*, with the exception of the sweet ode to his daughter called "Isn't She Lovely," is so flat that "Sir Duke" and "I Wish" could have been lost in the album's turgid sound. Instead, they resurrect the project, and the long-awaited *Songs in the Key of Life* became the first album to debut at the #1 position on *Billboard's* album chart.

GREAT MISSES	
DECEMBER 1976	#1
TORN BETWEEN TWO LOVERS - MARY MacGREGOR	
DECEMBER 1976	#21
AIN'T NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING - DONNY AND MARIE OSMOND	

## JANUARY 1977 #4 NIGHT MOVES—BOB SEGER

**W**hen I was young, it was impossible for me to accept that I was aging, second by second, day by day, year by year. I felt infallible, at least in spirit. When I now relate this to others, they usually tell me that they also had the same experience. Whoever we were, whenever we were born, we naturally clung to the belief that our lives, our friends, our generation, was different. We believed we would somehow retain our youthful ideals. Then, slowly but surely, what was once such a natural assumption was transformed into desperation. Youth may be nothing more than a state of mind, but our renegade faith in our youthfulness became increasingly difficult to sustain. Responsibilities, finances, marriage, kids, a mortgage...before we knew what had happened, we found ourselves on the wrong



side of the white picket fence, and fighting vices that had turned into habits. For some reason, we have been preprogrammed by nature to eventually allow some inner force to grab the wheel and steer us toward the middle of the road. Life becomes safer there, but it also becomes predictable. A sure sign that you are long gone is when you find yourself reminiscing about the things that you can no longer do. The laws of physical attraction render you considerably less desirable to the average seventeen year old than you were when you were seventeen yourself. Once you've reached that stage, teenage lust becomes a memory. Cross that threshold, and the door locks behind you. Instead, we're doomed to fondly remember specific moments from our freewheeling youth. One moment that usually stands out is the first time that we "did it."

For a number of generations now, teenage Americans have been discovering sex by the dashboard light. Maybe apple pie was once an adequate symbol of the American way of life, but since the '50s, what could be more American than losing your virginity in a car? How about a nostalgic American Top 40 hit about losing your virginity in a car. (As an aside, Bob Seger topped himself recently when he sold one of his least crass recordings, "Like a Rock," to be used for selling Chevy trucks on a TV ad campaign. Now, *that's* American. This Bud's for you, Bob. Hey, I have an idea! Why don't you see if some pharmaceutical company that sells anti-gas pills is interested in obtaining the rights to "Against the Wind"?) For those of us who have grown up, had children, and earn a respectable living, such spontaneous and risky behavior is, ahem, somewhat less likely to occur. But we remember. The story told in "Night Moves" is such a typical American experience that it almost always triggers parallel memories in the listener. This is what happens when a song about reminiscing becomes old enough to spur memories in its own right. More important than that, though, is the way that it captures the melancholy pleasure of reminiscing and the bittersweet pain of realizing that those days are irretrievably gone.

By the way, you might have noticed that there aren't many entries from 1977 in this book. Well, 1977 was not exactly a banner year for pop music. The chasm that separated the album charts from the singles charts had grown so wide that only the most extraordinarily powerful artists attempted to cross it. Even then, the handful who did bother to market corresponding singles with their album releases often did so grudgingly. Fleetwood Mac, the Eagles, Peter Frampton, Bob Seger, and Boston were all enjoying phenomenal success with career-topping albums, but the singles that were culled from these releases were simply that: extracts from a larger project. Most album artists wouldn't have been caught dead on what they per-

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1977	#10
GO YOUR OWN WAY—	
FLEETWOOD MAC	

The story told in "Night Moves" is such a typical American experience that it almost always triggers parallel memories in the listener.



ceived to be the pathetically puerile and crassly commercial pop charts. Attitudes varied from indifference to disdain, but the end result was the same: Top 40 music had fallen into such a state of disrespect that it has yet to fully recover.

Meanwhile, the album charts were fine, even healthy. If I were to chronicle creatively successful albums, then 1977 could be seen as a particularly promising year. Pete Townshend and Ronnie Lane (*Rough Mix*), Neil Young (*American Stars 'n' Bars*), the Sex Pistols (*Never Mind the Bollocks*), Steely Dan (*Aja*), The Talking Heads (:77), Graham Parker (*Heat Treatment*), Joan Armatrading (*Show Some Emotion*), and David Bowie (the epochal and deliberately anticommmercial *Low* and *Heroes*) all released albums in 1977, giving us plenty to talk about and keep us entertained. The singles charts, though, were quite another story. Because of the deep-rooted prejudices that "respectable" artists held against their often insipid seven-inch competition, singles had become little more than a marketplace for the predictably stupid and the painfully artless. Rock and roll didn't die, it just moved out of its original neighborhood. Albums counted, singles didn't. In the process, the seven-inch 45 became what it was originally intended to be: disposable.

### MARCH 1977 #1 HOTEL CALIFORNIA—THE EAGLES

Trying to write something nice about this record is about as easy as rejoicing over a trip to the dentist. The fact is that I loathe "Hotel California" as much as I appreciate its artistry. I can't go on enough about how much I love to hate this

song. I actually derive pleasure from the anger that it arouses in me. Whenever it comes on the radio, I usually crank up the volume like some deranged madman and bathe myself in the egotistical misanthropy that it educes. Any song that can arouse so much bile really ought to be on the list of *worst* songs, but something here draws me in, kind of like a moth on a suicide mission. Before it kills me, it makes me feel alive and grateful to be free of the jaded view of humanity that is represented by the song's lyrics.

I say this from the standpoint of a longtime Eagles fan. I've liked them ever since their first album, and that is probably a good part of the reason that "Hotel California" manages to impress and bug me simultaneously. Don Henley, Glenn Frey, Randy Meisner, and Bernie Leadon were originally brought together for a series of appearances at Disneyland to back up Linda Ronstadt. Frey came to Los Angeles via Detroit, Henley came by way of a small town in Texas, Meisner hailed from Nebraska, and Leadon

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1977 <u>LIDO SHUFFLE</u> —BOZ SCAGGS	#11
APRIL 1977 <u>SIR DUKE</u> —STEVIE WONDER	#1
APRIL 1977 <u>AIN'T GONNA BUMP NO MORE (WITH NO BIG FAT WOMAN)</u> —JOE TEX	#12
NOVEMBER 1977 <u>SLIPSLIDIN' AWAY</u> —PAUL SIMON	#5
APRIL 1978 <u>BECAUSE THE NIGHT</u> —THE PATTI SMITH GROUP	#13
APRIL 1978 <u>WEREWOLVES OF LONDON</u> —WARREN ZEVON	#21





came from Minnesota. After the shows, Ronstadt went on her way, but the band decided to stick together. All four were diverse musicians who moved within the ever-tightening circle of West Coast country rock. J.D. Souther, Jackson Browne, Poco, the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Rick Nelson and the Stone Canyon Band, and, of course, Ronstadt were all acquaintances who provided the various Eagles with an opportunity to work until they began to attract attention as a unit.

When the Eagles first appeared on the scene, I was charmed by their straightforward brand of country rock and their laid-back, self-effacing style. They were a tonic from the bombast that defined most early-to-mid '70s rock and roll. "Peaceful Easy Feeling" and "Take It Easy" summed up their mellow attitude, and although I knew they weren't making capital "A" art, they nonetheless were a fun band to listen to. By their second album, I wasn't too sure about the "art" part any longer. *Desperado* was a brilliant album from start to finish, and it bypassed whatever plebeian expectations were set up by their debut. Producer Glyn Johns helped the band assemble the low-keyed work of genius, and yet *Desperado* sold only modestly and yielded no hits. *On the Border* righted that situation quickly enough, with "Already Gone" (#32) and then their first #1 hit, "Best of My Love," but it unfortunately abandoned the artistic ambitions of their previous album. *On the Border* also introduced a fifth member into the fold. Guitarist Don Felder had chops to spare, and he toughened the Eagles' sound, bringing them closer to rock and roll and farther away from country rock.

Although they might have tried to shrug it off, success was already going to the bandmembers' heads. Their fourth album, *One of These Nights*, made it plain enough. Just a glance at the airbrushed photo on the back sleeve was enough to let you know that self-importance had taken the place of self-effacement. Musically, they were now venturing into places where a typical country-rock band would never think of treading. The title song (#1 for a week) veered dangerously close to disco, insipid lyrics and all, while Leadon's leaden instrumental about the effects of peyote ("Journey of the Sorcerer") was an embarrassingly pompous

## GREAT MISSES

APRIL 1977	#1
<b>I'M YOUR BOOGIE MAN— K.C. AND THE SUNSHINE BAND</b>	
MAY 1977	#1
<b>GONNA FLY NOW—BILL CONTI</b>	
MAY 1977	#1
<b>UNDERCOVER ANGEL—ALAN O'DAY</b>	
MAY 1977	#26
<b>ARIEL—DEAN FRIEDMAN</b>	
JUNE 1977	#1
<b>DA DOO RON RON—SHAUN CASSIDY</b>	
JUNE 1977	#2
<b>I'M IN YOU—PETER FRAMPTON</b>	
AUGUST 1977	#1
<b>STAR WARS/CANTINA BAND—MECCO</b>	
SEPTEMBER 1977	#1
<b>YOU LIGHT UP MY LIFE— DEBBIE BOONE</b>	
NOVEMBER 1977	#32
<b>CALLING OCCUPANTS OF INTERPLANETARY CRAFT— THE CARPENTERS</b>	
DECEMBER 1977	#3
<b>SOMETIMES WHEN WE TOUCH— DAN HILL</b>	
JANUARY 1978	#8
<b>THUNDER ISLAND—JAY FERGUSON</b>	
FEBRUARY 1978	#6
<b>DUST IN THE WIND—KANSAS</b>	





Depending  
on your  
perspective,  
“Hotel California” was either  
their most  
honest or  
their most  
despicable  
composition.

amalgam that combined orchestration, psychedelia, and country styles without any sense of direction. “Lyn’ Eyes” (#2 for a couple of weeks) was the most typical sounding single, and it showed that the band had a flair for sympathetic characterizations, while Meisner’s “Take It to the Limit” (#4) signified that the band’s change in direction might contain more than hot air. One thing made plain by all this was that Leadon’s folky instrumental pursuits were completely at odds with the overall vision of the band. Needless to say, Leadon was history sometime after the album was released, cutting off whatever tenuous ties to country music had remained.

For their next effort, *Hotel California*, Joe Walsh was brought in as Leadon’s replacement. His years as a solo performer and with the James Gang had made him a star in his own right, so he was an inspired choice whose presence ought to have lightened things up a bit. Instead, it sounds as though he got smothered. Other than coauthoring the band’s ultraslick ode to the oh-so-cool-it’s-dangerous lifestyle of rock and roll, titled “Life in the Fast Lane,” Walsh was responsible for only one composition, and it was the most plodding Eagles song yet: “Pretty Maids All in a Row.” “New Kid in Town” was the bland first single (#1), followed by the outrageous ego-fest of a title tune, “Hotel California.”

In five albums, a simple and unassuming country-rock band in plaid shirts and blue jeans became transformed, through the power of Hollywood and the magic of airbrushing, into the most egotistical and corporate band in America. Depending on your perspective, “Hotel California” was either their most honest or their most despicable composition. Depending on what day you ask me, I’m perfectly capable of either opinion. To really appreciate this song, I think you need to have a finely tuned sense of irony. When I interpret the lyrics literally, I become incensed at this band’s overwhelming indifference to their gluttony and decadence, and their blithe acceptance of their hedonistic lifestyle. If I temper my resentment and recognize the irony in the words, then I am able to appreciate this song on a completely different (and probably accidental) level. The ironic truth is that most Eagles fans didn’t have a clue to help them understand the disgusting egotistical pathos of this song. Because the average stadium rock enthusiast was still capable of being enough of a nitwit to blindly thrust his fist in the air at the sound of the opening chords, it ultimately proved that the Eagles class structure philosophies were as appropriate and damning as Richard Wagner must have been in pre-Nazi Germany. At least the Eagles were visible enough to stir a reaction. By 1977, other bands—such as Journey, REO Speedwagon, Foreigner, Styx, Nazareth, and eventually Loverboy, Survivor, Toto, and Boston—existed solely as product. Any reaction besides clapping and reaching for your wallet would have been detrimental to this brand of corporate sludge, which reduced rock and roll to nothing more than formulaic mass manipulation. “Hotel California” might have made me feel miserable, but at least it tried to say something. Most songs that inspired me to elaborate on them in this



book did so because I thought they were great songs that boded well for the future of pop music. “Hotel California” is here because it made me realize that my expectations were overly optimistic. Rock and roll had surely reached its nadir.

The Eagles became the very thing that their song lyrics cataloged and mocked, and they did it with a smug self-assurance that was astoundingly inappropriate for any self-respecting rock-and-roll band. If it was rock and roll that you were interested in, then it was time to look elsewhere. The California dream was definitely over and it was now time to check out.

## MAY 1978 #3 TAKE A CHANCE ON ME—ABBA

Most music fans vehemently denied any attraction to the Swedish foursome, yet somebody out there was buying a whole lot of Abba records. By the end of the '70s, sales topped 50 million units, and Abba out-grossed Volvo as Sweden's #1 export. Like Volvo, the group's output was consistent, well-constructed, safe, predictable, and invested with an undeniable appeal. Each hit song was reliably tuneful and full of timeless qualities that caused Abba to outlast its competition time and time again. Most pop hits, particularly those from the disco era, suffered from a built-in obsolescence that rendered them worthless over time. Although Abba was as middle-of-the-road as they come, even its most trendy material, such as “Dancing Queen,” continues to accrue some mileage. “Knowing Me, Knowing You” and “Take a Chance on Me” are good examples of Abba's crafty workmanship and fine attention to detail, and they represent some of the finest work to come off the band's assembly line. By constructing the kinds of songs that *they* liked, Anni-Frid, Benny, Bjorn, and Agnetha (A-B-B-A) drove themselves to the pinnacle of pop superstardom without allying themselves with any specific fashion.

Catchy pop melodies were Abba's forte, strengthened by excellent vocal harmony and superb production. “Take a Chance on Me” is only one example, though probably the best, of Abba's style. Although emulating pop music clichés can be a dangerous business, songwriters Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus made it all sound so easy. Their songs sounded as good coming over a portable radio as they did booming out of a sound system at the trendiest discos. Abba's vocals were always polished but never sounded better than they did on “Take a Chance on Me.” Unlike their early hits, which they were forced to sing phonetically, vocalists Anni-Frid (Frida) Lyngstad and Agnetha Faltskog sound sufficiently comfortable with the English language here.

Although music as blatantly commercial as Abba's was decidedly unfashionable in the late '70s, they were recognized as pop geniuses by some very surprising sources. Even one of punk rock's most outspoken and intelligent figureheads, Joe Strummer of the Clash, confessed a weakness for Abba. The fact is, almost everybody had a sweet tooth for Abba's brand of Eurovision pop. It gave us all a break

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1978	#2
<u>BAKER STREET</u> —GERRY RAFFERTY	



from the bleak visions that the American and English groups were offering, and it romanticized the notion of pop music with an international flair. Sometimes, Abba took the “European” tag a little bit too far, but “Fernando,” “Mama Mia,” and “Chiquitita” had melodies that far outclassed any low-rent attempt at European classicism.

Abba began as four solo music professionals that enjoyed moderate popularity solely within Sweden’s borders. The two male songwriters met at a party and soon set to work writing and performing as a duo. It wasn’t long before they realized the commercial potential of asking Bjorn’s wife, Agnetha, and Benny’s girlfriend, Frida, both of whom were already professional performers, to join. Sweden was not exactly an international music center, so one would have expected Abba to be satisfied with its local achievements. Ambition led them to expect more, and when their third consecutive entry in the Eurovision Song Contest took first place, other countries began to take notice. Unfortunately, so did quite a few music critics, who were unkind to Abba’s brand of lightweight and breezy pop. With no musical roots (as defined by the American and English critics) and a barely adequate handle on the English language, Abba was an easy target for their vitriolic nature and acerbic wit. Somehow, Abba’s appeal transcended (or circumvented) most critical opinions. On paper, nobody liked them, but in 1979 the *Guinness Book of World Records* listed them as the best-selling act in recording history. From today’s perspective, I think it might even be fair to say that they deserved it.

## MAY 1978 #19 DEACDN BLUES—STEELY DAN

**W**alter Becker and Donald Fagen met while attending Bard College in New York and became quick friends, sharing a passion for jazz and blues and a disdain for the current crop of psychedelic ramblings that had overtaken pop music.

They pooled their ideas and formed a band that at one time included comedian/actor Chevy Chase on drums. Initial attempts to peddle their wares proved fruitless, with three exceptions. The first was an offer for them to produce music for a low-budget film called *You Gotta Walk It Like You Talk It*. The second was the sale of a song called “I Mean to Shine,” which was picked by, of all people, Barbra Streisand. Their next offer was an invitation to tour as backing musicians for Jay and the Americans, which I am sure did little to expand their love of life on the road and playing live. Producer Gary Katz met the duo around this time and sympathized with their inability to get a proper foothold within the industry. When ABC-Dunhill offered Katz a position as house producer, he in-

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1978 <u>I'M NOT GONNA LET IT BOTHER ME TONIGHT— THE ATLANTA RHYTHM SECTION</u>	#14
JULY 1978 <u>FM [NO STATIC AT ALL]—STEELY DAN</u>	#22
AUGUST 1978 <u>REMINISCING— THE LITTLE RIVER BAND</u>	#3
AUGUST 1978 <u>JUST WHAT I NEEDED—THE CARS</u>	#27



vited Becker and Fagen to come along as songwriters. Katz felt that the only way his friends would get their material heard was if they recorded it themselves, so instead of soliciting their songs, he helped put together a backing band and offered to produce the effort. Along with chief engineer Roger Nichols, it was a relationship that would continue for the extent of Steely Dan's existence.

After the release of their first two albums, a few short touring stints ensued, the effects of which caused Becker and Fagen to swear off touring, supposedly forever. With no prospect for work, the other bandmembers started taking other jobs, leaving the songwriters at a crossroad. Their direction, though, was self-determined. Forget maintaining a "band" and paying salaries to people simply for them to remain on call, they decided. Forget touring through one-horse towns in chartered buses and generic hotels. They would write—that's supposedly what they were being paid to do anyway—and then hire session musicians to realize their visions.

Becker and Fagen adapted to the hermetic atmosphere of the recording studio almost instantly. They sewed up their third album, *Pretzel Logic*, and then released a pair of masterpieces back to back. *Katy Lied* and *The Royal Scam* were purely studio efforts, with hired guns supplying the instrumentation, but the variety of material and the artistic scope of Becker and Fagen's vision was stunningly complete. The studio was their adopted home. *Aja*, their sixth album, followed suit by exaggerating the traits of its predecessors. Its sound was so airtight that it left the impression of being recorded underwater at twenty fathoms. Becker and Fagen submerged themselves and recorded a "pop" album that sounded too perfect to have been recorded by mere humans. Between the rigidly accurate writing, engineering, production, and performance, *Aja* came off sounding less like a pop album than like a demonstration disk for audiophiles.

One song on the album lacks the technically brilliant fireworks of the others but stands out for its emotional honesty. "Deacon Blues" is a song about insularity, nestled in a sea of insular material. Just how this song managed to become a Top 40 single is completely beyond my comprehension, but I'm glad that it did. Fagen's usually sardonic vocal delivery is absent here, leaving him sounding vulnerable and honest. Without the protective shell of his attitude, he nakedly recounts the tale of a misbegotten life, full of unrecognized accomplishments and misdirected choices. Wrapped in a cocoon of self-pity, the singer longs to embody the life of a romantic iconoclast. In his disillusionment, he envisions himself as a scotch-drinking, late-night jazzman who burns out before he fades away. In actu-

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1978	#32
<u>CHEESEBURGER IN PARADISE</u> —	
JIMMY BUFFETT	
MAY 1978	#32
<u>TUMBLING DICE</u> —LINDA RONSTADT	
JULY 1978	#1
<u>YOU NEEDED ME</u> —ANNE MURRAY	
JULY 1978	#3
<u>HOTBLOODED</u> —FOREIGNER	
JULY 1978	#8
<u>COPACABANA</u> —BARRY MANILOW	
AUGUST 1978	#1
<u>HOT CHILD IN THE CITY</u> —NICK GILDER	
AUGUST 1978	#19
<u>DANCE [DISCO HEAT]</u> —SYLVESTER	





ality, he accepts his fate, as well as his attitude of abandoned hope. As a rather pathetic last request, he then asks us to remember him for being the prototypical loser of his generation.

It is a fully developed and wholly believable character, who perhaps even has elements of autobiography. Usually, Becker and Fagen wrote as third-party observers, so it is rare to find a song in which personal revelations are a possibility. If any of their songs offers insights into their personal trials and tribulations, however, this is it.

## NOVEMBER 1978 #28 ONE NATION UNDER A GROOVE—FUNKADELIC

**B**efore we get into it, this would be as good a place as any to lament the pop charts' mishandling of the early days of alternative R&B. The most startling example of what I am referring to concerns "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, which was the most innovative and powerful recording by a black artist in years, yet it missed the Top 40 completely. Perhaps it was because I live in New York, where rap music was already thriving, and I wrongly thought that the popularity of this record was nationwide instead of regional. But I don't think that explains things sufficiently. My guess is "The Message" was overlooked because it was only available as an extended twelve-inch single, a new medium with a limited market share. Its lyrics single-handedly broke rap topics wide open—to extend well beyond mere boasting or insulting—and brought the style into the realm of social criticism. A record this challenging deserves accolades, whether it's seven, twelve, or a hundred and twenty inches, yet it only managed to scrape its way to #62 in 1982 (it reached #4 on the R&B charts).

Disco was the first musical form to capitalize on the twelve-inch single because it allowed for a heavier bass mix and louder output, while the additional time meant that imaginative deejays could use the records creatively. After a five-year run, disco began to show signs of wear and tear, causing hybrids to arise that combined disco with other forms. One deejay invention was to extract rhythm tracks from sections of the extended twelve-inch mixes and then ad-lib rhymes over the cyclical rhythms. Others would add percussive sounds made by pushing a record back and forth on the turntable, a technique known as "scratching," or use a beat box (a drum machine) to provide a consistent rhythm under a montage of prerecorded excerpts. 1980 signaled the formal birth of rap music, with "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang, but it would be another ten years before the pop charts would adequately reflect the major impact that rap was having on popular music. For many listeners, this was just as well, but like it or not, rap's plain-spoken style was not going to let itself be ignored forever. By the '90s, it demanded that you take notice, and after a fifteen-year battle for recognition and respect, it finally became the most represented (and most controversial) form of contemporary music.

Another hybrid of disco was beat-heavy funk, as exemplified by the work of deejays who became recording stars, such as Arthur Baker and Jellybean Benitez, and the





anonymous artists whose names graced the record labels, such as Taana Gardner (“Heatwave”), Project (“Love Rescue”), the Strikers (“Body Music”), Change (“Paradise”), and Tom Browne (whose “Funkin’ for Jamaica” performed the seemingly impossible feat of going to #1 on the soul charts without ever reaching the Hot 100—a feat that George Clinton repeated in 1983 with “Atomic Dog”). This was a meatier type of disco that allowed for more substantial and experimental mixes, as well as a greater range of rhythms, but it also was ignored by the pop charts, even while dominating black radio. Other acts incorporated a punky, new-wave energy into the equation, but these songs also failed to chart adequately, as exemplified by the paltry #40 position of Rick James’s “Give It to Me Baby.”

So, how did George Clinton’s “P-Funk” nation manage to do it? First of all, nobody could claim that Clinton was hopping on anybody else’s bandwagon or merging with anybody else’s style. R&B was always among the most earthy and grounded of musical forms, but Clinton figured out a way to bring it into outer space. Through his innovations, he cut a path that would allow artists such as Prince to take funk to a whole new level, while dance music would embrace things like mechanization, computers, video imagery, “break” and robot dancing, and the futuristic hip-hop rhythms of Afrika Bambaataa. Synthesizers and computers were now providing digital sounds that became common tools in funk recordings. Many of these influences were shared with white culture, thus allowing the artists to finally appeal to a crossover audience while recording state-of-the-art funk. Soon enough the process reversed, and artists like Thomas Dolby, New Order, the Human League, and even the Clash were welcomed in the dance clubs and on black radio. With records such as “Tear the Roof off the Sucker” (1976) and “One Nation under a Groove” (1978), Clinton launched a bicultural movement that would eventually transmogrify into a form of pop music known as techno-funk.

The Parliaments dated all the way back to the mid-’50s, when they popped up on some street corner in New Jersey singing doo-wop with hopes of stardom. The band relocated to Detroit in 1959 and tried to charm Motown Records, which recorded them for four years but never released anything. Disgusted with the inactivity, Clinton and the Parliaments dropped their uniforms and once more shot for the street. A single, “(I Wanna) Testify,” was released in 1967 on the Revilot label, and it rocketed up the R&B charts and even climbed to #20 on the pop charts. Unfortunately, in light of Clinton’s fame, others now laid claim to the name “Parliaments.” The group was forced to abandon its decade-old moniker and replace it with the hipper-sounding Funkadelic. When the legal smoke cleared, Clinton reclaimed the name the Parliaments and started recording on Holland-Dozier-Holland’s Invictus

**This was a meatier type of disco that allowed for more substantial and experimental mixes, as well as a greater range of rhythms, but it also was ignored by the pop charts, even while dominating black radio.**



**With this single, Clinton gives us a taste of what we could expect if James Brown were an extraterrestrial.**

label, while Funkadelic (essentially the same group of musicians under a different name) signed on with the Westbound label. The two quasi-independent operations maintained a thinly veiled connection under a Clinton-held umbrella, that was casually referred to as the P-Funk family. When Invictus folded, Clinton moved Parliament to Casablanca and started to *really* confuse everybody by releasing albums and singles under various other pseudonyms. James Brown's musicians were jumping ship with some regularity in the mid-'70s, and a few of his most notorious backup players drifted into the P-Funk camp. Bootsy Collins, Maceo Parker, and Fred Wesley all left Brown and began rehearsing with Clinton, who by now was recording as Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy's Rubber Band, the Horny Horns, Parlet, and the Brides of Dr. Funkenstein. The entire family incorporated something like forty musicians. In the mid-to-late '70s, Clinton brought the whole magilla on the road for a gloriously ambitious mess of a tour, which earned them all a well-deserved reputation as futuristic messengers for a new brand of psycho-funk.

Endless exercises in pointless silliness took up the majority of their album space, but their singles provided them the opportunity to focus on the groove without any sense of overkill. "Tear the Roof off the Sucker (Give Up the Funk)," released by Parliament, was the first late-period cut to make a point for smaller doses when it reached #15. When listening to a single, you didn't need to familiarize yourself with such cosmic slop as Afro-nauts, Sir Nose D-Voidoffunk, Bootzilla, the Mothership, the P-Funk Army, or Funkentelechy. Without the added confusion of Clinton's excessive symbolism and space-junk visions, the singles seem to float on air. "One Nation under a Groove" proves the same thing again but with a brand new techno-funk beat that can really tear the roof off the sucker. With this single, Clinton gives us a taste of what we could expect if James Brown were an extraterrestrial. The band, including Clinton himself, actually considered "One Nation under a Groove" to be almost *too* commercial, but decided to go ahead with it anyway. "Getting down just for the funk of it," Clinton and his cohorts were able to compress their rhythmic vision into the spaces of a killer groove that was no longer than it had to be and no shorter than it needed to be. It fit comfortably on both a seven- and a twelve-inch single, and "Nation" reached #28 on the pop charts while rising to the #1 position on the R&B charts. As Clinton himself once said, "Funk is its own reward."

## DECEMBER 1978 #16 TAKE ME TO THE RIVER—THE TALKING HEADS

**T**he birth of punk rock was not as sudden and clearly defined as many historians would lead you to believe, and the scope of punk rock was not nearly as limited as has been suggested. A brand of do-it-yourself punk/garage rock had gained popularity in the mid-'60s, mostly because of the effect the British Invasion had



on the typical teenage consciousness across America. For a short while, these amateurish efforts sounded fresh and invigorating, but due to the unflagging efforts of the established segments of the industry, they were slowly overwhelmed by the sheer professionalism of rock's major players. As rock music moved out of the clubs and into the theaters, then out of the theaters and into the arenas, there was no longer any rapport between the artist and the audience. Bands moved farther and farther away as the stages grew higher and higher. Whether it was the West Coast polish of the Eagles or the Doobie Brothers, the hard rock/heavy metal brawn of Deep Purple, Nazareth, and Black Sabbath, or the faceless vapid-ity of Toto, Styx, and Journey, mid-'70s rock was aimed somewhere over the heads of its listeners, disconnecting the give-and-take relationship that had previously existed at live shows. For the legions of fans who continued to turn out for their favorite bands, stadium concerts became an event more than a musical experience.

It was the pub scene, long forgotten by the press and music critics, that maintained the sweaty immediacy and sense of intimacy that are so important for live music to work. In England, places like the Hope and Anchor Pub helped launch the careers of such pre-punk acts as Graham Parker, Ian Dury, and Nick Lowe (with Brinsley Schwarz) and also provided the spawning ground for the future punk rockers. In America, New York's CBGB (the now ironic acronym for "Country, Bluegrass, and Blues") served as a home base to bands like Television, the Patti Smith Group, Blondie, the Ramones, and the Talking Heads. Each of these acts had little in common musically, but they cohabited well and a scene developed that grew large enough to attract attention. It wasn't long before CBGB came to be viewed as a musical mecca, and virtually every band that was part of the scene eventually released a record.

If everybody who now claims to have been part of the New York club scene from the beginning really was there, then the Bowery would have sunk into the ocean from the weight of all the bodies, and CBGB's walls would have burst. In reality, punk was a fringe culture that never really caught on, expanded only by a few curious onlookers who would drop in to gawk at what they perceived to be a freak show. CBGB held only about four or five hundred sweat-soaked and illegally crammed people. Practically none of the original punk-rock bands who played there sold records in sufficient enough quantities to chart, and for the most part, the scene remained insular.

It wasn't until punk was softened into the much more easily digestible and readily packaged new wave that it began to make a commercial dent in the U.S.

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1979 #1  
I WILL SURVIVE—GLORIA GAYNOR

JANUARY 1979 #31  
SMATTERED—THE ROLLING STONES

### GREAT MISSES

DECEMBER 1978 #1  
DO YA THINK I'M SEXY—  
ROD STEWART

DECEMBER 1978 #10  
I WAS MADE FOR DANCIN'—  
LEIF GARRETT



By blunting the razor's edge of punk's safety-pin-and-spray-paint leer, and replacing it with the cool angularity of Day-Glo geometric shapes and skinny ties, the record companies were able to turn punk into a fashion statement, and the American public finally succumbed. Only by virtue of the fact that it never really went away, punk has remained highly influential in determining the direction of the recent music that has been disturbed by its wake.

Like most of the New York-based bands, the Talking Heads fit into the early punk scene only by dint of the fact that they played at CBGB. The New York underground saw them as a welcome change, but the rest of America didn't quite get the Talking Heads. With David Byrne's wide-eyed, vulnerable stance and his quivering vocal style, it was hard to decide whether he was a stunningly original talent or just comically deranged. His lyrics also came straight out of left field. At a time when practically everybody else in pop music was assuming a macho posture or singing deliberately veiled lyrics, Byrne sang with an almost childishly innocent clarity and sincere wonder about a book that he read, feeling confused, the joys of infrastructure, the strength of a supportive family, etc. He had a uniquely open-minded perspective that allowed him to find something imaginative in what otherwise might be seen as mundane. By sharing his artistic appreciation for the ordinary, he offered suggestions for diffusing the tension of our own lives. This, however, was only one facet of Byrne's complex vision. He must have known that he would appear odd to an audience that had grown used to more conventional stage personas, so he juxtaposed a sense of danger and paranoia into his songwriting that gave a serious twist to his open-ended associations. The disturbed, yet somehow amusing, character study, "Psycho Killer," provided a perfect outlet for his sincere but paranoid stage persona, a persona that CBGB club owner Hilly Krystal likened to "a chicken with its head cut off."

**With David  
Byrne's wide-  
eyed, vulner-  
able stance and  
his quivering  
vocal style, it  
was hard to  
decide whether  
he was a  
stunningly  
original talent  
or just comi-  
cally deranged.**

Byrne's genuine image might seem to be a contradiction of punk's attitude, but it was actually perfect for the punk rock scene. An important part of the punk ethic was to disregard what was expected of you. If standard corporate posturing was offensive or unnatural, then you ought to stick to your guns and be true to yourself. Once you did so, the sense of freedom would be immediate, and the stylistic impact both overwhelming and palpable. Because Byrne's style was different, it was also perceived to be genuine and spontaneous. Without excess deliberation, he was therefore able to recapture the rebellious essence of good rock and roll.

Artistry and integrity had become an anomaly in late '70s rock and roll, but the Talking Heads reintroduced them as primary ingredients to be incorporated over primal (but intelligent and tasteful) rhythms. "Take Me to the River" broadsided the status quo by combining the best ingredients of conventional pop music and classic soul





music, stirring them together, and then presenting the mix in the guise of punk rock. The first ingenious thing the Talking Heads did was to take a classic soul song and *slow it down*. Even more important was choosing Al Green (as much of a trailblazer of heartfelt soul as ever existed, yet not sanctified to the point where a cover version would appear sacrilegious) as the source of inspiration. Then they worked on it until it felt comfortable, so comfortable that it was interchangeable with their own original songs. By the time they finished, they achieved what previously would have been considered all but impossible. They took an Al Green song, recreated it in their own image, but never destroyed the funky root. They usurped Green's song right from under him.

Through their work with Brian Eno (three albums' worth), the Talking Heads almost single-handedly came to represent the East Coast perspective of new wave rock and roll. It was a heady responsibility, but Byrne's aloof demeanor diffused whatever weighty maxims were being thrust at him. Meanwhile, bandmembers Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, the husband-and-wife rhythm section, began work on a commercially successful side project called the Tom Tom Club, which recorded more relaxed compositions than the deliberately cranial work of the Talking Heads. In 1983, director Jonathan Demme documented a Talking Heads concert in a film called *Stop Making Sense*, which, in tandem with the Band and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz*, stands out as the most professionally made and entertaining rock-and-roll film ever. Video conscious in the video age, the Talking Heads increased their relevance throughout the '80s, until they suspended their recording as a group in favor of individual interests.

## FEBRUARY 1979 #1 WHAT A FOOL BELIEVES—THE DOOBIE BROTHERS

**S**ome of the best and most consistent ear candy of the early '70s came from the pen of Tom Johnston. Johnston relied on solidly rocking guitar riffs to structure his songwriting, resulting in some of the most irresistible singles of the era. "Listen to the Music" (#11), "Long Train Runnin'" (#8), "China Grove" (#15), and "Another Park, Another Sunday" (#32) were typical examples of Johnston's trade. Although lyrically vacuous, they were undeniably catchy and probably would have held up reasonably well if the AOR (album oriented radio) hit radio stations weren't constantly torturing us with them. Patrick Simmons was the Doobie Brothers' second-string songwriter and proved himself to be almost as adept as Johnston was at penning memorable rockers. He also had a mellow side, as was evidenced by his surprise #1 hit, "Black Water" (originally released on the B side of "Another Park, Another Sunday") and gorgeous album tracks such as "South City Midnight Lady."

Outwardly, the Doobie Brothers displayed the healthy (and somewhat rare) talent of maintaining a career as album-oriented artists and pop performers, with Johnston taking lead on seven of the band's eight Top 40 singles. Inwardly, though, all was not well in Doobie-land. Johnston was suffering from the most typical side effects of excessive rock-and-roll stardom (addictions, exhaustion, etc.) and





lost his sense of direction. His creativity floundered at the same time the rest of the band craved a clean break from anything so crass as juvenile pop. Instead of being appreciated for lining their pockets with gold, Johnston became expendable. To be fair, the band could hardly be expected to wait around indefinitely while their careers melted away. Since Johnston's health was unreliable and his brand of energetic riff-rock was becoming dated anyway, they grew impatient and devised a plan that, once in effect, would force him into the background. Guitarist Jeff "Skunk" Baxter was the most recent addition to the Doobie Brothers, taking up permanent

residence with the band because his other employer, Steely Dan, was much too unreliable to provide him with steady work. Baxter suggested that another Steely Dan alumnus, Michael McDonald, come on as a vocalist/keyboardist/songwriter. When Johnston had to abandon the band in the midst of a two-month tour, McDonald was brought in to reinvigorate them.

The change, as evidenced by their next album, *Takin' It to the Streets*, was immediate and astonishing. The band that just one album ago was a guitar-driven boogie band with unlimited pop potential, had suddenly transformed into a funky, blue-eyed soul outfit. McDonald practically took over the songwriting chores while Johnston was allocated one mediocre composition. Fans of the old Doobie Brothers may have resented the sudden change, but there was no denying that this McDonald guy was a damn good songwriter/vocalist. The album's title song became McDonald's first single with the band, and it announced their radical departure in style. Except for the occasional Simmons composition that would hearken back to the old days, the Doobie Brothers were the same band in name only.

Soon, McDonald's distinctive and soulful vocals became commonplace on the charts, whether as lead for the Doobie Brothers or as a session vocalist for any of a score of different artists. For

the most part, guitar boogie was replaced with well-paced and funky polyrhythms, which suggested the sophisticated work of talented bands like Little Feat or Steely Dan. Because of the sudden change in style, the Doobie Brothers were granted a new lease on life and extended their stardom for an additional five years.

The high point of McDonald's influential years came in 1979 with "What a Fool Believes." At that time, the music industry was in the midst of another tremendously volatile state of flux, but McDonald's vocal style lulled the conservative element of the business into believing that everything would be just fine. Nothing

**GREAT HITS**

FEBRUARY 1979	#4
<u>SULTANS OF SWING</u> —DIRE STRAITS	
MARCH 1979	#1
<u>HEART OF GLASS</u> —BLONDIE	
MARCH 1979	#7
<u>SHAKE YOUR BODY (DOWN TO THE GROUND)</u> —THE JACKSONS	
MAY 1979	#7
<u>I WANT YOU TO WANT ME</u> —CHEAP TRICK	
JULY 1979	#1
<u>GOOD TIMES</u> —CHIC	
JULY 1979	#21
<u>IS SHE REALLY GOING OUT WITH HIM</u> —JOE JACKSON	
AUGUST 1979	#12
<u>CRUEL TO BE KIND</u> —NICK LOWE AND HIS COWBOY OUTFIT	
AUGUST 1979	#15
<u>GOODBYE STRANGER</u> —SUPERTRAMP	



could have been further from the truth. Pop music was experiencing a crisis unlike anything since the birth of rock and roll, and had managed to isolate just about anybody who considered quality to be a good thing. “My Sharona,” “Pop Muzik,” “Do Ya Think I’m Sexy,” “Ring My Bell,” and “Heartache Tonight” all reached #1 in that year. Meanwhile, the best and most invigorating music was not coming anywhere near the pop charts. In England, the Sex Pistols destroyed all preconceptions of what a pop band should be (and then promptly destroyed themselves), and in America, the Patti Smith Group was combining artful poetry with provocative confrontation. Such New York bands as Blondie, Television, the Talking Heads, and the Dead Boys were playing regularly around the city, and Londoners like the Clash, Generation X, and Elvis Costello were preparing for international stardom while being gobbled on by appreciative fans. Meanwhile, the Doobie Brothers were a salve for a confused industry in a state of disarray. That same year, McDonald crooned his band to four Grammy awards.

The Doobie Brothers were quite obviously miles away from the cutting edge of contemporary trends, but that doesn’t lessen the fact that “What a Fool Believes” was one of the best pop songs of 1979. McDonald paints a comically pathetic portrait of a chance meeting between two former lovers, each of whom has a completely different recollection of their relationship. While the male character charges ahead with the conviction of a man who believes that their love affair was the highlight of their lives, it becomes uncomfortably obvious that the female character does not share his enthusiasm. Sweet and sour, bittersweet and painfully romantic, “What a Fool Believes” focuses unflinchingly on an anticlimactic scene that could have fallen right out of a movie script.

Kenny Loggins, another holdout from the mid-’70s (you must remember Loggins and Messina) who has only increased his stardom into the ’90s, assisted McDonald with the songwriting. The two had not met previously, but were brought together at the suggestion of Doobie Brothers bassist Tiran Porter, who thought Loggins would be a clever foil for McDonald’s songwriting. As the story goes, Loggins heard McDonald running through the song from the driveway, and before he even knocked on the door, had imagined a continuation from where McDonald had left off. The serendipitous partners quickly finished writing “What a Fool Believes,” and thus wrapped up a song that went on to spawn the above-mentioned four Grammy awards. Because of their increasingly obvious obsolescence, or maybe because of McDonald’s interest in his solo projects, the Doobie Brothers disbanded after a few more albums, although they remained together for one final “farewell” tour. Like pining lovers, the group seemed to find it impossible to remain apart, and for the next five years kept reuniting at the drop of a hat. Eventually, McDonald decided to retain his career as a solo artist, while Johnston was reactivated as a permanent member.

#### GREAT MISSES

MARCH 1979 #3  
**IN THE NAVY—THE VILLAGE PEOPLE**

JULY 1979 #3  
**THE DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA—  
 THE CHARLIE DANIELS BAND**

AUGUST 1979 #1  
**POP MUZIK—M**



## SEPTEMBER 1979 #1 DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH— MICHAEL JACKSON

**M**ore than other styles, production was immensely important to the success of a dance hit. The long-term result is that many songs from this period don't enjoy the same longevity as the pop music that preceded it. The competitive nature of the producers caused them to insist upon "hotter" sounds that would become obsolete once a newer innovation came along. With too much attention on production and not enough on content, songs were easily dismissed in a short span of time.

The Jacksons' career at Epic Records had gotten off to a slow start, but once they were granted the creative license to write and produce their own material, things improved dramatically. Although their career had been disappointing during most of the disco period, they were now fully prepared to write and record songs in the post-disco style of dance music. "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)" was the Jacksons' entry into the post-disco maze, and it immediately brought them up to date. The production was as hot as anything that had preceded it, but there was something even more fascinating about the sound of this record. It had been five years since the Jackson 5 had left Motown, and in that time, all of them, particularly Michael, had visibly aged. No longer a precocious teenager, Michael Jackson was an introverted young man who had become so accustomed to being in the public eye that a normal life was all but impossible. His unique persona combined the asexual tension of a man obsessed with his privacy and an appealing, unthreatening assertiveness that brought considerable intensity to his performance. This

GREAT MISSES	
SEPTEMBER 1979	#11
<u>GOOD GIRLS DON'T—THE KNACK</u>	
SEPTEMBER 1979	#12
<u>DIRTY WHITE BOY—FOREIGNER</u>	
OCTOBER 1979	#1
<u>HEARTACHE TONIGHT—THE EAGLES</u>	

made "Shake Your Body" fascinating to listen to and too good to be easily dismissed.

As it turned out, "Shake Your Body" was nothing more than a precursor for what was to come. Michael Jackson had decided to take the considerable risk of renewing his solo career and asked Quincy Jones to assist him in formulating an album. Using the cream of L.A.'s session musicians and incorporating meticulous attention to every detail, from song selection to production, Jones and Jackson created a masterpiece of perfectly executed dance pop and balladry. *Off the Wall* was the title of the album, and it yielded four Top 10 hits, including "Rock with You" (#1 for four weeks), "Off the Wall" (#10), and "She's Out of My Life" (#10). The first single and the highlight of the set was Jackson's own composition, "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough." With its airtight groove and letter-perfect production, this one song is enough to justify the entire disco trend. It has all the ingredients, yet it escapes sounding stereotypical—a miracle, really. Syncopated horns, a pro-



cessed beat, a string section, falsetto voices, a funky guitar riff, sharp-as-a-tack production, and sexual innuendo would usually add up to nothing more than another variation on a common theme. “Don’t Stop ’Til You Get Enough” is a wonder in that it effortlessly soars over the heads of its plebeian competition. With generic ingredients, Jackson and Jones created state-of-the-art dance music that still sounds innovative today.

## NOVEMBER 1979 #4 CRUISIN’—SMOKEY ROBINSON

**A**round 1978 or ’79, pop music went into a coma from which it has yet to fully recover. Reeling from the shock of being attacked simultaneously by both disco and punk, pop hit the mat and curled up into a ball. Risking movement was out of the question, so pop music stuck to traditional forms, while avoiding anything that could be detected as progress. 1978 brought on the disco haze of “Night Fever,” “Shadow Dancing,” “Le Freak,” “Stayin’ Alive,” and “Kiss You All Over” (these were the top five singles from that year), as well as predictably dull offerings by the Rolling Stones (“Miss You”), Wings (“With a Little Luck”), Eric Clapton (“Lay Down Sally”), and Bob Seger (“Still the Same”). The lifeblood that had once made these classic artists sound so invigorating and essential had turned anemic.

Although it was thriving, punk was completely absent from the pop charts. With American radio ignoring its very existence and the major labels working overtime to figure out a way to tame this movement and turn it into a cash cow, it barely stood a chance.

A newer, friendlier punk rock, without all of those messy ideas about social issues and anarchy came in 1979. Even the word “punk” was deemed distasteful, so the media-friendly and fashion-conscious term “new wave” was applied instead. There now, isn’t that better? All scrubbed up and ready to go, bands like the Cars (Elektra), Devo (Warner Bros.), the Knack (Capitol), and Blondie (Chrysalis) were now welcome on the pop charts with the predictably dull pap of Styx (“Babe”), the Eagles (“Heartache Tonight”), and Rod Stewart (“Do Ya Think I’m Sexy?”), as well as the last dying gasps of commercial disco, such as “No More Tears (Enough Is Enough)” by Barbra Streisand/Donna Summer and “Don’t Stop ’Til You Get Enough” by Michael Jackson.

By 1980, pop began to make tentative steps toward a recovery. Disco, new wave, good old-fashioned pop, rock and roll, and R&B were being used in all sorts of random combinations. Once easily categorized artists were now crossing boundaries, and the hybrids were a welcome change and occasionally even interesting.

### GREAT HITS

DECEMBER 1979 #29  
**CHIQUITITA—ABBA**

### GREAT MISSES

NOVEMBER 1979 #1  
**ESCAPE [THE PINA COLADA SONG]—  
 RUPERT HOLMES**

DECEMBER 1979 #3  
**COWARD OF THE COUNTY—  
 KENNY ROGERS**





**Since nobody else seemed interested in taking the torch, Robinson carried his own mantle into the '80s.**

But not always. Kenny Rogers grasped at soul (“Lady”), Blondie grappled with disco (“Call Me”)—these were the two biggest hits of the year—and Billy Joel made embarrassing overtures to new wave (“It’s Still Rock & Roll to Me”). It was hardly like old times, but at least Shaun Cassidy, the Bay City Rollers, the Captain and Tenille, and Leif Garrett were nowhere to be found.

But although outright junk began to vanish, it wasn’t being replaced with anything substantial. Pop music was still flat, dull, and directionless. All that could be hoped for was that a song would occasionally come along that might be good enough to save us from the mediocre standards of the previous decade. Leave it to one of pop music’s

most talented practitioners to show us how little things had really changed after all. The soothing voice of Smokey Robinson was one of the most reassuring and inspiring sounds that could have been conjured from this mess. He didn’t compromise himself by combining various styles or by taking an ill-timed stab at some new trend. His lush and romantic voice hadn’t changed a whit since his hits with the Miracles. He ignored the fact that black music was now almost exclusively in the hands of the producer, and he disregarded the trend toward groundless or predictably ordinary themes by writing and producing “Cruisin” in his own traditional (read “timeless”) style.

Since nobody else seemed interested in taking the torch, Robinson carried his own mantle into the '80s. Thank God. Like a vine that needed to grow across a ravine to remain alive, Robinson bridged a musical gap that otherwise might have left us stranded. Disco, which dismissed anything more than two weeks old, and punk, which could only look back in anger, nearly cut us off from our past. Simply by being himself, Robinson played a major role in reuniting us with our pop heritage while simultaneously proving that the good stuff never really goes away. He found a common ground where the disparate tastes of modern listeners could all join together and agree wholeheartedly on at least one thing: Robinson knew how to make a great record.





**Chapter  
Eight**

**1980-1989**







## APRIL 1980 #14 BRASS IN POCKET—THE PRETENDERS

Chrissie Hynde renders impotent those “women in rock” magazine features that appear every now and then. From as far back as the girl group trends of the early '60s and as recently as the onset of groups like Hole, Throwing Muses, and Babes in Toyland, this talk has constantly arisen. Can't we just get over it? Women may not ever have represented a majority in the music business, but when a girl group or a female singer/songwriter does achieve some level of fame, it's almost always because of her talent, not her sex. And when an influx of female artists occasionally rises to the surface, it is not because of a sexual revolution. People don't buy records for the sake of ideology. They buy them because they happen to like the music, pure and simple, and Chrissie Hynde happens to be writing and recording some of the most interesting music that is available.

Few artists carry the burden of survival as heavily or as gracefully as Hynde. It's probably difficult enough being the only creative source in an otherwise all-male band, but when two-thirds of her band died drug-related deaths, a curse seemed to settle over the Pretenders. Dispelling any such impressions, Hynde found replacement musicians and released the tender and inspiring “Back on the Chain Gang.” Above and beyond her abilities as a singer/songwriter, she has shown a will to survive not only because she wants to, but because she has the talent and vision to stay the course.

Born and raised in Akron, Ohio, Hynde relocated to England in 1974. There she worked temporarily as a journalist for the British music rag *New Musical Express*, and started writing songs and trying to establish her persona as an independent-minded crank. She moved back and forth between France, America, and England, where she finally settled during the tumultuous early days of punk rock. After a series of false starts, she brought together the three musicians who had the muscle to back her songwriting's aggressive punch. James Honeyman-Scott, Pete Dinklage, and Martin Chambers (the only survivor of the three) were all excellent musicians, but the Pretenders were squarely resting on the chip that sat on Chrissie Hynde's shoulder. The architecture of this arrangement lent each side additional strength, with Hynde benefiting from fronting a powerful group of subservient men, and the band benefiting from the prestige of backing one of the most distinctive voices in rock and roll.

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1980 #36  
HAPPER'S DELIGHT—  
THE SUGARMILL GANG

FEBRUARY 1980 #15  
REFUGEE—  
TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS

APRIL 1980 #23  
TRAIN IN VAIN—THE CLASH

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1980 #6  
HIM—RUPERT HOLMES

MARCH 1980 #9  
CARS—GARY NUMAN

MARCH 1980 #23  
ANYWAY YOU WANT IT—JOURNEY

MARCH 1980 #38  
BABY TALKS DIRTY—THE KNACK



**Besides being a memorable song, it overflows with personality and is a remarkable vehicle for Hynde's sultry vitriol.**

Although her early writing captured the essence of the punk movement, it also displayed a tuneful compactness that was rarely aligned with such aggressiveness. During the '70s, the best pop singles were nothing more than expurgated album tracks. Hynde wrote songs that were singles first and album tracks second. For anybody who preferred music to be direct and focused, this was a welcome turn of events. "Brass in Pocket" was just such a single. Besides being a memorable song, it overflows with personality and is a remarkable vehicle for Hynde's sultry vitriol. Music fans who were paying attention were already aware of Hynde's self-righteous nature and her indignant singularity. She could launch an avalanche of venom better than practically anybody, but this made it all the more rewarding when we could eke a glimpse of the gold that lay beneath the granite exterior. "Brass in Pocket" was a brag, but it was a vulnerable and self-comforting one. Since nobody else was gonna say so, her song noted reassuringly that she was special. In the space of a single 45, the woman who once sounded like she could zap a fly off the wall from twenty paces proved herself to be warm-blooded after all.

Hynde's relationship with Ray Davies of the Kinks (a longtime hero of her youth and the author of her first single, "Stop Your Sobbing") seemed to be like something right out of the rock-and-roll fantasy book *Rock Dreams*. Although they had a child, the pair separated before being wed. Hynde eventually went on to marry (and later divorce) Jim Kerr, the leader of the Scottish band Simple Minds.

Displaying more aggression and toughness than any of her female predecessors—including Suzi Quatro, the Wilson sisters (Heart), and Joan Jett and the Runaways—Hynde has a range of expression broad enough to avoid any caricaturing of her as just another "touch chick" in rock. She brings complexity and realism to her role, and this in turn frees her from the inherent limitations of being perceived solely as a female rocker.

## **FEBRUARY 1981 #7 WHILE YOU SEE A CHANCE—STEVE WINWOOD**

**W**hen Steve Winwood found himself in the uncomfortable position of fronting someone else's band, he decided that it would be best if he left the Spencer Davis Group and formed his own. After a quick studio side project called Powerhouse, he went to work choosing musicians for his next band, Traffic. Dave Mason and Jim Capaldi were old Birmingham friends of Winwood's who, in fact, had done some session work for the Spencer Davis Group. Another musician who had assisted at these recording sessions was reedman Chris Wood. It was in this way that the Spencer Davis Group had inadvertently proved itself to be the breeding ground for Traffic. Mason and Winwood had little in common other than their



ability to write occasionally catchy songs. The band clung together for a rocky couple of years and yielded three albums: *Mr. Fantasy*, *Traffic*, and, after Mason's departure, *Last Exit*. All albums now sound decidedly dated and uneven, and none was particularly successful in the U.S. After *Traffic* broke up, Winwood joined forces with another ex-bandmate, Eric Clapton. After the power trio, Cream, had played themselves into three opposing corners, Clapton sensed that they should break up before they thoroughly destroyed each other. What was once an interesting and ambitious musical project had degenerated into three egos vying for solo space. Clapton disassembled Cream and went in search of a group that would be a bit more peaceful. Assuming that Winwood would relieve some of the pressure that Clapton felt as a front man, the pair organized a short-lived project called Blind Faith. Clapton brought Ginger Baker from Cream and they recruited bassist Rick Grech from Family. Together they recorded one album with some of Winwood's finest compositions to date, including "Sea of Joy" and "Can't Find My Way Home," before folding under the pressure of media hype and an inability to gel properly.

After a stint with Baker's band Air Force, Winwood began work on a solo album but found himself working regularly once again with Capaldi and Wood. The project transformed itself into a *Traffic* revival, and the result was 1970's breakthrough album, *John Barleycorn Must Die*. Through various changes, *Traffic* continued to release interesting but sporadic albums, including *Welcome to the Canteen*, *The Low Spark of High-Heeled Boys*, *Shoot Out at the Fantasy Factory*, *On the Road*, and *When the Eagle Flies*. An extremely broad-based and varied body of work appears on these albums, and each has a few high points, but too many personnel changes caused the band to fall apart in 1974. While they maintained an active profile on AOR stations, none of their material ever came near America's Top 40.

For a few years, Winwood occupied himself with session work and the odd solo project. He used his time to work slowly and deliberately on his own material and to familiarize himself with the various electronic instruments that were becoming readily available. The sudden proliferation of programmable keyboards, drum machines, and sampling equipment presented a brave new world of possibilities, and Winwood's patient experiments helped him to uncover an album's worth of beautiful and warm sounds from the not-too-endearing instruments. *Arc of a Diver*

## GREAT HITS

JULY 1980	#9
<u>LET MY LOVE OPEN THE DOOR</u> —PETE TOWNSHEND	
OCTOBER 1980	#5
<u>MASTER BLASTER (JAMMIN')</u> —STEVIE WONDER	
NOVEMBER 1980	#5
<u>(JUST LIKE) STARTING OVER</u> —JOHN LENNON	
NOVEMBER 1980	#5
<u>HUNGRY HEART</u> —BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	
NOVEMBER 1980	#10
<u>DE DO DO DO, DE DA DA DA</u> —THE POLICE	
DECEMBER 1980	#9
<u>SAME OLD LANG SYNE</u> —DAN FOGELBERG	
DECEMBER 1980	#10
<u>HEY NINETEEN</u> —STEELY DAN	
FEBRUARY 1981	#10
<u>DON'T STAND SO CLOSE TO ME</u> —THE POLICE	





## GREAT MISSES

MAY 1980 #1  
IT'S STILL ROCK AND ROLL TO ME—  
BILLY JOEL

MAY 1980 #6  
STEAL AWAY—ROBBIE DUPREE

MAY 1980 #19  
SHOULD'VE NEVER LET YOU GO—  
NEIL AND DARA SEDAKA

AUGUST 1980 #13  
ALL OVER THE WORLD—  
ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA

SEPTEMBER 1980 #8  
XANADO—OLIVIA NEWTON JOHN/  
ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA

was the thoughtful result of his work, and “While You See a Chance” is the representative single. Although critical opinions were mixed at the time of its release, I believe that time will prove this album and its single to be some of the best and most consistent work Winwood has done. Perhaps the critics were harsh because he was not considered to be a singles artist, and it was easy to mistake his sudden popularity for slightness. This simply isn’t true. “While You See a Chance” is lyrically valid and musically captivating. Later singles were rather slight but still enjoyable, including “Higher Love” (#1 in 1986) and “Freedom Overspill” (#20). “Roll With It” marked a somewhat self-conscious return to his Spencer Davis Group roots, but even then, you can’t fault somebody for sounding like himself. Also, it was the *#1 single of 1988*. It outsold everybody. It sold more copies than any single by George

Michael. More than Guns ‘n’ Roses. More than Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Bon Jovi, or Rick Astley. Sometimes nice guys don’t finish last.

## OCTOBER 1981 #3 EVERY LITTLE THING SHE DOES IS MAGIC—THE POLICE

In England, Malcolm McLaren’s Sex Pistols took rock and roll for a long walk off a short pier. With complete disregard for the pre-existing gentry and their pompous musical ideas, they tore into twenty years of rock-and-roll history and threw it into the dustbin. To be sure, music desperately needed a good, swift kick in the pants. Unfortunately, rock and roll as a genre had splintered so much that it became impossible for it to be patched together seamlessly. Common ground became a very rare thing on the pop charts, and no particular artist could be said to be representative of the genre. Styles veered all over the place, with impassioned fans of dance music despising rock music, and vice-versa. This left the field wide open, and punk rudely attempted to fill the gaping hole. The human aspect of music-making was all but lost, and it fell into the hands of the Sex Pistols to drive home the point that anything, even nihilistic anarchy, was better than the status quo.

It’s funny, then, how all that pre-existed would almost be destroyed by a band as premeditatedly calculated as the Sex Pistols. With a love for the outrageous and a sixth sense that told him a change was in the air, McLaren implemented a search for the correct personalities to enact his vision. In this sense, the Sex Pistols were about as authentic as America’s Monkees. England’s reaction to the Sex Pistols was immediate. At first, nearly everybody was horrified that the British



nation could spawn such a disgustingly filthy, untalented, and rude bunch of slobs. Because of the controversy they kicked up, they went through three record labels in as many months. By offending practically every human on the face of the earth who had come to be familiar with them, the Sex Pistols attracted swarms of attention. Johnny Rotten (aka John Lydon) was the band's mouthpiece, spewing blind rage and hatred in every direction, and Sid Vicious was the band's hood ornament. With absolutely no musical talent whatsoever, Vicious's job was simply to be as unpredictably violent as his natural tendencies dictated. His complete lack of restraint, and the unsolved murder of his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, led to his early death by overdose.

By the time the Sex Pistols' star burned out, the entire English music scene had changed irrevocably. Practically every dead-end kid with a desire to play an instrument was inspired by the fact that such untalented yobs could be so damned exciting to see and hear. Within months, England was awash in a blitzkrieg of punk bands bashing out a do-it-yourself style of adrenaline-fueled vitriol.

In America, the punk scene was much subtler. For starters, the music scene barely acknowledged the Sex Pistols' existence, and knew of them only by their curious live appearances through the state of Texas (which were covered by the national media), until they rattled to a collapse somewhere on the West Coast. "God Save the Queen," "Anarchy in the U.K.," and "Holidays in the Sun" were wholly British in their subject matter, leaving America even more confused and indifferent, while "fans" who came to see the Pistols had nothing better to do than pummel them with debris. None of their singles came within a country mile of America's Top 40, and their only legitimate album never even cracked the Top 100. Punk's fight was left to its first wave of interpreters, and there were many. The Damned, the Clash, the Buzzcocks, and Generation X all fueled this first wave but, with the exception of the Clash, they fared hardly any better in America than the Pistols.

It took a band as moderately punky as the Police to break down the international barriers that held off punk music. Talented musicians who decided to adopt the do-it-yourself ethic of punk, Andy Summers, Stewart Copeland, and lead vocalist Sting (adopting stage names was common among punk's early bands) trudged around England in a broken-down van, playing gigs virtually anywhere that they

### GREAT HITS

MARCH 1981 #2  
BEING WITH YOU—SMOKEY ROBINSON

JUNE 1981 #19  
IN THE AIR TONIGHT—PHIL COLLINS

JULY 1981 #40  
GIVE IT TO ME BABY—RICK JAMES

SEPTEMBER 1981 #17  
JUST ONCE—  
JAMES INGRAM/QUINCY JONES

SEPTEMBER 1981 #17  
SAY GOODBYE TO HOLLYWOOD—  
BILLY JOEL

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1981 #1  
STARS ON 45—STARS ON 45

JUNE 1981 #8  
HEARTS—MARTY BALIN

AUGUST 1981 #12  
BEACH BOYS MEDLEY—  
THE BEACH BOYS



were welcome to set up. With their bleached hair and high-energy, reggae-inspired rhythms, they were welcomed into the European punk fold, but America still maintained a safe distance. A telling incident occurred on a New York radio station when the Police were beginning their assault on America. Dave Hermann, a popular deejay who was on WNEW-FM at the time, brought a clairvoyant psychic into the station and asked him if he could predict the future of popular music. Quite assured that he could, this prescient poser proceeded to remove his watch so as not to interfere with the "signals." Hermann then played "Roxanne" by the Police, followed by some now long-forgotten track by a group known as Desmond Child and Rouge. Without hesitation, the clairvoyant stated that the Police track was doomed because the singer's voice was much too grating and the music was too simple-minded (or some such thing). Desmond Child and Rouge had all the ingredients of typical late-'70s corporate pop, and he predicted great things for them. Ahem. Hermann politely dismissed the phony and stated that the rest of us would have to wait and see.

Well, we didn't have to wait too much longer. Desmond Child eventually developed into a well-known songwriter, but his band took the plunge almost immediately. The Police, on the other hand, attacked America with a vengeance. The band's work ethic was astonishing. Like they did in England, they toured the States in a van, with their sound man serving as their chief (and only) roadie. "Roxanne" went on to become one of America's first alternative hits, and each subsequent release got more attention than its predecessor.

By the time of their fourth album, *Ghost in the Machine*, the Police were international superstars. Unfortunately, the price of experience was a heavy load to bear. During their previous tour of four continents, including stops in areas of the globe that were isolated from Western pop culture, Sting, Summers, and Copeland saw poverty and destitution like they had never seen. Starvation was no longer a concept, but a reality, and their fourth album reflects the knowledge that so many people live with this pain on a daily basis. Sting began to express universal concerns in his lyrics, asking the Western world to employ its might to help. While the Police's previous records had been sparse and limber, *Ghost in the Machine* became a lumbering behemoth. In conjunction with producer Hugh Padgham, the band layered an excess of synthesized keyboards on the album, along with countless overdubs, blanketing the already weighty subject matter in a web of bombastic production. With the best of intentions, the Police became bogged down by the weight of the world.

**"Every Little  
Thing She Does  
Is Magic"  
sounds almost  
magical among  
the dour  
surroundings of  
*Ghost in the  
Machine.***

"Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" sounds almost magical among the dour surroundings of *Ghost in the Machine*. It captures the Police doing what they do best by combining a simple, upbeat love song with intelligent lyrics, a great melody, and typically fantastic ensemble playing. What other band of the mid-'80s was lithe enough to float above the dense production of this song and make it sound easy? Who else could have presented a pop song



that so seamlessly shares familiar and foreign influences? The simple escapism of the single was perfect for the post-progressive pop scene of the blossoming '80s. Balancing lighthearted whimsy with the personal/political concerns that are expressed in the song's companion album, the Police were confident in knowing that they enjoyed the best of both worlds.

## APRIL 1982 #13 EMPTY GARDEN—ELTON JOHN

It's funny how one insect can damage so much grain.

**A**lthough I have lived near New York City for my entire life, there are only two incidents that I associate with Manhattan of which I have almost photographic recall. The first was when I was a small child and the entire Northeastern United States was crippled by a power failure that came to be known as the Blackout of '65. The second incident occurred when I was older. It was infinitely more crippling than a power outage, and the sickening reverberations spread much farther than the Northeastern United States. In a matter of minutes, the news had circled the globe. John Lennon had been mortally wounded by a crazed lunatic with a handgun.

What happened here as the New York sunset disappears  
I found an empty garden among the flagstones there.

Lennon loved New York City. He loved the lifestyle it allowed, the options it presented, and the relative anonymity it offered him. Finally away from the hamster wheel of superstardom, he was able to be himself. Creating music became secondary to lounging about the house, but he would occasionally emerge from his self-imposed hibernation to record or produce the odd track or two. His ability to be honest with himself was something that every one of his fans respected. If Lennon wanted to sit back “watching the wheels,” then that was his prerogative. Now and then, he and Yoko Ono would take out an ad in *The New York Times* just to say hello or happy Christmas to their fellow city residents. He'd even drop in at WNEW at a moment's notice to play records with a somewhat stupefied deejay named Dennis Elsis. He loved the city, and the city was glad to have him.



And we are so amazed. We're crippled and we're dazed.  
A gardener like that one no one can replace.

Gun laws in America are very different from those in Europe. This year, the number of New York City cab drivers that will be slain by handguns will be greater





than the number of people in general that will die similarly in all of Great Britain. Comparatively speaking, New York is a very dangerous place. It is also stimulating, so maybe Lennon thought it was worth the risk. Then again, maybe he didn't think of it at all, or no more than a frequent flyer might imagine a plane crash. As a reality, it was unfathomable, if not to Lennon, then to the millions of residents who would have risked their own lives to save him.

Lived here, he must have been a gardener who cared a lot  
Who weeded out the tears and grew a good crop  
Now it all looks strange.

There is now a hole in the spirit of rock and roll, maybe in the spirit of mankind, that can never be filled. Everybody, even people who were adamantly not Beatles fans, could sense the void. Depending on who was talking, Lennon was a hero, an antihero, a coward, a pillar of strength, lazy, or driven. He was a mass of contradictions, but he was always human...and fragile, as humans tend to be. Elton John, who worshipped the Beatles as a youngster, knew this firsthand. He met Lennon through a mutual acquaintance, and the two became very good friends. Lennon assisted on his version of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," and then Elton John reciprocated by contributing his talents to Lennon's single "Whatever Gets You through the Night." The sessions were pure joy for each of them, prompting Lennon, in a moment of casual conversation, to agree that if his song became a #1 hit, he would appear onstage with Elton John. Although he had said this

GREAT MISSES	
MARCH 1982	#3
<u>I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ME—CHARLENE</u>	
MARCH 1982	#25
<u>BABY MAKES HER BLUE JEANS</u>	
<u>TALK—DR. HOOK</u>	

because of his absolute certainty that it could never happen, it did. Elton John decided to collect on Lennon's promise. Lennon, though, had been inactive for so long that he was terrified at the thought of appearing onstage. He was convinced that he would be viewed as a has-been and debated whether or not he could actually do it. On Thanksgiving night in 1974, Lennon was backstage, still vacillating and vomiting from nervousness, when Elton John announced him to a capacity crowd at New York's Madison

Square Garden. The crowd was ecstatic. Here, in his adopted home city, in a live atmosphere that was once so familiar but now so foreign to him, Lennon witnessed the genuine affection that people had for him. It wasn't the hysterical screaming of Beatlemania that he heard. It was respect and an outpouring of gratitude. He was no has-been and, in fact, had taken on the status of a living legend. Lennon was celebrating the only #1 record that he would enjoy as an ex-Beatle, until the month of his death.

The friendship between Elton John and Lennon thrived. Elton John became the godfather of Lennon and Ono's son Sean, and both were excited by the prospect of recording together since they each had become affiliated with Geffen Records. After a small lapse in his own popularity, Elton John resurfaced as a





superstar of the '80s and performed before 400,000 people at a free concert in Central Park. Lennon's home at the Dakota apartment building loomed over the horizon, on the border of the park, and resounded with the echoes of the show, including a touching rendition of Lennon's "Imagine." Later that year, on December 8, it would resound with the sound of five gunshots. John Lennon was dead.

I've been calling but no one answers...  
I've been calling, hey, hey, Johnny.

## AUGUST 1982 #12 BLUE EYES—ELTON JOHN

After eight years of unquestioned success as songwriters, Elton John and Bernie Taupin drifted apart. There was no rift or formal separation, only a distance that had set in because of personal difficulties and the physical miles between them. Taupin was living in California and successfully establishing new relationships for his writing, while Elton John remained on the other side of the globe in England. He procured a new lyricist named Gary Osborne and recorded a mostly lackluster album, appropriately titled *A Single Man*. Later projects teamed him with other nondescript lyricists and yielded music that was equally nondescript, including the disco-fied work on *Victim of Love*. Hits continued to come, notably "Mama Can't Buy You Love" and "Little Jeannie," but they lacked the intriguing edge of his best work with Taupin.

The album *21 at 33* (whose title supposedly referenced his twenty-first album at the age of thirty-three) had Elton John reuniting with many of his old mates for some tracks, including Taupin, guitarist Davey Johnstone, bassist Dee Murray, and drummer Nigel Olsson. Elton John was snapping back into form. His next albums, *The Fox* and *Jump Up*, were sporadic but had highlights that rivaled his best material.

"Blue Eyes" features lyrics by Osborne and some of the most sophisticated chord sequences that Elton John has ever written. With a progression steeped in complex jazz changes and a melody that resonates with blue notes, it's anything but ordinary for early-'80s pop music. At a time when punk rock had degenerated into monotonous and childishly simplistic electronic ditties, such as "Pop Muzik" by M and "Cars" by Gary Numan, "Blue Eyes" was particularly welcome for its refreshing musical intelligence, at least by listeners who were annoyed by the new decade's unceasing trend toward techno-rock.

Like a fine wine, well-crafted melodies often improve with time, while mass-produced hokum betrays its meager shelf life. "Pop Muzik" and "Cars" were both phenomenally successful (#1 and #9) but have about as much relevance today as

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1982 #8  
TAINTED LOVE—SOFT CELL

JUNE 1982 #1  
ABRACADABRA—STEVE MILLER

JUNE 1982 #1  
EYE OF THE TIGER—SURVIVOR

JULY 1982 #23  
HOT IN THE CITY—BILLY IDOL

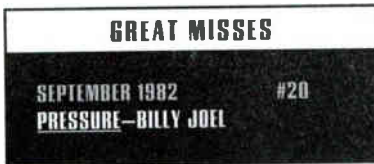
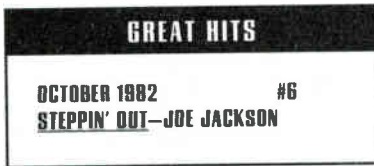


“Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka-Dot Bikini” or “Speedy Gonzales.” “Blue Eyes” climbed to #12 but lost none of its appeal as a resonant and intriguing melody. Unlike much of its competition, it seems destined to become an evergreen among a field of annuals.

## NOVEMBER 1982 #3 SEXUAL HEALING—MARVIN GAYE

**M**arvin Gaye moved from the social to the sensual when he released the blatantly erotic “Let’s Get It On.” By Motown standards, this song was X-rated, but it only scratched the surface of Gaye’s later exploration into all things sexual. When he separated from his wife, Anna, who was seventeen years his senior, to live with Janis Hunter, a girl seventeen years his junior, Gaye’s obsession with sexuality became compulsive enough to influence, no, dominate his art. His album *I Want You* features more labored breathing than a convention of asthmatics. After Hunter gave birth to Gaye’s daughter, Anna Gordy figured she had stood as much as she could and began divorce proceedings. The resultant settlement stated that Gordy would receive the advance and all of the royalties from Gaye’s next album release. Gaye gave the double album the rather sardonic title of *Here, My*

*Dear* and then sat back and watched the critics pick it apart like so many carrion crows. Gaye did eventually marry Hunter, but his philandering soon destroyed his second marriage as well. Nonetheless, he was shocked and hurt when he discovered his wife was having an affair with his friend Teddy Pendergrass. A serious drug dependency and financial problems compounded the difficulty of this time, and Gaye’s grip on reality became very tenuous. His relationship with Motown soured irreparably, and in 1981 he signed with CBS Records.



Work began on a new album, but Gaye lacked material and direction. Fortunately, he was re-

united with his old friend Harvey Fuqua. Fuqua helped to produce the album, provided artistic direction, and generally put Gaye’s life back into some semblance of order. “Sexual Healing” is the simply structured, gently erotic first single from the resultant record, *Midnight Love*. The album, particularly “Sexual Healing,” further explores Gaye’s sexual obsession and celebrates the sanctified element of sex. Eroticism is expressed as liberation of the soul. Prince would later popularize a seamless combination of the sacred and the profane, but it was Gaye who spent a decade developing the theme.

Both the album and the single became hits, and finally Gaye’s career was properly revived. “Sexual Healing” generated two Grammy awards, the first time that Gaye was officially recognized by this institution. Unfortunately, his newfound happiness and mental stability were short-lived. He allegedly started taking drugs



again, and his darker moods occurred more frequently. On April Fool's Day, 1984, while staying at his parents' house in California, an argument developed between Gaye and his father, Marvin Gaye Sr. Their relationship had always been strained and confrontational, but on this morning it came to a head, with Gaye's father shooting him in the chest. In one quick stroke, the maddeningly unpredictable and artistically fruitful life of a truly creative superstar had ended.

## JANUARY 1983 #1 BILLIE JEAN—MICHAEL JACKSON

**W**orking once again with Quincy Jones as producer, a man who has been nominated for 76 (!) Grammy awards, Michael Jackson created *Thriller*, the best-selling album of all time. Forty million copies were sold worldwide, and the collection sat at the #1 position for a stupefying thirty-seven weeks. "Billie Jean" was the second of seven singles that were culled from *Thriller*, all of which entered the Top 10. They were "The Girl Is Mine," a duet with Paul McCartney (#2); Billie Jean (#1 for seven weeks); "Beat It" (#1 for three weeks); "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'" (#5); "Human Nature" (#7); "P.Y.T." (#10); and "Thriller" (#4). Jackson was no longer a star or even a superstar—he was a phenomenon. His music controlled the airwaves, and his videos flooded television screens. Interestingly, his sister Janet repeated his feat a few years later with her album *Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814* and in one category even surpassed *Thriller*. Her album also yielded seven Top 10 singles, but four of them went to #1 ("Miss You Much" for four weeks, "Escapade" for three weeks, and "Black Cat" and "Love Will Never Do" for a week apiece). Before the ink dried in the record books, though, Michael produced five consecutive #1 singles with his own follow-up release, *Bad* ("I Just Can't Stop Loving You," "Bad," "The Way You Make Me Feel," "The Man in the Mirror," and "Dirty Diana"). I suppose this is what happens when sibling rivalry goes haywire.

"Billie Jean" was accompanied by one of the first high-tech, high-budget videos of its kind, and it quickly became thoroughly unavoidable. Somehow, I still find it possible to enjoy this song, even after seeing the video so often and in such heavy rotation that it begins to resemble a commercial—which it is, naturally. Anybody watching MTV at this time can attest to the fact that Jackson was the #1 product offered up for sale. By early 1984, his white socks and bejeweled glove were almost as familiar as a Pepsi commercial. (This fact did not go unnoticed by Pepsi's advertising executives. They would soon launch a campaign that featured Jackson and Madonna as ad reps, but the net results

### GREAT HITS

NOVEMBER 1982 #8  
ROCK THE CASBAH—THE CLASH

DECEMBER 1982 #29  
SHOCK THE MONKEY—PETER GABRIEL

JANUARY 1983 #5  
BACK ON THE CHAIN GANG—  
THE PRETENDERS

### GREAT MISSES

DECEMBER 1982 #12  
GOODY TWO SHOES—ADAM ANT



While he plainly states that "Billie Jean is not my lover... (and) the kid is not my son," we wonder if what we are hearing is the whole truth, a half-truth, or a fabrication.

would be somewhat disastrous. Madonna would dance before burning crosses, prompting her dismissal, while Jackson's hair would catch on fire during a commercial filming. That and the subsequent controversy of his sexuality caused him to be dropped as well.) Jackson's image and facial features were also about as homogenized as a commercial. Plastic surgery had anglicized his face, while his excessive caution with the press made him seem like a cross between James Brown and Mister Rogers.

Growing up in public caused Jackson to value his privacy over most anything else. He had been famous since he was eight years old, and this hyper-exposure led him to withdraw deeper into himself as he became a household name. His life was fundamentally different from the average person's, and his eccentricities became harder and harder to comprehend. It seemed as if reality didn't offer very much in the way of personal satisfaction to Jackson. Living in a state of suspended childhood, he desperately wanted to insulate himself from the harsh realities of ordinary life, but all the power and all the money in the world could not prevent life's painful moments. His fragile world existed somewhere between reality and fantasy, so the average fan had difficulty discerning fact from fiction. Does he *really* sleep in a hyperbaric chamber? What in the world could he possibly want with the Elephant Man's bones? Is he or isn't he guilty of the child molestation charges that were brought against him? Fans could only wonder. This is what "Billie Jean" is about. Underneath the topical tale of paternity is a series of questions. The words are about denial, but can we trust the credibility of the singer? While he plainly states that "Billie Jean is not my lover...(and) the kid is not my son," we wonder if what we are hearing is the whole truth, a half-truth, or a fabrication. By paralleling his public persona with the character in the song, Jackson created a remarkably complex pastiche of images. Just as he has with his own life, "Billie Jean" mixes fact and fantasy, reality and perception, into a mysterious blur.

Once a figure becomes as famous as Jackson, his credibility as a performer usually comes under fire. After all, how many performers who once hosted their own television variety shows (as Jackson did with the Jackson Five) that can still sing convincingly with some form of emotional resonance. Johnny Cash is one. But Donny Osmond? Sonny and Cher? Dolly Parton? Glen Campbell? We know that they aren't really baring their souls for us. They are performers who will sing a song, but they can no longer *embody* a song. To state the obvious, Jackson is different, not only from "normal" people (his word), but from his showbiz peers. Even though he has one of the most famous faces in the world, we really can sense autobiographical references in his best songwriting. By emphasizing the fantastic aspect of his private world, Jackson effectively removes the average fan's ability to see the wall between his stage image and his personal life. He is





the guy in “Billie Jean.” That is an amazing feat, if you think about it. He has caused his life to become so intertwined with his artistry that they blend and feed off one another. It is this fascinating situation that empowers “Billie Jean” to become much more than a simple story/song. Simultaneously, it is an illusion, a fantasy story, and an allusion to his own troubled life.

This is a remarkable talent, but it is also ultimately sad because Jackson has trapped himself. He is trapped because his public image provides the fuel that feeds the characters in his songwriting. His art and his life have become inseparable. Fantasy is supposed to be a vent for us to temporarily escape the harshness of reality. Once the differentiation with reality is no longer apparent, then escape is no longer an option. For somebody who has succeeded at his most ambitious plans, this must be a painful and frustrating discovery. Even if he never records another song, Jackson’s very life has become a performance for “normal” people to judge.

## MARCH 1983 #6 LITTLE RED CORVETTE—PRINCE

You had a pocket full of horses, Trojans, and some of them used.

**A** love song to a girl who is funky enough to save used condoms? Well, there’s a topic that hasn’t been broached yet. When Prince came onto the scene, he brought topicality (some would say vulgarity) to a whole new level. He’s written songs that deal with being seduced by his sister, practicing for a career in male prostitution, seducing a stranger in a wedding dress (who wants to preserve her virginity so she offers him fellatio instead)...and this was within the space of two songs from one album, the aptly titled *Dirty Mind*. When taken out of context, these themes sound mindlessly vapid and resemble little more than a childish cheap means to shock people. On record though, Prince approaches his subjects with such religious fervor that he manages to convince us that his lyrics are as harmless, and maybe even as positively constructive, as the fantasies that inspired them. Unlike 2-Live Crew, whose sexual immaturity is as immeasurable as their songs are irrelevant, Prince somehow conveyed a sense of responsible conviction in his outlook. His lyrics may shock us, but the real reason that they inspire such controversy is because we aren’t used to hearing somebody, especially a man, sharing his fantasies with us. Prince’s songs may sound as though they are emanating from the bedroom, but they are actually emanating from his overactive imagination. He’s not doing or saying anything that doesn’t already reside somewhere in the recesses of our own thought patterns. (Am I revealing

### GREAT HITS

MARCH 1983 #5  
SHE BLINDED ME WITH SCIENCE—  
 THOMAS DOLBY

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1983 #3  
MR. ROBOTO—STYX





Full of self-doubt and electricity, the song is overflowing with a sexual tension that builds and builds until it breaks down in a post-orgasmic shudder, only to pick up all over again just a few moments later.

too much of myself here?) I'm not saying that we are all suffering from a heady dose of immorality. (Weren't you paying attention when Dr. Ruth explained that fantasies are normal and healthy?) What I'm saying is that it is the nature of a sexual fantasy to be a bit weird and thoroughly fantastic.

You might think that this kind of talk wouldn't exactly endear Prince to the traditional R&B audience, who preferred their sex to be considerably more traditional (at least on vinyl), yet they held on. He started out as a fairly ordinary R&B artist, but Prince quickly found himself moving away from the run-of-the-mill expectations of the dance-based charts. After the relatively tame "I Wanna Be Your Lover" became a #1 R&B single in 1979, Prince's style moved more toward contemporary hard rock and new wave, and the R&B audience followed him wherever he went, giving him over a dozen Top 10 R&B hits in ten years. His subject matter was hardly conducive to FCC (Federal Communications Commission) rules, but he continued to wow the critics, while becoming a conservative radio programmer's worst nightmare.

When he released his double album *1999* seventeen years before the album's title date, Prince was being marketed to a rock-and-roll audience that was mostly unfamiliar with him. The three singles that were culled from this album soon changed that. Prince maintained more than a few traces of modern R&B while casting a sideways glance at new wave's stylish limitations. Instead of sinking in the mire of punk's anarchy, he immersed himself into the hedonism of contemporary dance music, with a dose of pre-apocalyptic fear thrown in for justification. The subject matter (of the singles — not the rest of the album) kept its sexuality steeped in well-chosen metaphor (reference the above-quoted gem), and this time radio offered Prince no resistance at all. "Little Red Corvette" emanated from car radios and Walkmans all over America. By concocting a deliberate blend of hard-core funk with the cross-over sound of album-oriented radio and new wave styles, Prince salvaged pop music from itself and once again integrated it. At a time when MTV's extremely limited playlist was dangerously ignorant of black music styles, he became its token black performer.

Prince's previous efforts suffered slightly from claustrophobic production, but *1999* sounds more spacious and commercial, especially on the 45s. While the other two singles ("1999" and "Delirious") are excellent, as well, "Little Red Corvette" might qualify as the best single of Prince's long and varied career. Of the three, it benefits most from his improved production techniques. Full of self-doubt and electricity, the song is overflowing with a sexual tension that builds and builds until it breaks down in a post-orgasmic shudder, only to pick up all over again just a few moments later. This time, the intensity rises even further as the song



“fades to black,” presumably to grant the couple a bit of privacy. Now *that's* stamina.

Was Prince nothing more than a self-obsessed loon who brought onanism to new aural heights, or was he a driven visionary who wove a diorama of God (the backdrop) and sex (the foreground) into a workable philosophy for a post-modern society to live by? Naturally enough, it depends upon your point of view concerning the new morality, and *that* would probably depend on whether or not you sympathized with his uninhibited and insatiable sex drive. Either way, Prince was certain to get your attention. By his next album and the corresponding movie, *Purple Rain*, he'd be unavoidable.

## JUNE 1983 #1 EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE—POLICE

**W**hile the Police were working overtime in the late '70s to establish themselves both at home (in England) and abroad (in America), the dust that the punk bands had kicked up began to settle, burying the major record labels in a pile of debris. Sales of prerecorded music were in a funk, so the more palatable new wave artists were swept up by every A&R man who had a pen for signing contracts. When they exhausted the fallout of the “real” new wave bands, they invented their own (remember the Knack?). Most of these new wave bands did little to alleviate the slumping industry, though. They might have had a knack (pardon the pun) for attracting media attention, but for the life of them, they couldn't seem to translate the press into record sales. Elvis Costello, Squeeze, Joe Jackson, and XTC sold only moderately, while many others had trouble selling anything at all.

The Police were destined to be different. A&M Records signed the band before they had even set foot in America, and like the others, sales were initially slow. Their no-frills touring method attracted enough attention to breathe new life into their older recordings, however, and “Roxanne” began to climb back up the charts. The musical talents of all three bandmembers were immediately obvious to anybody who saw them. Combining rock's solidity with reggae's elasticity while playing at punk's warp speed gave them a vital energy and original sound that would have been welcome at any time period. Stewart Copeland was one the most quick-wristed and precise drummers in all of rock and roll, while guitarist Andy Summers was a master of concise invention. Add to this Sting's budding ability to compose entire songs (as opposed to fragments that were developed into songs), and you have yourself a band with one heck of a lot of commercial potential.

*Outlandos D'Amour*, the punkish and compact first album, was followed by *Regatta De Blanc*, which quickly outsold its predecessor, mostly on the strength

GREAT HITS	
APRIL 1983 <u>LET'S DANCE</u> —DAVID BOWIE	#1
MAY 1983 <u>SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS</u> —EURYTHMICS	#1
MAY 1983 <u>COME DANCING</u> —THE KINKS	#6



of radio-friendly material such as “Walking on the Moon,” “The Bed’s Too Big without You,” and “Message in a Bottle.” While other new wave acts continued to struggle, the Police became million-sellers. With their finances secure and their fame intact, they set out on a world tour that encompassed four continents. Meanwhile a third album, *Zenyatta Mondatta*, caught them in their most loose-limbed state yet, with a sound that captured the essence of their live energy. Some critics moaned, complaining of a lack of structure and a haphazard approach to writing, but no other Police album did a better job of showing the band to full advantage. All three players interwove their parts into a hypnotic pattern that can only come from intense familiarity and constant playing, something uncommon for ordinary pop music. The Police had become a perfectly integrated unit with no weak link. “Don’t Stand So Close to Me” (#10) and the much more literate than it sounds “De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da” (#10) were extracted as singles and contributed to making the band a household name around the globe.

Their fourth album, *Ghost in the Machine*, is much more weighty and suffers somewhat from overproduction, although it too has some excellent moments, including the singles “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic” (#3) and “Spirits in the Material World” (#11). Signs of strain were evident, though, and the band recognized the need to take a break. After a prolonged absence that gave them an opportunity to recover from one another, they launched headlong into what was destined to become their last album. *Synchronicity* is a masterful record, featur-

Once focused,  
it was plain to  
hear that “Every  
Breath You  
Take” wasn’t a  
soothing love  
song at all,  
but a scathing  
claim to empow-  
erment, sung  
with  
an attitude  
that actually  
revealed  
the singer’s  
powerlessness.

ing a subdued approach to instrumentation that allows Sting’s excellent songwriting to become the album’s focal point. More so than on previous Police albums, the emotional core of Sting’s writing is laid bare. He recorded the album while in the midst of a divorce, and his expressive voice conveys the complex emotions that resulted from his separation. Sting’s pain and confusion come across with a natural ease that is evident on each of the three Top 10 singles that the album yielded, including “King of Pain” (#3), and “Wrapped around Your Finger” (#8), but none more so than “Every Breath You Take” (#1 for eight weeks). Few “love” songs could claim to harbor more anger, possessiveness, and outright spiteful aggression than this does. The ostensible niceties of Sting’s words express emotions that were obviously less than kind. Once focused, it was plain to hear that “Every Breath You Take” wasn’t a soothing love song at all, but a scathing claim to empowerment, sung with an attitude that actually revealed the singer’s powerlessness. Sting was aware of it, and the sentiments that he expressed in “Every Breath You Take” bothered him enough to consciously set out to rectify it. For his first release as a solo artist, he wrote a song that he intended to be an antidote, titled “If You Love Somebody, Set Them Free.” “Every Breath You Take” was writ-



ten before he knew better, or before he *cared* to know better. Song topics are often fictional, but Sting seems unconcerned with disguising his lyrical intentions and their parallel to his own personal experience. It takes time to come to terms with the loss of control that results from a separation, and these lyrics capture the time before the healing has begun. Resentment seeps out of every pore of his voice and is quite chilling, especially since it is aimed directly at a loved one who has become estranged. MTV played a vital role in familiarizing the public with “Every Breath You Take” and the other singles from *Synchronicity*. Although videos had accompanied their earlier hits, they were crude in comparison. In the early '80s, video was usually an unimaginative and egocentric means of promotion that had yet to realize its creative potential. As was typical for the genre, Police videos were dull and mindless—that is, until Kevin Godley and Lol Creme (ex-10 C.C. techno-heads with a sharpened eye for all things artistic) began to construct their sets and their storyboards. Instead of having Copeland, Summers, and Sting stand around like awkward nimrods, Godley and Creme brought a sense of underlying meaning to their visual images, providing a surreal subtext that didn't interfere with the songs themselves.

“Every Breath You Take” was the first Police video that didn't deride the music it attempted to compliment. It was still limiting, but at least it relied on surreal images instead of hyper-real idiocy. After all, Sting has an intense presence that demands respect. Furthermore, songs about divorce don't lend themselves to moronic mug shots. Godley and Creme recognized this and capitalized on it. Their constructions granted Sting the chance to expand his persona while expounding his thoughts, qualities that would benefit him as he began a career as a solo artist.

## SEPTEMBER 1983 #29 DON'T FORGET TO DANCE—THE KINKS

**R**ay Davies always displayed an astute ability to understand the characters in his songs. In fact, for Davies, “character study” can sometimes be a more appropriate term than “song.” Consider the “Well-Respected Man,” one of his earlier characters, whom Davies seems to loathe. Without passing judgment or making rancorous comments about the person's nature, he simply tells us about him. Although the description is damning, we are allowed to decide for ourselves.

The Kinks' next hit single describes the “Dedicated Follower of Fashion.” In this song, we meet a person preoccupied with trends, but again Davies seems happy only to observe him. It is the listener's job to decide if he is flighty or silly. In “Sunny Afternoon,” the protagonist is wealthy and might even be the “Well-Respected Man” that we met earlier, but there's a

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1983 <u>1999—PRINCE</u>	#12
AUGUST 1983 <u>TRUE—SPANDAU BALLET</u>	#4
SEPTEMBER 1983 <u>BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE— THE TALKING HEADS</u>	#9



distinct difference. By singing in the first person, Davies allows himself to empathize with the character's ennui. A listener gets the impression that, sure, he's rich and he's a creep, but he has feelings, too. By the time Davies wrote "Lola," his fans were so used to his style that they were prepared to accept the sexual ambiguity of the main character.

You might notice a trend. Davies's sensitivity to his characters' views seems to become more and more developed as he gets older. In "Don't Forget to Dance," he creates a character who is so real and well-developed that a sensitive listener wants to reach into the record and help her out of her melancholy.

Davies's inspiration for the song came while taking a walk. A woman he knew leaned from a window and waved hello at him, and he felt that she looked lonely. This inspired the first few lines: "You look out of your window, into the night, could be rain, could be snow, but it can't be as cold as what you feel inside." The lyrics continue to tell a tale of a young woman, perhaps in her thirties, who feels that her friends have all moved on and that her best days are

behind her. Thankfully, Davies himself sings directly to her and does such a heart-warming and beautiful job of bolstering her ego that we feel relieved, maybe invigorated. You can almost see her smiling at him through tear-stained eyes when he reminds her, "Don't forget to dance, don't forget to smile." His attention to her sadness is as uplifting and hopeful to the listener as it is to the dispirited woman.

His better songs of this period, notably "Come Dancing" and "Better Things," all express similar concerns for the main characters. "Don't Forget to Dance" is a hauntingly beautiful song, and it makes us care so much that we realize how, one day, we might need this song to comfort ourselves.

## OCTOBER 1983 #14 MODERN LOVE—DAVID BOWIE

Considering his influence on music in the '70s, it is incredible to consider that besides his three antiseptic funk singles from the *Young Americans* album, David Bowie only had one other Top 40 hit during that decade (and it was "Space Oddity," a song that dated from the '60s). No artist better represents the rift that formed between "album rock" and pop music during those years than Bowie. Although his seminal album *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* was chock full of potential hit songs, absolutely nothing from that album charted as a Top 40 single. His next album, *Aladdin Sane*, was equally commercial but also went unrepresented on the singles charts. Perhaps it was the aggressive androgyny of his image or the experimentation of his various styles, but American pop audiences simply didn't want to hear from Bowie, while progressive FM audiences found him to be a futuristic visionary.

Bowie, along with Marc Bolan (of T. Rex), and Bryan Ferry and Brian Eno (of Roxy Music), tore to shreds the supposed honesty of expression that the blues-





derived rock-and-roll bands of the '60s meant to represent. Integrity of emotion might have once been essential to rock and roll, but it was subverted by the ironic and aloof posturing of these glamorized thespians. Bowie might have been little more than a carefully constructed image, but he was clever enough to manipulate the press and his audience into believing that image was enough. This lent him an amorphous quality that, like hot air, could continually change its form. Ironically, musicians who tried to follow in his footsteps and carry his image into the '80s were misunderstanding the entire point of Bowie's work. Whether it was Gary Numan or the Human League, they displayed barely a fraction of Bowie's musical inventiveness. Furthermore, they lacked the vision and element of surprise that kept Bowie in the public eye for so long. He wouldn't stay the same long enough for an audience to grow tired of him. In contrast, their lack of imagination and inability to transform themselves into anything other than Bowie-influenced clones meant that their careers would be short-lived.

Meanwhile, Bowie grew tired of being pegged into a definable role, even if that role was one of constant innovation. As another means of reinventing himself, he decided to move his style front and center into the thick of popular tastes. By enlisting Sigma Sound Studios—which was the home base for Philadelphia International Records and artists such as Teddy Pendergrass, Billy Paul, and the O'Jays—Bowie made his first foray into dance music. Here, he recorded deliberately funkified arrangements of his songs. The sessions yielded “Fame” (#1), “Young Americans” (#28), and “Golden Years” (#28) and also established the beginning of Bowie's “thin white duke” phase. From here, Bowie extracted himself from the mainstream and headed in a decidedly more experimental direction. He recorded his next album, *Station to Station*, in California, and it featured some extremely clever and experimental music set to Bowie's most narcissistic lyrics yet. Fed up with the sycophantic nature of California's music scene, Bowie decided to relocate to the comparably austere surroundings of West Berlin, Germany. Here, with fewer distractions, he recorded three of his most interesting albums. *Low*, “*Heroes*,” and *Lodger* were all recorded with input from producer/experimentalist Brian Eno and netted some of the most artistically satisfying work of Bowie's career. This artistic success did not come with financial reward, however, as none of these albums yielded so much as one hit single (even the magnificent “*Heroes*” failed to make an appearance on the Hot 100).

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1983	#23
<u>LOVE IS A STRANGER</u> —EURYTHMICS	
OCTOBER 1983	#36
<u>EVERYDAY I WRITE THE BOOK</u> — ELVIS COSTELLO	

**Bowie might have been little more than a carefully constructed image, but he was clever enough to manipulate the press and his audience into believing that image was enough.**



*Lodger* and his next record, *Scary Monsters*, were equal parts wild experimentation and deliberately commercial balderdash. The result was both fascinating and bizarre, showcasing some of Bowie's most interesting and visual music yet, as can be attested through his ingenious videos for "D.J.," "Boys Keep Swinging," "Fashion," and "Ashes to Ashes." With these videos, Bowie became the most recognizable of chameleons. Still, none of these songs charted as hit singles.

Once again, Bowie decided to enter the mainstream. He hired Nile Rodgers (one-half of the Rodgers/Edwards production team, which was responsible for Chic's "Good Times") as producer and went to work on the most straightforward album of his career. The title track, "Let's Dance," became Bowie's second #1 single, while "China Girl" and "Modern Love" also became substantial hits. By the time "Modern Love" was released as a single, most people who were interested had already purchased the album, so it hindered sales enough to cause it to stall at #14. Still, it was easily one of Bowie's most commercial recordings yet. An energy-infused dance number with confounding wordplay made for a thoroughly satisfying slice of pop art. With less pretension than he had ever displayed, Bowie's artistry as a melodist was in full view, as was his finely honed talent for holding the attention of an audience. "Modern Love" showed that Bowie might have enjoyed playing the role of the man who fell to Earth, but he was quite capable of performing what ordinary Earthlings loved to hear.

## DECEMBER 1983 #8 PINK HOUSES—JOHN COUGAR MELLENCAMP

**B**efore "Pink Houses," Johnny Cougar's place in the scheme of things was somewhere in the territory of a maladjusted poor man's Springsteen, and even then he fell in line considerably after more deserving singers/guitar players, such as Tom Petty and Bob Seger. Cougar had talent, but it was buried beneath a churlish brattiness that made him unlistenable to anybody who felt that smashing mailboxes or stealing hubcaps was a stupid way to spend a Saturday night. He was an average guy with such an exaggerated sense of self-importance that he enlisted himself as a spokesman for average guys everywhere. When his album *American Fool* became a best-selling record in 1983, it seemed as though a lot of average guys were listening, too. Still, his opinions were unfocused, and his attitude was annoying. Critics in particular had trouble swallowing Cougar's childish rants, but by 1983 their opinions were due for a tune-up.

The first sign of adjustment (pretentiousness in reverse) was when he dropped his assigned star moniker of "Johnny Cougar" for his own family name. As John Mellencamp, he was symbolically abandoning his star profile and accepting his heritage. This could have been little more than pompous window dressing, but he really did seem to be sincere in his intentions, and I bet that he really did feel stupid going around with a name like Johnny Cougar in the first place. Next, Mellencamp found a means to quench his rage and soften his stance. By incorporating his small-town vision into the broader context of an entire nation's hopes and desires, he found the means to discuss something more grand than himself



(“Hurts So Good”) or his inventions (“Jack and Diane”). He might have still been a hothead, but patriotic fervor provided Mellencamp with a responsible focus for his restless energy.

What could be more American than intense singularity and a wariness of any organization that wields enough power to subvert individual will? There’s got to be an easier way to say this...oh yeah: question authority. Mellencamp developed an instinctual ability to smell a rat. His previous style portrayed him as the kind of guy who would take on all comers. Although he still would, now instead of a meaningless punch-up with a drunken brawler, his opposition was corporate greed, political red tape, and a government gone awry. Before he could be taken seriously though, he needed to establish that he was planted on the correct side of the political fence: not Republican, not Democratic, but fiercely individualistic.

With an acoustic guitar, blue jeans, and a red bandanna, Mellencamp epitomized the folk rebel. The clothing categorized him as sympathetic to the working class, while the acoustic guitar made him appear to be the spiritual descendant of Woody Guthrie. Although they lacked the intensity and the immediacy (not to mention the sharp political focus) of Guthrie’s work, his lyrics now spoke of common-man themes, and a sense of continuity came to exist between the two. Guthrie was singing about the tail end of American expansionism; Mellencamp was singing about how there was no place else to go. Guthrie sang about the Great Depression and how it affected migrant farmers (“If you ain’t got that do-re-mi...”); Mellencamp sang about the not-so-great recession and how it destroyed the family farmers. Guthrie longed to find a place where the common man could claim what was rightfully his; Mellencamp tried to find out whether or not the American dream was letting us down. Guthrie captured the innate sense of heroism involved in the American struggle to survive; Mellencamp saw beauty in the way Americans adapted to their fate.

“Pink Houses” is a simple metaphor for the American dream, stripped down to its most basic form. With a maturity that was lacking in his previous work, Mellencamp wrote about people in a way that made you immensely proud to be an American, and he did it without proselytizing or flag-waving. America had its problems, but at least it still granted us the right to move about and a forum to speak our minds. The American dream was a privilege that made each and every one of us feel responsible for our own destinies. Whether or not this was absolutely true is another matter, but at least the dream lingered. Mellencamp seems awed by the resilience of people who

### GREAT HITS

NOVEMBER 1983 #4

**I GUESS THAT’S WHY THEY CALL IT  
THE BLUES—ELTON JOHN**

NOVEMBER 1983 #17

**IN A BIG COUNTRY—BIG COUNTRY**

**Mellencamp wrote about people in a way that made you immensely proud to be an American, and he did it without proselytizing or flag-waving.**



survive in tough times. In twentieth century America, visions of grandeur are often met with harsh reality, but instead of giving up, people just lower their expectations. You probably won't grow up to be president, or a famous ball player, or even a rock star, but a little pink house is a respectable goal to strive for. The amazing change in Mellencamp's attitude is how he is absolutely not condescending about this. He sees the beauty of millions of people struggling individually to claim a small slice of fulfillment. The most astonishing thing about his lyrical personification is how it takes into account the hugeness of it all. Like a man in a helicopter with a telephoto lens, Mellencamp turns individual lives into a microcosm of the American experience.

When I was growing up, my family would often drive north to spend a few weekends at a modest cottage in the Berkshires. The ride would take us through a rural part of upstate New York, and on the way, we always passed a ramshackle house with an open front porch that looked as though it had never been painted. The house faced right at the interstate, and I swear this is true, I vividly remember a black man sitting on the front porch and waving at the cars as they sped by his front door. We passed there often, and more times than not, that man was there to greet me with a kindly wave. I came to look forward to waving back at him, and when he wasn't there, I missed him. After passing the spot where he usually sat, I imagined the interior of his collapsing abode, but I never felt sorry for him because, from the interstate, he seemed happy.

Now, focus on the rickety house by the interstate that is in dire need of a paint job. See the proud man inside, talking with his wife who is toiling at the kitchen sink. Pan back until you can see his property and the highway that cuts in front of it. Now pan back farther until you can see the surrounding countryside for miles in every direction. Ain't that America? From that height, our country sure can be a beautiful place.

## MARCH 1984 #1 AGAINST ALL ODDS—PHIL COLLINS

Critical consensus tends to dismiss Phil Collins as a self-effacing nice guy who worked hard and became a superstar by churning out endless reams of ordinary material, but that's not a fair impression. In the wake of his previous career as the drummer for Genesis, when it was a pompous art-rock outfit under the auspices of Peter Gabriel, it is much too easy to view Collins's present work as trivial in comparison. The fact is, most reviewers didn't much like early Genesis either. While critics bumped into each other trying to decide which version of Collins they disliked the most, he continued to do what he wanted and became a superstar in the process. Not only did he laugh all the way to the bank, but he also recorded the occasional classic that he could be proud of. Few people can claim to work as hard as Collins, and although some of his material is a bit slight, he is certainly capable of rising above the ordinary from time to time.

The story of Collins's career has been told often so I'll reiterate it quickly. Collins was a child actor, known mostly for his role as the Artful Dodger in the London





production of *Oliver*. He was also a talented drummer and was recruited into Genesis in 1970 after the previous half-dozen or so drummers didn't work out. He remained in the background until the group's charismatic front man, Peter Gabriel, decided to leave for a solo career in 1975. Gabriel went on to become a first-class artist with high-tech ambitions and global interests. After an endless series of fruitless auditions to replace him, the other bandmembers turned around and noticed that they had a drummer who could do the job, so Collins became the band's new front man. In the process, they lost a good deal of their art-rock pretension and became more popular as a result. Meanwhile, Collins continued to record with a jazz-rock band called Brand X and also established himself as the workaholic solo superstar of the '80s.

Collins's first album, *Face Value*, was a melange of styles, but it was much more direct than anything Genesis had ever attempted. It was also more popular and yielded two hit singles ("I Missed Again" and "In the Air Tonight"), inspiring Genesis to consider simplifying its own sound. Although it was a completely new style for the group, Collins's "hit record" format was now exploited regularly. "Follow You, Follow Me," "Misunderstanding," and "No Reply at All" were only a few of their hit singles before Collins retaliated with his solo cover version of "You Can't Hurry Love." By then, it was becoming difficult to tell what was Collins and what was Genesis; he gave Genesis its first Top 10 hit with "That's All" and followed it with his own first #1 single, "Against All Odds." To date, there are six others: "One More Night," "Sassudio," "Separate Lives," "Groovy Kind of Love," "Two Hearts," and "Another Day in Paradise."

Most of the songs on Collins's first album were very personal in nature, as they were based upon the painful experience of his divorce from his first wife. Of course, these things are debatable, but *Face Value* is also probably his most artistically satisfying album, adding further evidence to the unfortunate axiom that pain often yields the most powerful and expressive music. The lyrics in "Against All Odds" surely fit into this equation. Since it was released considerably after *Face Value* and the mostly dumb follow-up album *Hello I Must Be Going*, I assumed that Collins was going through an emotional flashback—until I learned that it was an outtake from his earlier recording sessions. Aha! When offered a chance to write the title song for the movie *Against All Odds*, Collins simply took this outtake from *Face Value* (originally titled "How Can You Sit There") and dressed it up in new clothes.

The past forty years of pop music have amply proved that generic love songs can often be a dull affair, but there is nothing dull about "Against All Odds." Now that he's established an image as a fun-loving, easygoing guy, odds are good that

### GREAT HITS

JANUARY 1984 #8  
WRAPPED AROUND YOUR FINGER—  
THE POLICE

JANUARY 1984 #19  
MIDDLE OF THE ROAD—  
THE PRETENDERS

### GREAT MISSES

FEBRUARY 1984 #2  
SOMEBODY'S WATCHING ME—  
ROCKWELL





**For a while,  
Collins was in  
touch with his  
muse, and from  
his own  
personal  
turmoil, he  
created a few  
songs that will  
hold their own  
among the  
most painfully  
expressive love  
songs of  
our time.**

Collins wouldn't be able to pull off another love song as emotionally captivating as this, and odds are just as good that he probably wouldn't want to, either. The passion that he expresses in these lyrics just can't be faked so easily. For a while, Collins was in touch with his muse, and from his own personal turmoil, he created a few songs that will hold their own among the most painfully expressive love songs of our time.

A good example of Collins's philanthropic nature and his untiring work habits is the role that he played at Bob Geldof's awesome fund-raiser, Live-Aid. The groundwork for this awe-inspiring charity event was laid by an English-based project known as Band-Aid. Since he played drums and sang on the original Band-Aid single, "Do They Know It's Christmas" (this, by the way, was the inspiration for the superstar conglomerate known as U.S.A. for Africa to record "We Are the World"), Collins was keen on being involved as much as possible in the subsequent live events. When Geldof's efforts led to a joint British-American concert to take place on both continents on July 13, 1985, Collins was determined to appear at both shows. With some essential assistance from the supersonic Concorde, Collins appeared live at London's Wembley Stadium and Philadelphia's J.F.K. Stadium in the same day.

Live-Aid should live on as an event whose magnitude will eclipse all other mega-superstar concert events, if for no other reason than the scope of its purpose. Besides raising multi-millions to relieve mass starvation in Africa, it also diffused the rampant cynicism that had overtaken the music industry. Through the truly remarkable vision and untiring lobbying efforts of Geldof, a musician previously known only for his role as the singer and songwriter for the Boomtown Rats, and the cooperation of stars such as Phil Collins, Pete Townshend, Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney, Tina Turner, U2, a reunited Led Zeppelin, and literally scores of others—the reality of famine hit home for people in more fortunate countries throughout the globe. In Geldof's words, they succeeded in making "compassion fashionable." Besides being formally recognized by the Queen of England, Geldof went on to become the first entertainer ever nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. As a result of his example, the next few years would witness a barrage of other star-studded events for worthy causes, including the Sun City Project (for anti-apartheid causes), Farm-Aid (Neil Young, Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp), and others trying to alleviate the financial plight of America's family farmers), and the Conspiracy of Hope Tour (featuring, at various times, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Tracy Chapman, U2, and others raising money to aid Amnesty International). It may have taken thirty years, but rock and roll had developed responsible aspirations and, with a maturity that reflected its age, was willing to help change the world.



## MARCH 1984 #34 (ALSO AUGUST 1988 #1) RED RED WINE—UB40

The mixed population that lived in the midland and northern cities of England had considerably different tastes than those of the more cosmopolitan capital, London. Because these cities were mostly industrial centers, a large percentage of their population was made up of working class people, and an interracial mix that included relocated Jamaicans and native-born Englishers. Being a commonwealth of Great Britain until 1962, Jamaica had fewer restrictions for its citizens to become nationalized, and as a result, a good deal of Jamaicans moved to Great Britain in search of a better life and steady work. For the most part, the Jamaican faction got along well enough with the native whites, and they often exchanged cultural influences. The early '60s saw the rise of the Jamaican-based ska movement in England, which was eventually appropriated by the "mods," who appreciated its danceable rhythms and its exotic nature. As ska matured into reggae, English towns such as Birmingham and Coventry maintained a steady interest in the Jamaican rhythms. Unfortunately, a coarse and violent skinhead movement arose in the late '60s that threatened the resilience of Jamaican music. British youth groups like the National Front were fascist organizations with blatantly racist policies and violent tactics that provided a means for dangerously hateful kids to create havoc. For some reason, whose inherent contradictions are impossible for me to understand or explain, these junior racists tended to favor reggae and ska, thus marring the perception of these styles by law-abiding citizens. The perceptions were skewed further when punk dominated the English music scene and adopted reggae as a major influence for source materials.

Near the end of the decade, an offshoot of punk arose that drew directly from the days of ska. By combining these two disparate forms of music, Jamaicans and white punks were uniting to record classic songs and their own original compositions. The movement came to be known as two-tone music and was exemplified by such bands as the Specials, Madness, the Selector, and the (English) Beat. Besides a common musical interest, these bands also tended to share common concerns, as reflected in their actions and the lyrics of their songs, which included racial inequality, nuclear proliferation, and unemployment. Unfortunately, the two-tone bands were often, albeit unwillingly, swept up in the mindless violence of the National Front skinheads. (In England, the term "skinheads" refers to a violent sect of N.F. kids who shaved their skulls as a sign of solidarity. This *should not* be confused with the hardcore-music and slam-dancing American version of skinheads, who in the '80s were, for the most part, thoroughly apolitical, and shaved their heads only as a means of proving that they existed somewhere outside of normal society. The peaceful hardcore scene is now essentially dead.) The violence that erupted around

**The violence that erupted around the two-tone movement was completely at odds with the concerns of the bands, who were usually biracial and despised racism openly.**



**With their exclusively English inferences and their homemade style of anglicized reggae, UB40 remained a nonentity in America over the course of its next few album releases.**

the two-tone movement was completely at odds with the concerns of the bands, who were usually biracial and despised racism openly. Notwithstanding the stupidity of a faction of fans who insisted on misunderstanding this, their music was almost always intended to foster a sense of peace and unity.

Despite the controversies, reggae continued to thrive in England. This was in stark contrast to what was happening at the same time in the United States. In America, reggae (or any form of Jamaican music, for that matter) was either ignored completely or existed solely on the fringes of popular culture. In fact, America's acceptance of reggae as a style can be summed up completely in our obsession with only one artist, Bob Marley. As had already happened before, for a brief period in the '60s, Jamaican music was once again going to reach America's shores via a roundabout stopover in England.

Like so many other English groups of the time, UB40 came together after becoming inspired by the do-it-yourself ethic of punk rock. They began rehearsals, although none of the bandmembers knew how to play their instruments. Opting for cover versions of their favorite reggae classics, they practiced with strict regularity for six months, until they felt they were ready to appear in public. England's ravenous fans of roots-reggae rock accepted them almost immediately, and they began incorporating original compositions into their live set. As a means of defining their working-class roots and their political stance, they chose the name UB40 from a government-issued form that was given to recipients of unemployment benefits. The cover of their first album was made up entirely of a twelve-by-twelve-inch enlargement of this very form.

With their exclusively English inferences and their homemade style of anglicized reggae, UB40 remained a nonentity in America over the course of its next few album releases. Indeed, America was completely ignorant of the band—until it achieved #1 status in England with the single “Red Red Wine.” The album it came from consisted solely of cover versions of the band's favorite reggae songs. Although “Red Red Wine” was written by Neil Diamond (not exactly your typical dreadlocked Rastafarian), the song was basically unknown in the states and was popular in the U.K. only through a reggae inspired version that was recorded by one Tony Tribe. Tribe's version inspired UB40 and, ironically, it was their rerecording of a rerecording that had all the markings of an original and inspired hit. Once it reached #1 in England, the song became known to American record buyers, who appreciated it enough to make it a modest hit at #34.

Fast forward to 1988. A resurging interest in “Red Red Wine” causes the song to garner airplay all over again. To support the unexpected demand, the single is reissued and, surprise of surprises, it climbs all the way to #1. Seemingly out of the blue, UB40 belatedly became stars, proving once and for all that, in this crazy



industry, virtually anything is possible. Maybe it was the reassuring sound of lead singer Ali Campbell's voice, or maybe it was the presumed exoticism of Astro, the band's "toaster" (a Jamaican expression for someone who talks in rhyme over an instrumental track—a precursor of rap). Whether it was the unassuming sound, the loping rhythms, or the band's nonthreatening stance, America accepted UB40 unhesitatingly. Inspired by the overwhelming popularity of their single, UB40 would continue the trend by releasing reggae-fied cover versions of non-reggae songs. With the runaway success of these rerecordings, UB40 now graces the charts with a fair amount of regularity.

## MAY 1984 #2 DANCING IN THE DARK—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

**B**ruce Springsteen's early years growing up in Freehold, New Jersey, have been portrayed as considerably less than idyllic, but he was hardly unique in this regard. It was not a rare thing for a family to struggle to make ends meet, nor was it unusual for a shy teenager to become withdrawn and occasionally antisocial. Tales of bouts with his father, concerning the length of his hair and the volume of his music, are so familiar that they could have been stories from my own teenage years. The unfortunate fact is that dysfunctional families and even domestic violence aren't all that uncommon. Even his latching onto music as a form of self-expression is a typical means of escape for frustrated or bored kids. What was unique about Springsteen was his absolute determination to break out from the implied limitations of his upbringing. This desire created an unbreakable bond with his fans.

Since Springsteen was slow to make friends, the guitar must have served as a means for him to communicate his thoughts without the risk of exposing his insecurity or need for self-protection. It was a conduit through which he could express his innermost feelings, but it was also a shield that protected his fragile psyche from becoming too vulnerable. His music deflected any real communication into a forum which doesn't usually allow for a direct response. Judging from his early material, it sounds as though he wanted to overcome his cautious nature, and he did this by slowly (and safely) revealing various aspects of his personality through his songs. It wasn't until he grew older and became more confident in his abilities that his lyrics became less veiled and more directly personal.

"Dancing in the Dark" was the first Top 10 single from an album that eventually yielded seven of them: "Dancing in the Dark" (#2), "Cover Me" (#7), "Born in the U.S.A." (#9), "I'm on Fire" (#6), "Glory Days" (#5), "I'm Goin' Down" (#9), and "My Hometown" (#6) all appeared on the *Born in the U.S.A.* album. If they had

### GREAT HITS

APRIL 1984 #10  
BORDERLINE—MADONNA

### GREAT MISSES

MAY 1984 #5  
SISTER CHRISTIAN—NIGHTRANGER





**With little attempt at disguising himself, Springsteen was now using his personal experience not only as the voice for his material, but as the subject matter.**

had enough time to continue milking it, the remaining tracks were good enough to yield five more. “Dancing in the Dark,” “Born in the U.S.A.,” and “Cover Me” were also subjected to horrendously inappropriate and overwhelmingly boring twelve-inch dance remixes by producer Arthur Baker. Baker almost completely destroyed the essence of the writing, and added little more than a processed beat and synthesized schlock to glue the extraneous noises together. Perhaps the intention was to expand Springsteen’s audience base into the dance clubs, but whoever didn’t already appreciate him certainly wasn’t going to change their minds based upon these irrelevant pieces of vinyl.

“Dancing in the Dark” captures Springsteen in a state of inspired boredom. Maybe it was frustration with his limited capacity to communicate, or maybe just ennui, but the song’s character is fed up with his routine and is ready to bust a move. The girl who has attracted his attention just might be responsive, too, provided his communication skills hold up. As far as his audience was concerned, though, the message was coming through loud and clear.

This wasn’t a story about somebody else, this was Springsteen singing about himself. Why else would he include the day and night reversal of the first verse (“I get up in the evenin’...I come home in the mornin’...”) which eliminates the possibility of the song being about just anybody? With little attempt at disguising himself, Springsteen was now using his personal experience not only as the voice for his material, but as the subject matter. Someone else might be able to sing it, but they would stand in the shadow of the man who wrote the words. Springsteen was no longer concerned about maintaining a safe distance between his life and his work. Sure, there were still character portrayals, but they were all heavily invested with his personal perspective. It doesn’t hurt matters when every song on the *Born in the U.S.A.* album exhibits a liberal use of the word “I,” nor does it hurt that Springsteen displays a latent talent for acting by making every track so fundamentally believable. With this, his biggest hit album, he finally seemed comfortable with himself.

## OCTOBER 1984 #2 PURPLE RAIN—PRINCE

Prince has often been compared, with some justification, to Sly Stone, Jimi Hendrix, and any number of others, but in all honesty, pop music has never seen the likes of him. His combination of instrumental talent, business and promotional acumen, and novel songwriting and production abilities, all wrapped up in a freaked-out persona that defies classification, is unparalleled in the industry. Few artists have shown less uninhibited fear of change than Prince. He has dropped everything on a dime and then picked himself up all over again more times than





can be counted. In fact, he's not even "Prince" anymore. Now, he's the "artist formerly known as Prince," or a performer with a bisexual symbol for a name, or an epicene creation who wants us to call him Victor. I don't know, it confuses me, too. Like anybody who covets his privacy, he probably feels that what ought to matter is what he wants us to see, no matter how manipulated or predetermined it may be. I don't mind exclusion from his private affairs, but he's mistaken if he thinks his fans will remain dedicated to someone who insists on dehumanizing his stage image beyond recognition. Without appearing to be grounded to Earth, he may come to resemble a cartoon character, leaving his audience feeling betrayed by his unwillingness to communicate. Through a sea of changes, one thing has remained consistent. No matter what the musical style or the manufactured image, Prince has remained firmly in control of his own destiny. Despite all the role-playing and gimmickry, he may be one of the most honest performers we have. Rather than hiding behind the wall of his persona, he immerses himself in it and uses it as a form of therapy. Odds are that the new and future versions of the artist previously known as Prince will continue to be variations on this theme.

From the very beginning, Prince has insisted on producing his own music. In retrospect, it is easy to see why. How could another producer possibly be involved in a project as personally sexual as *Dirty Mind* or *1999* without diluting the intensity of its focus? Who else could have shaped the single-minded vision of *Purple Rain* or *Sign 'O' the Times* except for the author? The reason these albums are masterpieces is because they wear their idiosyncrasies like badges of honor, and they never surrender to a more balanced "normalcy," which would have spoiled them.

Prince's cinematic history is less consistent. To date, he has made four movies of sporadic interest and uneven quality. *Under the Cherry Moon*, *Sign 'O' the Times*, and *Graffiti Bridge* all exposed some aspects of his character and erased others, but none came anywhere near the runaway success of *Purple Rain*. By making a loosely autobiographical movie on a shoestring budget of \$7 million, he parlayed the public's curiosity into a whopping \$75 million gross, and counting. Had it not been for the most captivating soundtrack ever put to film, this never could have happened. On camera, Prince gives new meaning to the term "wooden," and his acting is about as emotive as a slug's—until he steps onstage. The instantaneous transformation is disarming, and the performances are astounding—easily making this the best dramatic rock and roll ever captured on film.

The phenomenon that was *Purple Rain* was both overwhelming and unavoidable. Suddenly, this sex-obsessed pop star, who insisted on doing everything him-

### GREAT HITS

JUNE 1984	#1
<u>WHEN DOVES CRY</u> —PRINCE	
JULY 1984	#1
<u>MISSING YOU</u> —JOHN WAITE	
AUGUST 1984	#3
<u>DRIVE</u> —THE CARS	
SEPTEMBER 1984	#8
<u>BLUE JEAN</u> —DAVID BOWIE	

### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1984	#26
<u>I CAN'T DRIVE 55</u> —SAMMY HAGAR	



Because of songs like "Purple Rain," it becomes clear that his sex/God obsessions are less contradictory than they might originally appear to be.

self, was appealing to everybody from teenyboppers to insurance salesmen. The movie, the companion album, and the resultant hit singles permeated every core of the entertainment industry. Just for diversity, *Purple Rain* deserves accolades. Five songs entered the Top 40, and each of them displayed a different musical style: "When Doves Cry" (#1 for five weeks) is cold funk, which features no bass part at all (can you feature the absence of something?), and a callous vocal performance of a heartrending subject; "Let's Go Crazy" (#1 for two weeks) is pedal-to-the-metal rock and roll; "Take Me with U" (#25) is romanticized new wave; "I Would Die for U" (#8) is energetic and syncopated techno; and the title song (#2 for two weeks) is a climactic dirge with soul-searching frankness.

The autobiographical connotations of *Purple Rain's* story line add depth to Prince's emotional performance. As the film goes on, we start to trust him and sympathize with his character, particularly during the movie's climax, featuring a live performance of the song "Purple Rain." Here, the scope of Prince's subject matter widens considerably beyond his usual obsessions with sexual fantasy. It is grounded by real emotion, but is no less fantastic for it. He faces down the burdens of a lifetime, shoulders his own humiliation, and then tests the devotion of a loved one with his brutal honesty. His intensity is chilling, and it makes you realize that Prince is deep enough to know that he occasionally needs someone to hold him for something other than gratuitous pleasure. Because of songs like "Purple Rain," it becomes clear that his sex/God obsessions are less contradictory than they might originally appear to be. Both require faith, trust, and an openness if the relationship is to be successful. His "pray naked" stance is really a sign of acceptance that life's trials and tribulations are only distractions from the life that God has intended for us to live. On "Purple Rain," we can hear the real voice of Prince, the person, vowing to get on with his own life.

## NOVEMBER 1984 #9 BORN IN THE U.S.A.—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Whether it was restlessness or an extremely focused personal vision is uncertain, but Bruce Springsteen changed bands and musical directions quite often before he finally signed with Columbia Records. A stint with a Jersey shore bar band called the Castiles led him to organize his own group, called Steel Mill. Despite their steadily increasing recognition, including a promotional offer from concert promoter Bill Graham, Springsteen left the group with little warning. He temporarily fronted an experimental outfit called Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, and then formed the Bruce Springsteen band, only to quit that lineup, as well. Afterward, he took a hiatus from playing with bands and concentrated on polishing his songwriting.



It was around this time that he was introduced to Mike Appel, an employee of a music publishing firm who once fronted a Top 40 band called the Balloon Farm (“A Question of Temperature,” #37 in 1968). Appel had extraordinary faith in Springsteen’s talent and must have sensed his commitment to the spirit of rock and roll, as well as his passion for its raw power of communication. They eventually signed contracts that gave Appel control over Springsteen’s recording, publishing, and management. It was a move that would one day cause immense legal difficulties, but for the time being, it got Springsteen what he had always wanted. Appel arranged an audition with the legendary John Hammond at Columbia Records, and thus began Springsteen’s long-term affiliation with his only record label. To say that this sort of instantaneous acceptance is a rarity is a gross understatement. Label executives are constantly barraged with requests for auditions and receive enough tape to fill a series of airplane hangars, so the fact that Springsteen was even able to get in the door, no less be signed immediately by the first person who heard him, is astounding. It serves as a testimony both to Appel’s confident selling power and to Springsteen’s raw talent.

Appel himself produced the sessions for the first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, New Jersey*, which sold poorly when it was first released in 1973. While the public largely ignored him, the rock press buoyed Springsteen’s career through these early years. *The Wild, the Innocent, and the E Street Shuffle* fared only slightly better. Constant touring helped to increase his core audience while letting everybody else know that Springsteen was much more than the Bob Dylan-influenced clone he was being touted as. Nevertheless, Columbia grew increasingly uncertain of Springsteen’s salability and paid an advance for his third album only after much hesitation. Pulling out all the stops, Springsteen and Appel spent the lion’s share of the advance on one specific recording. Emulating Phil Spector’s kitchen-sink approach to production, while incorporating a maniacally anal-retentive attention to detail, they completed one song, “Born to Run,” in half a year. When they finally presented the belated recording to Columbia, the label executives shrugged indifferently, said it was inappropriate for single release (!), and announced their intention to withhold any additional advance. Worse, the immense number of overdubs that were crammed onto sixteen tracks meant that the song was virtually impossible to edit. With his biggest supporters gone (Hammond was semi-retired, and label chief Clive Davis was removed from his position under scandalous circumstances), Springsteen’s career was hanging in the balance. It wasn’t until the college-age son of the label’s new chief executive, Irwin Segelstein, chided his father that they reconsidered their position.

**Constant touring helped to increase his core audience while letting everybody else know that Springsteen was much more than the Bob Dylan-influenced clone he was being touted as.**



It was around this time that two of rock and roll's most pertinent critics, Dave Marsh and Jon Landau, began promoting Springsteen vigorously. Landau had gotten close enough to his subject to actually enter the recording studio during the making of *Born to Run* and earned a production credit in the process. Before he saw it coming, Appel's tenuous hold on Springsteen's career was wrested from him. Springsteen had become increasingly dissatisfied with Appel's management techniques and was becoming more reliant on Landau. After a prolonged legal battle, Appel was out and Landau was in.

Amid this craziness, Springsteen's career burst wide open. *Born to Run* was a hit. His face graced the covers of both *Time* and *Newsweek* for their October 27, 1975, issues. Unfortunately, the lawsuit would destroy whatever precious momentum this attention generated. It would be three years before he released a fourth album, and by then, the record industry had changed sufficiently to suggest that Springsteen might not fit in as well as he once had. The album *Darkness on the Edge of Town* did well enough, as did its follow-up, *The River*, but it wasn't until 1984 that Springsteen's career would meet, and then eclipse, the recognition he received back in 1975.

Springsteen's struggle for control seemed to have taken a toll on his songwriting. Whereas his previous work had been buoyant and uplifting, his songwriting now reflected his realization that things might not always be what they seem. In short, he sounded like a glass-is-half-empty kind of guy. By the time he released the stirringly emotional and chillingly stark performances of the *Nebraska* album, a record that contains nothing but undoctored tapes of haunting demo recordings, Springsteen left no doubt that there was "a (great) meanness in this world." In

**With such a complex vision, coupled with his newfound ability to express himself in terms of national concerns, Springsteen's songwriting well seemed to have become bottomless.**

comparison, his next album, *Born in the U.S.A.*, seems positively brilliant—not to say that *Nebraska* wasn't a work of genius, but that it was all shadows, gloom, and dead ends, while *Born in the U.S.A.* seems to reassert that a bright light still might lie at the end of every tunnel. One lingering effect of Springsteen's legal wrangling may have been his coming to terms with imperfect solutions. Some damage can be irreversible, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we have to wake up every morning and be overwhelmed by our problems. Springsteen seems to have adopted a philosophy that was something like this, and in *Born in the U.S.A.*, he applied it to the national spirit of America during the Ronald Reagan years.

With such a complex vision, coupled with his newfound ability to express himself in terms of national concerns, Springsteen's songwriting well seemed to have become bottomless. The homespun wisdom of his characters contains the simple profundity that can only come from hard-earned experience. On "Born in the U.S.A.," the title song from the album, Springsteen's lyrics are graphically realistic in their portrayal of a spurned Vietnam veteran. The song





hovers on the brink of despair, but the martial beat of the music betrays an underlying strength and sense of pride that are desperately trying to rise to the surface. The music contains one endless chord, a drone that is as unchangeable as the righteous rage of the song's protagonist, and which can be interpreted to symbolize the momentum of a nation besieged by its collective ignorance. The song's visceral effect might well have provided some of the impetus for the government to classify Vietnam veterans as a socially disadvantaged group.

On *Nebraska*, Springsteen summarized his darkened vision by concluding that it was unbelievable how, with so much injustice in the world, every person can still manage to "find some reason to believe." In its despair, *Nebraska* comes dangerously close to mocking an entire nation for what Springsteen saw as its blind faith and ignorance. "Born in the U.S.A." confronts that self-imposed blindness by forcing us to open our eyes. What we see might not be so pretty, but if we look straight ahead, we'll have to admit that awareness is infinitely better than ignorance. Maybe, if we can adapt to what we see, we will realize that the glass is actually half full.

## DECEMBER 1984 #1 I WANT TO KNOW WHAT LOVE IS—FOREIGNER

Throughout the late '70s, one unpleasantness was as consistently predictable (and dreaded) as hurricanes in August. Each new Foreigner single was guaranteed to irk me with its reliably annoying blend of rock-and-roll clichés, corporate mannerisms, and lyrical idiocy. At its best, Foreigner blended into the background of late '70s radio like aural wallpaper and allowed me the freedom to ignore their mix of hot air and bluster. "Feels Like the First Time," "Cold As Ice," "Double Vision," and "Blue Morning, Blue Day" could be ignored, if not for their volume level, then for their complete lack of musical inspiration and originality. At its worst, Foreigner could send me into a radio-destroying rage. "Hot Blooded" ("Check it and see, I've got a fever of a hundred and three"), "Dirty White Boy," and "Head Games" were excruciatingly annoying recordings that flaunted bad taste as though it were an act of rebellion. Crunching power chords and sexist lyrics were a dime a dozen on FM radio, so Foreigner's modus operandi for "rising above" the (un)herd was to stoop to newer depths of depravity with each new single. "Head Games" was my personal limit. It was also the title of an album that featured a cover photo of a clearly underage girl pressing herself against a men's room urinal. "Head" games, indeed. It's enough to make Spinal Tap's album cover suggestion for *Smell the Glove* seem quaint in comparison, but this was real! The visual pun was despicable, but the song was equally offensive for feigning emotion where none existed. Some people considered this stuff to be rock and roll, but it required a redefinition of the term to include music that was about as inspiring as a garden-variety rock, with lyrics that made you want to roll over.

Foreigner was far from alone in unloading this brand of noxious rock music. Bad Company may have started it, but they were quickly followed by Boston, Journey, Asia, Loverboy, REO Speedwagon, and a cartel of others that I'd just as





**Low on dietary value but high on filler, formulaic hard rock was a dangerous thing that, if abused, could stunt your growth, and that is exactly what happened to the popular music scene.**

soon not remember, all of whom were guilty at one time or another of churning out worthless chunks of chaff. Taken as a whole, these bands cooked up a tastelessly bland concoction that was easy to swallow, so it became pop radio's dietary staple. Since it was flavorless enough to avoid being offensive, most people never complained as they were fed rock and roll's equivalent of bleached white bread. The recipe was simple: a macho posture, a long-haired front man with a three-octave range, a technically adept guitar player who favored bar chords and speedy lead lines, a lumbering rhythm section that pounded out the beat, and a delusion that led them to believe they were "blues" players. These were the basic ingredients that each band abused to varying degrees, before sprinkling in their own list of additives and preservatives.

Low on dietary value but high on filler, formulaic hard rock was a dangerous thing that, if abused, could stunt your growth, and that is exactly what happened to the popular music scene. Too many predictably lame concoctions were now hogging the mainstream, and musical development came to a halt. Pop and AOR entered a frozen state that abhorred change. Nineteen seventy-nine drifted into 1980, then 1981, then 1982, then 1983, with little happening of either artistic or historic merit. New wave offered up a different flavor, and R&B finally freed itself from the reigns of disco with a new "street" sound, but mainstream rock-and-roll radio didn't want to know. Constant return trips to the white-bread bank yielded financially sound results, so the bands kept cooking up batch after batch of the same thing. Over the years, the resultant product became so predictable that it should have been labeled with serial numbers instead of song titles, as could be attested by the phenomenal popularity of generic "hair" bands such as Warrant, Winger, Motley Crüe, Cinderella, and Poison.

Just when I least expected it, Foreigner began to do something very surprising. For no apparent reason, they began to show the good taste to add some extra spice into their mix. I never would have guessed it, but I couldn't deny my ears. "Urgent" was the first Foreigner song I heard that was neither invisibly bland nor aurally offensive. Hardly "urgent," it was at least musically interesting and featured the tasteful sax playing of Junior Walker for added flavor. I figured that it must have been an accident, and that somebody carelessly spilled a little Tabasco sauce into their formula, but with their next single, I could no longer deny Foreigner's deliberate attempt to upgrade their sound. I liked "Waiting for a Girl Like You" enough to champion it among friends (most of whom thought I'd lost my grip entirely), and I was actually frustrated to see such a deserving record not go to #1. Easily Foreigner's most significantly wholesome release to date, it was stymied at #2 for a staggering ten weeks.



Any attempt to sustain my original opinion of this band was difficult after these last two releases, but it was the third pitch that really caught me looking. “I Want to Know What Love Is” is as powerful a single as I have ever heard. Aided immeasurably by the New Jersey Mass Choir and singer Jennifer Holliday, Foreigner was treading on turf that was completely foreign to it. It was all that lead singer Lou Gramm could do just to hold his own on this Mick Jones (the band’s leader, primary songwriter, and guitarist) composition, but in all honesty, his reflective approach is as brilliantly understated as it was unexpected. Producer “Mutt” Lange earned his pay here by implementing a broad dynamic range into the production that empowers the gospel choir without emasculating the recording. In place of braggadocio and hormonal rage are lyrics that actually resemble a prayer for acceptance and deliverance. Addressing topics such as patience, maturity, and open-mindedness are as far away from standard juvenile hard-rock themes as you can get, but Jones and Foreigner were determined to prove that they were no longer your typical hard-rock band. If they could convince me, then they could convince anybody, and they did. “I Want to Know What Love Is” earned them respect from critical quarters, and went on to become the band’s first #1 single.

## DECEMBER 1984 #5 THE BOYS OF SUMMER—DON HENLEY

**T**he Eagles’ last studio-recorded album took one heck of a toll on the bandmembers. *The Long Run* seems to have taken its name from the methods they used to record it. It took the better part of a year to create and cost more than a million dollars to produce, yet it sounds as though the songs were written in about two days. There is nothing here to justify that type of expense, and there is nothing to blame except perhaps their own severely damaged work habits. Tracks were recorded and mixed arduously, then pored over through a microscopic lens. Once the inevitable “defects” were discerned, it was back to the drawing board, where the exhausting process was repeated ad infinitum. What makes no sense is that the Eagles were lavishing all of this attention on sub-par material. Whether they just threw their hands in the air and surrendered or truly felt comfortable with the antiseptic results is unclear to me, but the outcome was an awful album. So much life was pumped out of the recordings that *The Long Run* sounds like demographically created android-rock. Even the supposedly humorous “Greeks Don’t Want No Freaks” is so embarrassingly unfunny that you could only wonder what they were originally thinking. Timothy B. Schmitt, the longtime bassist for Poco, was brought in to replace the departed Randy Meisner (coincidentally, Schmitt replaced Meisner in Poco, as well) and provided the only song that seems to have survived the laborious dehumanization process. “I Can’t Tell You Why” moves along at a funereal pace, but it is still the liveliest track on the album. When he was in Poco, Schmitt averaged about three songs an album for more than a dozen albums, any of which were equivalent to “I Can’t Tell You Why” in terms of quality, and yet he couldn’t get himself arrested. Here, with the lumbering corporate



monolith known as the Eagles, he finally got the exposure he needed to thrust him into the spotlight. On the power of that one song, Schmitt is now remembered primarily for his role in the Eagles. The irony is that the veteran bandmembers couldn't keep pace. The Eagles blew it, and they knew it. Their anal-retentive recording methods destroyed the album, while the mounting frustration from their indecisiveness destroyed the band.

After *The Long Run*, each member went his own way. Most of their efforts were only marginally interesting and artistically irrelevant, but Don Henley was attracting an awful lot of attention before he even released anything. Publicity ought to be a good thing when you are trying to start a new career, but Henley was in the papers for all the wrong reasons. Stories involving naked underage girls, illegal drugs, and his subsequent arrest didn't do much for his reputation. The irony here was that he was being arrested for the same behavior that he was alluding to all over the *Hotel California* album. Lashing out at the press and the gossipy public who lapped it up, he filled his first solo album with paranoid and angry diatribes such as "Nobody's Business" and the eye-opening hit single "Dirty Laundry" (#3).

Two years passed before his next album, and Henley appeared to have cooled off. More importantly, the stigma of his earlier problems with the law melted away. Without any personal distractions to overwhelm him, and without having to be concerned about the suitability of his songs (or inappropriate harmony parts) for other bandmembers, Henley's writing talents flourished and took on a highly personal tone. Collaborating with Mike Campbell, the guitarist from Tom Petty's Heartbreakers, he constructed an album that surprised nearly everybody. For topics, he chose to abandon anger and defensiveness, replacing them with thoughtfulness and reflection. This gave the album a mature and even-handed feel that was lacking from his previous work.

The first single, "The Boys of Summer," was a perfect example of his newer, gentler attitude. The song catalogs a collection of detailed memories that evoke

**The lyrics tell  
of that moment  
when you  
realize that  
the present  
seems to be  
unfulfilling, but  
recollections  
of the past  
somehow  
aren't.**

both eroticism and denial. ("You've got the top pulled down...your brown skin shining in the sun....You've got your hair slicked back and those Wayfarers on....") If you feel vulnerable, the present might seem only black and white, but memories can flood the senses in living color. The lyrics tell of that moment when you realize that the present seems to be unfulfilling, but recollections of the past somehow aren't. Adrift on blissful memories, the protagonist is startled back to reality when he "(sees) a Dead-head sticker on a Cadillac." With this simple (and amusing) image, he recognizes the danger of holding on to the past ("Don't look back. You can never look back"). He wants to remain his skeptical, cautious, and ambivalent self, but in the end, his sense of longing wins out. The romantic wins. It is the little things that make time-tripping seem so inviting, and Henley's gorgeous lyricism tells of a reminiscence with enough detail to make it both believable and



irresistible. By recalling the details, he stirs our own memories of hot summer days gone by.

## MARCH 1985 #1 CRAZY FOR YOU—MADONNA

I'm not going to pretend that I'm a fan of Madonna—because I'm not. I'm not going to pretend that I respect her artistry, either—I don't. In much the same way that the moguls of the disco era manipulated the masses into accepting pabulum as the creative norm, Madonna has invented a niche, exclusively hers, that allows her to release mediocre song after mediocre song, with some supposedly scintillating image that succeeds beyond my imagination in transporting each and every one of them toward the top of the charts. Media attention has become more important to her than music, and since this skews what would be considered “normal” priorities for an artist, it's that much easier for me to dismiss Madonna as a social phenomenon instead of a musical one, as a stage performer instead of as a singer or musician.

Now, I need to ask a rhetorical, existentialist question. If you had an infinite number of monkeys stand before a microphone, how long would it take before one of them screeched out a well-crafted melody? I know that's not fair, because monkeys could never have the intense and unwavering ambition that Madonna has. Also, monkeys couldn't be as deliberately manipulative and usurious as Madonna has been to carry herself to the pinnacle of stardom. Besides, if you're a normal human being, there is no such thing as a sexy monkey.

A combination of intense discipline and backlot sexuality brought Madonna from apparently hopeless obscurity to being one of the most well-known performers of her age. Leaving her hometown of Detroit for New York, she sang briefly for an amateur band called the Breakfast Club. To support herself and gain experience, she acted, she posed, she danced...in short, she did whatever she could to propel her career. She even developed a contingent of female fans who began to emulate her style of dressing in vampish, second-hand clothing. One thing that these girls could not duplicate, however, was Madonna's formidable ambition. By 1983, the entire country was familiar with her belly button, seen on the ubiquitous MTV airings of videos from her first album, such as “Holiday,” “Lucky Star,” and “Borderline.” *Like a Virgin* followed, and then her perfectly cast role as a flighty, flimsy sex symbol in the movie *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Once she became a star, her early career moves almost came back to haunt her when *Penthouse* and *Playboy* exposed her early nude photos. Instead of ruining her, they added to her appeal as a modern-day bad girl. She sold 80,000 albums a day. She posed as Marilyn Monroe for the video of “Material Girl.” She married actor Sean Penn, and the couple seemed to be filmed by unwelcome paparazzi twenty-four hours a day. Their only film together, *Shanghai Surprise*, was an outright disaster and it flopped. The





**It's as  
overwrought,  
overproduced,  
and  
undertalented  
as the rest of  
her work, but it  
stands out for  
the simple  
directness  
and overt  
romanticism of  
its message.**

deliberate controversy of “Papa Don’t Preach,” a song about a pregnant teenager, followed, and then we learned of an exercise regimen that firmed up her body but not her acting ability. Her performances in the film *Who’s That Girl* and the play *Speed the Plow* were mercilessly and justifiably panned. By 1989, her marriage to Penn had collapsed. Pepsi paid her millions to roll around on an altar with an effigy of Christ and to dance half-naked in front of burning crosses—as brilliant an advertising campaign for soda as could be conceived. Madonna and—egad, Warren Beatty—costarred in the film *Dick Tracy* amid rumors of their liaison. The oh-so-tasteful single “Hanky Spanky,” or whatever it was called, was released after that, followed by the documentary *Truth or Dare*. This, in turn, was followed by comedian Julie Brown’s vastly superior lampooning, called *Dare to Be Truthful*. Then Madonna released her pseudo-controversial book *Sex*, but most buyers found the purchase price to be the most controversial element of the project. Then came the movie, *Body of Evidence*. No comment (why bother?).

Somewhere in the middle of this mess, she released “Crazy for You.” Maybe I’m as vulnerable as the next guy, or maybe I’m desperate to relate to a cultural phenomenon that doesn’t speak directly to me, or maybe I’m simply a sucker for a great pop song, but Madonna finally hit a nerve when she sang “Crazy for You.” It’s as overwrought, overproduced, and undertalented as the rest of her work, but it stands out for the simple directness and overt romanticism of its message, as well as for the captivating lilt of the melody, written by John Bettis and Jon Lind.

Does she have a message? Is she conveying anything besides unbridled hedonism? Is there any humanity to her image or is it digitized sex? Essentially, Madonna offers us her body, but won’t let us kiss her. Is this sexy? Is it desirable? Is it popular? Madonna is arguably *the* most famous woman on the planet Earth, so there is your answer. She is no more or less than a reflection of our own short-sighted desire for immediate gratification, and I don’t like to admit such a personal weakness, but can 80 million Madonna fans be wrong? Am I subconsciously crazy for her? If nothing else, observing Madonna means you will never be bored, and she wouldn’t have it any other way.

## MARCH 1985 #3 NIGHTSHIFT—THE COMMODORES

**S**ongs about dead rock stars are usually dreadful. “Rock and Roll Heaven,” produced by Dennis Lambert and recorded by the Righteous Brothers, is the first song that comes to mind, with its absurd imagery of dead rockers engaging in some eternal jam session. To be honest, the thought of the ethereal spirits of Janis Joplin, Otis Redding, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Jim Croce, and Bobby





Darin (Bobby Darin?) all huddled around a microphone, while endlessly trying to harmonize, does not impress me as a thrill worth dying for. Maybe it's me, but if I cared to hear interminable jamming, I'd just as soon attend a Grateful Dead concert. Meanwhile, I'll try to keep myself occupied by observing the creative efforts of the living.

By 1985, most people had left the Commodores for dead. Lionel Richie's earlier exit left them with about as much chance of survival as the Diana Ross-less Supremes, perhaps even less so since the remaining members were generally unknown. Since Richie's departure had also cost them their producer and a charter member (guitarist Thomas McClary), the prognosis was less than heartening. On their way to the tar pits, the Commodores hesitated long enough to reflect on their relevancy. Then, with their last gasp, they recorded what still stands as the best pop single ever made about dead people.

If the easy-listening audience who followed Richie's later work with the Commodores and his subsequent solo career were suddenly confronted with the band's early recordings, they'd probably hurt themselves while darting for the power button on their stereos. Screeching guitars, chunky block chords, syncopated horn charts, wailing synthesizers, and heavy beats were common ingredients. Originally, the band was a stone-funk party outfit and proud of it. They catered specifically to their core black audience, with little regard for crossover status. Of course, Motown intended to change that, and eventually it did. By the time Motown got its hooks into the Commodores, Richie's voice was pouring out into supermarket aisles and elevators all the world over. "Three Times a Lady," "Sail On," and "Still" were hardly more than romantically rendered (and subliminally depressing) shopping stimulants, and after the spectacular sales of his duet with Diana Ross on "Endless Love," Richie became convinced that the world needed another solo crooner of monotonous pabulum. His manager, Benny Ashburn, passed away before Richie's solo career got off the ground, so he hired Ken Kragen, the man responsible for Kenny Rogers's assault on the Western Hemisphere, to take his place. From this point on, Richie exhibited about as much funky soul as Rogers did. I admit that this assessment is a bit harsh, and that seven #1 hits in seven years is astounding, but I can't help but notice that the majority of these songs ("Truly," "Say You, Say Me," "Hello," "All Night Long") exude about as much excitement as (and even less passion than) a rousing rendition of "The Gambler."

With their lead singer gone, the Commodores tried desperately to get back to basics and maintain a portion of their market share. Unfortunately, Motown's faith in the Richie-less act was less than encouraging, and a drastic dip in album sales and concert attendance only proved that their reticence was warranted. J.D. Nicholas, the former lead singer for Heatwave ("Boogie Nights," "The Groove Line"), was brought in to salvage the remaining lineup, while the bandmembers continued to actively write

**By the time Motown got its hooks into the Commodores, Richie's voice was pouring out into supermarket aisles and elevators all the world over.**



and search for new material. It was in this state of desperation that Walter Orange, the group's drummer and (remaining) vocalist, penned "Nightshift" as an homage to Marvin Gaye and Jackie Wilson. In a fateful coincidence, producer Dennis Lambert, the very same guy who produced "Rock and Roll Heaven," was brought into the project.

Of course, given the subject matter, sentimentality is unavoidable, but somewhat miraculously the song avoids being treacly or morose. The lyrics set us up for a pointed overview of the subjects' hit singles in order to drive home the point that they'll be missed, but the irony is that the fading glory of the Commodores causes the sentiment to resound. These guys are just too good to languish. Interestingly, "Nightshift" followed Diana Ross's "Missing You" into the #1 slot on the R&B charts, signifying back-to-back #1 tributes to the spirit of Marvin Gaye.

## MARCH 1985 #6 I'M ON FIRE—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Longing, alienation, and determination are common themes in Bruce Springsteen's work, but this song can kill you at twenty paces. With utter simplicity and a lyrical directness that nails its target point-blank between the eyes, Springsteen's passion becomes fearfully contagious. I know because I can't listen to this song (I mean, *really listen*) without getting a case of the chills. His moon-dog wail as the song fades away only adds to the skin-crawling texture of this nightmarish obsession. Springsteen takes the song's subject to such an unnatural extreme that it becomes hard to tell if the singer is simply in love or if he is a serial rapist:

Sometimes it's like someone took a knife, baby, edgy and dull  
and cut a six-inch valley through the middle of my skull.

Oh. That's nice.

Lyricaly, songs of passion don't get much more graphic than this. Instrumentally, they don't often create a more lonesome atmosphere, either. If you really listen, you'll find that there really is nothing about this song that is comforting. When passion becomes pain, when the pursuit of pleasure leads to sickness, it's a good sign that it might be time to chill out. What this song makes more than plain, though, is that chilling out is sometimes no longer an option. If love hurts so much that it torments you, then the thought process is numbed and logic becomes irrelevant. Sanity is a knife-edge made all the worse by a constant ringing in the ears that makes concentration all but impossible. Violence is only an outburst away. For such a quiet song to draw all of this into a couple of minutes is astoundingly profound, and it is also astoundingly disturbing.

Maybe you never thought of "I'm on Fire" quite in these terms. Perhaps I've colorized the intensity a bit too much for the average person's taste, but the elements are all there. With no vent for relief, Springsteen has constructed one



of the most frighteningly obsessive and constrictive love songs that has ever been written.

## APRIL 1985 #1 **EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE WORLD—** **TEARS FOR FEARS**

It's difficult to figure how some great English singles from the late '70s and early '80s never reached the Top 40. In case you were wondering why they don't appear in this book, "Tempted" by Squeeze stalled at #49 while Elvis Costello's "Allison" never even charted. Neither did "I Confess" or "Save it for Later" by the English Beat. "Mad World," "Pale Shelter," and "Change" were all played like Muzak at dance clubs and on alternative radio, but despite their tuneful melodicism and tasteful production, Tears for Fears couldn't crack the Top 40, either. It took English new wave bands a few years to settle down and sink in in America, and by the time they did, there really was no such thing as "new wave" any longer. This wasn't so much because musical tastes changed as because music itself had moved so far away from its punky roots that any connection became virtually unrecognizable. Claiming post-punk allegiance through the influence of credible bands such as Joy Division and the punk-approved primal scream theories of psychologist Arthur Janov, Tears for Fears was a third-generation (punk/new wave/post-new wave) band that maintained its dignity with the roots-conscious crowd. At the same time, the band's bright and airy production techniques helped their depressing themes gain national exposure with audiences who could not care less about punk.

With the release of their second album, *Songs from the Big Chair*, Tears for Fears finally caught the public's ear with an attention to production details that left us little choice. As crisp, bright, and crystal clear as recorded sound gets, "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" poured over the airwaves and immediately captivated the public's attention. Assisted by producer Chris Hughes, principal bandmembers Curt Smith and Roland Orzabel crafted a record of sonic richness that was instantly attractive. It boasted an undeniably (though superficially) infectious sound that was reminiscent of the days when pure pop music existed for no other reason than to make us feel good, and it climbed all the way to #1. On a roll, the band culled three other singles from the album, all of which reached the Top 40. ("Shout," an ode to Janov's principles, reached #1 for three weeks, "Head over Heels" reached #3, and "Mother's Talk" stopped at #27.) Tears for Fears was 1985's flavor of the year, probably because people were willing to overlook the consistently depressing messages in their lyrics. Although their music was thematically lim-

**It boasted an undeniably (though superficially) infectious sound that was reminiscent of the days when pure pop music existed for no other reason than to make us feel good.**



**As punk was gestating into new wave, Europe experienced a tidal wave of regional bands on independent labels, unlike anything previously known.**

ited, the recordings themselves were a fascinating blend of catchy hooks and sharp execution, but could this be so easily dismissed as middle-of-the-road pop?

As punk was gestating into new wave, Europe experienced a tidal wave of regional bands on independent labels, unlike anything previously known. England, Scotland, and Ireland were awash with groups of kids with no discernible musical abilities rehearsing original material in their council flats, while labels were recording and releasing their product faster than they could learn how to play their instruments. Some, like Joy Division/New Order, the Cure, and Echo and the Bunnymen became influential and creative despite their instrumental shortcomings, while others were hardly a flash in the pan. This punk-inspired, British-based movement penetrated America, particularly New York, as an urban nightclub subculture that was separate from the traditional music scene of the time. Dance clubs from previous eras, such as the Electric Circus and the Peppermint Lounge, were ac-

tive once again, along with scores of other, newer ones, and all featured live bands (usually after midnight) and deejays who prided themselves on playing some of the most obscure records of the post-new wave era.

This mini-movement was itself splintered into various subsets. The most famous, common, and easily dismissible of these were the "haircut bands" (A Flock of Seagulls, the Thompson Twins, Culture Club, Duran Duran), which became popular for their looks as much as for their sound. A spin-off sect of this was the "new romantics" (Ultravox, Spandau Ballet, Visage, Adam and the Ants), with their high-blown theories of fashion over substance and a cliquy attitude that made nonbelievers feel thoroughly unwelcome and unworthy. Another subset was the "synth-pop" movement (Depeche Mode, Yazoo, Soft Cell, the Pet Shop Boys), whose bands usually featured an electronic keyboard player (or a bank of them) and a front person who sang over coolly scintillating (and simplistic) dance music. Usually, their material was inspired by American soul music, but in place of burning passion was an icy detachment that lent their music an impenetrable gauze. Yet another popular subset was what my friends and I referred to as the "crybaby bands." Using their material solely as a means of personal catharsis, the crybaby bands (including the Cure, the Birthday Party, and, in particular, Joy Division and its stable of label mates on Manchester's Factory Records) wallowed in songs about self-pity, depression, and suicide as though they were something worth celebrating.

Somewhere in the middle of this morass, Tears for Fears was created. Borrowing the synthesizer-laden sound and dual personality approach of the synth-pop movement, then dubbing psychologically confused lyrics onto their well-executed productions, Roland Orzabel and Curt Smith created a more palatable form of stylistic depression. Although doom and gloom were ubiquitous in their work,



Tears for Fears incorporated production values that always enlivened the proceedings. As humorless as a band could be, they seemed to rely on the production stage to kick their mournful butts into gear—which leads me to believe that the truly pleasant sound of “Everybody Wants to Rule the World” was really a happy accident. With such a bright and bouncy riff reverberating throughout the song, it’s easy to disregard the sourpuss sentiments of the lyrics. From the beginning, it was impossible to deny Tears for Fears’ attention to detail, but “Everybody Wants to Rule the World” has a sound that instantly asserts itself. To be honest, the record is great more for how it sounds than for what it says, which is all well and good, but it raises a significant question: is it really rock and roll? By deliberately throwing their passion on ice and displaying a morbid obsession with their own psyches as well as a detachment from anybody else’s, Tears for Fears disregards entirely the communal connection that defines some of the best rock and roll. Furthermore, the “shoe-gazing” stance (an expression derived from the post-new wave English bands’ tendencies to stand around on stage in a sulky pose) of Tears for Fears and their ilk (China Crisis, Jesus and Mary Chain, Lloyd Cole and the Commotions) doesn’t invite interaction at all except perhaps to stare at your own shoes as well. While most of these bands were commercially dense, Tears for Fears had a full palette of melodies and sounds to lure us in. Although lyrically self-obsessed, they created aurally wondrous ear candy that overrode the flimsy limitations of their dime-store analytical lyrics. In 1985, this is what America was looking for, and from an ocean of struggling post-new wave English bands, Tears for Fears was among the first to significantly crack the American market. They did this just in time, too, because the English music scene was about to subdivide itself to death. By 1987, English music had spread itself so thin that it dissipated.

## MAY 1985 #5 WOULD I LIE TO YOU?—EURYTHMICS

**M**aybe it’s because I’m a drummer, but songs that consist solely of electronic percussion usually leave me flat. Considering the remarkable rise of synthesizer bands in the mid-’80s though, I don’t think it bothered everybody else quite as much. But if you were a drummer looking for work in the ’80s, the problem was more than aesthetic, it was financial. With so many bands relying on drum machines, the very idea of “manual” drumming began to seem passé, even quaint. If you wanted work as a percussionist in the ’80s, programming knowledge was a much more valuable commodity than limber wrists.

As the decade progressed, the influx of electronic bands was truly astounding. What began essentially as a fringe movement of artistes came to define the very nature of mainstream pop. Bands from the early ’70s used synthesizers only as a means of re-creating classical themes, or perhaps to broaden or mystify their overall sound. Synthesizers were seen as something to be incorporated into what they were already doing. A group of innovators, however, came to see synthesizers as a means to an end. Before punk, such European bands and artists as Kraftwerk (“Autobahn,” #25 in 1975), Tangerine Dream, and Jean-Michel Jarre





developed their ideas almost exclusively on synthesized, computer-controlled keyboards. Surprisingly, America didn't immediately take to this trend; almost all future developments on the electronic front continued to come from England. In the wake of punk rock, a crop of new bands came onto the scene with a lot of ambition and not a lot of talent, many of whom relied on the programmable qualities of synthesizers to create music. What set this second wave of technical innovators apart from the first wave was their prevailing ignorance of musical technique. Starting off with punk's concept that you needn't be a musician to make music—and inspired by “players” such as Brian Eno, who forged a brilliant career despite a lack of musical finesse—the new wave of naive synth-pop acts included the Human League (“Don't You Want Me,” #1 in 1982, and “Human,” #1 in 1986), Heaven 17, Gary Numan (“Cars,” #9 in 1982), Orchestral Manoevers in the Dark (“Enola Gay,” which didn't chart, and “If You Leave,” which did at #4 in 1986), and Soft Cell (“Tainted Love,” #8 in 1982). Exclusively British, these bands recorded simple monophonic creations that relied heavily on elaborate visuals to bring their cold and lackluster music to life.

In no time (which is about how long it takes for musical trends to arrive and depart in the U.K.), the English charts were swarmed with synth-pop outfits, many of which began to penetrate the American charts, as well. Depeche Mode (“Personal Jesus,” #28 in 1989, and “Enjoy the Silence,” #8 in 1990) was one of the few synth-pop bands to show some staying power, and Thomas Dolby (“She Blinded Me with Science,” #5 in 1983) was one of the more talented producers, although he suffered from a very sporadic career.

For the most part, the band format of choice among the synth-crazy Brits was the duo. With one technician and one front person, duos littered the British and American charts, including Soft Cell, O.M.D., the Pet Shop Boys (“West End Girls,” #1 in 1986, and “What Have I Done to Deserve This,” with Dusty Springfield, #2 in 1987), Yaz (or Yazoo—surprisingly, no Top 40 hits until they split in half), Erasure (ex-Yaz member Vince Clarke's new outfit, with “Chains of Love,” #12, and “A Little Respect,” #14, both in 1988, while Yaz's other half, Alison Moyet, reached #31 in 1985 with “Invisible”), and finally, the Eurythmics. By far the most diverse and creative of the synth-pop lot, the Eurythmics were consistently on the charts while simultaneously expanding the rather limited palette of the typical synth-pop duo.

**Annie Lennox  
and Dave  
Stewart were  
originally  
members of a  
new wave  
power-pop  
outfit (another  
trend that  
ultimately went  
nowhere) called  
the Tourists.**

Annie Lennox and Dave Stewart were originally members of a new wave power-pop outfit (another trend that ultimately went nowhere) called the Tourists, which had little success on the charts and even less respect from the music press. Dismissed as trendy followers, the band eventually collapsed, leaving Stewart and Lennox disillusioned but determined to survive. They decided to continue as a duo and released their first album, *In the Garden*, which almost completely failed to sell. Retreating to their living



quarters and working on a severely limited budget, they proceeded to record the tracks for their next project. With little more than an eight-track recorder, synthesizers, some creative percussion (banging on the wall, for instance), and Lennox's vocals, they completed the album *Sweet Dreams Are Made of This* in 1982. Released into a veritable sea of synth-pop, the title song yielded a #1 single, while its equally haunting follow-up, "Love Is a Stranger," also entered the charts and rose to #23.

Freed from the limitations of her previous group format, Lennox thrived and became one of the most mysterious and evocative personalities in the music business, rivaling even David Bowie with the strength of her persona. With her remarkably photogenic face and striking chameleonic look, she was custom-made for the video age. At first, she appeared to be an androgynous, orange-haired ice queen with a penchant to wear men's clothing. "Who's That Girl" (#21 in 1984) further mystified her image when she appeared in various guises throughout the video (as both sexes), some of which rendered her barely recognizable. While other synth bands relied on slides and video projections, Lennox offered us plenty to look at, with a presence that added both muscle and vulnerability to the group's music.

Once freed from the restraints of the typical rock-group format, the Eurythmics now sought to break free from the inherent limitations of being a synth-pop duo. The pair were constantly challenging the parameters of their sound and vision. A significant sign of this was the tasteful arrangement of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's string section on "Here Comes the Rain Again" (#4 in 1984). It was their fourth album, though, that destroyed whatever perceptual barriers may have existed. *Be Yourself Tonight* features an ingenious combination of hard-hitting rock and roll with some truly funky soul ingredients, which the rest of the music industry seemed to have discarded as being outdated. Instead of sounding like a regression, the Eurythmics were suddenly playing some of the most powerfully rocking funk music around. "Would I Lie to You?" was the album's first single, and it features a masterful combination of musical talent with the ultimate "drop-dead" attitude. A searing horn section (a *real* horn section), a heavy metal guitar attack, and a relentlessly pounding rhythm make it virtually impossible not to pay attention to this record. Lennox's portrayal of a cold-as-ice goddess is enough to leave the average listener (or MTV viewer) completely dumbfounded. After this record, it became thoroughly inappropriate to compare the Eurythmics to their more simple-minded synth-pop competition. With their seemingly unlimited diversity, the Eurythmics dwarfed them all. By broadening their presentation and sound to suit their own ambitions, Lennox and Stewart transcended everybody's somewhat limited expectations.

## MAY 1985 #8 VOICES CARRY—'TIL TUESDAY

**A** reasonably potent burst of pop music sprang onto the scene in 1985, bringing a spark that was missing since the early '70s. Wham!, Paul Young, Phil Collins, Simple Minds, the Thompson Twins, and Dire Straits all had gigantic hits that



**Things only  
appeared to  
be getting  
better because  
the drought of  
1975-82  
was lifting,  
but so what?**

were at least likable, if not exactly trendsetting. Things were beginning to look up.

Nineteen eighty-five was also the year that the megastar conglomerate U.S.A. for Africa displayed a heartwarming amount of artistic humility (yeah, right), as expressed in the painfully pretentious single "We Are the World." With its grossly naive lyrics presuming that nice thoughts would be enough to warm the hearts of starving people everywhere, it was much too easy to adopt a cynical attitude about hearing four dozen millionaires express their sympathies while basking in the reflection of their own greatness. It wasn't the song that mattered, though (believe me, it wasn't the song). It was the intention, and millions upon millions of dollars were raised for a cause—famine relief—that gave good reason for all involved to feel justifiably proud of their life-saving accomplishments. One of the most encouraging trends of 1985 was that signs of creativity were becoming abundant, as well. Tears for Fears, Prince, Bruce Springsteen, and the Eurythmics all reached phenomenal heights while maintaining artistic credibility. Furthermore, acts that were once considered to be outside the mainstream were being welcomed into the fold. Sade ("Smooth Operator," #5), Godley and Creme ("Cry," #16), and Kate Bush ("Running up That Hill," #30) all cracked the Top 40 with music that was unusually tasteful for the pop charts. Yep, looking back from today's perspective, 1985 almost looks good.

Unfortunately, looks were deceiving. Things only appeared to be getting better because the drought of 1975-82 was lifting, but so what? Like a starving person in the desert, most of what we perceived to be wonderful accomplishments were really only a mirage. Pop was back, but substance was still lacking from the typical single. We moved from "We Shall Overcome" (the defiant positivity of the early '60s) to "We Can Work It Out" (the naive optimism of the mid-'60s), through "We Are the Champions" (the hedonism of the '70s), and on to "We Are the World" (the self-satisfying platitudes of the Reagan era). By 1986, it was back to business as usual. Whitney Houston bragged about "The Greatest Love of All" while Lionel Richie went "Dancing on the Ceiling." Wang Chung wanted everybody to "have fun tonight" by "Wang Chung"-ing tonight. (Wha. . .?) Huey Lewis bragged that he was "Stuck with You" (aren't you lucky), while Bon Jovi gave corporate rock a bad name. Bananarama rerecorded a bad song ("Venus," originally a #1 hit in 1970 for the Shocking Blue), and once again it went to #1. In fact, all of these songs went to #1 in 1986. This was progress?

Most disappointing was the failure of the once-underground bands to enact any sort of significant change. Once bands like Blondie, the Talking Heads, and the B-52s infiltrated the pop charts, it seemed as though a whole new era of creative, entertaining, and maybe even enlightening pop music was about to begin. Instead, it only signified their willingness to adapt to the mainstream. No matter how you cut it, new wave was intended to exist outside the mainstream, and in that regard, it achieved its less than illustrious goal. It was the post-new



wave bands that accepted the challenge of pop music. With nothing to lose, they tackled pop styles without any sense of contradiction. Aimee Mann was a songwriter without a doctrine. Other than speaking her mind and trying to find a clever way to do so, she had no particular allegiance to any cause or style. What she and her band, 'Til Tuesday, most wanted, though, at least at first, was to become known, and since the music industry can sometimes be a less than hospitable place, they knew that they would need more than talent to make it. With deliberation, they consciously set out to create a contemporary image, and at first it worked brilliantly. A record contract with Epic and a heavy-rotation video on MTV yielded a hit single in “Voices Carry,” and consequently, a hit album. Mann’s striking looks played off the androgyny of guitarist Robert Holmes, while bandmembers Michael Housman and Joey Pesce sported only the most fashionable of haircuts. In the long run though, their self-consciousness did little to help them, and probably made it hard for some to take Mann’s multiple talents as a singer/songwriter/bass player at face value. More than anything else, their spot-perfect contemporary look served only to date them.

But those who forgot the band after their first album were making a mistake. Despite appearances, Mann was a truly gifted songwriter with a real knack for melody and an immediately recognizable talent for turning a clever phrase. Just like her supremely gifted boyfriend at the time, Jules Shear, she could write a glossy and unforgettable pop song. Her autobiographical lyrics usually conveyed plenty of pathos and uncertainty, along with a truckload of vulnerability that comes from being so honest.

“Voices Carry” is almost perfectly constructed, while Mann’s delivery of the disturbing vocal should have been more than enough to prove that her talents went far beyond the “sex symbol” or “haircut band” box that critics tried to put them in. After a long hiatus, Mann returned in 1993 with a powerful and disturbing solo album. Though much (much!) bleaker than her previous work, it maintained its autobiographical edge and proved that her songwriting and expressive skills ought to keep her around for quite awhile.

## SEPTEMBER 1986 #26 IN YOUR EYES—PETER GABRIEL

**A**s far as I’m concerned, quitting Genesis was the best thing Peter Gabriel could have done. Although fans hail the band’s music as being intelligent and provocative, I’ve only found it to be pretentious and boring. This isn’t from lack of trying. I own a number of the Gabriel-led Genesis albums and have occasionally forced myself to listen to them, but the outcome was usually more like swallowing castor oil than having a pleasant listening experience. I just didn’t get it. I tried, but I may as well have been listening to gas music from Jupiter. The thing is, once Gabriel went solo, I immediately began to understand the nature of his work. Music that is deeply personal has always appealed to me, and once Gabriel peeled back the seven or eight layers of onion skin that masked (in some cases, literally) the intensity of his work with Genesis, I saw the beauty of what he was trying to





## GREAT HITS

JUNE 1985	#3
<b>IF YOU LOVE SOMEBODY SET THEM FREE</b> —STING	
JUNE 1985	#5
<b>GLORY DAYS</b> —BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	
NOVEMBER 1985	#30
<b>RUNNING UP THAT HILL</b> —KATE BUSH	
DECEMBER 1985	#6
<b>MY HOMETOWN</b> —BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	
FEBRUARY 1986	#2
<b>MANIC MONDAY</b> —THE BANGLES	
MARCH 1986	#24
<b>OVERJOYED</b> —STEVIE WONDER	
MAY 1986	#1
<b>SLEDGEHAMMER</b> —PETER GABRIEL	
JULY 1986	#5
<b>WORDS GET IN THE WAY</b> —THE MIAMI SOUND MACHINE	

## GREAT MISSES

SEPTEMBER 1985	#1
<b>WE BUILT THIS CITY</b> —JEFFERSON STARSHIP	
DECEMBER 1985	#28
<b>SEX AS A WEAPON</b> —PAT BENATAR	
JANUARY 1986	#20
<b>HOW TO BE A MILLIONAIRE</b> —ABC	
FEBRUARY 1986	#1
<b>ROCK ME AMADEUS</b> —FALCO	

do and sensed the liberation that it granted him. He seems to be acutely aware of music's therapeutic ability to aid in self-discovery. His songwriting method hinges on his ability to deliberately seek out personality flaws. Once he finds them, he abrades the wound until it becomes swollen and plainly visible, making it easier to analyze. In Gabriel's hands, music is a means to arouse any lurking evil spirits so that we can know them and better defend ourselves against them. Know your enemies, particularly the ones that you keep hidden deep in your own soul, and you'll be better for it.

This type of thinking can make for some pretty interesting songwriting, and in that category, Gabriel is no slouch. Practically every song is another means for personal exploration. For this reason, his songs can sometimes be frighteningly intense and darkly humorless. Somewhere just beneath the top layer lies an awareness that intelligence is worthless without vulnerability. When it works effectively, it can make the listener feel vulnerable as well, which is a disconcerting experience when you realize that the source of your discomfort is a pop song. Gabriel is well aware of the presumed limitations of pop music, but his intellect and his artistic ambitions constantly challenge him to vault them. Sometimes, as on his hit songs "Sledgehammer" (#1 in 1986) and its not-too-subtle rewrite, "Steam" (#32 seven years later), he is only banging his head against the wall. At other times, as on "No Self Control," "Biko," and his fabulous single "In Your Eyes," he clears the wall entirely in one quantum leap.

"In Your Eyes" benefits from the reedy and hollow rasp of Gabriel's voice because it brings out overtones, both literally and figuratively. Through an intricate weave, secular and religious imagery reinforce one another in his words,

and the very sound of his voice strengthens the dual nature of the lyrics. It's about need, but is it a need for gratification or salvation? With so much information crossing back and forth, everything starts to resonate and expand until it collapses the boundaries that normally apply to pop music. It sounds complicated, but that's because Gabriel's songwriting is complicated. Simultaneously





direct and implicit, coarse and subtle, his songs contain a world of self-discovery for anybody who cares to look beneath the surface.

## OCTOBER 1986 #37 WELCOME TO THE BOOMTOWN—DAVID AND DAVID

**W**elcome to the Boomtown” is kind of like “Hotel California,” part two, only now the paint is peeling off the walls, and there are exposed cracks in the ceiling from one too many tremors. Like the Eagles, David and David lived in Hollywood. Also like the Eagles, they were fixated on the social collapse of their hometown paradise. There was one very fundamental difference between each band’s style, though. While the Eagles found themselves sunk up to their necks in the mire, David and David stood on the sidelines and witnessed the piece-by-piece destruction of their surroundings with a detached sense of bemusement and disgust. Like unprotected workers in a nuclear reactor, they had to be at least vaguely aware that the drug culture, the sex culture, and the money culture were taking its toll on them, as well. They knew that the only way to protect themselves was to leave town, but they were fascinated by what they saw, and ambitious, so they chose to stay and become infected. Aware of the self-inflicted damage that was eating up every last trace of their innocence, they came to despise that part of themselves. Perhaps as a means of exorcism, they chose to expose the rot that was eating at their souls and created this damning single and the revelatory album that came with it.

Oh hell, maybe I’m just making all of this stuff up. Maybe David Baerwald and David Ricketts aren’t self-flagellating seers who drove themselves to the edge just so they could bring us a report from the front line. Maybe they’re only a pair of songwriters with overactive imaginations. If anything can be judged from Ricketts’s subsequent work with Toni Childs or both of their contributions to Sheryl Crow’s hit album (with the singles “All I Wanna Do,” “Leaving Las Vegas,” and “Strong Enough”), this may very well be the case. On the other hand, if you ever heard either of Baerwald’s solo albums, you’d be much more inclined to believe the “prophets of doom” theory. It is up to the listener to decide whether they are real or phony visionaries, but if they are real, then boy oh boy, is a hard rain gonna fall.

For generations, folks on the East Coast have accepted the implicit knowledge that they are living among the ruins of a cultural Babylon. West Coasters, though, tend to see themselves as just missing the Promised Land’s final bastion of greatness, with nothing else to do except wait for the walls to come tumbling down on their heads. With the constant fear of earthquakes and other natural disasters hovering in the air, while social unrest simmers on the back burner, it is easy to view the cultural collapse of California in Biblical proportions. Fire, flood, cultural famine, and the attack of the barbarian hordes will eventually combine to

### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1986 #3  
HIP TO BE SQUARE—  
 HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS



bring about an instantaneous demise. Obsessed with thoughts of impending doom, an entire culture locks itself behind steel gates and expensive security systems. Residents are so focused on the oncoming slaughter that they fail to realize that they are already perched among the ruins, and that the enemy has already scaled the walls and infiltrated their abodes.

A swift, overwhelming, and climactic collapse would certainly be an appropriate end to a town that has created countless climactic endings, and if it were a movie, then perhaps things would eventually end that way. Unfortunately, it is doubtful that the reality will be quite so grandiose. In all likelihood, the decline of West Coast civilization will occur much like it did in the East: brick by brick, cobblestone by cobblestone. David and David don't talk about the heavens parting and angels on chariots riding down from the clouds with spears of fire. They simply focus on a couple of poor souls who got too caught up in a decadent lifestyle that they couldn't (or didn't want to) escape. Brick by brick. Cobblestone by cobblestone. One soul at a time.

## FEBRUARY 1987 #2 DON'T DREAM IT'S OVER—CROWDED HOUSE

If you wanted to know just what was missing from '80s rock that made it seem less vital or less fun to listen to than the hit songs of the '60s, you need look no further than this song. I don't know exactly what they all are, but the ingredients are on this record. With an instantly contagious melody and mysterious lyrics that say almost nothing, "Don't Dream It's Over" floats on a breeze. Just like some of the best singles from the '60s, it sounds vital, and the sound is all that matters. Who cares if you don't know what they're talking about? I can't tell if Neil Finn is depressed out of his mind or having the time of his life, but it doesn't matter. All that matters is that it makes you feel so good.

A melody like this is as rare as a gemstone, perhaps even more so, since it is intangible. It exists on a separate plain from logical thought, and here the lyrics (hence the logic) are totally subservient to the purpose of the melody, providing little more than appropriate syllabics to hold the construction together. I'd be hard pressed to think of anything more purely aesthetic than a melody, and Neil Finn must have one of the most well defined and unlabored senses of melody I've ever heard.

Finn's older brother, Tim, must have been a substantial inspiration for him. Tim Finn's band, Split Enz, sneaked onto the international scene during the latter part of the glitter years. Since they were from New Zealand, the band seemed unlikely to attain its lofty goals. Their desperation for stardom was so intense, though, that

GREAT HITS	
NOVEMBER 1986 <u>DON'T GET ME WRONG</u> — THE PRETENDERS	#10
DECEMBER 1986 <u>THE FUTURE'S SO BRIGHT I GOTTA WEAR SHADES</u> —TIMBUK 3	#19
JANUARY 1987 <u>BIG TIME</u> —PETER GABRIEL	#8
FEBRUARY 1987 <u>SIGN 'O' THE TIMES</u> —PRINCE	#3



they created an image that looked like what might happen if the Elephant Man met with the main character of David Lynch's *Eraserhead* while vacationing at Disneyland. The result was so absurdly amusing that people started to pay attention, discovering a band with a very talented songwriter (Tim Finn) among its ranks. After a couple of years the image softened, and they brought in a new songwriter who gave Tim a run for his money. The upstart was none other than Tim's little brother, Neil. Their last album together, *True Colors*, besides being a great pop album, amounted to nothing so much as a duel between the songwriting talents of the two siblings.

When the duel ended, the band was the only victim. Tim went on to a commercially sporadic but artistically brilliant solo career. Neil grabbed Split Enz's drummer, Paul Hester, and a bass player named Nicholas Seymour and formed Crowded House. Moving to a small bungalow in Hollywood (the house that provided the band's name), they recorded the material for their first album, including "Don't Dream It's Over." Working with producer Mitchell Froom—who has had the distinction of producing some of the most notable artists of the past ten years, including Elvis Costello, Richard Thompson, Peter Case, Los Lobos, and the American Music Club—they recorded a sporadically brilliant collection of songs that refused to sell. It took eight months of steady promotion for the record to break, but when it finally did, it broke big. "Don't Dream It's Over" rose to #2, and the second single, "Something So Strong," reached #7. Their second album, *Temple of Low Men*, was at least the artistic equal of their debut album, but for some reason it met with a resistance that this time never relented. For a change of pace, the Finn brothers began writing together, and it wasn't long before they realized that Tim would make a good addition to the trio. The band's third album, *Woodface*, featured Tim as a fourth member, but he found the atmosphere a bit *too* crowded and left soon afterward. He was replaced with guitarist Mark Hart, and the band continues to record their melodic wonders as a foursome.

The mid-'80s trend for retrospection caused many bands to rerecord songs from the '60s that would have been better if left alone. All out-performed the original recordings on the charts while adding next to nothing to the integrity of the originals. The list is endless: "Venus" by Bananarama (#1 in 1986), "La Bamba" by Los Lobos (#1 in 1987), "I Think We're Alone Now" by Tiffany (#1 in 1987), "Lean on Me" by Club Nouveau (#1 in 1987), "You Keep Me Hangin' On" by Kim Wilde (#1 in 1987), "Mony Mony" by Billy Idol (#1 in 1987), "Groovy Kind of Love" by Phil Collins (#1 in 1988), "Baby I Love Your Way"/"Freebird Medley" by Will to Power (#1 in 1988—this was the last straw),

## GREAT MISSES

JANUARY 1987 #5  
RESPECT YOURSELF—BRUCE WILLIS

Moving to a small bungalow in Hollywood (the house that provided the band's name), they recorded the material for their first album, including "Don't Dream It's Over."



and those are only the #1s! I also counted another twenty-some-odd within the same time frame that hid themselves among the Top 10: “Always Something There to Remind Me” by Naked Eyes, “You Can’t Hurry Love” by Phil Collins, “Sea of Love” by the Honeydrippers, “California Girls” by David Lee Roth, “Dancing in the Street” by David Bowie and Mick Jagger, “Harlem Shuffle” by the Rolling Stones, “Crimson and Clover” by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts, “Tainted Love” by Soft Cell (oh, please, make me stop), and it didn’t end there. There was also the deliberately retro “original” writing of Billy Joel (“Uptown Girl”), the Stray Cats (“Stray Cat Strut”), ABC (“When Smokey Sings”), and the Beach Boys (“Kokomo”). Something was lacking, and nothing made it so obvious as did the trend to reinvent our past. While everybody else was digging through the past in search of a perfect melody, however, Neil Finn continued to pull them out of the air. “Don’t Dream It’s Over” would have sounded great in any year, but among this serious bane of originality, it sounded positively brilliant.

## MARCH 1987 #1 WITH OR WITHOUT YOU—U2

**A**t a time when the Protestant and Catholic factions in Northern Ireland were becoming increasingly polarized, Paul Hewson was being raised in Dublin by a Protestant mother and a Catholic father. Although his parents decided straight away to raise him in the Protestant church, his experience and his intellect often left him feeling as though he were hanging in the balance of the two faiths, with no definite connection to either. To some extent, his future bandmates Adam Clayton, Larry Mullen, and Dave Evans shared his ambiguity, and came together in the hope that music would provide them with a more tangible identity. Although their abilities were initially very limited, they were inspired by the punk movement to play anyway. Hewson never subscribed to the trash-and-burn notions of punk, but he appreciated its tendency to remove the barriers that had previously existed between the audience and the stage. He also saw it as a means to bring a new beginning to the stale music scene.

After mincing about with names such as Feedback and the Hype, they eventually settled on U2, for no particular reason other than liking its visual compactness and the constructed pun it contained, suggesting unification. Even before they chose a band name, however, their nicknames were already firmly in place. Dave Evans became “The Edge,” and Hewson was dubbed “Bono Vox.” Bono’s name was appropriated from an advertisement for a hearing aid and contained an inherent irony: “bono vox” is Latin for “good voice,” but it was yet to be established that he had any singing talent at all. In fact, their early gigs usually ended with the consensus that Bono’s vulnerable presence was simply a means to disguise his utter lack of talent.

Entrepreneur Paul McGuinness recognized a certain potential in the young band and offered to manage them, provided they abide by his developmental ideas. The band was young enough to adapt and eager enough to learn, so under his tutelage they changed from adequate amateurs to sharpened pros. Meanwhile,





McGuinness himself learned a thing or two about the inherent difficulties presented by the music industry. As a band, their attitude also came into focus, especially when everyone except bassist Adam Clayton started attending Bible class and became born-again Christian fundamentalists. The sense of spirituality (not the religiosity) that they derived from their religious beliefs would be reflected in virtually all of their work. They were not evangelical preachers, but the sense of confidence and calm that they gained from prayer was visible to anyone who cared to see it.

Meanwhile, they continued to rehearse and shop their demos around. It took them more than a year, but by 1980, Island Records offered them a contract. Producer Steve Lillywhite was brought in to work on their first album. Lillywhite was one of the hottest up-and-coming producers in the business around this time, mostly because of his ability to combine a sound that was definitively his own with a sympathetic approach to the band's own desires. *Boy* was the name of the album, and it generated significant airplay ("I Will Follow," in particular) while the U2 members familiarized themselves with America during their first national tour.

Their second album, *October*, was considerably bleaker, as it reflected the dichotomy of the Edge, Bono, and Larry's practicing of Christianity in a rock-and-roll lifestyle, as well as the alienation this caused Clayton. It was not the breakthrough album that the record companies were hoping for, but the band's live shows were now conveying all the passion that the band could express as it continued along on its quest for some type of absolute truth. The third album, *War*, captured the essence of their live sound and brought the band to the level of stardom that pundits had been predicting for years. On the strength of this album, *Rolling Stone* magazine selected U2 as "the band of the '80s."

Overall, U2 still sounded like rock-and-roll amateurs, but this only compounded the innocence of their message. Furthermore, the skills that they had developed through constant playing taught them how to turn their shortcomings to an advantage. Clayton's simplistic bass playing became a backbone underlining the Edge's rhythmic attacks and Mullen's steady pounding. A strict  $\frac{4}{4}$  rhythmic pulse became something of a trademark for the band. The bass unleashed a barrage of quarter notes played on the root chord, the drums were usually based around the supportive rhythms of eighth notes, and the Edge scratched out a constant barrage of sixteenth-note rhythms. It wasn't complicated, but it worked. The Edge's sound was the identifiable element. With notes reverberating all around, he gave the three-piece instrumental outfit a fullness that contradicted its compact size. Another advantage was the Edge's disdain for the traditional guitar solo. He is a rhythmic player, and he virtually never breaks out of his rhythmic patterns. Taken together, the rhythmic assault was hypnotic, and Bono's constantly developing sense of melody and showmanship became the perfect focal point for this aural

**The sense of spirituality (not the religiosity) that they derived from their religious beliefs would be reflected in virtually all of their work.**





While the lyrics speak of claustrophobia, the production of Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno is the definition of spaciousness, further fueling the band's dichotomous nature.

barrage. By the time of the band's fourth album, *The Unforgettable Fire*, he was no longer yelping and yelling—he was genuinely singing. Just as importantly, the band began to understand the subtle art of dynamics, and it brought character to its compositions. While other bands were featuring the blips and bleeps of synthesizers, U2 stood out for playing music that was extraordinarily human.

If seen in the wrong light, U2's honesty could be easily mistaken for pompous grandstanding. At times they reminded me of a child who claims he has an urgent message, but when told to speak, has nothing to say. Bono's lyrics often seemed to be little more than spur-of-the-moment ramblings that took him in circles. This was mostly because the band itself was feeling a lot of uncertainty. Many was the time that they nearly disbanded because of the conflict between their faith and their lifestyle. Without resolution, Bono was yelling into the darkness and hoping that an answer would present itself. In retrospect, U2's best moments aren't when they try to deliver messages of import, but when they ask the right questions. Their fifth album, *The Joshua Tree*, makes it plain enough. "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" is one of the most eloquent statements about confusion that I have ever heard. Looking for truth in a dogmatic world, Bono was being pushed and pulled, and he willingly played out his passion play on record.

"With or without You" covers similar themes. How can you resolve a need for something that is repellent? When your intellect is attuned to both sides of an argument, how can you find which half offers truth and which half offers deception? Is satisfaction something that you deserve or something that you must earn? All of this exists as subtext to Bono's passionate words, and the band's understated performance proves to be the most sympathetic support of all. Rather than emitting platitudes, Bono speaks a plain truth. While the lyrics speak of claustrophobia, the production of Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno is the definition of spaciousness, further fueling the band's dichotomous nature. U2 was no longer reaching for the answers; they were immersing themselves in the purity of the question. *The Joshua Tree* is their least didactic album, and as such, it is one of their best. Recognizing the heartfelt longing that Bono conveyed as nothing less than a desperate plea for peace of mind, Americans received the confused message loud and clear. "With or without You" became U2's first #1 hit.

## APRIL 1987 #27 SHIP OF FOOLS—WORLD PARTY

**W**orld Party exists as an amorphous collaboration of souls brought together for the exclusive purpose of assisting singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist/engineer/producer Karl Wallinger in realizing his musical visions. Wallinger is



an ex-member of the Waterboys, a band whose early records suffered from an unfortunate but inevitable comparison to U2's (their first single was called "I Will Not Follow"—get it?), until they abandoned their quest for a *big* sound and settled down as an accomplished Irish-folk outfit. After serving his time for two records with the Waterboys, Wallinger decided to set out on his own. Working mostly by himself, he became World Party's principal member, with loads of bit players coming and going at his will.

World Party's style tends to be an eclectic mix of influences, many of which suggest the records that Wallinger loved while growing up. A casual listen could reveal references to the work of the Beatles, Prince (by way of Sly Stone), the Rolling Stones, Van Morrison, *Blonde on Blonde*-era Bob Dylan, and *Young Americans*-era David Bowie. With so much of his writing being blatantly derivative, it's sometimes hard to resist the temptation of playing "Name That Influence" with each track. But while it may be cool to hear him employ a deft reference to "Sympathy for the Devil," it also brings into question his artistic intentions. It is certainly fair to say that he is not simply ripping off ideas with little regard for their original sources because he uses them lovingly and applies them to a completely new context. At the same time, it is less easy to determine if his sensibility is his own or if it is also firmly planted in someone else's shoes. Is he simply plucking period-piece references, a la Lenny Kravitz, or is he creating full-blown and loving mock send-ups of the psychedelic era, a la XTC's clever alter ego, the Dukes of Stratosphear? For sure, Wallinger's best work is when a song stands solidly on its own laurels instead of resting on the shoulders of his mentors.

Unless I'm missing something, "Ship of Fools" surely makes the grade. I've played "Name That Influence" any number of times with this song (it has become a distraction of sorts), and each time I have to pass. Sure, the title's a little bit shopworn, being the name of a Grateful Dead tune (from the *Mars Hotel* album) as well as the title of a Katherine Anne Porter novel, but otherwise it seems to be untainted by any obvious influences. As his group name suggests, Wallinger's lyrics tend to concern themselves with global matters. Whether talking about peace, brotherhood, the "green" movement, or political direction, Wallinger's words often avoid the personal and instead take broad, sweeping strokes about issues that confront the entire planet. "Ship of Fools" is no different. Using the obvious metaphor of the title to explain how "We're setting sail to the place on the map from which no one has ever returned," he is able to portray global leadership as ineffective and misdirected. The world is a rudderless vessel that is guided by greed and short-sighted planning.

One interesting implication of his words is that the so-called "moral majority" may have stepped out of bounds. While "Ship of Fools" was rising up the charts, hell was breaking loose all over the music industry, mostly because of a couple of Washington wives who instituted something

**For sure,  
Wallinger's best  
work is when a  
song stands  
solidly on its  
own laurels  
instead of  
resting on the  
shoulders of  
his mentors.**



known as the Parents Music Resource Center. The P.M.R.C. was founded in May 1985 after Tipper Gore (wife of then-Senator Al Gore) became horrified by the words of a Prince song that referred to masturbation. Upset that pop music was not subject to any type of rating system, she set out, along with then-Treasury Secretary Jim Baker's wife, Susan, to rid the marketplace of all purportedly offensive materials. A media circus ensued, with musicians as diverse as Frank Zappa (who gave a thoroughly eloquent litany of First Amendment rights), Dee Snider of Twisted Sister, and even John Denver (!) testifying before unusually dumbfounded members of a Senate subcommittee. When the smoke began to clear, it became obvious that the political momentum had taken the issue to unstoppable proportions. Record companies—with the grudging approval of their overseer, the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) voluntarily agreed to label records that contained what were now defined as “explicit” lyrics.

Whether it was intentional or not, Wallinger and World Party were casting judgment on a policy that was enacted without the benefit of foresight. Once lyrics were subjected to review, it seemed only logical that other aspects of artistic expression would become beholden to similar treatment, and that is exactly what began to happen. Government grants for artists in other media were investigated by the Senate for the artist's tendency to be either provocative or pornographic. “Drawn by the promise of the joker and the fool and the light of the crosses that burn,” the music industry implemented a program that would have a profound effect on the future of recorded music, particularly heavy metal and rap, and other art forms, as well. As the song says, “You're gonna pay tomorrow.” Singing with the conviction of a dedicated activist (another trait that betrays his unabashed love of the '60s), Wallinger made it plain that it might be a good time to jump ship and swim for dry land.

## NOVEMBER 1987 #9 THE ONE I LOVE—R.E.M.

**H**ello, and welcome to Lyric Interpretation 101. I have rather pompously assigned myself to be your instructor. Ever since the dawning days of psychedelia, lyrics have gone well beyond the literal meanings and linear construction of past eras. With so much vague imagery confronting us, the role of listener has become more challenging, causing us to rely on our power of intuition to “fill out” whatever the singer happens to be saying. The purpose of this course is to learn to accept our expanded role as the songwriter's interpreter. For our first subject, we will discuss the author's intentions and the ramifications of “The One I Love” by R.E.M. (Don't you hate when teachers use ridiculous words like that?)

Michael Stipe has been loath to discuss the meaning of his lyrics, and I can hardly blame him. Unless the author has specific intentions of telling a story in a linear fashion, songs aren't usually intended to be read like prose, or even like poetry, so their meanings are interpreted differently by every person who hears them. As far as I can tell, Stipe's writing is almost purely impressionistic, painting word pictures that can be viewed in any number of ways. Writers who avoid



literal interpretations of their work usually do so not to stymie their audience, but to assist them. By maintaining a distance from his work, Stipe makes it plain that once a song leaves his desk, it becomes public property, and the audience is welcome to indulge their own perceptions.

To draw an analogy, imagine a painting that, upon first encounter, leaves you with no particular image but still somehow leaves an impression. Whether it's the color, the texture, or whatever, you find yourself returning to it from time to time. After a while, images appear that weren't noticeable at first but now are as plain as day. As a result, you find yourself being drawn deeper and deeper into the canvas. You begin to "understand" what you see and apply meaning to certain brush strokes and the choices of color. Every time you look, the painting reveals itself further, and you become overwhelmed by the depth of meaning that you perceive. Your obsession causes you to search out information about the artist and his methods. Then one day you chance to read an interview with him, and you discover, in the painter's own words, that the painting was originally intended to be a floor plan of his new kitchen but it didn't come out right, so he let his kids throw paint at the canvas for half an hour. Boy, wouldn't you feel stupid. The point here is that your original impressions by far outweigh the mundanity of the truth. Whether or not you see things or feel things as the artist intended is irrelevant. Your impressions may be completely at odds with the artist's intent, but that only reveals the power of his creation. If a painting is evocative enough to inspire somebody to embellish it in his own particular way, then it has succeeded in stimulating both the imagination and the thought process.

In "The One I Love," Stipe's wordplay is very fragmentary, with each line containing an independent thought that often contradicts those that follow. "This one goes out to the one I love" is simple and straightforward enough, leading us to expect that another generic love song is probably on the way. Once coupled with the line "A simple prop to occupy my time," though, a whole new set of meanings is formed. It isn't the individual thoughts in each line, but rather the linkage of the two that arouses situational dichotomy. Is it about love at all, or is it only about a usurious, manipulative creep who abuses the power that he is granted through a sexual relationship? The impressions continue to deepen when Stipe yells the word "Fire!" as though he were a man fearing for his life. Is he talking about burning passion? Heated anger? Overwhelming destruction? Losing your soul to the powers of evil? (Let's not get too carried away.) Odds are that the real reason Stipe yells "Fire!" is because he happens to like the way the phonetic voicing of the word fits into the song. What word could possibly be more evocative than one describing elemental

GREAT HITS	
JUNE 1987	#1
<b>I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR—U2</b>	
JUNE 1987	#2
<b>U GOT THE LOOK—PRINCE</b>	
JUNE 1987	#7
<b>SOMETHING SO STRONG— CROWDED HOUSE</b>	
NOVEMBER 1987	#1
<b>BRILLIANT DISGUISE— BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN</b>	





power? If we knew that the song had no particular meaning to the author, it would lessen our respect for our own imagery. If we found out the author's meaning was different from our impressions, it would be disappointing. In the end, all that matters is that we come away with something of our own.

Now for your homework assignment, I want you to go back and listen to all of those damned Steely Dan recordings that used to drive you crazy.

## MARCH 1988 #1 WISHING WELL—TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY

**F**ew artists came on the scene flaunting as much potential for superstardom as did Terence Trent D'Arby. Then he opened his mouth:

"I am a genius" (ouch).

"My record is the most brilliant debut album from any artist this decade" (ouch again).

"My album is better than *Sgt. Pepper*" (oh, really?).

"I have sex more often than I wash my hair" (me, too!).

It's hard to be humble, isn't it, Terence? Statements like these were probably only intended to shock the press and the public out of their indifference, and in that sense, they worked: The press came to despise him. The public became less than enchanted also. Whether it was the critical backlash from his overripe ego or simply an inability to put his talent where his mouth was, D'Arby's career sank like a stone sometime after his debut album. Despite two follow-ups, including the thoroughly weird *Neither Fish nor Flesh* and the thoroughly good *Symphony or Damn*, he hasn't been able to come anywhere near the hoopla that surrounded him in 1988. For kicks, I recently asked a bunch of high-school-age kids what they thought of D'Arby, and not a single one had any idea who I was talking about. You can be sure that wouldn't have been the case in 1988. D'Arby was the main feature in any number of magazines, including a cover story in *Rolling Stone*, and he had a #1 single on both the R&B and pop charts. In addition, he was often referred to as the one artist who was capable of rivaling the

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1988	#1
<u>FATHER FIGURE—GEORGE MICHAEL</u>	
JANUARY 1988	#9
<u>TUNNEL OF LOVE—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN</u>	

GREAT MISSES	
JANUARY 1988	#1
<u>NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP—RICK ASTLEY</u>	
FEBRUARY 1988	#7
<u>I SAW HIM STANDING THERE—TIFFANY</u>	

rhythm empire of Michael Jackson. As it turns out, things developed somewhat differently. Jackson's sister, Janet, inherited his crown as the next mega-superstar, while D'Arby became just another also-ran.

This was not the future that D'Arby had predicted for himself, and in all honesty, it's a shame that his career foundered so quickly. Though D'Arby might have





overstated his abilities somewhat, his grandiose statements stemmed from the passionate bravado contained in his music, so it was only to be expected that his sure-footed abilities would infect his speech. When he sings, his confident passion is as plain as his talent. “Wishing Well” is so fantastic particularly because of the enormous confidence that it conveys. The powerful rhythm is uncompromisingly solid and driving while the guitar playing is as relaxed as a funk guitar can possibly be. It’s the keyboard riff that sets the whole thing ablaze, though. With three syncopated notes, it elevates the rhythm to perfection while D’Arby revels in the greatness of it all. Add to the equation the fact that his voice is capable of all of the smoke and honey textures of Sam Cooke while capturing the punchy muscle of Otis Redding, and it makes it easy to understand D’Arby’s indiscretions. In fact, you might even agree with him. With a hit record this good, it’s no wonder that he became cocky. His sound hovered perfectly between the pop and R&B charts and easily satisfied the demands of both. For his next record, D’Arby took some time to head off in a completely different, let’s just say “less accessible,” direction. Meanwhile, the R&B charts were not about to stand still, waiting for him to lead the way. They progressed nicely without him.

Throughout history, the R&B charts were constantly changing direction, and the ’80s showed no sign of altering the pattern. Just the name changes that have taken place over the years say plenty to describe their constantly shifting contents. In the early ’40s, *Billboard* used the title “Harlem Hit Parade” but changed it to “Race Records” in 1945. Nineteen forty-nine introduced the title “Rhythm and Blues Records” (thank you, Jerry Wexler—an employee of *Billboard* at the time who is credited with coining the phrase), which was simplified to “Hot R&B Sides” in 1958. By 1963, pop market tastes were considered to have moved so close to R&B tastes that a separate R&B chart no longer seemed necessary, so it was discontinued until 1965, when it was reinstated as “Hot R&B Singles.” Nineteen sixty-nine brought another name change with “Best Selling Soul,” which was modified to “Hot Soul Singles” in 1973. This sufficed until 1982, when the name was changed yet again, this time to “Hot Black Singles,” until things came full circle by 1990, when the title reverted to “Hot R&B Singles,” as it remains today.

With so much else going on, record buyers quickly tired of D’Arby’s braggadocio. After one more hit single (“Sign Your Name”), the public quickly became indifferent. D’Arby became something of a nonentity while his style of music began to polarize somewhat from its mainstream counterparts. His middle ground was no longer dead on target. Rap music was moving to the foreground and began to share the spotlight with the slick mainstream predictability of artists like Whitney Houston, En Vogue, and Janet Jackson. D’Arby’s experimentalism ostracized him even more than his words did until he no longer fit into either equation. The R&B charts forgot about him, and the pop charts had no room for his inventive creations.

**The powerful rhythm is uncompromisingly solid and driving while the guitar playing is as relaxed as a funk guitar can possibly be.**



For a while, though, D'Arby was able to go all the way and, considering his enormous will to succeed, I wouldn't be too surprised if he manages to find his way back to center stage sometime in the near future.

## MARCH 1988 #32 WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD—LOUIS ARMSTRONG

If there is one thing, just wu-u-u-u-u-nn thing, that I hope the reader will sense when reading this book, it's that there is historical continuity running through the music of our culture. It starts with the inception of recorded music and continues to the present day. Most people who read this today are bound to have their own impressions about who the most important and innovative musical artists are, but the scope of their vision usually doesn't stray too far beyond the past forty years. I myself decided to begin this history in 1955, so I suppose that I'm as guilty as anybody else. In that time, a whole lot of artists have come and gone, but there is one thing of which I am absolutely certain: it is never too late to discover Louis Armstrong. Quite simply, Armstrong was the single most important musical influence of the twentieth century. Stop. Check, please.

He practically invented jazz, in the early sense of the word, which is to say that he practically invented all contemporary forms of popular music, as well. Armstrong developed the idea of "riffing," or playing around a phrase. He developed "scat" singing, or the art of a vocal solo break. He was the first black artist to successfully bring "race" music into the mainstream (before him, even after him, bluntly racist, "darkie" records were prevalent). He mastered the art of improvisation and introduced the notion of personal expression

**His gruff blend of charcoal and gravel gave him one of the most distinctive tones of this century, while his energetic mugging made each and every one of his performances supremely entertaining.**

while playing. He was perhaps the most creatively inventive soloist who ever lived, with a sense of timing and phrasing that remains unsurpassed to this day. His tone and embouchure (how his lips approach the instrument) provided a sonority that was as crystal-clear as trumpet playing can be. He was largely responsible for making the instrumental solo break a routine procedure in popular music while also moving jazz away from ensemble music and toward a means for soloist expression. As if that weren't enough, he was also one of the most influential and pitch-perfect singers who ever lived. His gruff blend of charcoal and gravel gave him one of the most distinctive tones of this century, while his energetic mugging made each and every one of his performances supremely entertaining. Need I say more? The man was a genius, in the truest sense of the word.

You don't know American music until you know Louis Armstrong. Baroque musicians developed the twelve-tone system of notation in the 1600s, which Western civilization has been using ever since, and Johann Sebastian Bach



taught us how to use it (“The Well-Tempered Clavier,” “The Goldberg Variations”). But almost 300 years would have to pass before Armstrong would teach us how to live inside that system, and make it breathe with a personal sense of liberation and spirituality, giving it a distinctly American sensibility at the same time. Before him, there were formal methods of expression (many of which were developed by Joseph Haydn), such as the sonata and the concerto. There was also the contrived dramatic emotion of opera, and the informality of the traditional folk song, but little in the way of extemporaneous outpourings. At the turn of the century, these musical forms were being smelted and recast into something brand new, and Armstrong provided the mold for the prototype. Put simply, he taught the world how to make music swing.

To hear the legacy of Pops Armstrong, all you need to do is listen to the innovators of big band swing and even his nemesis, bebop. Even music as far flung as the pre-rock-and-roll pop music of the early '50s contained elemental traces of his influence; it had to because his innovations were so broad and far-reaching. Even the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame acknowledged a debt to Armstrong by inducting him in 1990.

Only New Orleans could have provided all the ingredients for a trumpet player like Armstrong to develop so fully and so quickly. With its nightclubs, whorehouses, and street parades, New Orleans was not only conducive, but encouraging to a horn player who wanted to play virtually all of the time. Armstrong made his recording debut in 1923, playing cornet with another New Orleans legend named King Oliver. A year later, he came to New York and played for bandleader Fletcher Henderson, in the process broadening his reputation as one of the most exciting instrumentalists of the time. Circumstances soon brought him to Chicago, where he worked as a session musician until Okeh Records made him an offer to put together a band for recording purposes. At the time, this was highly unusual; most bands earned their reputations through live performances and then recorded their most popular material. Louis Armstrong and the Hot Fives (or the Hot Sevens, as they came to be called with the addition of “Baby” Dodds on drums and Pete Briggs on Tuba), on the other hand, were exclusively a recording outfit and never (never!) performed together live. The other members included Johnny Dodds on clarinet, Kid Ory on trombone, Johnny St. Cyr on banjo (all were from New Orleans), and Armstrong’s wife, Lil, on piano. To the bandmembers, recording was a decent way to make a few extra bucks; they were paid fifty dollars each per session. All the while, they remained blissfully unaware that they were recording some of the most seminal music of all time. Armstrong’s unharnessed genius on these early recordings will probably remain unsurpassed. This genius caused him to outgrow the original Hot Fives/Hot Sevens and begin a short but artistically stunning stint of recordings with pianist Earl Hines.

**To hear the legacy of Pops Armstrong, all you need to do is listen to the innovators of big band swing and even his nemesis, bebop.**



**"What a Wonderful World" is a brilliant example of how Armstrong could squeeze blood from a rock.**

With Hines, Armstrong finally assumed the formal role of bandleader. A tension hovered in the air between the two players, extracting some of the most ingeniously creative playing of their careers. Unfortunately, this tension eventually caused the two to split. From there, Armstrong left Chicago and headed back to New York, where he took the city, and soon the entire world, by storm. His New York sessions featured an increased emphasis on his role as a vocalist. With his liberal alterations of the strict melodic pattern and cadence, he invented a method of singing that completely changed the world's perspective of how a standard vocal line could be approached. It wasn't only his technical brilliance that made him a sensation, though. His effusive personality brought a warmth and endearing sense of humanity to his voice, which granted him the ability to sound casual and relaxed while he was breaking musical barriers. In short, he effortlessly proved that he could sing as well and as imaginatively as he played trumpet.

Unfortunately, our country's obsession with youthfulness took a toll on Armstrong, and by the mid-'40s, his vision had become scattered. For one thing, he no longer surrounded himself with musicians who could challenge him, instead relying on backing players who were merely functional. By then, his innovations were in the hands of the polyrhythmic constructions of such big band songwriter/arrangers as Duke Ellington. His talents were as daunting as ever, but his choice of material began to lapse while his image solidified into parody. He could have sung the phone book and made it seem musical, and judging from some of his later work, it wouldn't have been too surprising if he actually did. "Hello Dolly" became a surprise #1 hit for Armstrong in 1964, smack dab in the middle of the British Invasion. Although his talents were still intact, however, the song attempted to reduce him to the role of a mere character, which is exactly what the contemporary audience of the '60s perceived him to be.

Even then, Armstrong's engaging personality and innate ability to express emotion remained undiminished. "What a Wonderful World" is a brilliant example of how Armstrong could squeeze blood from a rock. In his hands, the tired hokum of the lyrics became a thing of pure beauty. His presence really did make you want to reflect on your life and be thankful. Originally released in 1967, "What a Wonderful World" became a European hit while Americans continued to view Armstrong as an elder statesman, or maybe even a national institution, who had passed his prime. It wasn't until twenty-one years later, with its use in the film *Good Morning Vietnam*, that America reevaluated the song and bought it in sufficient quantities for it to reach the Top 40.

Armstrong spent the latter portion of his life residing in a modest home in Queens, New York. He passed away on July 6, 1971, just two days after his rumored birth date of the Fourth of July. I guess I'm expecting too much if I think I might be able to inspire kids of the digital age, or even parents of kids of the digital age, to go back and listen to Armstrong's antiquated recordings,





dubbed from scratchy 78s (remember, this was before there was any such thing as tape recording). But if there is just wu-u-u-u-u-nn thing....

## APRIL 1989 #13 CULT OF PERSONALITY—LIVING COLOUR

Since their inception, it seemed as though a portion of the music press had been paying attention to Living Colour for all the wrong reasons. Because they were an African-American band in a traditionally white medium (“heavy” rock), it was only natural for writers to focus on the barriers they must have faced on a regular basis and to champion them for it, but this was often at the expense of an honest critical overview of their music. To an extent, it is understandable why critics and fans would focus on the politics of their music instead of the music itself; the band’s leader, lead guitarist, and spokesperson, Vernon Reid, cofounded something known as the Black Rock Coalition, whose primary purpose is to help black artists gain exposure in mainstream markets. Reid gained valuable exposure in his role as an activist—including getting important support from Mick Jagger, who produced the band’s early demos—but these affiliations usually distracted listeners from the band’s music, turning their attention instead to their politics. It didn’t help matters that the subjects of their songs usually revolved around politically controversial topics, either. In reviews for the band’s recordings, words like “didactic” and “polemical” were commonplace, and the fact is that most of Living Colour’s material was a trifle too pedantic. Their stance often made listening to their music something of a burden, particularly since singer Corey Glover (a former actor best known for his role as Frances in Oliver Stone’s *Platoon*) delivered his messages as though they were syncopated sermons. The belabored arrangements also made critics question whether the band was suffering from a paucity of ideas, with a near limitless technical ability to disguise any such shortcomings.

But what an astounding technical ability it was, and when the songwriting was free of overtly heavy and transparently obvious topics, look out. The rhythm section—featuring Will Calhoun on drums and Muzz Skillings (replaced by Doug

### GREAT HITS

MARCH 1989 #24  
ORINOCO FLOW (SAIL AWAY)—ENYA

APRIL 1989 #3  
BUFFALO STANCE—NENEH CHERRY

JULY 1989 #8  
END OF THE INNOCENCE—DON HENLEY

### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1988 #1  
BABY I LOVE YOUR WAY/FREEBIRD  
MEDLEY—WILL TO POWER

JANUARY 1989 #1  
ETERNAL FLAME—THE BANGLES

MAY 1989 #1  
BABY DON'T FORGET MY NUMBER—  
MILLI VANILLI

SEPTEMBER 1989 #1  
BLAME IT ON THE RAIN—  
MILLI VANILLI

OCTOBER 1989 #1  
WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE—  
BILLY JOEL





Wimbish) on bass—was heavy-handed (my God, is that an understatement), but it could shift gears in a manner that defied real time or gravity. Glover might occasionally have sounded as though he was singing from a soapbox, but he also brought a much needed touch of humor to the proceedings. His voice was blissfully free of the nonsensical affectations and codpiece mannerisms that usually afflicted the heavy metal genre. As for Reid, well, it's hard to summarize his otherworldly talents in a few sentences. His guitar style is most often compared favorably to the legendary complexity of Jimi Hendrix, which goes a long way toward explaining his diversity, but that's only part of the story. He has also displayed the constructive talents of Jimmy Page, as well as a deft touch that is exclusively his own. Over the years, I've seen plenty of guitarists bang mercilessly on their instruments, but the pistol-whipping toughness and neck-warping stranglehold that Reid exerts on his poor guitar make it a wonder that the instrument can survive the onslaught at all, no less stay in tune.

Taken together, Living Colour was one heck of a formidable outfit. "Cult of Personality" proves it, too. While it can send more conservative listeners running for cover, adventurous listeners just can't resist cranking it up to eleven and lashing about on air guitar—and that's the mature component. The hard-core followers who comprise the band's base contingency usually thrash their heads about at brain-damaging speed while looking for something to jump off of, just to release the pent-up aggressions that the music gives rise to.

Although Living Colour hit the scene as a fully developed outfit, Reid didn't develop his chops overnight. Like so many other third- and fourth-generation guitarists who eventually became wizards of the instrument (Eddie Van Halen, for instance), Reid had been listening to music his entire life and incorporates much of what he has heard into his playing style. Ever since rock and roll became a cultural phenomenon, legions of ten-year-olds have spent hours sitting in their bedrooms perfecting the art of playing lead guitar. What made Reid different was that he happened to be black, and his tastes happened to be universal. This diversity led to early stints playing progressive jazz with Roland Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society, experimental forays with Bill Frisell, and the post-punk funk of Lester Bowie's Defunkt.

**What made Reid different was that he happened to be black, and his tastes happened to be universal.**

The commercial limitations of these styles, as well as rock and roll's invisible color barrier, led Reid to cofound the Black Rock Coalition (with journalist Greg Tate) so that he could cut a path for his own project, Living Colour. Industry resistance was intense, though, and Reid found himself being dismissed by virtually every record label that heard his demo, including many that acknowledged the band's artistry while confessing that they had no idea how they could successfully market an African-American band to a white audience. In retrospect, the situation seems patently absurd. Just who invented this rock-and-roll stuff, anyway? No matter, rock and roll, particularly the "heavy" variety, had become the property of white teenagers. Un-



der the circumstances, it's no wonder that the band became obsessed with topics of racism and dispossession. The band struggled for years, but it wasn't until Jagger's affiliation that Epic Records took notice. Even then, it still underestimated the commercial potential of Living Colour.

"Cult of Personality" is the killer leadoff track from the band's first album, *Vivid*, and it became their first single as well. Although their material was an improbable presence on the singles charts, the band eventually battled its way into the Top 40, aided immensely by exposure of their videos on MTV. The album began to sell in droves, and eventually racked up sales that topped the two-million mark. Not too shabby for a band that couldn't get a record contract to save their lives. A stadium tour with the Rolling Stones exposed them even further to the mainstream rock-and-roll audience. Ultimate industry recognition came when "Cult of Personality" was awarded a Grammy for the best hard-rock performance of the year.

Despite some of my early suspicions, Living Colour had nothing to prove to me or anybody else. They may not have been natural songwriters, but they seemed sincere in their intentions and played like there was no tomorrow. "Cult of Personality" may be an anomaly on the Top 40, but it is surely the best example of Living Colour's ability to cross progressive jazz-rock and post-punk styles over heavy-metal rhythms. While the stitches may be evident elsewhere on the album, "Cult of Personality" is seamless. Just as importantly, the song's words tend to intrigue rather than preach. The lyrical thrust conveys an intelligent wariness of media hype and its penchant for pigeonholing individuals as character types. Given the band's tough-going early history, they ought to know as well as anybody. The song also discusses our susceptibility for allowing the media to create packaged images of our leaders, turning them into commodities that we may or may not "buy." Here, the band's social conscience is brilliantly clever, and its instrumental power only heightens the intensity of the message, while asserting that Living Colour was not going to roll over and die for anybody. It is disturbing, then, to hear that Living Colour has since disbanded, with each of the members pursuing other projects. Musically and lyrically, the band displayed an ability to grow by constantly moving into new territory. Each new release added a new depth of meaning to the term "heavy" metal. Apparently whatever progress was made by Living Colour is now left in the hands of heavy-metal's less imaginative standard bearers.





**Chapter  
Nine**

**1990-1994**









## FEBRUARY 1990 #1 NOTHING COMPARES 2 U—SINEAD O'CONNOR

Over time, music video proved itself to be much more limiting than was originally hoped. We had great expectations of video in the early '80s. It was supposed to be a brave new frontier, but it strangled more than it salvaged. The problem was that, left to our own imaginations, a song doesn't usually have a visual accompaniment, but an emotional one. What's more, a video becomes dated after only a few viewings. Whether it is due to a lack of artistic vision or perhaps a thoroughly shortened attention span on the part of the audience, once we grasp the director's intention, the video is on its way to obsolescence. Consider, for instance, that there are rarely more than a few feature-length movies that the average person can bear to watch more than two or three times. Music video is just as likely to wear out its welcome, but it is also susceptible to becoming dated and then forgotten. Music, on the other hand, can withstand years of exposure (granted, with an occasional period of rest). The inherent problem is fairly obvious—film doesn't expand our interpretations of a song, it only limits us by presenting one specific series of images over and over. Even worse, music video ties us down to the role of a passive observer. Before MTV, music was something that could accompany an active lifestyle. One of rock and roll's vital forces since its inception was its mobility. In the video age, however, contemporary music was dropped into the lap of the modern day couch potato. Lying back on our couches in our stocking feet with channel selectors pressed into our palms, music video becomes as stimulating (and as much of an expendable commodity) as a bag of potato chips, and just as likely to grow old and soggy.

The videos with the longest shelf lives are usually the ones that don't interfere with our own imaginations. On "Nothing Compares 2 U," the video remains focused on a close-up of Sinéad O'Connor. There is no secondary story line, no surrealist imagery, and no staged performance shots—just the steady image of O'Connor's singing head. She mouths the emotionally wrenching content of Prince's song until a lone tear appears on her cheek. It still holds us back, because it forces us to accept the song as being representative of O'Connor's emotions rather than our own, but otherwise it is unobtrusive and effective.

Lyrically, "Nothing Compares 2 U" is unusual for Prince, which might be the reason that he gave it away. It just isn't like him to write a song from the perspective of a spurned lover, or even to express regret. Coming from O'Connor though, the song is imbued with enough elements from her Irish heritage and personal pathos to make it vividly intense. Few musical styles are more emotionally direct than traditional Irish folk music, and few artists are capable of relaying a broad array of emotions without sounding overly dramatic or pretentious. O'Connor moves from a soothing whisper to a hair-raising howl in an instant, and she does it without any of the forced melodrama or arty pretensions of other singer/actresses, such

**Lyrically,  
"Nothing  
Compares 2 U"  
is unusual for  
Prince, which  
might be the  
reason that he  
gave it away.**



**It is hard to imagine just what about O'Connor's personal tales of pain and anger captured the imaginations of so many people, and rarely does such a singular vision of personal trauma reach such phenomenal heights.**

as Kate Bush (whom I otherwise happen to think is a wonderful artist). O'Connor gets away with it because it's easy to assume that she isn't showboating at all, but exorcising her own private demons by letting her entire palette of emotions escape unchecked. She is a banshee angel.

If you can stand O'Connor's bratty and unfocused rantings (I'm referring to her music here, not her personality), you'll eventually pick up on her strong will and intelligent desire for truthfulness, neither of which are normally considered to be commercial. Her singing style is so personal that it can be simultaneously off-putting and disarming. It is hard to imagine just what about O'Connor's personal tales of pain and anger captured the imaginations of so many people, and rarely does such a singular vision of personal trauma reach such phenomenal heights. But both the album (*I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got*) and the single ("Nothing Compares 2 U") rose to #1 in America.

Whether O'Connor is a victim of her own honesty or just has an irrepressible urge to speak out of turn is uncertain, but her brash and tough-minded comments have gotten her into an awful lot of trouble with the press. In the early part of her career, she made some disparaging and pointed barbs about U2's (particularly Bono's) sincerity, and her image as a controversial hothead was set. Pro-IRA musings did little to endear her to the English press or to the antiviolence movement either. She later made vague references to sexual advances that supposedly occurred during a meeting with Prince, which only left most people wondering which of these two was less grounded in reality. She even incurred the public wrath of Frank Sinatra by refusing to acknowledge the American flag during the National Anthem.

All of this paled, though, in comparison to her *Saturday Night Live* appearance, in which she tore up a photograph of the Pope on national television. She attempted to explain her motives, stating that it was a symbolic protest against the Roman Catholic church, which in her opinion casts Irish women into a role of servitude. Of course, she is entitled to her views, but choosing an American TV show to perform such a blunt stunt struck me as deliberately provocative and manipulative. The following morning, she found herself on the cover of practically every newspaper, most of which referred to her as a despicable heathen ingrate.

Not long afterward, she attended a tribute to Bob Dylan at New York's Madison Square Garden. Dozens of famous faces were there, for the exclusive purpose of performing their interpretations of Dylan's songs. I was among the audience, and from my perspective, it seemed fairly obvious that O'Connor had come fully prepared to make the most of her recent notoriety. When her turn came, most of



the audience was polite enough to applaud gently, if not vigorously. She came to the front of the stage looking nervous and vulnerable, but the vast majority of the crowd seemed willing to give her the benefit of the doubt and waited patiently for her to start. Instead, she stood there until the silence became pointedly uncomfortable. Predictably enough, what began as sporadic outbursts of disapproval slowly built into a crescendo of booing. What struck me (again) as a manipulative piece of performance art had reached its climax. At that exact moment, she launched into an a cappella rendering of “War,” Bob Marley’s musical adaptation of Rasta figurehead Haile Selassie’s words, then promptly ran from the stage. It was the only non-Dylan composition that was performed all evening. My initial reaction was to laugh aloud at her bravado and wonder if the audience realized that they had played right into her hands. As inappropriate and out of context as it was, O’Connor had once again managed to be both provocative and disarming. In light of her harsh anti-Catholic stance, could it be only a coincidence that she chose to recite words that are an integral part of Rastafarian faith? After all, Rastafarian doctrine is notoriously anti-Catholic and views the Pope as a virtual archenemy.

Deliberate or not, O’Connor had done it again. She became fed up with the press, and the press (along with everybody who reads it) became fed up with her. By unspoken mutual agreement, she withdrew from the limelight. Keeping a low profile, she now saves her beautiful and expressive voice for sporadic recordings and performances while doing her best to keep controversy and personal exposure out of her work. Without a doubt, O’Connor has paid the price for her outspokenness.

## FEBRUARY 1990 #13 NO MYTH—MICHAEL PENN

**A**s the ’90s set in, the compact disc fulfilled its inevitable destiny by overtaking both vinyl and cassette sales, changing forever the way prerecorded music would be marketed. Once the CD was readily available, record companies wasted no time at all in discontinuing the availability of vinyl, which of course sounded the death knell for the once so popular seven-inch single. With alarming immediacy, turntables were becoming as old-fashioned as wind-up Victrolas, with most people packing up their albums into storage or selling them off for cash.

The profitability of the shift to CDs was staggering. Once the record companies determined that the market could easily bear the exorbitant price increase, the move away from vinyl was almost cathartic. Consumers were mostly pleased with the technological marvel of the new format and didn’t complain about the ridiculous price increases, believing the initial claims of the CDs’ alleged indestructibility and perfect digital sound, as well as the myth that they were much more expensive to produce. Now that everybody owns a few CDs that refuse to play because of surface damage, and record companies now complain that *albums* are too expensive to manufacture cost-effectively, we know better. Nevertheless, it’s too late to resurrect the now-dying vinyl format, and instead of laying out seven



or eight bucks for an LP, we pay fourteen to sixteen bucks a pop for a compact disc. All hail Western consumerism and the system of free enterprise. Compound the increased interest in new releases that resulted from curiosity over the new format by the proliferation of fans who were suddenly interested in re-purchasing large portions of their collection and you end up with windfall profits for the record labels and artists who specialized in the classic album format. Losers were the singles artists and the vinyl single that once provided their income. By the '90s, songs could obtain the #1 singles position with only a fraction of the sales that were required fifteen or twenty years ago.

No doubt about it, the long-playing compact disc ruled. Other formats—the three-inch CD single, for example, or the cas-single, or even the twelve-inch vinyl single—competed for consumer dollars by trying to become the format of choice for the new short-play format. Unfortunately, none caught on to any great degree, making it necessary for artists to complete full-length recordings before they could be deemed marketable (and more profitable). This paved the way for somebody as marginally talented as M.C. Hammer to come on as though he were going to be the next Beatles or Michael Jackson when, in fact, he was little more than a precursor for someone as completely untalented as Vanilla Ice. Hammer's single, "You Can't Touch This," was available only on twelve-inch vinyl (unless, of course, you wanted to buy the full-length CD) so it rose no higher than #8 while the CD that contained it went to #1 for twenty-one weeks. Vanilla Ice was the next to benefit, with his singles "Ice Ice Baby" and "Play That Funky Music" reaching #1 (for one week) and #4, respectively, while the full-length CD, *To the Extreme*, was a #1 record for sixteen solid weeks. With a dearth of format choices, individual songs that got a lot of airplay caused long-playing compact discs and cassettes to sell in quantities that were once reserved for the inexpensive 7" vinyl single. In this way, rap had finally conquered the charts, with one rule of thumb: the more benign the artist, the more successful the act.

**With a dearth of format choices, individual songs that got a lot of airplay caused long-playing compact discs and cassettes to sell in quantities that were once reserved for the inexpensive 7" vinyl single.**

This affected Michael Penn no more and no less than anybody else who existed on the fringe of the major labels' interests, except that his label needed to figure out where he fit into the equation. Penn (yes, actors Sean and Christopher are his kid brothers) presented a problem because his label (RCA) had trouble categorizing him, and actually had to do some work to get his record heard, but it turned out to be worth the effort. He was aided in this by the rebirth of contemporary hit radio as a viable format, which welcomed concise, melodic music for constant rotation between commercials. He wasn't as readily packageable as other C.H.R. stars—such as New Kids on the Block, Wilson Phillips, Whitney Houston, Paula Abdul, or Janet Jackson—so he was going to have to make it or





break it solely on the appeal of his material. Luckily, Penn was plainly talented as a songwriter and performer, with a penchant for catchy pop hooks and intriguing words. “No Myth” cracked the hit radio market, as well as MTV and VH-1, while his follow-up, “This and That,” broadened his base by charting simultaneously on the Modern Rock, Album Track, Adult Contemporary, and Hot 100 charts. He may not have been pleasing all of the people all of the time, but he was doing a good job of pleasing most of the people some of the time. By writing intelligent and artistically sound music, Penn was able to beat the music industry at its own game. While cyclical grooves, rhythm workouts, and predictable commercial ditties dominated the charts, Penn implanted some substance into the marketplace by writing honest-to-goodness *songs*. While much of the rest of the industry had grown jaded and detached from something as old-fashioned as a melodic pop song, Penn reveled in his inventions. He didn’t escape unscathed, though, as far as can be determined by his lyrics. “No Myth” lacks the innocence of a simpler age, which the singer recognizes is long gone, yet he longs for it and resents being trapped in an age of post-whatever.

**While much of the rest of the industry had grown jaded and detached from something as old-fashioned as a melodic pop song, Penn reveled in his inventions.**

As a well regarded New Age theorist from the Washington based think tank, the Rand Corporation, was expounding, “History” already happened (*The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukiyama). In a severely encapsulated nutshell, Fukiyama attempts to prove that liberal democracy is the ideal arrangement for humanity, and now that it has conquered the world (thus ending our ageless search for a perfect ideology), it has satisfied the need for individuals to seek personal recognition. I don’t know how to test the logic of such a theory, but I’m willing to bet next week’s paycheck that Fukiyama was a baby boomer. In one very unsettling sense, this was the ultimate insult that could be paid to anyone born after 1965, since it attempts to prove that anything of historical substance ended before they could influence a change.

This seems to be the cross that post-baby boomers have been destined to bear. How self-serving can we (I say “we” since I myself was born at the tail end of the baby boom) possibly be? Is it possible that the rapidly graying ’60s set could get out of the way and let the next generations have their own identity? My God, we were a pain in the butt coming in (perhaps justifiably so), and now we’re being a pain in the butt going out. We bombard our children with our own culture and shove our experiences down their throats, but we never let them share in them. As a result, their lack of identity becomes a means of identity, and we pretend that we can’t figure out why. Contemporary culture does not have to be woven through the past, however. If this were true, then invention, creativity, ambition, and romance are all already dead.





What bothers me most about this is the blithe acceptance of our myths by the present generation. It must have occurred to them that the “history has already happened” theorists could be very wrong: “What if I were Romeo in black jeans? What if I were Heathcliff? It’s no myth.” Penn denies the argument of fatalistic inevitability that his generation has become entrenched in, but he also remains warily realistic: “Maybe she’s just looking for somebody to dance with.” Either way, he deserves praise for trying to prove the value of artistic integrity, particularly since it came at a time when contemporary culture seemed to be ostracized from pop music as a means of identity. Paradoxically, Penn became an iconoclast by embracing tradition, while the cut-and-paste styles he competed against identified the pop culture of the early ’90s as little more than an assemblage of previous styles. While trying to convince us that the modern age is “No Myth” the cultural remains of a marketplace that ought to belong to an entirely new generation tries doggedly to prove otherwise.

## FEBRUARY 1990 #18 SACRIFICE—ELTON JOHN

**E**lton John’s career has been one of utmost consistency and continuous popularity. To date, he has racked up *twenty-four* platinum albums (sales in excess of one million). Since his chart debut in 1970, he has had a Top 40 hit in America *every single year*. It’s unfortunate that his personal travails have been so much less predictable.

While Elton John has remained continually popular in the eyes of the general public, he has also undergone a tremendous number of personal ordeals in recent years. In 1984, he surprised both friends and fans (as well as his home country’s sensationalist and homophobic press) by marrying studio recording engineer Renate Blauel. Besides the obvious difficulties that face most celebrity marriages, Elton John had a plethora of additional baggage, not the least of which was his admitted bisexuality, to draw the seriousness of his intent into question. Despite the odds, though, the couple seemed genuinely happy together, and Elton John often declared his desire to start a family. Unfortunately, his health would not cooperate, and then the English press became outright hostile. His first brush with bad luck came when his voice began to fail him. Doctors feared that he might have throat cancer and recommended that he undergo an operation. Luckily, the tumor turned out to be benign, but for a while he was forced to communicate by writing on a chalkboard.

During this period, his record label released a live album from Australia, which featured Elton John performing well-nigh perfect renditions of some of his best material, with full orchestration and fully blown-out vocal cords. His performance is both fascinating and extraordinary, not only for the sheer effort of his singing, but for his ability to communicate all of the latent emotion contained in his historic songs. Many of the recordings, including the single “Candle in the Wind,” were good enough to make substantial improvements over the originals, which were often quite good already.



Even before his voice healed, the English press began a ruthless campaign to cast Elton John's private life in the worst possible light. First came accusations that the wedding was a sham, intended to cover up the homosexuality of each partner. From this presumptuous and suspect suggestion, they sank to a totally careless level of cruelty by making assertions about Elton John and young boys. The charges were first proved to be uncorroborated, then unfounded. Things became so out of hand that he had to endure a constant barrage of front-page headlines that questioned his sexuality, his human decency, and his veracity. Breaking the unwritten rule that celebrities should not sue tabloids, Elton John fought back with a lawsuit each time the English papers made wrongful allegations. Initially, this only strengthened the press's resolve to absolutely ruin his credibility, and perhaps his entire life. The public never turned against the man, though, and continued to buy his records and attend his concerts. America was mostly unaware of the demeaning charges, instead noting his charitable appearances at Live-Aid and his contribution for AIDS research through the Dionne Warwick/Stevie Wonder/Gladys Knight/Elton John single "That's What Friends Are For." His goodwill was foremost in the public's eye, not the tirade of cruel assertions.

The battle of the press versus the pop star raged on, and Elton John did finally win. The offending paper issued a front-page apology, but not until after it was announced that Elton John's marriage had collapsed in the interim. Whether the fight with the press played a role in the couple's separation can only be speculated, but the point remained that while his ordeal was over, it was not without cost. At the same time, Elton John, a maniacal shopping addict, sold nearly all of his personal effects at auction. Sotheby's raised the equivalent of twenty-five million dollars for his possessions. Quite obviously, he was entering an entirely new phase in his life.

With the controversy, the extravagance, the opulence, and the personal complications behind him, Elton John began anew with a style that was comparatively austere. When held up to his image as a mid-'70s showboater, his new appearance took on the airs of a Trappist monk. As much as things seem to have changed, though, they were actually very much the same. He continued to write with Bernie Taupin, he revived his relationship with most of his management and musicians, and his voice returned to form. The albums *Reg Strikes Back* and *Sleeping with the Past* were released, offering proof that despite the changes, Elton John's music was as sound as ever.

Most notable was a single from the latter album called "Sacrifice." With words and a melody that express unbridled sympathy for anyone who is confronted with a painful choice, it is perhaps the most beautifully moving song of his entire ca-

**With the controversy, the extravagance, the opulence, and the personal complications behind him, Elton John began anew with a style that was comparatively austere.**



reer. Strangely, when first released in late 1989, the record couldn't even reach the pop charts and instead was relegated to the more subdued (i.e., ho-hum) "Adult" charts. Perhaps sensing that the song was overlooked, the record company gave it a belated promotional push, and Elton John announced that all British revenues from this and future singles would be donated to AIDS relief and other deserving charities. Finally, the public caught on to the philanthropic nature of the song and pushed it to #18 on the pop charts. In England, where it had been overlooked, it rose all the way to #1. As hard as it is to believe, this was Elton John's first #1 hit single in his home country.

With "Sacrifice," Elton John's career began to climb to a level of fame that was comparable to his years as a mid-'70s megastar, without all the resultant hype that usually goes along with it. Besides such hummably likable singles as "Club at the End of the Street," "You've Gotta Love Someone," and "The One," he contributed award winning songs to Walt Disney's animated film *The Lion King*, and his musical output continues unabated. For twenty-five years, Elton John has supplied a bounty of memorable melodies, and his ongoing presence on the contemporary charts shows that the well is far from dry.

## APRIL 1990 #21 HEART OF THE MATTER—DON HENLEY

It's a good thing that songs like this are written. They are a service to the people who need them. Frank Zappa comes to mind, who in his book *The Real Frank Zappa Book* said: "I detest 'love lyrics.' I think one of the causes of bad mental health in the United States is that people have been raised on 'love lyrics.' . . . It's a subconscious training that creates a desire for an imaginary situation which will *never exist for you*. People who buy into that mythology go through life feeling that they got cheated out of something." Maybe he has a point, considering the vapidness of some lyrics (probably some that are in this book) and the tendency for people to drolly glamorize love and confuse it with sex and/or pain, but ultimately I don't think he was right. After all, how do most of us express our emotions? A personal, truthful, and/or romantic conversation is desirable but not always very likely, at least not on a regular basis. More often than not, we hide our true feelings because we don't want to appear vulnerable. We could try to intellectualize our emotions and study the various intricacies of love, or read about it in a romance novel or self-help book, but that is ultimately calculated and unfulfilling. We crave a romance of our own.

More often  
than not, we  
hide our true  
feelings  
because we  
don't want  
to appear  
vulnerable.

Why not, then, express love and emotion in a song? Most of us aren't comfortable enough with our relationships to say everything that we should. And often we can't express ourselves properly because we don't even know for ourselves how we feel. Like Cyrano de Bergerac writing poetry so another man can obtain his love, songwriters give us an opportunity to link with the emotions that they ex-



press. A relevant song moves us emotionally and says something that we could never express.

By definition, love songs romanticize the emotion they describe, usually pain, but most people want to romanticize their pain. It's a sanity service, really, because we don't want to feel so all alone. Not that "Heart of the Matter" is a conventional love song, by any means. The emotions expressed are complex and multifaceted. I've just played this song maybe twenty times in a row, and I can't seem to get beyond my own personal imagery to talk objectively about it. The point is that while the lyrics might not work for everybody on the same level, they nonetheless manage to convey a feeling that can be picked up on by anybody who cares to become emotionally involved.

I don't think that a rookie artist could ever (ever!) record a song this personal and get it across. (Remember "Sometimes When We Touch" by Dan Hill? Ugh.) When recording artists like Pete Townshend or Eric Clapton achieve some longevity, they naturally become familiar to their audience. This stature helps to make them finally capable of expressing a greater honesty in their music, much like the blues artists they have always revered. Don Henley has been around for a while, and "Heart of the Matter" gains from this because we know that the same egotistical hedonist who sang "Hotel California" suddenly is capable of emotional honesty. I hated Henley around the time of "Hotel California." He seemed like the kind of guy who would spit on you and steal your girlfriend just to prove he could do it. This self-absorbed image made it all the more surprising when he finally began to show signs of humility. We, as fans, became witnesses as he humbled himself. Perhaps either of the two personalities presented in these songs are fictitious, but I doubt it, and it really wouldn't matter if they were. His life, as expressed in his music, is a sort of passion play, and as he plays it out before us, we relate to it vicariously. The bad guy who is out of touch with his own heart softens up, and in the process we find our own personal "Heart of the Matter."

## JULY 1990 #1 VISION OF LOVE—MARIAH CAREY

### A BELATED OPEN LETTER TO MARIAH CAREY

**D**ear Mariah, We've never met, but I grew up so close to you (I still live in Huntington) that I feel a certain kinship with you. Rather than write just another overview of the song, I thought it would be nice to air my views directly to you and openly. To be completely honest about this, Mariah, I have essentially been ignoring you for most of your career. Not that I haven't heard your music—that would be well-nigh impossible—it's just that I haven't ever really paid attention. Considering how many records you have sold since 1990, I guess this makes me the odd man out. But for better or worse, I have a tremendous capacity to tune some things out, and your style of music usually doesn't register in my consciousness. This





explains how I missed your debut single, "Vision of Love," and why now, years later, I'm trying to play catch-up.

When I did finally listen and heard you sing those notes that are just a notch below a dog whistle, my first reaction was disbelief. I was absolutely convinced that it *couldn't* be your voice, no way. It seemed inhuman. It had to be a synthesized sample of your voice played on a keyboard and reproduced electronically. Well, the evidence is in, and I admit that I was wrong. But I still find it beyond credibility that anybody could hit some of those notes (that's not really your voice singing those flourishes during "Emotions," is it?). Even by operatic standards, your voice is a one-of-a-kind wonder. It's obvious that yours is an amazing talent and that you work hard to pour everything you have into your performances, but there is still something lacking that prevented me from appreciating your music at face value. As far as I was concerned, there were already way too many women singing generic love songs and/or dance music, and your voice (believe it or not) just blended in with the crowd.

"Crowd" is not a word that I choose lightly. The number of modern-day divas (for lack of a better all-encompassing word) is truly overwhelming. If I were to include the merely talented along with the superhuman, the list includes Whitney



Houston (your most obvious superhuman counterpart), Anita Baker, Natalie Cole, Toni Braxton, Vanessa Williams, Celine Dion, Annie Lennox, Lisa Stansfield, Sade, Taylor Dayne, Gloria Estefan, Lisa Fischer, Regina Belle, Jody Watley, Joan Jett (just kidding—I wanted to see if you were still paying attention), and Shanice Wilson. Not to overlook veterans such as Aretha

Franklin, Patti LaBelle, Dionne Warwick, and Gladys Knight, or the fringe divas like Janet Jackson, Madonna, k.d. lang, Amy Grant, Paula Abdul, or any number of others who have slipped my mind. You see, it's easy to get mixed up when the field is so crowded with talented people. With virtually every one of the above-mentioned vocalists specializing in dance music and/or torch ballads, it's no wonder that critics sometimes find your music to be ordinary or generic.

With that said, I'll try to explain how it was that I managed to ignore your work for so long. For starters, your material sometimes makes it easy to ignore your spectacular talent. Part of the problem lies with the professional sheen that turns your arrangements into airtight constructions. Like a good wood with too much varnish, it can no longer breathe underneath all that shine. Of course, producer Tommy Mottola is your husband, and you have access to the absolute cream of the studio crop, but this isn't necessarily a good thing. Some of the arrangements sound like freeze-dried, state-of-the-art dance tunes or love ballads—just add voice. By ironing out all of the wrinkles, the character of your singing is bathed in window dressing, as though you had replaced a live model with a mannequin, and your songs are reduced to shiny new product instead of down-and-dirty classics. Then again, I don't think you aspire to be down-and-dirty. In fact, I bet you find the whole idea repulsive. I can understand why you would want to be accepted on your own





spotless terms, but critics expect to hear some real life when they listen to someone sing with as much conviction as you do.

Maybe the lavishness is the result of insecurity with your position in the industry. I understand that you are somewhat uncomfortable performing live onstage, and maybe the huge set constructions comfort you. But it would be nice to hear you sing without all of the bombastic accompaniment from time to time. Your appearance on *MTV Unplugged*, a special intended for featuring only acoustic performances, is a case in point. Although your performance was convincing, I somehow doubt that Jules Shear's original conception of the show would have included a twenty-five member backup group. You've got to chill out and relax a bit. I know that some critics have claimed that your exorbitant style is unnecessary showboating, but that's just their attitude problem. You became famous so young and so quickly that you've had less time to adjust your style and erase some possibly troublesome habits. A less talented artist or one with an ego problem probably would have blown it entirely. As far as I can tell, it's not showing off (at least not in the literal sense), but a naturally exuberant tendency to over-sing that occasionally afflicts your work, and already it is tempering with age and experience.

Which brings us to the next point of contention: your lyrics are sometimes a problem, also. It's bad enough that the smoothed-out production style can drain the life's blood out of the material, but lyrically trite non sequiturs don't help much in this department either, and can leave cynics claiming that the songs never had any life in the first place. Hollow epithets just aren't moving, especially to anybody who listens to music for a living and has heard similar sentiments dozens of times already. It would help considerably if you try to avoid such clichés as "Couldn't we just learn to love each other," "Dream lover come rescue me," "And I love you so, more than you could ever know," or "If you believe in yourself enough...you're gonna make it happen." Maybe if Barney sang these lyrics, they'd gain some resonance (after all, who ever heard of a lovelorn purple dinosaur?), but coming from another pop diva, they just fall flat and lifeless. This isn't to say that these topics are unworthy of further musical treatment, only that they usually deflect the listener from investing any real value onto a composition that sounds like it was extracted from a Hallmark greeting card. Critical opinion regarding this has been so unanimous that even the criticisms have become clichés.

Another criticism has arisen from time to time, and that is the assertion that you aren't soulful. If soul can be defined as an honest expression of emotion, as opposed to a depiction of events or a technical display of virtuosity, then it's debatable to say whether you miss the mark. Who's to say what you are feeling when you sing? The problem here is that you aren't transparent enough for people to read your intentions. Like Whitney Houston, many of your

**You became famous so young and so quickly that you've had less time to adjust your style and erase some possibly troublesome habits.**



records seem to be overproduced vocal performances instead of truly soulful out-ings, but once again, I think you need some time to get comfortable with the fact that you are now a superstar before you can open up your heart and expose your true inner self. Once you make a move away from the generic material and production pabulum that presently hamper you, then you'll be able to kill two birds with one stone.

None of these criticisms are absolute or apply all of the time. Sometimes your vocal chops are just so good that they express soulfulness all by themselves. Your blue notes and melisma occur with such natural ease that I could sometimes swear you were born and raised in a gospel church. "Vision of Love" is one such example ("Can't Let Go" is another). The other criticisms don't apply here, either. You sound passionate (almost down-and-dirty, even), and the production isn't intrusive, while the lyrics are both convincing and original.

So, Mariah, take the criticisms with a grain of salt and consider them to be a necessary evil. Meanwhile, be grateful that the critics are at least listening to you. So many others aren't ever taken seriously enough to even get themselves noticed. As for the nasty comments, let them eat cake, Mariah. They're just jealous, that's all. OK, I admit it, *I'm* jealous. I wish I had a five-octave range, drop-dead good looks, and more money than Uncle Scrooge McDuck. I even wish that I could live on a sprawling farm, with Tommy Mottola to cook dinners for me. Pay no attention to the naysayers. You just go, girl.

## JANUARY 1991 #6 WICKED GAME—CHRIS ISAAK

**H**istory has a way of clogging things up for contemporary artists. Anybody who wanted to make music in the '50s or the '60s didn't suffer from the gravity of history while developing their work as much as modern artists do. Over time, it can start to feel as though all of the good ideas have been taken and that the best that can be done is to creatively recycle something that somebody else already did. This bears no reflection on modern artists or the quality of their work, but it

can explain why most new ideas don't seem to be as innovative as those that came before. It's just a fact of life that artists now are seriously limited by a dwindling supply of authentically original niches that are still available to claim as their own. For example, rock and roll is nothing if not rebellious, but how many different ways of rebelling can possibly exist (assuming

<b>GREAT HITS</b>	
JANUARY 1991 <b>DISAPPEAR—INXS</b>	#8

we're going to remain legal, anyway), and does it make as much sense to continue playing by rock and roll's rules if they no longer grant artists enough room to move freely? How often do we find ourselves describing new artists as offshoots or hybrids of other artists? The very fact that a museum now exists to laud our past rock-and-roll heroes means that there are quantifiable means for determining whether or not something is "rock and roll" enough. If we constantly



repeat the patterns of our past, though, then we are negating the force—the ingenuity—that made rock and roll such a vital form in the first place.

Perhaps the best that we can expect is to have the most timeless aspects of our rock-and-roll culture revived from time to time while accepting new ideas as the force of change that rock and roll needs to survive. In the broadest of terms, this would mean that techno, rap, and the other assorted children spawned with rock-and-roll hearts should be celebrated for keeping the cutting-edge essence alive, while traditionalists can continue to revel in the spirit of rock and roll's past by appreciating the music of Counting Crows, the Spin Doctors, or Chris Isaak.

The spiritual connection that rock and roll has maintained to the Memphis branch of its roots has never diminished and is one of the primary reasons that Elvis Presley become an undying icon. Sun Studios and Graceland have progressed from landmarks to holy sites. By singing in a forlorn and brooding style that is thoroughly modern but also reminiscent of early rockabilly, Isaak has adopted a much-revered musical terrain. His Elvis Presley cum Roy Orbison cum Slim Whitman (no kidding) vocals are classic Southern-country croon, particularly since they are ensconced in James Calvin Wilsey's spacious guitar work, which itself is reminiscent of what Duane Eddy would have sounded like had he been produced by Brian Eno.

It is this fascinating blend of the familiar with the new that makes Isaak's best work stand out. At his best, his songs sound simultaneously familiar and unpredictable, almost invoking a sense of *déjà vu*. The word "evocative" can easily be over-used to describe anything as intangible as a song, but "Wicked Game" makes it an impossible word to avoid. The song is rife with imagery while being careful to avoid the specificity of a distinct picture. From the instant Wilsey's guitar introduces the opening bars with a wavering note that bends perilously toward its intended pitch, "Wicked Game" can cause your blood to freeze right in your veins. The instrumental introduction sets up a mood of romantic obsession and displacement unlike any other song I have heard. Drenched in reverb, with a healthy dose of tremolo (at least that's what my old and cheap amplifier used to call this vibrato effect), the descending phrase is as unsettling and yet as captivating as the romantic obsession that Isaak goes on to relate, while raising the spirit of the undying legends of America's neo-holy ground, Memphis.

Some emotions are thoroughly beyond our ability to contain. Once love and its mind-warping sidekick, desire, kick in, things like logic and responsibility are rendered impotent, irrelevant even. "Wicked Game" conveys that moment when love goes beyond distraction to become an unwelcome obsession. The conflicting nature of overpowering love and a need for control sets up a perfect blend of passion and anguish that is as romantic as it is illicit. When you have no control, all you can do is surrender; once you succumb, your life will never be the same again.

GREAT MISSES	
SEPTEMBER 1990 ICE ICE BABY—VANILLA ICE	#1
OCTOBER 1990 GEORGIA ON MY MIND— MICHAEL BOLTON	#36
JANUARY 1991 PLAY THAT FUNKY MUSIC— VANILLA ICE	#1



The underlying beauty of “Wicked Game” is the way it avoids telling a story and instead bathes us in a netherworld that perfectly captures a purely emotional state. Only the haunting production connotes the inevitable loss of control that the lyrics suggest. Not only is the style timeless, but the song seems to be coming from a place outside of where time exists. It has been said that the most alive humans can feel is when they are closest to death. As some psychoanalysts have espoused, fulfillment of an all-powerful and overwhelming desire (i.e., great sex) is as close as we can come to experiencing the finality of death without dying. Like the wavering guitar that can suggest a note without sustaining it, a passion tortures you until your soul is suspended and hovering somewhere between the two polarized states of life and death. If the passion is absolute, then so is the sense of fatalism that accompanies it. Choice is not an issue. “Wicked Game” is an aural depiction of the moment when you surrender to the void and fall into the hands of eternity (and you thought it was just a love song).

## MAY 1991 #4 LOSING MY RELIGION—R.E.M.

Since punk had fizzled out without making any substantial commercial impact, most record companies reverted to business as usual and stuck to safe product that was intended to have broad appeal. For a generation that came of age during punk’s flare-up though, there was no turning back. The mainstream offered nothing of consequence and little of interest, so an underground scene was formed, made up of hundreds upon hundreds of bands that had little hope of mainstream

appeal, and it flourished. In major cities and college towns, an entire culture came into being that supported this underground network by attending any of dozens of nightly shows and buying independently released records that gained exposure mostly through word-of-mouth.

Like any college town, Athens, Georgia, has a large population of budding adults who are trying to figure out what they ought to be doing with their lives. What made Athens a bit different in the early ’80s though, was its Bohemian atmosphere and the importance that homemade music had on the local scene. Most of the young population in town attended the University of

Georgia, but a good percentage drifted in and out of school while concentrating most of their energy on forming bands. In the late ’70s, the B-52s were the first to emerge from Athens and rise to a level of prominence, which surprised and then inspired other bands to do the same, including Pylon, Love Tractor, and R.E.M.

Bassist Mike Mills and drummer Bill Berry were old friends who met Peter Buck and Michael Stipe at an Athens party. The four quickly realized that they had the necessary pieces to make a band, so they began to rehearse. Initially,

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1991	#1
<u>I’VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU</u> —LONDON BEAT	
MARCH 1991	#7
<u>CRY FOR HELP</u> —RICK ASTLEY	
APRIL 1991	#4
<u>I TOUCH MYSELF</u> —THE DIVINYLS	





they concentrated on cover versions and only warily worked a few original songs into their set. Over time, their originals began to take precedence, and once they named friend Jefferson Holt their manager, R.E.M. became a band that could be taken seriously. They recorded a highly touted and now highly collectable 45 RPM single, "Radio Free Europe"/"Sitting Still," at Mitch Easter's (of Let's Active) Drive-In Studio. It was released on the tiny Hib-Tone label, bringing R.E.M. enough attention to earn a contract with I.R.S. Records. Continuing to work with Easter, R.E.M. then recorded an E.P. (an "extended play" is a collection of songs considerably shorter than a typical album collection) for I.R.S. titled *Chronic Town*, which marked the first time the band got broad exposure. *Chronic Town* was just one of many records released into a melange of independent product, yet it stood out.

While other bands were experimenting with all sorts of styles, from minimalism to polyrhythm to atonality, R.E.M.'s songs were rhythmically straightforward and contained ambitious melodies. Their look was straightforward, too, without the neo-gothic, doom-and-gloom fashion or introverted attitudes that were very popular, particularly among the English bands. By the mid-'80s, the American underground scene had become somewhat polarized from the sporadic and fickle English scene, with a do-it-yourself methodology whose purpose was to keep a band relevant and active for as long as possible. R.E.M.'s members have been masters at controlling most aspects of their career, a trait that has added to their appeal as a roots-based alternative to industry-driven drivel or trendy, self-important hype.

Because Stipe's lyrics are mixed low and mumbled to the point of being inaudible, R.E.M. conveys the all-important aura of mystery that most underground bands of the early '80s required for respect and credibility. An added advantage of Stipe's vague approach is that it allows listeners to hear phrases that don't necessarily exist and apply their own meanings to the songs. Every now and then a literal message emerges, but by and large, R.E.M.'s lyrics remain as opaque as smoke-filled glass. After the first album, the appropriately titled *Murmur*, critical opinion was nearly unanimous: R.E.M. was the best new underground band, by default implying that they were also the best band around. Subsequent releases (*Reckoning*, *Fables of the Reconstruction*, *Life's Rich Pageant*, *Document*) continued in a similar vein, each time expanding on the band's vocabulary, and in turn, their audience base, until it surpassed mass acceptance and hovered on the brink of superstardom.

More than most, R.E.M. is a good *band*, with all the things that implies. The members are friends, which has helped them to attain longevity, and they are dedicated to the idea of the "band" as a philosophy of sorts. These things, in com-

**While other bands were experimenting with all sorts of styles, from minimalism to polyrhythm to atonality, R.E.M.'s songs were rhythmically straightforward and contained ambitious melodies.**





bination with their willingness to work and an ability to write intriguing and melodic songs, are what caused R.E.M. to succeed where other independent-based bands have failed. Due largely to R.E.M.'s ability to reach a mass audience, America's independent labels flourished, providing impetus for other Athens-type scenes to flourish, as well, including the Seattle scene that years later would spawn bands such as Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden. Even after R.E.M. moved to Warner Brothers and became hugely popular with the album *Green*, they did so without accusations of selling out. They had their proverbial cake while eating it, too.

*Out of Time* was R.E.M.'s second Warner Brothers album, and it could be considered the record that broke them wide open with pop audiences. Besides yielding the Top 10 singles "Losing My Religion" and "Shiny Happy People," the album rose to #1. Now, they were not only being called "America's best rock-and-roll band" (on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, no less), but they were the country's biggest-selling band as well. This steady increase in exposure took place without any significant change in image and without destroying the aura of mystery that clung to the band's material and its lead vocalist/lyricist, Michael Stipe. An irony of this was that while R.E.M. continued to be viewed as remaining true to its ideals and retaining a high level of integrity, the bandmembers also became masters of audience manipulation.

R.E.M., and particularly its mercurial lead singer, now face an unusual crossroads. To become legendary, artists must surrender a portion of their personal lives and privacy to the cause. Just as disturbingly, they also may have to abandon their artful approach for something much more direct and personal. Virtually anybody who has become a figurehead—from Bob Dylan to Pete Townshend to Lou Reed to John Lennon—did so by trading style for substance. For R.E.M. to do this, it would need to abandon inscrutability and embrace forthrightness. Some legends, such as Mick Jagger, have flirted with the idea ("If I should stick a knife in my heart...") but ultimately decided that it wasn't worth the personal expense. At its most intense, rock and roll is cannibalistic and thrives on the personal carnage that it yields. The above-mentioned figureheads have all at some point sacrificed a portion of their lives to the unquenchable demands of rock and roll, only to find that their lives became unalterably changed, sometimes partially or completely ruined, by the self-exposure.

**The song takes its title from a Southern colloquialism but revels in the multiple interpretations to which it is prone.**

Stipe must know this well. In fact, I think this point could very well be a subtext in "Losing My Religion." The song takes its title from a Southern colloquialism but revels in the multiple interpretations to which it is prone. When Stipe sings "Life is bigger. . . than you, and you are not me," he seems to be evaluating the potential cost of making himself too vulnerable. Stardom is sometimes a harrowing experience ("That's me in the spotlight losing my religion") so why should he be compelled to expose himself any more than is necessary ("I'm choos-



ing my confessions")? Although a headlong plunge into artless confession is the viable means that more than likely would increase their long-term significance, is it worth it? Image-wise, R.E.M. is one of the most ill-defined bands to ever hit the mainstream. Much of its success could be directly attributed to a mastery of metaphor and allusion, so is this something worth risking?

R.E.M. has already come a long way and changed the face of modern music. They didn't want to go to the mountain, so they brought the mountain to them. The irony lies in the fact that the end result is essentially the same: R.E.M. is on top of the mountain. Now they must choose what they want to say from this vantage point. Do they continue to merely entertain, or do they risk becoming the fools on the hill who sold their souls to a meat grinder disguised as eternal recognition? Oh no, I've said too much...I haven't said enough.

## JUNE 1991 #2 RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW—JESUS JONES

The revolution will not be televised.

—*Gil Scott-Heron*

**W**ell, not exactly, anyway. The reasons it wasn't televised were different than those implied by musician and poet Gil Scott-Heron (he reasoned that the youth movement of the late '60s would become a street revolution, not a media circus), and so was the revolution to which he was referring. In less than three months in late 1989, Eastern European communism was brought to its knees, and the top leaders of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary were forced to resign one after another. The reason the downfall was not televised was because of communism's control of the media right until the end of the power struggle. In Romania though, we caught a glimpse of just how dramatic and sudden the changes could be, when freedom forces grabbed control of the state-run television station and broadcast live footage of the state militia's last gasp. The country's fascist leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, ran for his life, only to be recaptured, returned, and executed almost immediately. In this particular instance, the revolution most certainly was televised.

While the figureheads of communism were being systematically displaced, statues of communist heroes were being destroyed, as if removing the symbols would somehow erase the memory of repression that they represented. The ideological differences that had rent the world into distinct halves for nearly fifty years were suddenly evaporating with alarming rapidity. From the West, it seemed like a dream come true. Communism was admitting its failure to serve the best interests of the common people. While the failed attempt of Chinese students at Tiananmen Square to fight for their country's acceptance of Western ideals may have been the most dramatic

### GREAT MISSES

JUNE 1991 #8  
 GYPSY WOMAN [SHE'S HOMELESS]—  
 CRYSTAL WATERS



**Coming out at a time when rock and roll was either dead or AWOL, the rock-and-roll rhythms of "Right Here, Right Now" stood out like a sore thumb at the #2 position.**

and moving incident the West witnessed, the opening of the Berlin Wall was surely the most symbolic.

Englishman Mike Edwards witnessed these events on his television just like everybody else. Scenes of people dismantling the Berlin Wall one stone at a time had a resonance throughout Europe that most Americans could only imagine. For decades, most Europeans had felt caught in the middle of the two superpowers on either side of their borders and felt sure that, like all previous world wars, they would provide the arena for an inevitable confrontation. When communism collapsed, an ecstatic sense of relief gripped all of Europe, and Edwards tried to put his emotions on paper. Sensing that it was a remarkable time to be alive, he composed the words and melody for "Right Here, Right Now," and concluded that it was probably the best thing he would ever write. I agree. This isn't intended to be a dig at his other sometimes excellent work, but rather an endorsement of his ability to capture the personal emotions of a globally over-

whelming moment as it was happening.

During a radio interview, I once heard Edwards say that it was not the intention of his band, Jesus Jones, to make music with longevity. Instead, they were trying to manufacture a brand of pop that was accessible to modern listeners by using styles that were immediately gratifying. This may prove to be true of the band's other work, but "Right Here, Right Now" will probably resonate for quite a while. Maybe it's because of the guarded optimism of the lyrics or the well-crafted melody that contains them, or maybe it's because the instrumentation is somewhat traditional with a well-polished arrangement; all I know is that Jesus Jones made a timeless recording that rather ironically uses immediacy as its primary topic.

Coming out at a time when rock and roll was either dead or AWOL, the rock-and-roll rhythms of "Right Here, Right Now" stood out like a sore thumb at the #2 position. The irony of this is that Jesus Jones was one of the original innovators of the techno-rock movement (floppy disks and computerized sound samples), which had only recently begun to displace genuine rock and roll (drums and guitars). Depending on how you define the stylistic boundaries of rock music, it could be stated that not a single rock act topped *Billboard's* singles charts in either 1990 or 1991. Unless your definition includes the marginal rock stylings of Sinéad O'Connor, Prince, or the London Beat, virtually every single record that topped the charts during these two years was either a love ballad, hip-hop, or techno. A synthetic, mechanical rigidity had overtaken the charts, dehumanizing the majority of the love ballads, while elsewhere techno-based rhythms pulsed with the relentless monotony of a strobe light. While the wall came tumbling down, we danced. Jesus Jones quickly re-embraced the techno movement on its next album, *Perverse*, which was recorded entirely with synthetic instru-



mentation. As Edwards states in the album's leadoff track, "Zeroes and Ones," "This time the revolution will be computerized." There is little doubt that he'll be right.

## JULY 1991 #7 CRAZY—SEAL

As the '90s progressed, a strange thing happened to radio. With music splintering into more polarized styles and subdivisions than there were ways to define them, radio itself inadvertently began to diversify. Individual stations still held closely to their formats and playlists, but so many different formats existed that anybody with the will to channel-surf could stumble upon an entire cornucopia of styles. It took a bit more effort on the part of the listener than it did in the early '70s, when radio was at its most open-minded and progressive, when many genres were played on every channel, but the end result was pretty much the same. Creative radio was still missing in action, but diversity once again became rampant. Rock stations once considered "progressive," are now so tightly focused that they can't even play Stevie Wonder songs any more, but it was their loss, since other tight formats picked up the slack, aiming at a different demographic base. It's funny, but as radio tore popular music into bite-sized niches to suit every demographic base imaginable, it also became the best means by which we could stitch the pieces back together.

Seal (full name Sealhenry Samuel) benefited more than most from the expansion of formats because his music so naturally thwarted the boundaries that radio presented. "Crazy" appealed to pop, album rock, modern rock, adult contemporary, alternative, and R&B markets with no sign of strain. Maybe he picked up the ball that Terence Trent D'Arby dropped, thus availing him of the wide array of markets that welcome this new brand of British soul (as has been testified by the success of Simply Red's Mick Hucknall and Lisa Stansfield). Mixing traditional elements of soulful expressiveness that are reminiscent of Marvin Gaye with production values that are purely modern, and technical wizardry with a superficially glamorous veneer, Seal synthesized a style that is purely his own. "Crazy" is the Top 10 hit that exposed him to a broad array of listeners. They immediately identified with his brooding yet powerful vocals, which combine personal insight with a sense of compassion. Also, Seal's inclination to avoid showboating (a la D'Arby) will probably bode well for his future since the player who avoids showing off is usually least susceptible to dropping the ball.

Mixing traditional elements of soulful expressiveness that are reminiscent of Marvin Gaye with production values that are purely modern, and technical wizardry with a superficially glamorous veneer, Seal synthesized a style that is purely his own.





Despite the encouraging trend of diversity once again hitting the airwaves, the lasting quality of most contemporary popular music remains questionable. Since radio is supposed to be a profitable business, maybe there is no longer a place for challenging programming. Barbarian bean counters have disassembled diversity so they can sell airtime to skin care products, car insurance, designer jeans, etc. Focused nostalgia is intended to appeal to specific age groups. Sixties nostalgia was rampant in the late '80s and now, in the '90s, '70s nostalgia is proliferating. There are even stations that specialize in the greatest hits of the '70s! But does this mean that "Seasons in the Sun" has the same shelf-life (and thus the same recognition) as "Jumping Jack Flash"? If so, this could be disturbing. My guess (and my hope) is that as the '70s nostalgia trend fades, so will most of the disposable material, while merit and substance will determine which songs retain relevance into the next century. Meanwhile, contemporary Top 40 is subjected to the same scenario. It can be argued that the Top 40 contains nothing but a bunch of meaningless pop songs with no "heavy" significance, but I'm not particularly sure that the Top 40 is any more or less relevant than the so-called alternative stuff that loves to boast about its own importance. To my taste, there is probably an equivalent ratio of good to bad songs in either genre. While the pop charts offer an endless array of predictably formulaic tunes, the alternative market has become so hung up with its own sense of immediacy that the songs often have a shelf life that's about as long as a bulb-heated hamburger. By deliberately using disposable styles, the best ideas of the alternative marketplace are often reduced to timepieces. Trendy music disappears from our memory as soon as styles change direction, while the seemingly trite concoctions on the pop charts linger specifically because of their irrelevance to any trend. Neither arrangement is desirable, but a dated song stands less of a chance of developing relevance than does a song that originally seemed superfluous. While newness is essential to keep music alive and interesting, it appears as though it will be artists like Seal, who abide by traditional formats, who will find themselves (and their recordings) enjoying a reasonable degree of longevity.

## DECEMBER 1991 #6 SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT—NIRVANA

**K**urt Cobain could have dyed his skin green, put a dinosaur bone through his nose, and sung opera in Eskimo, *but if two million people bought his product, he was not alternative.* The word "alternative" in the '90s faces the same problem that occurred with the word "soul" in the '60s. Does it define a stylization or a circumstance? For instance, soul music *as a classification* encompassed virtually every black artist and also white artists who fit the *stylization* of black music, whether or not their music was soulful. In the early '90s, "alternative" began to mean virtually every artist who had long hair, ripped jeans, and a grunge jones, whether they sold three or three million records. But what is so "alternative" about selling in mainstream quantities? Once you outsell Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey, the word "alternative" is useless.





Cobain and his band, Nirvana, became trapped by this inherent contradiction, and he obviously didn't like it. The alternative tag was OK when he was traipsing around Seattle playing local gigs, but once he became super-famous, nothing made much sense anymore. It wasn't his fault that the media liked labels, but it did become his problem. Perceptions became screwy. Old fans were disenfranchised and confused, while the millions of new ones were hopping onto the media bandwagon and celebrating the "next big thing," alternative music.

I'm not implying that the media were responsible for Cobain's suicide, but they sure didn't help to alleviate his problems, either. The more miserable he was, the more strung out, the more unpredictable, angry, and sullen, the happier the media became, because they could point to how well he fit into the cubbyhole that they had filed him under to sell copy. It was beneficial for them to say, "See, we told you he was alternative," but for Cobain, his life was at stake. In this light, his demise seems almost predestined, which is a shame. His talent warranted more than that, and he deserved better, both as an artist and as a human being.

Before his death, the scathingly bitter lyrics of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" had a humorous tinge. You could laugh at Cobain's insights regarding the hopeless predicament of his generation. He railed against the machinations that kept him fed and stimulated but never satisfied, but his railings seemed simply to be a means of relieving his ennui. He sounded like a waif screaming into a hurricane. It probably felt cathartic, but it was essentially an exercise in frustration. Obviously, he touched a chord, and more than a few million kids who shared his frustration picked up on this once obscure "alternative" rock act. In a flash, he was designated the movement's spokesman.

In the aftermath of his suicide, the lyrics now ring hollow with resigned disappointment and a cancerous frustration. It was never really about "teen spirit" (i.e. the mental state of youth), but about Cobain's own mental state; his perception of a generation that he wanted no part of, yet which embraced him unquestioningly. The lyrics cover a lot of ground, but a recurring image is his inability to articulate. When communication dwindles to an echo ("Hello, hello, hello, hello") and even the echo is meaningless ("oh well, whatever, never mind"), it is hard to remain incensed. Eventually, you just surrender. Had he chosen to live, a lot of people might have derived strength by watching and listening to Cobain as he struggled with his personal demons. His pain and rage might have made others aware that they were not alone. Instead, he bailed out, leaving a generation that already felt abandoned and rudderless even more alienated.

#### GREAT HITS

OCTOBER 1991 #1  
**CREAM—PRINCE**

DECEMBER 1991 #2  
**CAN'T LET GO—MARIAH CAREY**

#### GREAT MISSES

OCTOBER 1991 #1  
**WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN—  
 MICHAEL BOLTON**



## APRIL 1992 #10 ONE—U2

**W**ait a minute, what's going on here? Had the members of U2 lost their minds? The band that had worked tirelessly to convince half the free world to trust in the goodness of its intentions suddenly went Vegas showbiz and glitter. In one of the most seismic shifts rock and roll has ever witnessed, U2 abandoned its vulnerable innocence for a posture that placed Bono somewhere between Madonna and Andy Kaufman. He became a self-conscious, Vegas-era Elvis who knew how to "vogue." Yes, it's a bizarre hybrid, but the image change was even more bizarre.

Apparently, U2 sensed the need to change. I suppose they realized that they'd taken this sincerity thing as far as they possibly could. Once you stand emotionally naked before the crowd, as Bono had done time and time again, there is no place to hide and no mystery to enshroud your intent. If they had continued

along the same path, things might have gotten tiresome and predictable. Realizing this, the band set off in the completely opposite direction. Sincerity was replaced with attitude. Clarity of intent was replaced with enigma. Earthiness and humanity were replaced with high-tech gadgetry and mechanized characterization. Warmth and spaciousness were replaced with industrial noise and claustrophobic focus. Instead of street clothes, Bono was now wearing bug shades and a reflective suit. In short, everything was different now. This was a very clever change of pace, particularly for U2. Because of who they were, nobody really believed that they had suddenly become cynically deceptive, so we looked through the cracks to find the truth. The truth was irony: the band was deliberately assuming the posture of cynical deception so that we could see through them and think for ourselves.

GREAT HITS	
JANUARY 1992	#18
<u>I CAN'T MAKE YOU LOVE ME</u> — BONNIE RAITT	
FEBRUARY 1992	#2
<u>TEARS IN HEAVEN</u> —ERIC CLAPTON	
MARCH 1992	#16
<u>HUMAN TOUCH</u> —BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN	

GREAT MISSES	
FEBRUARY 1992	#33
<u>LIVE AND LET DIE</u> —GUNS AND ROSES	

By embracing all the technical wizardry that was available, U2 made the world an infinitely

smaller place; it was so small that it became comical. Combining prearranged video shots with as-they-were-happening broadcasts from local satellite television, the stage shows mixed the real and the unreal in a sickening blur that, on another level, was both stimulating and entertaining. The arcane and the stupid were mixed with the hyperreal to the point where everything became meaningless. Words flashed by in rapid succession, phrases appeared and disappeared, and images rolled across the giant stage screens at a mind-numbing speed. The messages were cryptic and occasionally sarcastic: "Death is a career move." "Watch more TV." "Contradiction is balance." "Art is manipulation." "Guilt is not of God." The images flashed by so quickly that it was easy to think that all of this information was meant to be some type of subliminal manipulation. As art, it *was* ma-



nipulative, but it wasn't subliminal at all. The images, words, and phrases moved by just slow enough to register in our minds. Bono's stage persona was coy and reveled in the fact that he was taking the audience for a ride. Once his attitude announced his intention to manipulate, the message wasn't subliminal anymore. Instead, it became a statement about how easy it is for us to let ourselves be manipulated by the mass media.

Bono revealed the game for what it was when he told the press "I'm learning to lie." Why did he say this? Did he feel that since he couldn't beat the manipulative media, he'd join 'em? Nah, he already had beat 'em. Bono's lie was that he really didn't want us to believe him when he said he was learning to lie. He was glad-handing us, all right, but he was winking at us on the sly, too. By accepting him on his own terms, we saw the kernel of truth that underlined this charade. U2 put on an air of phoniness so they could take Bono's one dimensional stridency and disguise it. The "furrowed brow" syndrome that had afflicted U2's best work gained depth because they buried it. What genius it was to evoke truth through the haze of contrivance!

This was a very clever tactic, but it could also be very confusing. The band knew what it was doing, but the audience didn't always get it. A lot of people simply thought Bono had become decadent. The underlying problem with his creation though, is that he runs the risk of actually becoming decadent. Perhaps he won't be able to escape this construction of his. When I was a kid, I used to mug it up with my friends by acting like an idiot to make them laugh. One really moronic tactic was to screw up my mouth into some grotesque shape and cross my eyes. Although it would get a cheap laugh, my mother would warn me, "You better be careful, or one day your face might get stuck like that." At ten years old, that was enough to put the fear of God into me. But I did it anyway, and luckily my face never got stuck.

Watching the new U2 in action, it becomes apparent that junk-food culture has progressed to a junk brain-food culture. U2 knew it and portrayed it brilliantly. The show became one of the most entertaining, humorous, frightening, and most importantly, aware artistic expressions of cultural crisis that I ever expect (or hope) to see. Bono wore his mask well, but oddly enough, the pretension of his character somehow granted him the ability to become even more personally honest than he had previously been. Despite its deceptively (and deliberately) idiotic title, the album *Achtung, Baby* was probably the most serious record the band ever recorded. Hidden by the mask of pretense, Bono sings some of the most powerfully truthful words he ever wrote about painful separation and the alienation that ensues. That guitarist, the Edge, was experiencing a divorce while the album was being constructed certainly was not irrelevant. In fact, it seems as though Bono donned the Edge's mask so that it would be easier to embody his experience. "One,"

**Despite its deceptively (and deliberately) idiotic title, the album *Achtung, Baby* was probably the most serious record the band ever recorded.**



“So Cruel,” and “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” all flaunt indignation while pain oozes out of every corner. “One” in particular contains lyrics that can sting you to the depths of your soul. No matter how you look at it, there is nothing even remotely amusing about this song or its unadulterated lyrics about emotional abuse and dependency.

Bono was like a jester at a masquerade ball. No longer tethered to his own real-life persona, he was free to wreak havoc in any way he saw fit. He sang about how lonely and disaffected he felt, all the time adopting the persona of a vainglorious freak. The act was emotionally wrenching and awkwardly amusing, all at the same time. He was disconcerting, but he was fun to watch, too. Probably for the first time in his life, Bono discovered the freedom that artifice offers, and as a result, his hang-ups became liberated. Hidden behind his shades, he was free to say whatever he pleased. I only hope that his face doesn’t get stuck that way.

## JUNE 1992 #34 WHY—ANNIE LENNOX

Three years after the unofficial dissolution of her partnership with Dave Stewart in the Eurythmics, Annie Lennox released a solo album called *Diva* that was powerful enough to overwhelm even the best parts of her previous work. True to its title, Lennox had taken time off to distance herself from her previous incarnation as one-half of a trendy synth-pop duet so that she could reemerge as a fully formed and confident solo performer. Not too surprisingly, she handled the change brilliantly. In so doing, she laid claim to an image that, although less “hip,” was also less susceptible to changes in the tastes and styles of the pop marketplace. It also allowed her to become what she had always displayed a potential for: a heartrending and truly soulful vocalist.

Like Sinéad O’Connor had done with some regularity, Lennox stripped away all images of pretense and let us see her confused and vulnerable side. No longer detached or aloof, her personality became a key factor in her music. While her voice glides effortlessly through the melodies of songs that she composed, her heart is plainly in tow, particularly on her first solo single, “Why.” The haunting piano refrain immediately clues listeners in to the overwhelming loneliness that the lyrics eventually convey.

During the chorus, Lennox’s voice drifts around the title word and drags every ounce of emotion from what must be the most eternally lingering syllable of the English language. By repeating the question “Why?,” she makes it a rhetorical statement of pain and a genuine plea for help. The litany of possessions, some

GREAT HITS	
MAY 1992	#5
<b>DAMN, I WISH I WAS YOUR LOVER— SOPHIE B. HAWKINS</b>	
JUNE 1992	#4
<b>IF YOU ASKED ME TO—CELINE DION</b>	

GREAT MISSES	
JUNE 1992	#4
<b>ACHY-BREAKY HEART— BILLY RAY CYRUS</b>	



real and some figurative, that she lists at the end of the song is frighteningly intense, particularly the way Lennox's voice dissolves into utter resignation. There is no satisfying answer to her plea, and by song's end, she realizes it. It is a transcendent and desolate moment, in which she must face her fate totally alone.

Without contrivance or artifice, Lennox became a singer well-attuned to matters of the heart. Yet, despite her embracing of emotional honesty, she maintains the ability to conjure up feelings that aren't necessarily reflective of her own life. She has become the consummate artist whose innate intelligence becomes the driving force of her emotional outpourings. This is a rare talent, but it allows her to achieve the level of artistry that she aspires to while maintaining her privacy and a sense of stability. Most important, though, is the manner in which she conveys sincerity with more conviction than some of her more popular competition. Beating out such obvious stalwarts as Madonna, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston, Lennox was voted the best female singer of 1992 in *Rolling Stone* magazine's readers' poll. While proceeding cautiously, she sings as if she had thrown caution to the wind. Annie Lennox the person was certainly not a diva, but Annie Lennox the performer had become the definition of one.

## JULY 1992 #1 END OF THE ROAD—BOYZ II MEN

The black male vocal-group phenomenon that cropped up in the '30s (the Mills Brothers, the Golden Gate Quartet, the Ink Spots) and dominated R&B music in the '50s (the Orioles, the Cardinals, the Flamingos, the Dominoes) never really died at all. As tenacious, valid, and worthy a musical format as has ever existed, it continuously adapted to contemporary styles. Whether it was doo-wop (the Moonglows, the Platters), '60s pop, innovation, and social consciousness (the Drifters, the Isley Brothers, the Impressions), Motown soul (the Four Tops, the Temptations, the Miracles), '70s slickness (Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, the Chi-Lites, the Delfonics, the Stylistics, the O'Jays, the Spinners, the Manhattans), '80s hip (Force M.D.'s, New Edition), or the retro-soul of the '90s (Boyz II Men, Boyz II Men, Boyz II Men), black vocal music has remained healthy and intact.

As has happened consistently throughout Top 40 history, styles from the past are periodically dusted off and recycled. Sometimes the results are predictable and tame, while at other times an innovative updating of a timeless musical style results. Boyz II Men picked up on the dearth of gently soulful vocal music that had been popular years ago and revitalized it. Perhaps a portion of their fame can be attributed to a backlash that resulted from frustration with the phony musicality of bands like New Kids on the Block and Vanilla Ice and the exposure of Milli Vanilli as lip-synching airheads, but their appeal ran much deeper than

GREAT HITS	
JULY 1992 PEOPLE EVERYDAY— ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT	#8
JULY 1992 ALL I WANT— TOAD THE WET SPROCKET	#15





If you  
required proof  
that Boyz II Men  
had the goods,  
the a cappella  
fade-out of "End  
of the Road"  
provided it.

that. Boyz II Men represented the real thing at a time when it was becoming difficult to determine whether the real thing existed anymore.

If you required proof that Boyz II Men had the goods, the a cappella fade-out of "End of the Road" provided it. The group's stunningly powerful and moving four-part harmony could never have been faked. No doubt about it, Boyz II Men's recordings were not some record producer's incantation, but the real item.

With down-home earnestness and a purity that could make a child blush, Boyz II Men were as far removed from the contemporary trends of gangsta rap and New Jack sleaze as was possible. While Snoop Doggy Dog and Ice Cube were in your face, and Sir Mix-a-Lot was explicitly sexual, Boyz II Men sang about true love, broken hearts, and fidelity. Their combination of hip hop and harmony (hip-hop doo-wop?) brought a whole new genre into focus that has resulted in the stardom of artists like Shai, Silk, All-4-One, Color Me Badd, and S.W.V., perhaps even aiding the rise to superstardom of such obvious talents as En Vogue.

"End of the Road" began its ascent to record-breaking proportions after appearing on the soundtrack for the film *Boomerang*. Its simple sentiments and truly excellent four-part harmonies captured the imaginations of millions, while the group's heartfelt delivery and superb vocal talents touched a romantic nerve that was being overlooked by the bass-heavy dance music that dominated the charts. After floating to the #1 position, the song stubbornly refused to relent the spot and held on for a phenomenal thirteen weeks. "End of the Road" became the longest-running #1 record of all time, beating the thirty-six-year-old record of eleven weeks that was held by Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel"/"Hound Dog." In a manner that was as unpredictable as it was unbelievable though, their record-breaking feat didn't have quite the longevity that Elvis's record had enjoyed. Only two weeks after Boyz II Men relinquished the top position, Whitney Houston's version of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You" (also from a soundtrack—*The Bodyguard*) took control of #1 and remained frozen there for *fourteen* weeks! Believe it or not, the battle didn't end there. Boyz II Men fought back with their next single, "I'll Make Love to You" (written by Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds), and went on to tie Houston's record of fourteen weeks at #1. It looks like this thing could go into extra innings.

Boyz II Men's debut album, *Cooleyhighharmony*, sold an amazing 7 million copies and resulted in a multimillion-dollar renegotiation of their contract with Motown records (all this for a band with a track record of only one album!), ensuring that these boyz will have plenty of financial security now that they are becoming men. No doubt about it, Boyz II Men have become the diamond in the tarnished tiara of Motown Records, a label whose image has thinned out considerably over the years, especially since its \$301 million acquisition by the international conglomerate Polygram NV. With that sort of money on the table, there



isn't much room left to hedge the bet. Odds are better than good that Boyz II Men will be exploited to the fullest extent of their contract, so that this extraordinary investment can be recouped in a timely manner. If they continue to chart as well as they have since 1992, then Polygram has absolutely nothing to worry about. In fact, since their second album, *II*, debuted at the #1 position, and the fourteen-week reign of "I'll Make Love To You" at #1 was usurped by another Boyz II Men release, "On Bended Knee," I'd bet that the corporate execs at Polygram were confident enough to buy some nice-sized turkeys at Christmastime.

Obviously, the members of Boyz II Men have been receiving an awful lot of attention from the media lately. The American Music Awards, the Soul Train Music Awards, the Grammy Awards, and virtually every other music-based award has been bestowed upon Michael McCary, Shawn Stockman, Wanya Morris, and Nathan Morris (no relation) at one time or another. Furthermore, these nice boyz were all named among the best dressed men of 1994. It's not so surprising that all four were nominated for this honor, particularly since they usually dress identically (not to be persnickety, but isn't individuality usually part of the criteria for determining these things?). Anyway, it isn't their mode of dress that counts so much as their vocal abilities, and it's a fair assumption that Boyz II Men are going to remain on a lot of best-of lists for quite a few years.

## SEPTEMBER 1992 #3 I'D DIE WITHOUT YOU—P.M. DAWN

**S**ometimes things aren't as black and white as they seem. The music industry's tendency to divide along racial lines has created invisible barriers that are something of a challenge to cross. Even if you are a bona fide crossover superstar, such as Boyz II Men or Whitney Houston, popular black artists are almost always labeled as R&B while white artists are usually found under pop/rock. The only truly integrated format is jazz and perhaps the blues, if the word "integrated" can be stretched to include a majority of black artists who play for an audience that is primarily white. Around 1990, this color barrier issue had once again gotten totally out of hand. Because of industry categorization, rack jobbers in record stores would (against homespun advice) often judge a disk by its cover and file it by some unspoken color code, with black artists on one rack and white artists on another.

This commercial apartheid carried over to radio as well. Rock and roll and AOR station programmers had fewer black artists on their playlists than they had appendages, while R&B stations were equally guilty of glossing over appropriate white artists. To their credit, pop and easy-listening stations remained well-integrated. This is because these formats are not driven by any particular culture, but instead by a target age group and/or a song's appropriateness for the workplace. Otherwise, when somebody did manage to cross over to the alternate market, they were often disparagingly referred to as "wiggers" or "oreos." The increasing popularity of rap and heavy metal music in the late '80s did little to salve the wounds, either. The heavy metal audience had become almost tribal in



its makeup, with a predominantly white male, teenage, and homophobic fan base, making it easier for some bands (Guns 'n' Roses in particular) to express their prejudices openly and without fear of recrimination. Rap, meanwhile, catered to an exclusively black audience with an exclusively black artist base.

Rap didn't remain a separatist art form for long though, and eventually proved itself to be the most dynamic of all present musical styles. It also became the most individualistic. Starting off as a playfully benign extension of disco's club scene, rap developed from a predominantly (if not exclusively) black inner-city culture and provided an inexpensive mode of expression for black youths. Musical knowledge, in the technical sense, was irrelevant to rap artists. Instead they relied on the technical abilities of the mix-master (or deejay), who would provide music from a prerecorded source, and the verbal skills of rhymer, who would recite their rhymes using the natural melismatic flow of speech, with little or no regard for melody. Initial chart resistance was strong, with a nearly repellent reaction from most middle-class whites, but this reaction would not last forever. It took about ten years for rap music to find a substantial white audience, but it did happen.

Over time, rap was transformed from a goofy forum for bragging about sexual virility and superhuman talents, to a socially conscious medium, absorbing an infinite number of themes and attitudes along the way. Rap moved through the cartoonish playfulness of the Fat Boys and DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, to the atrocious sexist farce of Luther Campbell and 2 Live Crew; from the hip-hop and heavy creations of M.C. Hammer and L.L. Cool J, to the hard-core gangsta rap of Ice-T, Public Enemy, and N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude—a deliberately provocative name meant to represent every conservative suburbanite's most paranoid nightmare). Most notable was the subtext of black nationalism, and eventually outright militaristic and separatist ideologies. Paradoxically, the more extreme rap artists became, the more they found themselves with a white fan base. This increased even further when rap and heavy metal became strange bedfellows. The unspoken (or explicitly stated) racism that was inherent to each style would seem to preclude any meeting of the minds, but a mutual respect for each musical form led to a peace summit that began in 1986 with Run D.M.C.'s adaptation of Aerosmith's "Walk This Way," and has expanded ever since.

**Over time,  
rap was  
transformed  
from a goofy  
forum for  
bragging about  
sexual virility  
and superhu-  
man talents, to  
a socially  
conscious  
medium,  
absorbing an  
infinite number  
of themes and  
attitudes along  
the way.**

A very lucrative audience was found when middle-class white teenagers adopted gangsta rap as an exotic style that, for the most part, was completely foreign, if not actually threatening, to their own experience. Ghetto turf wars, gun-toting violence, and warring with police are hardly a part of daily suburban life, but perhaps the anti-



establishment undertones provided a subtle means of rebellion, much as rock and roll and the glitter movement once did for earlier generations. Perhaps rap music will do the seemingly impossible, and temper some of the racial divisiveness by exposing young whites to black culture, instilling a sense of common identity. Unfortunately, the opposite is equally plausible, since rap can be used to alienate anyone who isn't an insider, thus posing a direct threat to the middle-class values of its white fan base. Nevertheless, whether the audience is enamored with the entire culture of rap or only with the style, rap has successfully crossed the color barrier.

One unfortunate side effect of rap's splinter-group mentality is the mean-spirited and nasty infighting and "dissing" that take place with regularity. For the same reason that rival gangs find it justifiable to wreak havoc on each other because of their allegiance to a specific turf or color, rival rappers are often quick to publicly ridicule their competition. What started out as mere boasting developed into an art form of nearly libelous proportions. P.M. Dawn found itself caught up in just such a situation. While an important factor of rap's dynamic is its diversity, one thing that remains consistent is each artist's need to maintain street credibility. With a sound that floats way above the street, P.M. Dawn developed something of a credibility problem. Front man Prince Be's style blends soft-spoken rap (in itself an anomaly) with heavenly choruses, lending his compositions a melodic edge that makes them popular with a crossover audience, but mostly ignored by the black press and disdained by rappers. Instead of celebrating their turf or their "hood," P.M. Dawn makes ethereal music that celebrates a state of mind. Rap purists were quick to launch a tirade of insults at Prince Be (a.k.a. The Nocturnal) and his brother DJ Minutemix (a.k.a. J.C. The Eternal—even their assumed rapper names are ethereal) for being soft and removed from the gritty realities of the streets. Since they refused to wield a macho bluster, their style was determined to be unthinkably un-hip. Although other artists specializing in rap permutations may have aroused dismissive mockery from some competitors, none was ostracized with such vehemence as was P.M. Dawn.

If you could imagine Smokey Robinson or, better yet, Johnny Mathis trying to appear streetwise, then you'll have some idea of the ludicrous problem that confronts P.M. Dawn, but it was the lack of these stereotypical traits that made the band appealing in the first place. The complete absence of violent imagery and grating noise was a welcome change from the shoot-'em-up bloodletting that most rap had come to signify, while the addition of melody was outright exhilarating. "I'd Die without You" probably shouldn't even qualify as rap at all, since none of the lyrics are spoken, but sung in layers of harmony that drift along as unobtrusively as a cloud on a summer's day. Romantic regret and longing have never sounded so ungrounded and airy while still conveying the pain of knowing that you brought the regret upon yourself. Musically lush and lyrically clever, "I'd Die

**Instead of celebrating their turf or their "hood," P.M. Dawn makes ethereal music that celebrates a state of mind.**





without You” is pure emotional expression, as though it is trying to convey something that exists on another plane of reality.

It seems as though some situations will never relent. Once the media industry finally started relinquishing its separatist policies, rap purists constructed another wall in its place. Prejudice and racism can come in many guises, I suppose. P.M. Dawn represents a major change in the scope of rap music and increases its broad-based appeal (and long-term relevance) by embracing a peaceful coexistence of the races. Their style draws freely from a potpourri of both black and white influences. Perhaps the sense of peace and spirituality that runs through their spacious arrangements will eventually speak for itself, and hard-core rappers will see the value of being associated with a group that is brave enough to dream of a utopia while singing to the heavens.

### SEPTEMBER 1993 #3 RIVER OF DREAMS—BILLY JOEL

Considering how many hit songs Billy Joel has had over the years (there have been forty so far), I thought it would be a marked oversight not to include him in this book. From the outset, though, my intentions were to list only those hit songs that impressed me as timeless, important, and/or just plain great, and none of his singles seemed to qualify as any of these things. While his albums might contain an intelligent and thoughtful song or two, his singles often sound contrived and trite. Many of his early singles have become dated to the point of self-parody—can anybody take “Piano Man” or “My Life” seriously any longer?—while many of his singles from the ’80s are creative but deliberately derivative flash-

backs to older styles. “Say Goodbye to Hollywood” should have been sung by the Ronettes, “Uptown Girl” by the Four Seasons, and “The Longest Time” by any street-corner doo-wop group.

GREAT HITS	
DECEMBER 1992	#35
<u>WHO'S GONNA RIDE YOUR WILD HORSES—U2</u>	
JANUARY 1993	#2
<u>ORDINARY WORLD—DURAN DURAN</u>	

Joel’s image hovers (not too convincingly) somewhere between the leather-jacketed rocker with a chip on his shoulder and the crafty, middle-aged, and middle-of-the-road songsmith. In fairness, this is probably an accurate reflection of who he really is and not some contrived

stance. Unfortunately, it can make his sensitive material sound like it came from a paint-by-numbers book, while his rock ‘n’ roll becomes unbearably bratty. To my tastes, Joel has always been a little bit too crafty for his own good, and sometimes this trait would lead him into territory that would have been much better left unexplored. Some of the most annoying singles known to modern man came from this guy’s pen, including the cloyingly obnoxious “Big Shot,” the headache-inducing “Pressure,” the appallingly misinformed stab at new wave of “It’s Still Rock and Roll to Me,” and his atrocious neo-politicization of Chuck Berry’s “Too Much Monkey Business” with “We Didn’t Start the Fire.” (Didn’t he hear R.E.M. do it





better on “It’s the End of the World As We Know It”?) Apparently, I wasn’t part of Joel’s target audience, but my opinion didn’t seem to matter much anyway, since the last two above-mentioned singles both went to #1, and represent the two most popular songs of Joel’s career.

For all of these reasons, I viewed any new Billy Joel single with suspicion. His writing so often lapsed into mundanity that it was easy for critics to adopt a similar attitude, which Joel himself often derided. In one famed incident while onstage at Nassau Coliseum (very near his hometown of Levittown, New York), he read negative reviews from local newspapers and then tore them up while his already convinced audience cheered. He never tried to be a critic’s darling. Instead he made music that was intended to have broad-based appeal. It was music that he and his hometown buddies would’ve appreciated, let the critics be damned. Critics became the elitist enemy, and quite honestly, elitism was a completely inappropriate reaction to Joel’s music. He was singing to the masses in a language that was intended for them, not the high-minded theorists who required some type of justification to appreciate his message. Either you appreciated his brand of sentimentality or you didn’t—it was as simple as that.

Considering my past experience, I was convinced that the likelihood of my hearing a Billy Joel single that I would really appreciate was fairly remote. Although a few album tracks had impressed me over the years (“Ballad of Billy the Kid” for its Aaron Copland-esque soundscapes, “Angry Young Man” for its clever piano phrasing, “Scenes from an Italian Restaurant” for its realism and humor, “Until the Night” for its moody romanticism), they were usually much too long or convoluted to ever be considered as singles. But no matter how dismissive I thought I was, a song or two began to sneak into my consciousness and make me pay attention. Some were simple and pleasant ditties (“Say Goodbye to Hollywood,” “She’s Got a Way”), but others began to resonate more deeply than I would have expected (“An Innocent Man,” “And So It Goes”). When he allowed his intelligence to override his commercial instincts, something genuinely inspired would often result, something that conveyed not only a sense of personal involvement, but an emotional commitment to the material.

“River of Dreams” has a catchy rhythm and a melody that sounds as though it should have been included in a Walt Disney animated feature. The lyrics fit the bill as well, since they are both politically neutral and ageless in their subject matter, while the theme is universal in its appeal and uplifting in its conclusions. I knew Joel was on to something when my four-year-old son and his friends began to request the song by name. For a contemporary pop song, this was a first, so I began to pay attention in a way that I otherwise probably never would have, and you know what? The kids were right. Besides its infectious sound, the song’s imagery can be as intriguing to an adult

“River of Dreams” has a catchy rhythm and a melody that sounds as though it should have been included in a Walt Disney animated feature.



as it is to a child. The song touches all of the bases that are instantly appealing to children (walking, sleep, dreams, night, mountains, river) while conveying well-presented metaphors for life, longing, and mystery. By doing exactly what he has always done, Joel hit pay dirt with a song that was probably his most populist composition yet, and it took a group of four-year-olds to make me realize this. Thank you, Dominick, Hollee, and Dare, for making me listen a little bit closer to something that was right under my nose, and I'm sorry, Billy, for not paying attention sooner.

### DECEMBER 1993 #3 BREATHE AGAIN—TONI BRAXTON

**N**ew musical ideas just don't seem to come as fast and furious as they used to. While constantly evolving technology requires that we reeducate ourselves in computerization and communications with ulcer-inducing regularity, music (art in general, for that matter) seems to be caught on a wheel that continually reconstitutes previously used ideas for contemporary consumption. It's debatable whether this has been fueled by rap music's method of sampling prerecorded tracks, the tendency of rock and rollers to search the past for inspiration, the safety-in-numbers mind-set of middle-of-the-road stylists, the revival of traditional soul, or a combination of all of the above, but it's becoming fairly easy to dismiss a good deal of contemporary music as little more than new treads on an old tire. Pop is

recycling itself, but does that mean that all good and original ideas have already been chewed up and spat out? An awful lot of good ideas have been thoroughly strip-mined by modern music purveyors, but that doesn't adequately explain why musical innovation has slowed to a snail's pace. The real answer lies in the nature of the music business itself.

Fewer songs are capable of striking us as innovative because artists are relying more and more on tried and true formulas. If artists don't match a station's programming restrictions, they won't get airplay—it's as simple as that. As a

result, fitting into a prearranged format is not only good business, but a practical necessity for survival in a very tough industry.

The sameness that has taken hold of contemporary music has made it difficult to discern the truly talented from the overly produced and the ordinary. Because of technology, we have become exposed to so much invented/constructed talent that it's easy to become jaded by a seemingly endless parade of silicone-injected phonies. This only contributes to the average listener's confusion, and makes it that much harder to recognize the real thing when it does come along. This was particularly true of the overwhelming influx of female vocalists who swarmed the charts in the early '90s. In a superficial way, most of them were talented, but

GREAT HITS	
OCTOBER 1993 <u>PLEASE FORGIVE ME</u> —BRYAN ADAMS	#7
OCTOBER 1993 <u>EVERYBODY HURTS</u> —R.E.M.	#29
NOVEMBER 1993 <u>LINGER</u> —THE CRANBERRIES	#8



since so many of them shared similar production values and song topics, casual listeners needed to perform a DNA analysis to tell one from another.

Toni Braxton cropped up in the midst of this, and at first it was easy to dismiss her as another blade of grass on a well-manicured golf course. Some critics were quick to dismiss her, not because she wasn't talented, but because they had already reached their threshold. They just couldn't stand the thought of listening to another silken-voiced diva. Even her association with Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds, Antonio "L.A." Reid, and Daryl Simmons didn't necessarily help, since it would be hard to find a soulful artist from the '90s who hadn't worked with some combination of these guys at one time or another. (Babyface in particular showed up at so many sessions that I was convinced he must have designed a "Babyface" suit and run a franchise from a central office. In only a few years, he produced monstrously huge hits for Madonna, Boyz II Men, Toni Braxton, T.L.C., Bobby Brown, Aretha Franklin, and himself, not to mention a small country of others.) But among such talented peers and such heavy competition, Braxton stood out, mostly because she could enliven and embody the lyrics that Babyface wrote for her.

Braxton was the first solo artist signed to La Face Records, the company that Reid and Babyface started, so she was privy to the pair's best and most focused material. She also happened to be the perfect foil for the Babyface style of sensuously languid love songs drenched in lovelorn romanticism. The first time anyone heard the Braxton/Babyface pairing was on the *Boomerang* soundtrack, which included the soon-to-be hit "Love Shoulda Brought You Home," but it wasn't until Braxton's solo album that it became plain she was destined to become something more than a talented also-ran or another pretty face in the crowd. Containing four hit singles ("Breathe Again," "You Mean the World to Me," "Another Sad Love Song," and a reappearance of "Love Shoulda Brought You Home"—all written or cowritten by Babyface), the *Toni Braxton* album announced the singer's intention to stay, as well as her ability to back the intention up.

On "Breathe Again," Babyface's songwriting is at its creative peak while Braxton's natural talents penetrate through the requisite production gloss. It's as though she instinctively knows how to make the gloss work for her rather than against her. By keeping her style straightforward and simple, she lets her own sense of expression rise to the surface and becomes the focal point of the record. Unlike her super-talented peers, such as Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey, you don't need to analyze the spaces between each pyrotechnic breath to discern a glimpse of realism. Her husky contralto has been compared to Anita Baker's, but where Baker's demeanor can be icy and distant, Braxton conveys a vulnerability that endears her to an audience. Braxton's strong religious roots and natural talent (her father was an Apostolic minister and her mother sang opera) both contribute to her ability to keep emotion front and center, letting technical prowess take a backseat. That's not to say that she isn't a truly gifted vocalist—quite

**Braxton stood out, mostly because she could enliven and embody the lyrics that Babyface wrote for her.**



the opposite—but only that she uses her technique exclusively in service to the song, rather than as the reason for the song’s existence. It’s a lesson that many of the present crop of overambitious divas could stand to learn.

## JANUARY 1994 #3 WHATTA MAN—SALT ‘N’ PEPA, FEATURING EN VOGUE

**W**hatta Man, whatta man, whatta man, whatta mighty good man.”

What we’ve got here is a phenomenal ability to communicate. There’s something about this record that can make a man feel real good about himself, provided he knows how to do the right thing, and this record makes no bones about what the right things are. Equity between the sexes is one of the most positive sentiments that I’ve heard in any rap song, and “Whatta Man” promotes this by making equity a sexy thing. Usually, the rap world is a tough place for any self-respecting woman because it is overflowing with moronic, ignorant, and cruel sentiments towards them. With a constant barrage of references to females as “ho’s” and “bitches” repeated ad infinitum without a trace of irony, such a nasty sentiment can numb your brain and maybe even dehumanize the listener into becoming a passive accomplice to such stupidity. By far a male idiom, the lowest common denominator mentality that pervades so much rap music has limited the number of strong-willed females who are willing to step into the heat. Queen Latifah is one, but her message is usually politically strident so it doesn’t always reach the street where she aims it. Others, such as M.C. Lyte and Yo-Yo, have had marginal success, but have done little to differentiate themselves aside from be-

**By far a male idiom, the lowest common denominator mentality that pervades so much rap music has limited the number of strong-willed females who are willing to step into the heat.**

ing girls in a male-dominated genre. Hoez With Attitude simply adapted themselves to fit the perspective of male acts such as Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg, by portraying themselves as blow-up sex dolls. By far, Salt ‘n’ Pepa have become the most prominent female rappers in the business, and they did it by retaining their streetwise attitude while taking a dignified and proactive stance toward sex. Without missing a beat, their message manages to be both ribald *and* responsible, making them role models with an edge.

Cheryl James and Sandi Denton both attended Queensborough Community College, but became close friends while selling service contracts by telephone for Sears. Another coworker, Hurby Azur, asked them to help him with a recording for a school project that, through a serendipitous chain of events, ended in a recording contract. Dubbing themselves Salt ‘n’ Pepa, they made Azur their manager and Dee Dee Roper (Spinderella) their deejay. Four million-selling (platinum) albums was the net result. They remain the only female rappers to go platinum, and rap finally got the women’s perspective of sexual



self-empowerment that it so sorely needed (and deserved).

The first three Salt 'n' Pepa albums had the girls "talkin' street" and dissing back at anyone who had trouble with the thought of females taking charge, but each record also portrayed them as women who needed to rise above the rampant victimization that surrounded them. Three years passed after the release of their third album, and in the interim all three bandmembers got pregnant and had children, an experience that had a profound effect on their outlook toward sex, and men in particular. When they were finally ready to return, they did it in style. Their fourth album, *Very Necessary*, represented the giant step that showed Salt 'n' Pepa taking control of their music, their careers, their relationships, and their image. Their lives and the lives of their children were too important for them to remain reactionary, so they decided to take a positive, active approach. An exercise regimen that whipped them back into shape after their pregnancies added extra muscle to their message and power to their stance, giving them the confidence to back up whatever they chose to say. A whip-smart appearance at Woodstock '94 affirmed it, and Salt 'n' Pepa became huge crossover stars. Pushing close to 4 million copies sold, *Very Necessary* brought rap into places where it otherwise may never have ventured. Confident enough in their status as rap's reigning female stars, James and Denton took the initiative to contact En Vogue about teaming up on a number about what constitutes a perfect mate, and En Vogue was quick to accept.

In the late '80s, Thomas McElroy (formerly of the Commodores) and Denzel Foster were inspired to form a classy female group and chose four exceptionally talented women from different backgrounds: Dawn Robinson (Connecticut), Maxine Jones (New Jersey), Cindy Herron (San Francisco), and Terry Ellis (Texas). When they were brought together in 1988, they immediately discovered a chemistry that exceeded their best expectations. Displaying a diversity whose common ground lies in their sense of teamwork, En Vogue hit the Top 10 repeatedly, with "Hold On" (#2), "My Lovin' (You're Never Gonna Get It)" (#2), "Giving Him Something He Can Feel" (#6), and "Free Your Mind" (#8). Their image varied greatly, depending on who took the lead role on any given song, but a sexy confidence and stunning ability to harmonize made them appealing to a broad spectrum of tastes.

The combined talents of all seven women meant that the message of "Whatta Man" would be unmistakable. Instead of ganging up on the opposite sex, Salt 'n' Pepa (with En Vogue's solid support) remark that a good man (that is, "a mighty good man") might be hard to find, but is sure worth the trouble of looking for. Salt 'n' Pepa might be salacious, but they're righteous too, with a natural honesty and sexual warmth that eclipse most "sexy" records. En Vogue's involvement is crucial, too, since they bring a more traditional and sultry sexiness to the song. Taken as a unit, Salt 'n' Pepa and En Vogue leave no doubt that they mean business. To men who are proud of their families and their wives, "Whatta Man" is a peace offering, while men who are disrespectful of and uncaring about their lovers or their own children get what they have coming to them. Age is a taboo subject among either group, but I think it would be fair to say that all seven women are significantly older than most of their hip-hop competition (not to mention the hip-





hop fan base), so their combined message speaks with a maturity that is unusual for rap music. Now let's see if some of these gangsta rappers can learn how to grow up, too.

### MARCH 1994 #9 STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Massive audience adulation and critical praise can be a very dangerous thing. Expectations often rise disproportionately to the artist's state of development, while overexposure looms in the background threatening to ruin everything. Once it kicks in, very few performers escape the resultant complications. Even Bruce Springsteen has fallen prey to the trap of becoming an established star. With his fan base expanded to the saturation point, his choice to change or remain the same becomes something like a double-edged sword. If he changes, his historical audience may feel betrayed, while the following who finds the change appealing

will most likely prove to be fickle. If he remains the same, the chances of finding a new audience become mighty slim, and more than a few of his old fans may grow tired of him. Once it hits, it's a catch-22 situation.

When Springsteen released the *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* CDs simultaneously, probably in an attempt to beat the curse, he lost on both accounts. No new fans jumped aboard, and a few of the older ones wondered what was going wrong. In my opinion, this had little to do with any lack of quality in the material. First of all, the sheer quantity of new songs was confusing and overwhelming to digest all at once. Furthermore, his formula of writing, which has always been successful, was intact almost to a fault, making much of the material predictably good but not necessarily memorable. If these were his second and third albums, he'd probably have become a superstar—*déjà vu* all over again. As it is, he finds himself entering the twilight of his days as a superstar, simply because his familiar sound and

GREAT HITS	
MARCH 1994 <u>MMM MMM MMM MMM</u> — CRASH TEST DUMMIES	#4
MARCH 1994 <u>LOSER</u> —BECK	#10
MAY 1994 <u>STAY (I MISSED YOU)</u> —LISA LOEB	#1
JUNE 1994 <u>FANTASTIC VOYAGE</u> —COOLIO	#3
JUNE 1994 <u>SHINE</u> —COLLECTIVE SOUL	#11
DECEMBER 1994 <u>HOLD MY HAND</u> — HOOTIE & THE BLOWFISH	#10

image have become so . . . well, so familiar.

I'll be the first to admit that I could be dead wrong about this. If Springsteen so desired, he could probably rally up the energy to recreate the phenomenal buzz that surrounded him ten years ago, but he'd have to be crazy to do so. The risk to his personal life, his health, and his stability would be too great while the rewards of increased fame and endless wealth just couldn't be as fulfilling as the first time around—been there, done that. I'm fairly confident that Springsteen's output from this point forward will be as self-fulfilling and iconoclastic as he wants it to be.



“Streets of Philadelphia” just might be “Exhibit A” evidence of Springsteen’s adjustment to post-superstar status. This song doesn’t contain a significant change in style, but it does seem to indicate a change in methods. It was released on Springsteen’s *Greatest Hits* album, which is auspicious mostly because of all the hit material that is absent. I know that after a five-album live set and the back-to-back release of his latest projects, a double CD of hits would seem commercially improbable, but it is simply not possible to overview Springsteen’s body of work with a single disk. Perhaps because of the recent spate of box sets and retrospectives, this collection comes off as flawed and sporadic, but at least it contained his best single in years.

A drummer friend of mine complains about the restrictive beat of “Streets of Philadelphia,” claiming that it is too monotonous for his taste, but I have to disagree. To me, the rhythm is as consistently regular as drawing a breath and exhaling, and yet as discomfiting as the knowledge that it isn’t going to continue like that forever.

It is possible to listen to this song and gloss over the references to AIDS, but it would be ignorant and selfish to do so. In fact, it was featured in Jonathan Demme’s award winning film about AIDS, *Philadelphia*. The monotonous rhythm causes us to focus on the lyrics, lyrics that tell the story of one man, an anonymous face on the streets of the city. A person who perhaps we once knew, who has loved ones and a family, with responsibilities to look after. A person who is suffering from a plague that has stolen his friends and robbed him of his health and his security—a person who is dying. Springsteen bestows dignity onto the character, but much more importantly, he recognizes him for the person who lies underneath the ravaging effects of this cruel disease, which tries to dehumanize him on a daily basis. Buried beneath the stigma, the misinformation, the ignorance, and the lies is somebody’s child, somebody’s lover, and somebody’s best friend; somebody who is forced to suffer the steady deterioration of his health and to live with the injustice of life every single minute that he remains alive.

Springsteen’s song isn’t heroic, but it is honest. In the past, his music embodied the spirit of rock and roll. Now, his recordings embody the spirit of humanity.





# AFTERWORD

**O**K, now that we've come this far, let's see if I can guess what you're thinking: "Where's the rest of the good stuff from the '80s and '90s?" Right? Well, you're not alone. There were times when I was compiling this book that the marked absence of specific recordings from the Top 40 would frustrate me, but never more so than in recent years. Scanning the lists of songs that did qualify as Top 40 singles in the past decade, I was appalled by the absence of several artists. Where was Joan Armatrading, Blue Nile, the English Beat, Peter Case, Aztec Camera, John Hiatt, Prefab Sprout, Paul Brady, Chris Whitley, Ice-T, Robyn Hitchcock, Lyle Lovett, or the Replacements? These artists had unique and popular styles, each of which struck me as profoundly commercial, yet none of them had a Top 40 hit. As for new acts, where was Soundgarden, or Nine Inch Nails, or Urge Overkill, or Grant Lee Buffalo, or Freedy Johnston, or Live, or De La Soul, or Cracker ('what the world needs now' is a Top 40 hit from these guys), to name just a few? Even more amazingly, where was Pearl Jam or Counting Crows? Is it possible to believe that "Mr. Jones," "Jeremy," and "Better Man" weren't Top 40 songs?

Because their charts have been consistently reliable over the years, *Billboard* is the most respected and most commonly used source for chart information. For this reason, all chart positions that appear in this book were extracted exclusively from *Billboard's* Hot 100 as represented in the books compiled by Joel Whitburn. Since this decade has begun, though, it appears as though entire genres are being overlooked by *Billboard's* pop charts. The situation was made all the more poignant when other charts, such as the Gavin Report, showed "Mr. Jones" to be the #1 song of the nation for the week of June 2, 1994 while *Billboard's* Hot 100 ignored the song entirely. How could a song be #1 on one chart and not exist on the other? Just who was right regarding the popularity of these artists?

At first, I was prepared to blame the out-of-balance circumstances on "Soundscan," which has been *Billboard's* method of gauging sales since 1991, but this didn't make sense. Soundscan is based upon actual point-of-purchase sales figures and monitored accountings of radio play, so how could it be inaccurate? Soundscan may have altered some aspects of determining a song's position (country artists in particular seem to have benefited from the new system), but it actually corrected some prior problems and, overall, appeared to be working fine. So then, what was to blame? As it turns out, the answer is painfully obvious: sales and popularity are not the same thing. "Mr. Jones" may very well have been the most popular song for one week in 1994, but it wasn't possible for it to be the best-selling single. In fact, it wasn't a single at all, but an album track that got extensive airplay. That's right, "Mr. Jones" was not a single. In an attempt to level the playing field, *Billboard* takes into account a song's format when

Scanning the lists of songs that did qualify as Top 40 singles in the past decade, I was appalled by the absence of several artists.



gauging its popularity, but since singles are no longer a viable means for many artists (or their labels) to showcase their work, the singles charts are no longer as relevant to the public as they once were.

While some charts, including *Billboard's* Hot 100, take airplay into account when gauging a song's popularity, it is senseless to list a song as a single if it isn't available apart from the album on which it appears (i.e., as a CD single, cassette, 12-inch single, or a traditional 7-inch 45). As a nation, America is distinct in using airplay to determine the chartability of songs. Most countries compile their charts from sales information only, feeling that it is only appropriate to chart what people are buying, not what the radio is trying to sell. To note the differences, *Billboard* now has three charts with overlapping information: the Hot 100 Sales chart (since 1984), the Hot 100 Airplay chart (also since 1984), and the good ol' Hot 100 Singles chart, which incorporates information from the other two (this is the chart that is referenced throughout this book, with the top 40 positions being the cut-off point for inclusion). In 1992, *Billboard* added the Top 40/Mainstream chart and the Top 40/Rhythm Crossover chart. All of this was in addition, of course, to such perennial favorites as the Country, R&B, Adult Contemporary, Latin, Album Rock, and Modern Rock charts. Just to be sure that the average person would not have a clue where to begin, they also added a separate Rap chart, as well as Dance/Club Play, Dance/Maxi-Singles Sales, Hot R&B Airplay, and Hot R&B Sales charts into the equation. That's a total of sixteen charts to gauge the popularity of specific songs. Confused? Me, too.

With so many subdivisions floating around, it has become increasingly difficult to discover good new material that is genuinely populist in nature. More than it has ever been in the past, the splintering of music trends makes common ground all but impossible, and it makes me paranoid trying to select contemporary songs with broad appeal. At first, I was ready to blame the dearth of truly excellent contemporary Top 40 selections on my own fascination with melody—a characteristic that generally seems to be less important on contemporary recordings than it was only ten years ago. Or, maybe I've been spending so much time and effort concentrating on the past while writing this book, that my attention lapsed on current trends. Maybe I'm just getting old—a frightening, and yet undeniable fact, one that might cause me to skew everything to the days of my own youth. Then it occurred to me that there could be a very simple (and less self-centered) explanation for all this.

What has been dubbed "Alternative" is really nothing more than a convenient means to categorize a very popular style, but these artists are poorly represented on the pop charts because they have a tendency to market themselves in an unconventional manner. Typically, alternative acts often display an aversion to overt commercialism and therefore avoid releasing mainstream singles. When they do release singles, they are often not representative of their best work. Pearl Jam did temporarily touch the upper reaches of the Top 40 with "Tremor Christ"/"Spin the Black Circle," but this is hardly representative of this band's best work. Soul Asylum moderated the edge that made them an exciting band and had a huge hit with "Runaway Train," but this wasn't an accurate portrayal of their true talents,





either. The Gin Blossoms had a few fine singles as well (“Found Out about You,” “Hey Jealousy,” “Until I Fall Away”), but nothing that struck me as innovative or earth-shattering. The Spin Doctors also had some great successes on the pop charts, but I couldn’t bring myself to include their efforts among the 1,000 best singles. Although the band sports the most well-greased rhythm section I’ve heard in years, it is totally wasted under monotonous moaning, such as that which constitutes the “melody” of “Two Princes.” As for the Top 40 singles by the Black Crowes, Janet Jackson, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Stone Temple Pilots, and Green Day, I’ll rationalize their absence by diplomatically stating that perhaps their best work is still ahead of them. Other than these and a few other exceptions, it can honestly be stated that much of the best new music hasn’t yet found a place on the pop charts.

Rap artists, on the other hand, thrive on the notion of hit singles. Whether they exist as extended remixes or in some other alternate format is irrelevant, so long as the songs exist in a radio-friendly mix and are available in some format other than on an album. This, along with its undeniable popularity, goes a long way toward explaining why there is such an extensive amount of rap music on the pop charts in comparison to other musical styles. Unfortunately, rap music often has an immediate impact that wears off and sounds dated after a few weeks. If a release doesn’t possess long-term significance, then its shelf-life (and hence, its historical value) is severely limited. So, although rap music is by far the most common musical style on the contemporary charts, it is not represented here to any large degree.

For all of these reasons, the pop charts now seem to be measuring something other than an adequate representation of popular tastes. Songs that play by the (outmoded) rules count, while those that don’t are shunted aside. The ludicrousness of these circumstances is exaggerated further by the unavailability of a commonly accepted singles format. The prevalence of the compact disc and the cassette’s tenacious ability to survive have rendered the very notion of a “single” ineffectual. It’s tough to admit it, but the genre is dying from neglect. The single is going away, and it probably won’t be coming back. Despite the music industry’s conservative unwillingness to abandon the format entirely, it remains unable to develop a format that is serviceable to individual song titles. How can you successfully market individual songs if no widely acceptable format exists for making individual songs available?

With 45 RPM singles becoming as irrelevant to contemporary culture as the eight-track tape, gauging sales of the long-playing formats and the airplay of “album tracks” (a term that lingers from the vinyl LP days but refers to anything that is included in a collection) is fast becoming the best means of determining the true popularity of any given song. For decades now, album tracks have offered

**The prevalence of the compact disc and the cassette’s tenacious ability to survive have rendered the very notion of a “single” ineffectual.**



a viable alternative to the single. Spurning singles as unsuitable for their “serious” material, album-oriented artists from the late ’60s considered the 45 as a crass and less artistic means of obtaining sales. In the ’70s, album tracks counteracted some of the overt sweetness that had begun to spoil the vitality of singles, and slowly long players overwhelmed the very concept of a singles chart.

By 1994, the difference between a single and an album track had become academic. Nowadays, as exemplified by the Counting Crows, it is difficult to determine what is and isn’t a single. The vinyl 45 is all but dead, and is substituted by a variety of other marketing methods, none of which possess the allure (or admittedly, the limitations) of the 7-inch record. Radio stations are programming from both compact discs and cassettes, so just because a station defines itself as a hit radio station no longer means that it plays only singles. The same is true for the consumer. With the ease of programmable CD players, there is little advantage to purchasing an individual track, which can cost fully half as much as an entire album. Without doubt, the long-playing compact disc (as well as its tenacious cousin, the cassette), has become the format of choice.

To know the whole story of contemporary popular music, you would, at the very least, also have to familiarize yourself with the songs that are available on the long-playing formats, particularly those that have never qualified as Top 40 songs. If there was a companion book that dealt specifically with album tracks that never made the Top 40, a more accurate understanding of current trends would result, since many of the historical trends that the Top 40 overlooked would be better represented. In other words, it would tell the other half of a vital story, rising in relevance over time while its populist counterpart fades away into oblivion....



# INDEX

- "#9 Dream," 469–470
- "1-2-3," 191–192
- "19th Nervous Breakdown," 209–210
- "96 Tears," 239–240

## A

- Abba
  - "Take a Chance on Me," 495–496
  - "Waterloo," 466–469
- Abbey Road*, 359–360, 361
- "ABC," 378–379
- "A Beautiful Morning," 307–308
- Aerosmith, 476–478
- Aftermath*, 216, 226
- "Against All Odds," 532–534
- "A Hard Day's Night," 135–136
- A Hard Day's Night* (album), 135, 141
- "Ain't Got No Home," 15–16
- "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," 387
- "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," 308–309
- "Ain't Nothin' You Can Do," 126–127
- "Ain't That a Shame," 3–4
- "Ain't Tbo Proud to Beg," 222–223
- airplay, 618
- album rock, 323, 528
- albums, American contrasted with English, 226
- Alexander, Arthur, 82–83
- "Alfie," 271
- "A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You," 261–262
- "A Little Bitty Tear," 38
- Alive and Kicking, 386
- "All Along the Watchtower," 326–328
- "All Around the World," 10
- Allen, Robert, 21
- Allison, Jerry, 23, 27
- Allman, Duane, 445
- All Stars. *See* Jr. Walker and the All Stars
- "All the Way," 25–26, 30
- "All You Need Is Love," 277–279
- "Along Came Jones," 34
- "A Lover's Concerto," 192–193
- "A Lover's Question," 38–40
- Alpert, Herb
  - "A Taste of Honey," 194–195
  - "This Guy's In Love With You," 309–310
- alternative music, 598, 618
- American Bandstand*, 29, 72
- American culture, fifties and sixties, 221

- American dream, 531–532
- "American Pie," 27
- "A Natural Woman [You Make Me Feel Like]," 289–290
- "And I Love Her," 141
- "Angel of the Morning," 316–317
- Animals
  - formation of band, 162
  - songs
    - "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," 162–163
    - "House of the Rising Sun," 138–139
    - "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," 186
- Another Side of Bob Dylan*, 170
- "Anyone Who Had a Heart," 115–116
- Appel, Mike, 541
- A&R (artist and repertoire) position, 14
- "Are You Lonesome Tonight?," 66–67
- Argent, Rod, 340–341
- Arkin, Alan, 15
- Armstrong, Louis, 51
  - biographical information, 572
  - impact on twentieth-century music, 570–571
  - "What a Wonderful World," 570–573
- "A Rockin' Good Way," 44
- "Around and Around," 33
- Asher, Tony, 233
- Ashford, Nickolas, 309, 387
- "A Taste of Honey," 194–195
- Athens, Georgia, 592
- Australia, British Invasion and, 267–268
- Avakian, George, 20
- "A Whiter Shade of Pale," 279–280
- Axton, Estelle, 86–87
- Axton, Mae, 8

## B

- "Baby, I Need Your Loving," 139–140
- "Baby Blue," 437–438
- "Baby I Love You," 116–117
- "Baby Love," 148
- "Baby [You've Got What It Takes]," 44
- Bacharach, Burt, 95–96, 116. *See also* Bacharach-David songwriting team
- Bacharach-David songwriting team, 130, 271, 310
- "Back in My Arms Again," 165–166
- "Backstabbers," 448–449
- Badfinger
  - and the Beatles, 393–394, 425



- demise of group, 426
- songs
- "Baby Blue," 437–438
  - "Day After Day," 424–426
  - "No Matter What," 393–394
- "Bad Moon Rising," 347–348
- Baerwald, David, 559
- "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," 35–36
- Ballard, Florence, 245–247. *See also* Supremes
- "Ball of Confusion," 384–385
- "Banana Boat [Day-O]," 14–15
- Band, The, 367–369
- Band-Aid, 534
- "Band of Gold," 380–381
- bands, 198, 525, 552–553, 553
- "Bang a Gong [Get it On]," 428–429
- Barri, Steve, 275–276
- Barry, Jeff, 117, 366
- Barry, Len, 191–192
- Barry-Greenwich songwriting team, 117, 366
- Bartholomew, Dave, 16
- Battle of the Bands*, 330
- Beach Boys
- biographical information, 108
  - impact of British Invasion on, 134
  - myth *vs.* reality, 234, 244
  - nerdy image, 179
  - songs
    - "California Girls," 179–180
    - "Don't Worry Baby," 133–134
    - "God Only Knows," 234–235
    - "Good Vibrations," 244–245
    - "In My Room," 107–109
    - "Sloop John B," 213–214
    - "Wouldn't It Be Nice," 233–234
- beat groups, 114, 132
- beat-heavy funk, 498–499
- Beatles. *See also* Lennon, John; McCartney, Paul
- albums, 231, 345–346, 359–360, 361
  - America's obsession with, 135
  - break with rhythm and blues, 157
  - compared/contrasted with other groups
    - Badfinger, 393–394
    - Beach Boys, 218
    - Rolling Stones, 173
  - explanations for popularity of, 115, 121
  - films/movies, 176–177, 349
  - image problems, 230–231
  - impact on pop music, 196
  - last hurrah, 359
  - loss of innocence, 320–321
  - meeting with the Supremes, 166
  - and pop music charts, 118–119, 121–122, 135
  - public appearances, 135, 210, 230–231
  - songs
    - "A Hard Day's Night," 135–136
    - "All You Need Is Love," 277–279
    - "And I Love Her," 141
    - "Can't Buy Me Love," 121–122
    - "Come Together," 359–360
    - "Day Tripper," 196–197
    - "Don't Let Me Down," 346–347
    - "Eight Days a Week," 157
    - "Eleanor Rigby," 231–232
    - "Get Back," 345–346
    - "Hello Goodbye," 293–294
    - "Help!," 176–177
    - "Hey, Jude," 319–321
    - "I Feel Fine," 149–150
    - "I'll Cry Instead," 141–142
    - "I Saw Her Standing There," 114–115
    - "I Want to Hold Your Hand," 113–114
    - "Lady Madonna," 305–306
    - "Let It Be," 377–378
    - "Nowhere Man," 210
    - "Paperback Writer," 217–218
    - "Penny Lane," 257–258
    - "Please Please Me," 117–119
    - "Rain," 218–219
    - "Revolution," 321–322
    - "She's a Woman," 150–151
    - "Something," 360–361
    - "Strawberry Fields Forever," 259–260
    - "Thank You Girl," 129
    - "The Ballad of John and Yoko," 349–350
    - "Ticket to Ride," 165
    - "We Can Work It Out," 195–186
    - "Yellow Submarine," 230–231
    - "Yesterday," 186–188
  - songs not on Top 40, 142, 197
  - songwriting, 114, 129, 187
  - transition to rock music, 258
  - and Yoko Ono, 349–350
- Beatles vs. the Four Seasons*, 94
- Beaumont, Jimmy, 45
- "Beautiful Morning," 307–308
- bebop, 50
- "Because," 139
- Beck, Jeff, 453
- Becker, Walter, 460–461. *See also* Steely Dan
- Bee Gees
- albums, 344–345
  - biographical information, 291–292
  - course of career, 324
  - disco phase, 281–282
  - songs



- "First of May," 343–345
  - "I've Gotta Get a Message to You," 323–324
  - "[The Lights Went Out In] Massachusetts," 291–292
  - "To Love Somebody," 281–282
  - "Words," 304
- Beetlejuice*, 15
- "Behind Blue Eyes," 426–428
- "Bells," 39
- Belmonts, 75
- "Be My Baby," 104–106
- Bennett, Tony
  - description of singing style, 89–90
  - longstanding popularity of, 103
  - songs
    - "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," 89–90
    - "The Good Life," 103
- Bennett, Veronica. *See* Ronettes
- Benson, Renaldo "Obie." *See* Four Tops
- Benton, Brook
  - biographical information, 44
  - songs
    - "It's Just a Matter of Time," 44
    - "Rainy Night in Georgia," 375
- "Bernadette," 262–264
- Berry, Chuck
  - appeal to teenagers, 18
  - live performances, 19
  - and rock-and-roll revolution, 5
  - songs
    - "Johnny B. Goode," 32–33
    - "Maybelline," 4–5
    - "School Day," 18–19
- Best of the Bee Gees*, 344
- "Beyond the Sea," 56–57
- big band music, 49
- Big Bopper, 43
- Big Brother and the Holding Company, 325
- Billboard* charts, 617–618
- "Billie Jean," 521–523
- "Bird Dog," 20
- bird names, for doo-wop groups, 48
- Birdsong, Cindy, 246
- Black, Bill, 10
- Black, Cilla, 116
- "Black Dog," 429–430
- Black Rock Coalition, 573, 574
- black vocal groups, 603
- Blackwell, Bumps, 6, 8, 24
- Blackwell, Otis, 28
- Bland, Bobby "Blue," 126–127
- "Blueberry Hill," 17
- "Blue Eyes," 519–520
- "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," 479–480
- "Blue Monday," 17
- blues
  - in British music scene, 188
  - country, 50
  - London's obsession with, 443–444
  - queen of, 46
- Blues Brothers*, 314–315
- Blues Incorporated, 188, 189
- Blunstone, Colin, 341
- Bobby Darin, 56–57
- Bolan, Marc, 428–429
- Bonds, Gary "U.S.," 65–66
- Bonham, John, 430
- Bono, 600–602
- Bono, Sonny, 125, 174–175
- Bookends*, 312
- Booker T. and the MG's, 86–88
- Boone, Pat, 3
  - "Long Tall Sally," 8–9
  - "Tutti Frutti," 6–7
- "Born in the U.S.A.," 540–543
- "Born to Be Wild," 317–318
- "Born to Run," 480–482
- Bowie, David, 458–459
- "Boxer," 342–343
- Box Tops
  - "Cry Like a Baby," 304–305
  - "The Letter," 282–283
- Boyce, Tommy, 239
- Boyce and Hart, 239
- "Boys of Summer," 545–547
- Boyz II Men, 603–605
- Bradley, Owen, 17–18, 74
- Brando, Marlon, 38
- "Brass in Pocket," 511–512
- Braxton, Toni, 610–612
- "Break It to Me Gently," 79–80
- "Breathe Again," 610–612
- "Bring It on Home to Me," 85
- British Invasion, 94, 123, 166, 185, 391
  - in Australia, 267–268
- British music scene, 188
- Brown, James
  - biographical information, 145
  - multiple styles of, 216–217
  - rock-and-roll revue, 181–182
  - songs
    - "I Got You [I Feel Good]," 195
    - "It's a Man's Man's Man's Man's World," 216–217
    - "Night Train," 84–85
    - "Out of Sight," 145–146





- "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," 181-182  
 "Prisoner of Love," 101-102  
 Brown, Michael, 242  
 "Brown-Eyed Girl," 283-284  
 "Brown-Eyed Handsome Man," 33  
 "Brown Sugar," 403-404  
 Bryant, Al. *See* Temptations  
 Bryant, Boudleaux and Felice, 20  
 bubblegum music, 334-335  
 Buckingham, 252-253  
 Buffalo Springfield, 255-256  
 "Build Me Up Buttercup," 338-339  
 Burdon, Eric, 138, 186  
 Burke, Johnny, 52  
 "Bus Stop," 232-233  
 "But I Do," 15  
 Butler, Jerry, 34-35  
 "Bye Bye Love," 19-20  
 Byrds  
     "Eight Miles High," 214-215  
     "Mr. Tambourine Man," 171-172  
 Byrne, David, 502
- ## C
- Cahn, Sammy, 26  
 California beach culture, 107-108  
 "California Girls," 179-180  
 "Call Me [Come Back Home]," 458  
*Calypso*, 15  
 Campbell, Glen  
     songs  
         "By the Time I Get to Phoenix," 292-293  
         "Wichita Lineman," 332-333  
     television appearances, 293, 333  
 "Candida," 387-388  
 "Can I Get a Witness," 106-107  
 "Can't Buy Me Love," 121-122  
 "Can't Get Used to Losing You," 98-99  
 "Can't Take My Eyes Off of You," 273  
 "Can't You See That She's Mine," 130-131  
 Capehart, Jerry, 38, 43  
 Capitol Records  
     and the Beach Boys, 214  
     and Frank Sinatra, 26, 29-30  
 Carey, Mariah, 587-590  
 "Carrie-Anne," 280-281  
 Cash, Johnny  
     "I Guess Things Happen That Way," 35-36  
     "I Walk the Line," 13  
 Cassotto, Walden Roberto. *See* Darin, Bobby  
 Castelluccio, Francis. *See* Valli, Frankie  
 "Cathy's Clown," 59-60  
 CBGB, 501  
 10 C.C., 471-472  
 CDs, impact on recording industry, 581-582, 620  
 "Chain of Fools," 295-296  
 "Chances Are," 21  
 Charles, Ray  
     biographical information, 64-65  
     controversy over style, 65  
     influence on popular music, 50  
     songs  
         "Georgia on My Mind," 64-65  
         "I Can't Stop Loving You," 83  
         "Ruby," 70-71  
         "What'd I Say," 49-50  
         "You Don't Know Me," 85-86  
 "Charlie Brown," 34  
 charts. *See* pop music charts; Top 40  
 Cher, 173-175, 174-175  
 Chess, Leonard, 5  
 Chiffons  
     "He's So Fine," 97-98  
     "One Fine Day," 102-103  
 Chi-Lites  
     "Oh Girl," 435-436  
 Chilton, Alex, 305  
 Chords, 45  
 Christie, Lou  
     "I'm Gonna Make You Mine," 359  
     "Lightning Strikes," 203  
 Clanton, Jimmy, 46  
 Clapton, Eric, 444-445  
 Clark, Dave. *See* Dave Clark Five  
 Clark, Dick, 29, 137  
 Clark, Petula  
     biographical information, 153  
     film career, 275  
     songs  
         "Don't Sleep in the Subway," 274-275  
         "Downtown," 153-154  
         "I Couldn't Live Without Your Love," 228-229  
 Clash, 14  
 Clayton, Adam, 562  
 Clement, Jack, 35, 36  
 Cline, Patsy  
     biographical information, 17  
     death in plane crash, 79  
     impact on country music, 17  
     songs  
         "Crazy," 78-79  
         "I Fall to Pieces," 74-75  
         "She's Got You," 81-82  
         "Walkin' After Midnight," 17-18



- Clinton, George, 499–500
- Clovers, 31
- Clowns, 46
- club scene, New York, 501
- “C’mon Everybody,” 43–44
- Coasters, 33–34
- Cobain, Kurt, 598–599
- Cobb, Ed, 222
- Cochran, Eddie
  - “C’mon Everybody,” 43–44
  - “Summertime Blues,” 37–38
- Cochran, Hank, 37
- Cochran Brothers, 37
- Cocker, Joe, 434–435
- Coleman, Cy, 30
- Collins, Dave and Ansell, 406–407
- Collins, Phil, 532–534
- “Come On, Let’s Go,” 43
- “Come Together,” 359–360
- commercialization of Top 40, 598
- Commodores, 548–550
- communism, 595–596
- compact disc, impact on recording industry, 581–582, 620
- contemporary music, lack of innovation in, 610–611
- Contours, 88–89
- Cook, Dale, 24
- Cooke, L. C., 24
- Cooke, Sam, 24
  - biographical information, 23–24, 159–160
  - description of singing style, 60–61
  - songs
    - “A Change is Gonna Come,” 159–160
    - “Bring It on Home to Me,” 85
    - “Wonderful World,” 60–61
    - “You Send Me,” 23–24
- Cooper, Alice, 441–443
- Corporation songwriting team, 383–384, 390
- Corsairs, 80–81
- Cougar, John, 530–532
- Count Five, 240–242
- country music, 17, 479
- country rock, 368–369
- Cowsills, 288–289
- “Crazy for You,” 547–548
- “Crazy” (Patsy Cline), 78–79
- “Crazy” (Seal), 597–598
- Creedence Clearwater Revival
  - group history, 364–365, 440
  - songs
    - “Bad Moon Rising,” 347–348
    - “Down on the Corner,” 364–365
    - “Fortunate Son,” 365–366
    - “Green River,” 353–354
    - “Proud Mary,” 339–340
    - “Someday Never Comes,” 439–441
    - “Up Around the Bend,” 381–382
    - “Who’ll Stop the Rain,” 375–376
- Crewcuts, 44
- Crewe, Bob, 193
- Crickets, The, 22–23. *See also* Holly, Buddy
- “Crimson and Clover,” 334–335
- Crowded House, 560–562
- Crudup, Arthur, 9
- “Cruisin,” 507–508
- “Crying,” 75
- “Crying in the Chapel,” 31
- “Cry Like a Baby,” 304–305
- Crystals
  - “Da Doo Ron Ron [When He Walked Me Home],” 100–101
  - “He’s a Rebel,” 90–91
  - “Cult of Personality,” 573–575
- Curtis, King, 33

## D

- “Da Doo Ron Ron [When He Walked Me Home],” 100–101
- dance music, 77, 162, 506, 529
- “Dancing in the Dark,” 537–538
- “Dancing in the Street,” 143–144
- “Dandelion,” 287–288
- “Dangling Conversation,” 235–236
- D’Arby, Terence Trent, 568–570
- Darin, Bobby, 51
  - “Beyond the Sea,” 56–57
  - “Mack the Knife,” 50–51
- “Dark Side of the Moon,” 21
- “Darling Be Home Soon,” 256–257
- Dave Clark Five
  - biographical information, 130–131
  - songs
    - “Because,” 139
    - “Can’t You See That She’s Mine,” 130–131
    - “Glad All Over,” 123
- David, Hal, 95, 116. *See also* Bacharach-David songwriting team
- David and David, 559–560
- Davies, Dave and Ray. *See* Kinks
- Davis, Billy, 42
- Davis, Spencer, 253–254
- Dawes, Charles, 36
- Dawn, 387–388
- “Day After Day,” 424–426



- "Daydream Believer," 290  
 "Day Tripper," 196-197  
 "Deacon Blues," 496-498  
 Dekker, Desmond, 350-352  
 Derek and the Dominos, 443-445  
 Diamond, Neil  
     and the Monkees, 247-248  
     songs  
         "Holly Holly," 366-367  
         "I Am, I Said," 402-403  
     as songwriter, 366-367  
 Diamonds, 44  
 Dick Jacobs Orchestra, 42  
 Dion, 75-76  
 "Dirty Water," 221-222  
 disco, 281-282, 462, 487-488, 498  
 dissing, 607  
 Distant, 123-124  
 "Dock of the Bay," 302-303  
 "Doggin' Around," 58-59  
 Dolenz, Mickey. *See* Monkees  
 "Domino," 395-396  
 Domino, Fats, 16  
     biographical information, 16  
     songs  
         "Ain't That a Shame," 3-4  
         "I'm Walkin'," 16-17  
         "Walkin' To New Orleans," 62  
 Dominoes, 38, 39, 42  
 "Donna," 43  
 "Don't Be Cruel," 9, 11-13  
 "Don't Dream It's Over," 560-562  
 "Don't Forget to Dance," 527-528  
 "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood," 162-163  
 "Don't Let Me Down," 346-347  
 "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying," 131-132  
 "Don't Make Me Over," 95-96  
 "Don't Play That Song," 388-389  
 "Don't Sleep in the Subway," 274-275  
 "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," 506-507  
 "Don't Worry Baby," 133-134  
 "Don't You Just Know It," 46  
 "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," 464  
 Doobie Brothers, 503-505  
 Doors, 271-273  
 doo-wop, 31, 44-45, 48, 50, 192-193, 484  
 "Double Barrel," 406-407  
 "Down on the Corner," 364-365  
 "Downtown," 153-154  
 "Do You Believe in Magic," 185-186  
 "Do You Know What I Mean," 413-414  
 "Do You Love Me," 88-89  
 Dozier, Lamont. *See* Holland-Dozier-Holland  
 songwriting team  
 Dramatics, 406  
 "Dream Lover," 51  
 "Drift Away," 457-458  
 Drifters, 39, 71-72  
     "On Broadway," 99-100  
     "Save the Last Dance for Me," 63  
     "This Magic Moment," 57-58  
     "Under the Boardwalk," 137-138  
     "Up on the Roof," 92-93  
 drugs  
     impact on popular music, 241-242, 259, 260  
     references to, in lyrics, 215  
 drummers, 347  
 Dunden, Tommy, 8  
 Dylan, Bob  
     albums, 356  
     analysis of lyrics, 170-171  
     biographical information, 169  
     contradictory nature of, 178-179  
     impact on popular music, 178-179  
     songs  
         "Lay Lady Lay," 356-357  
         "Like a Rolling Stone," 177-179  
         "Mr. Tambourine Man," 171  
         "Subterranean Homesick Blues," 169-171

## E

- Eagles, 493-494, 545-546  
     "Hotel California," 492-495  
 Earth, Wind, & Fire, 475-476  
 Easybeats, 267-268  
 Edwards, Dennis, 300  
 Edwards, Mike, 596-597  
 Edwards, Sherman, 21  
 Edwards, Tommy, 36  
 "Eight Days a Week," 157  
 "Eight Miles High," 214-215  
 "Eleanor Rigby," 231-232  
 electric guitars, 165, 171  
 electronic bands, 553  
 "Elenore," 330-331  
 Elliot, Cass. *See* Mamas and Papas  
 "El Paso," 14  
 Elvis Presley  
     biographical information, 12-13  
     double-sided hits, 9  
     impact on rock and roll, 12  
     as interpretive singer, 9  
     as rhythm and blues singer, 12  
     songs



- "Don't Be Cruel," 9, 11–13  
 "Heartbreak Hotel," 7–8  
 "Hound Dog," 9  
 "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," 9  
 "My Baby Left Me," 9–10  
 "That's All Right, Mama," 9  
 television appearances, 13  
 "End of the Road," 603–605  
 English bands, 552–553  
 English Invasion. *See* British Invasion  
 En Vogue, 613  
 Ertegun, Ahmet, 39, 51  
 ethnic music, 14  
 European regional bands, 552–553  
 Eurovision Song Contest, 466–467  
 Eurythmics, 553–555  
 Evans, Dave, 562  
 Everly Brothers  
     biographical information, 59–60  
     lyrics of, 19–20  
     songs  
         "Bye Bye Love," 19–20  
         "Cathy's Clown," 59–60  
 "Everybody is a Star," 374–375  
 "Everybody's Talkin'," 357–358  
 "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," 551–553  
 "Every Breath You Take," 525  
 "Everyday People," 338  
 "Every Hour," 6  
 "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic," 514–517
- F**
- Faces, 431–432  
 Fagen, Donald, 459–461. *See also* Steely Dan  
 Fakir, Abdul "Duke." *See* Four Tops  
 Falcons, 183  
 "Family Affair," 418  
 Famous Flames, 145  
 fashion, American rhythm and blues' impact on, 156  
 "Fat Man, The," 17  
 Fats Domino. *See* Domino, Fats  
 Feather, Leonard, 47  
 feedback, 149  
 "Feelin' Alright," 434–435  
 "Ferry Cross the Mersey," 157–158  
 "Fever," 10–11  
 Finn, Neil and Tim, 560–562  
 "First of May," 343–345  
 Flames, 145  
 Flamingos, 48  
 Fleetwood, Mick, 482–484  
 Fleetwood Mac, 482–484  
 Floyd, Pink, 21  
 FM radio, 225  
 Fogerty, John, 339–340, 365–366, 375–376, 439–441  
 folk music, 169–170  
 Fontana, D. J., 10  
 Ford, Frankie, 45–46  
 Foreigner, 543–545  
 "Fortunate Son," 365–366  
 "For What It's Worth," 255–256  
 "For Your Precious Love," 34–35  
 Foundations, 338–339  
 Four Seasons, 273  
     "Let's Hang On!," 193–194  
     "Walk Like a Man," 93–94  
     "Working My Way Back to You," 207–208  
 Four Tops  
     history of group, 140  
     producers and writers for, 237–238  
     songs  
         "Baby, I Need Your Loving," 139–140  
         "Bernadette," 262–264  
         "I Can't Help Myself (Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch), 167  
         "It's the Same Old Song," 180–181  
         "Reach Out I'll Be There," 237–238  
         "Standing in the Shadows of Love," 249–250  
 Fowler, Wally, 17  
 "Framed," 33  
 Franklin, Aretha  
     albums, 388–389  
     appearance in *The Blues Brothers*, 314–315  
     biographical information, 264–266  
     qualities of greatness, 306  
     songs  
         "A Natural Woman [You Make Me Feel Like]," 289–290  
         "Chain of Fools," 295–296  
         "Don't Play That Song," 388–389  
         "I Never Loved a Man [The Way I Love You]," 264–266  
         "I Say a Little Prayer," 318–319  
         "Respect," 251–252, 268–269  
         "Rock Steady," 410  
         "[Sweet Sweet Baby] Since You've Been Gone," 306–307  
         "Think," 314–315  
         "Until You Come Back to Me [That's What I'm Gonna Do]," 461–462  
         "You're All I Need to Get By," 400  
 Franklin, Melvin. *See* Temptations  
 Fratton, Russ, 5  
 Freed, Alan, 5, 45



"Friday on My Mind," 267–268  
 funk, 475  
 Funkadelic, 498–500  
 Fuqua, Harvey, 106–107, 161–162, 520

## G

- Gabriel, Peter, 557–559  
 Gamble, Kenny, 448–449  
 gangsta rap, 606–607  
 Ganser, Maryann and Margie. *See* Shangri-Las  
 garage rock, 221–222, 500  
 Garfunkel, Art. *See* Simon and Garfunkel  
 Garner, Erroll, 52  
 Gaudio, Bob, 273  
 Gaye, Marvin  
   biographical information, 106–107  
   death of, 520–521  
   hit streak, 152  
   producers for, 331  
   songs  
     "Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing," 308–309  
     "Can I Get a Witness," 106–107  
     "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You," 152–153  
     "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," 331–332  
     "Inner City Blues [Make Me Wanna Holler],"  
       417–418  
     "Sexual Healing," 520–521  
     "What's Going On," 398–400  
 Geldof, Bob, 534  
 Genesis, 557  
 "Georgia on My Mind," 64–65  
 Gerry and the Pacemakers  
   impact of the Beatles on, 157–158  
   songs  
     "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying," 131–132  
     "Ferry Cross the Mersey," 157–158  
 "Get a Job," 28–29  
 "Get Back," 345–346  
 "Get Off Of My Cloud," 188–190  
 Getz, Stan, 132–133  
*Ghost in the Machine*, 516–517  
 Gibbs, Barry, Robin, and Maurice. *See* Bee Gees  
 Gilberto, Astrud, 132–133  
 Gillespie, Dizzy, 10  
 "Gimme Some Lovin'," 253–254  
*Girl Can't Help It, The*, 38  
 "Girl from Ipanema," 132–133  
 girl groups, 68, 76, 97, 144, 156, 192–193, 511  
 "Give Him a Great Big Kiss," 156–157  
 "Glad All Over," 123  
 Gladiolas, 45  
 "God Only Knows," 234–235  
 "Good Golly Miss Molly," 30–31  
 "Good Life," 103  
 "Good Vibrations," 244–245  
 Gordy, Berry  
   and Diana Ross, 246–247  
   and Jackie Wilson, 42  
   and the Jackson 5, 370  
   and Jr. Walker and the All Stars, 161–162  
   and Marvin Gaye, 308–309  
   method of assigning writers and producers, 154  
   and the Miracles, 69–70  
   and the Supremes, 136–137  
   and the Temptations, 123–125, 154  
 gospel music, 24, 38, 39, 50, 421. *See also* soul music  
 "Got a Job," 29  
 "Got to Be There," 418–419  
 Gouldman, Graham, 207  
 Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 498  
 Grand Ole Opry, 17  
 Grass Roots  
   "Let's Live for Today," 275–276  
   "Midnight Confessions," 322–23  
   "Temptation Eyes," 397–398  
 Gray, Dobie  
   "Drift Away," 457–458  
   "The 'In' Crowd," 155–156  
 "Great Balls of Fire," 27–28  
 Great Hits  
   "1999" (Prince), 527  
   "Ain't Gonna Bump No More [With No Big Fat  
     Woman]" (Joe Tex), 492  
   "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" (Marvin Gaye  
     and Tammi Terrell), 277  
   "Ain't No Sunshine" (Bill Withers), 411  
   "All Day Music" (War), 414  
   "All I Have to Do is Dream" (Everly Brothers), 31  
   "All I Want" (Toad the Wet Sprocket), 603  
   "All Shook Up" (Elvis Presley), 18  
   "All the Young Dudes" (Mott the Hoople), 451  
   "Almost Grown" (Chuck Berry), 46  
   "Another Day" (Paul McCartney), 400  
   "Another Park, Another Sunday" (Doobie  
     Brothers), 466  
   "Another Saturday Night" (Sam Cooke), 101  
   "Any Day Now [My Wild Beautiful Bird]" (Chuck  
     Jackson), 85  
   "A Place in the Sun" (Stevie Wonder), 246  
   "Atlantis" (Donovan), 342  
   "At My Front Door" (El Dorados), 5  
   "At the Hop" (Danny and the Juniors), 27  
   "Baby, I Love You" (Aretha Franklin), 283  
   "Baby, I'm Yours" (Barbara Lewis), 175





- "Baby, It's You" (Shirelles), 81  
 "Baby You're a Rich Man" (Beatles), 278  
 "Back in the USA" (Chuck Berry), 50  
 "Back on the Chain Gang" (Pretenders), 521  
 "Baker Street" (Gerry Rafferty), 495  
 "Band on the Run" (Paul McCartney/Wings), 464  
 "Battle of New Orleans" (Johnny Horton), 46  
 "Be Bop a Lula" (Gene Vincent), 9  
 "Because the Night" (Patti Smith Group), 492  
 "Being with You" (Smokey Robinson), 515  
 "Big Girls Don't Cry" (Four Seasons), 91  
 "Big Time" (Peter Gabriel), 560  
 "Black Friday" (Steely Dan), 472  
 "Black Magic Woman" (Santana), 393  
 "Blueberry Hill" (Fats Domino), 13  
 "Blue Jean" (David Bowie), 539  
 "Blue Monday" (Fats Domino), 15  
 "Blue Suede Shoes" (Carl Perkins), 7  
 "Bohemian Rhapsody" (Queen), 483  
 "Boogie on Reggae Woman" (Stevie Wonder), 466  
 "Borderline" (Madonna), 537  
 "Bridge Over Troubled Water" (Aretha Franklin), 402  
 "Bridge Over Troubled Water" (Simon and Garfunkel), 376  
 "Brilliant Disguise" (Bruce Springsteen), 567  
 "Buffalo Stance" (Nenah Cherry), 573  
 "Burning Down the House" (Talking Heads), 527  
 "Burnin' Love" (Elvis Presley), 448  
 "Busted" (Ray Charles), 105  
 "California Dreamin'" (Mamas and Papas), 207  
 "Call Me" (Aretha Franklin), 377  
 "Call Me" (Chris Montez), 207  
 "Can't Let Go" (Mariah Carey), 599  
 "Carol" (Chuck Berry), 37  
 "Cast Your Fate to the Wind" (Vince Guaraldi Trio), 96  
 "Catch Us If You Can" (Dave Clark Five), 185  
 "Cat's In the Cradle" (Harry Chapin), 466  
 "Chain Gang" (Sam Cooke), 63  
 "Chances Are" (Johnny Mathis), 24  
 "Chantilly Lace" (Big Bopper), 37  
 "China Groove" (Doobie Brothers), 460  
 "Chiquita" (Abba), 507  
 "City of New Orleans" (Arlo Guthrie), 448  
 "Clean-Up Woman" (Betty Wright), 426  
 "Cold Sweat (Part 1)" (James Brown), 283  
 "Come A Little Bit Closer" (Jay and the Americans), 148  
 "Come Dancing" (Kinks), 525  
 "Come Go With Me" (Dell-Vikings), 16  
 "Come See About Me" (Supremes), 149  
 "Corinna, Corinna" (Ray Peterson), 71  
 "Cracklin' Rosie" (Neil Diamond), 387  
 "Cream" (Prince), 599  
 "Cruel to Be Kind" (Nick Lowe and his Cowboy Outfit), 504  
 "Cry Baby" (Garnet Mimms/Enchanters), 105  
 "Cry for Help" (Rick Astley), 592  
 "Crying Time" (Ray Charles), 205  
 "Cry Me a River" (Joe Cocker), 392  
 "Crystal Blue Persuasion" (Tommy James and the Shondells), 349  
 "Cupid" (Sam Cooke), 74  
 "Damn, I Wish I Was Your Lover" (Sophie B. Hawkins), 602  
 "Dance to the Music" (Sly and the Family Stone), 306  
 "Daniel" (Elton John), 460  
 "Daydream" (Lovin' Spoonful), 209  
 "Days of Wine and Roses" (Andy Williams), 99  
 "Dedicated Follower of Fashion" (Kinks), 223  
 "Dedicated to the One I Love" (Mamas and Papas), 262  
 "De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da" (Police), 513  
 "Devil With a Blue Dress On/Good Golly Miss Molly" (Mitch Ryder/Detroit Wheels), 244  
 "Devoted to You" (Everly Brothers), 37  
 "Different Drum" (Linda Ronstadt), 295  
 "Disappear" (Inxs), 590  
 "Doctor My Eyes" (Jackson Browne), 437  
 "Do It Again" (Steely Dan), 453  
 "Don't Bring Me Down" (Eric Burdon and the Animals), 223  
 "Don't Get Me Wrong" (Pretenders), 560  
 "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" (Elton John), 466  
 "Don't Stand So Close To Me" (Police), 513  
 "Down in the Boondocks" (B.J. Royal), 175  
 "Drive" (Cars), 539  
 "Duke of Earl" (Gene Chandler), 80  
 "Earth Angel" (Penguins), 3  
 "Eighteen" (Alice Cooper), 400  
 "End of the Innocence" (Don Henley), 573  
 "End of the World" (Skeeter Davis), 96  
 "Everyday I Write the Book" (Elvis Costello), 529  
 "Everybody Hurts" (R.E.M.), 610  
 "Everybody Plays the Fool" (Main Ingredient), 448  
 "Fantastic Voyage" (Coolio), 614  
 "Father Figure" (George Michael), 568  
 "Feelin' Stronger Every Day" (Chicago), 460  
 "Fernando" (Abba), 487  
 "Five O'Clock World" (Vogues), 197  
 "FM [No Static At All]" (Steely Dan), 496  
 "Fooled Around and Fell in Love" (Elvin Bishop), 483



- "Free Man in Paris" (Joni Mitchell), 466  
"Fun, Fun, Fun" (Beach Boys), 119  
"Funky Broadway" (Wilson Pickett), 283  
"Funky Stuff" (Kool and the Gang), 460  
"Future's So Bright I Gotta Wear Shades" (Timbuk 3), 560  
"Games People Play" (Joe South), 341  
"Get Ready" (Temptations), 212  
"Get Together" (Youngbloods), 356  
"Get Up I Feel Like Being a Sex Machine" (James Brown), 389  
"Give It to Me Baby" (Rick James), 515  
"Gloria" (Shadows of Knight), 215  
"Glory Days" (Bruce Springsteen), 558  
"Go All the Way" (Raspberries), 447  
"Goodbye Stranger" (Supertramp), 504  
"Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" (Elton John), 460  
"Good Hearted Woman" (Waylon and Willie), 483  
"Good Lovin'" (Young Rascals), 209  
"Good Times" (Chic), 504  
"Got to Get You Into My Life" (Beatles), 486  
"Go Your Own Way" (Fleetwood Mac), 491  
"Grazing in the Grass" (Friends of Distinction), 342  
"Grazing in the Grass" (Hugh Masakela), 315  
"Great Pretender" (Platters), 5  
"Have You Ever Seen the Rain" (Creedence Clearwater Revival), 397  
"Have You Seen Her?" (Chi-Lites), 417  
"Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the Shadow" (Rolling Stones), 244  
"Having a Party" (Sam Cooke), 85  
"Heart of Glass" (Blondie), 504  
"Heart of Gold" (Neil Young), 434  
"Hello, It's Me" (Todd Rundgren), 460  
"Help Me, Rhonda" (Beach Boys), 165  
"Here Comes That Rainy Day Feeling Again" (Fortunes), 405  
"Here Comes the Night" (Them), 172  
"Hey Nineteen" (Steely Dan), 513  
"Hitch Hike" (Marvin Gaye), 98  
"Hit the Road Jack" (Ray Charles), 75  
"Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me" (Mel Carter), 175  
"Hold My Hand" (Hootie & the Blowfish), 614  
"Hold On I'm Comin'" (Sam and Dave), 223  
"Hold What You've Got" (Joe Tex), 154  
"Homeward Bound" (Simon and Garfunkel), 207  
"Honky Tonk" (Bill Doggett), 11  
"Hound Dog" (Elvis Presley), 11  
"How Can You Mend a Broken Heart" (Bee Gees), 406  
"Human Touch" (Bruce Springsteen), 600  
"Hungry Heart" (Bruce Springsteen), 513  
"I Am a Rock" (Simon and Garfunkel), 217  
"I Can Help" (Billy Swan), 466  
"I Can Never Go Home Anymore" (Shangri-Las), 196  
"I Can See Clearly Now" (Johnny Nash), 450  
"I Can't Get Next to You" (Temptations), 354  
"I Can't Make You Love Me" (Bonnie Rait), 600  
"I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do" (Abba), 483  
"I Don't Know Why" (Stevie Wonder), 341  
"I Don't Want to be Right" (Luther Ingram), 441  
"I Don't Want to Spoil the Party" (Beatles), 162  
"If I Could Build My Whole World Around You" (Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell), 295  
"If Loving You is Wrong I Don't Want to be Right" (Luther Ingram), 441  
"I Fought the Law" (Bobby Fuller Four), 207  
"If You Asked Me To" (Celine Dion), 602  
"If You Could Read My Mind" (Gordon Lightfoot), 396  
"If You Don't Know Me By Now" (Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes), 450  
"If You Love Somebody Set Them Free" (Sting), 558  
"If You Need Me" (Solomon Burke), 101  
"If You Wanna Be Happy" (Jimmy Soul), 99  
"I Get Around" (Beach Boys), 131  
"I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues" (Elton John), 531  
"I Heard It Through the Grapevine" (Gladys Knight and the Pips), 291  
"I Hear You Knockin'" (Dave Edmunds), 396  
"I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself" (Dionne Warwick), 244  
"I Know a Place" (Petula Clark), 163  
"I Know" (Barbara George), 79  
"Iko Iko" (Dixie Cups), 169  
"I'll Be Around" (Spinners), 450  
"I'll Be Doggone" (Marvin Gaye), 163  
"I'm In Love Again" (Fats Domino), 8  
"I'm Not Gonna Let It Bother Me Tonight" (Atlanta Rhythm Section), 496  
"In a Big Country" (Big Country), 531  
"Indiana Wants Me" (B. Dean Taylor), 391  
"In the Air Tonight" (Phil Collins), 515  
"In the Still of Night" (Five Satins), 11  
"I Say a Little Prayer" (Dionne Warwick), 292  
"Is She Really Going Out with Him" (Joe Jackson), 504  
"Is That All There Is" (Peggy Lee), 362  
"I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" (U2), 567  
"Itchycoo Park" (Small Faces), 301  
"It Doesn't Matter Anymore" (Buddy Holly), 46  
"I Touch Myself" (Divinyls), 592  
"It's a Shame" (Spinners), 389



- "It's My Party" (Leslie Gore), 100  
 "It Takes Two" (Marvin Gaye and Kim Weston), 256  
 "It Was a Very Good Year" (Frank Sinatra), 205  
 "I've Been Lonely Too Long" (Young Rascals), 257  
 "I've Been Loving You Too Long" (Otis Redding), 172  
 "I've Been Thinking About You" (London Beat), 592  
 "I Wanna Be Around" (Tony Bennett), 96  
 "I Want to Be Wanted" (Brenda Lee), 64  
 "I Want You to Want Me" (Cheap Trick), 504  
 "I Will Survive" (Gloria Gaynor), 501  
 "I Wonder Why" (Dion and the Belmonts), 32  
 "Java" (Al Hirt), 115  
 "Jim Dandy" (Lavern Baker), 15  
 "Just a Little" (Beau Brummels), 168  
 "Just Like Me" (Paul Revere and the Raiders), 198  
 "[Just Like] Starting Over" (John Lennon), 513  
 "Just Once" (James Ingram/Quincy Jones), 515  
 "Just Out of Reach" (Solomon Burke), 78  
 "Just What I Needed" (Cars), 496  
 "Kansas City" (Wilbert Harrison), 46  
 "Keep Me Cryin'" (Al Green), 489  
 "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" (Bob Dylan), 460  
 "Knock on Wood" (Eddie Floyd), 246  
 "La La Means I Love You" (Delfonics), 304  
 "Land of 1,000 Dances" (Wilson Pickett), 233  
 "Let It Be Me" (Jerry Butler/Betty Everett), 144  
 "Let My Love Open the Door" (Pete Townshend), 513  
 "Let's Dance" (David Bowie), 525  
 "Let's Get It On" (Marvin Gaye), 460  
 "Let's Get Married" (Al Green), 464  
 "Lido Shuffle" (Boyz n the Scaggs), 492  
 "Lil' Red Riding Hood" (Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs), 225  
 "Linger" (Cranberries), 610  
 "Little Green Apples" (O.C. Smith), 323  
 "Live and Let Die" (Wings), 460  
 "Livin' for the City" (Stevie Wonder), 460  
 "Livin' for You" (Al Green), 463  
 "Living a Little, Laughing a Little" (Spinners), 470  
 "Locomotion" (Little Eva), 85  
 "Lonely Bull" (Herb Alpert/Tijuana Brass), 92  
 "Long and Winding Road" (Beatles), 381  
 "Long Cool Woman" (Hollies), 446  
 "Lookin' Out My Back Door" (Creedence Clearwater Revival), 388  
 "Look of Love" (Sergio Mendes and Brasil '66), 316  
 "Look What You Done for Me" (Al Green), 437  
 "Loser" (Beck), 614  
 "Louie Louie" (Kingsmen), 106  
 "Love is a Stranger" (Eurythmics), 529  
 "Love is the Drug" (Roxy Music), 483  
 "Love Me Do" (Beatles), 130  
 "Love Me Tender" (Elvis Presley), 13  
 "Love's Theme" (Love Unlimited Orchestra), 462  
 "Lucille" (Little Richard), 18  
 "Lyin' Eyes" (Eagles), 476  
 "Mack the Knife" (Louis Armstrong), 6  
 "Magic Touch" (Platters), 7  
 "Mama Mia" (Abba), 486  
 "Manic Monday" (Bangles), 558  
 "Master Blaster [Jammin']" (Stevie Wonder), 513  
 "Matchbox" (Beatles), 145  
 "Maybe Baby" (Crickets), 30  
 "Maybe" (Chantels), 29  
 "Me and Mrs. Jones" (Billy Paul), 451  
 "Memphis" (Johnny Mathis), 131  
 "Mercy Mercy Me [the Ecology]" (Marvin Gaye), 406  
 "Mess of Blues" (Elvis Presley), 63  
 "Middle of the Road" (Pretenders), 533  
 "Midnight Rider" (Greg Allman), 463  
 "Missing You" (John Waite), 539  
 "Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm" (Crash Test Dummies), 614  
 "Monday Monday" (Mamas and Papas), 212  
 "Money" (Barrett Strong), 57  
 "Monkey Time" (Major Lance), 104  
 "Montego Bay" (Bobby Bloom), 392  
 "Mother and Child Reunion" (Paul Simon), 434  
 "Mr. Big Stuff" (Jean Knight), 405  
 "Mr. Lee" (Bobettes), 22  
 "Mule Skinner Blues" (Fendermen), 61  
 "Music to Watch Girls By" (Bob Crewe Generation), 253  
 "My Boy Lollipop" (Millie Small), 131  
 "My Cherie Amour" (Stevie Wonder), 349  
 "My Hometown" (Bruce Springsteen), 558  
 "My Prayer" (Platters), 10  
 "My Whole World Ended" (David Ruffin), 341  
 "Na Na Na Na Hey Hey [Good-Bye]" (Steam), 363  
 "Nowhere to Run" (Martha and the Vandellas), 162  
 "Ode to Billy Joe" (Bobbie Gentry), 283  
 "Oh Babe, What Would You Say" (Hurricane Smith), 453  
 "Oh Happy Day" (Edwin Hawkins Singers), 347  
 "Oh How Happy" (Shades of Blue), 217  
 "Ohio" (Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young), 386  
 "One Less Bell to Answer" (Fifth Dimension), 393  
 "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" (Neil Young), 396  
 "Only Sixteen" (Sam Cooke), 50  
 "Only the Strong Survive" (Jerry Butler), 341  
 "Only You" (Platters), 5



- "Ooh Child" (Five Stairsteps), 384  
"Ooh My Soul" (Little Richard), 34  
"Ooh Poo Pah Doo" (Jessie Hill), 60  
"Ordinary World" (Duran Duran), 608  
"Orinoco Flow [Sail Away]" (Enya), 573  
"Overjoyed" (Stevie Wonder), 558  
"Party Lights" (Claudine Clark), 85  
"Peace Train" (Cat Stevens), 417  
"People Everyday" (Arrested Development), 603  
"People Get Ready" (Impressions), 162  
"People Got to Be Free" (Rascals), 317  
"Pipeline" (Chantays), 99  
"Please Forgive Me" (Bryan Adams), 610  
"Pledging My Love" (Johnny Ace), 3  
"Poor Little Fool" (Ricky Nelson), 35  
"Poor Side of Town" (Johnny Rivers), 244  
"Positively Fourth Street" (Bob Dylan), 194  
"Pretty Ballerina" (Left Banke), 256  
"Pride and Joy" (Marvin Gaye), 103  
"Problems" (Everly Brothers), 40  
"Proud Mary" (Ike and Tina Turner), 397  
"Quarter to Three" (Gary "U.S." Bonds), 74  
"Question" (Moody Blues), 382  
"Rag Doll" (Four Seasons), 131  
"Rainy Day Women" (Bob Dylan), 213  
"Rapper's Delight" (Sugarhill Gang), 511  
"Rave On" (Buddy Holly), 34  
"Reach Out of the Darkness" (Friend and Lover), 316  
"Rebel Rouser" (Duane Eddy), 35  
"Reflections" (Diana Ross and the Supremes), 283  
"Refugee" (Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers), 511  
"Release Me" (Esther Phillips), 92  
"Reminiscing" (Little River Band), 496  
"Rescue Me" (Fontella Bass), 194  
"Respect" (Otis Redding), 194  
"Rhiannon" (Fleetwood Mac), 483  
"Ride Captain Ride" (Blues Image), 382  
"Riders on the Storm" (Doors), 407  
"Road Runner" (Jr. Walker and the All Stars), 217  
"Rock and Roll Music" (Chuck Berry), 27  
"Rock Around the Clock" (Bill Haley/Comets), 3  
"Rocket Man" (Elton John), 438  
"Rock the Casbah" (Clash), 521  
"Roll Over Beethoven" (Chuck Berry), 9  
"Roundabout" (Yes), 434  
"Running Up that Hill" (Kate Bush), 558  
"Run Through the Jungle" (Creedence Clearwater Revival), 382  
"Sally Go 'Round the Roses" (Jaynets), 105  
"Same Auld Lang Syne" (Dan Fogelberg), 513  
"Say Goodbye to Hollywood" (Billy Joel), 515  
"Scarborough Fair/Canticle" (Simon and Garfunkel), 306  
"Searchin'" (Coasters), 20  
"Secret Agent Man" (Johnny Rivers), 211  
"Send in the Clowns" (Judy Collins), 476  
"Shake and Fingerpop" (Jr. Walker and the All Stars), 183  
"Shake!" (Sam Cooke), 154  
"Shake Your Body Down to the Ground" (Jacksons), 504  
"Sha La La [Make Me Happy]" (Al Green), 466  
"Shapes of Things" (Yardbirds), 215  
"Shattered" (Rolling Stones), 501  
"She Blinded Me with Science" (Thomas Dolby), 523  
"She Loves You" (Beatles), 118  
"Sherry" (Four Seasons), 87  
"She's Gone" (Hall and Oates), 487  
"She's Not There" (Zombies), 149  
"Shine" (Collective Soul), 614  
"Shining Star" (Earth, Wind, & Fire), 470  
"Shock the Monkey" (Peter Gabriel), 521  
"Shoop Shoop Song" (Betty Everett), 123  
"Show and Tell" (Al Wilson), 460  
"Sign of the Times" (Petula Clark), 215  
"Sign 'O' the Times" (Prince), 560  
"Since I Fell For You" (Lenny Welch), 106  
"Since I Lost My Baby" (Temptations), 183  
"Since I Met You Baby" (Ivory Joe Hunter), 15  
"Sincerely" (Moonglows), 3  
"Sir Duke" (Stevie Wonder), 492  
"Sister Golden Hair" (America), 470  
"Sixteen Candles" (Crests), 40  
"Sledgehammer" (Peter Gabriel), 558  
"Slip Away" (Clarence Carter), 319  
"Slipslidin' Away" (Paul Simon), 492  
"Slow Down" (Beatles), 145  
"Smiling Faces [Sometimes]" (Undisputed Truth), 406  
"Somebody to Love" (Jefferson Airplane), 271  
"Something So Strong" (Crowded House), 567  
"Soulful Strut" (Yound-Holt Unlimited), 336  
"Soul Man" (Sam and Dave), 286  
"Sounds of Silence" (Simon and Garfunkel), 196  
"Spanish Harlem" (Aretha Franklin), 411  
"Speedo" (The Cadillacs), 6  
"Spirit in the Sky" (Norman Greenbaum), 380  
"Spooky" (Classics IV), 299  
Stagger Lee" (Lloyd Price), 43  
Stand by Your Man" (Tammy Wynette), 337  
Stand!" (Sly and the Family Stone), 343  
Starting Over" (John Lennon), 513  
Stay [I Missed You]" (Lisa Loeb), 614  
"Stay in My Corner" (Dells), 317



- "Stay" (Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs), 66  
 "Steppin' Out" (Joe Jackson), 250  
 "Stop, Stop, Stop" (Hollies), 246  
 "Story in Your Eyes" (Moody Blues), 414  
 "Stranded in the Jungle" (Cadets), 10  
 "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes" (Crosby, Stills, and Nash), 362  
 "Sultans of Swing" (Dire Straits), 504  
 "Sunny" (Bobby Hebb), 225  
 "Super Bad" (James Brown), 392  
 "Surfer Girl" (Beach Boys), 104  
 "Surfin' Bird" (Trashmen), 108  
 "Suzie Q" (Dale Hawkins), 22  
 "Sweet Dreams are Made of This" (Eurythmics), 525  
 "Sweet Hitch-Hiker" (Creedence Clearwater Revival), 406  
 "Sweet Home Alabama" (Lynyrd Skynyrd), 466  
 "Sweet Little Sixteen" (Chuck Berry), 30  
 "Sweet Talkin' Guy" (Chiffons), 217  
 "Take a Letter, Maria" (R.B. Greaves), 362  
 "Take Five" (Dave Brubek), 75  
 "Take It Easy" (Eagles), 443  
 "Takin' It to the Streets" (Doobie Brothers), 486  
 "Talk to Me, Talk to Me" (Little Willie John), 31  
 "Tangled Up in Blue" (Bob Dylan), 470  
 "Teach Your Children" (Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young), 384  
 "Tears on My Pillow" (Little Anthony), 37  
 "Tell Her No" (Zombies), 154  
 "Tell Him" (Exciters), 92  
 "Tell Mama" (Etta James), 295  
 "Tequila" (Champs), 30  
 "That's Why I Love You So" (Jackie Wilson), 46  
 "The City of New Orleans" (Arlo Guthrie), 448  
 "The Future's So Bright I Gotta Wear Shades" (Timbuk 3), 560  
 "The Great Pretender" (Platters), 5  
 "The Long and Winding Road" (Beatles), 381  
 "The Look of Love" (Sergio Mendes and Brasil '66), 316  
 "The Magic Touch" (Platters), 7  
 "The More I See You" (Chris Montez), 217  
 "Then He Kissed Me" (Crystals), 104  
 "There Goes My Baby" (Drifters), 47  
 "These Eyes" (The Guess Who), 342  
 "The Shoop Shoop Song" (Betty Everett), 123  
 "The Story in Your Eyes" (Moody Blues), 414  
 "The Twist" (Chubby Checker), 63  
 "The Wanderer" (Dion), 79  
 "Think" (James Brown), 60  
 "Thin Line Between Love and Hate" (Persuaders), 414  
 "This Bitter Earth" (Dinah Washington), 62  
 "This Old Heart of Mine" (Isley Brothers), 212  
 "Time Has Come Today" (Chamber Brothers), 325  
 "Tired of Waiting for You" (Kinks), 162  
 "To Know Him is to Love Him" (Teddy Bears), 39  
 "Too Late to Turn Back Now" (Cornelius Brothers/Sister Rose), 441  
 "Train in Vain" (Clash), 511  
 "Treat Her Like a Lady" (Cornelius Brothers/Sister Rose), 405  
 "True" (Spandau Ballet), 527  
 "Tunnel of Love" (Bruce Springsteen), 568  
 "Turn on Your Lovelight" (Bobby Bland), 81  
 "Turn! Turn! Turn!" (Byrds), 196  
 "Twenty-Five Miles" (Edwin Starr), 341  
 "Twist and Shout" (Beatles), 122  
 "Twist and Shout" (Isley Brothers), 85  
 "Twist" (Chubby Checker), 63  
 "Twistin' the Night Away" (Sam Cooke), 81  
 "Two Faces Have I" (Lou Christie), 99  
 "U Got the Look" (Prince), 567  
 "Up Around the Bend" flip side, 382  
 "Use Me" (Bill Withers), 448  
 "Waiting on a Friend" (Rolling Stones), 517  
 "Wake Up, Little Susie" (Everly Brothers), 24  
 "Walk Don't Run" (Ventures), 62  
 "Walk this Way" (Aerosmith), 489  
 "Wanderer" (Dion), 79  
 "Want Ads" (Honeycone), 403  
 "War" (Edwin Starr), 385  
 "Werewolves of London" (Warren Zevon), 492  
 "We've Only Just Begun" (Carpenters), 391  
 "What Becomes of the Broken Hearted" (Jimmy Ruffin), 243  
 "What is Life" (George Harrison), 400  
 "When Doves Cry" (Prince), 539  
 "When Will I See You Again" (Three Degrees), 466  
 "Where or When" (Dion and the Belmonts), 57  
 "Whole Lotta Love" (Led Zeppelin), 369  
 "Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses" (U2), 608  
 "Why Do Fools Fall in Love" (Frankie Lymon/Teenagers), 6  
 "Wild Thing" (Throgs), 225  
 "Wild Weekend" (Rebels), 95  
 "Wild World" (Cat Stevens), 400  
 "Willy and the Hand Jive" (Johnny Otis Show), 34  
 "Wishin' and Hopin'" (Dusty Springfield), 138  
 "Without Love [There is Nothing]" (Clyde McPhatter), 15  
 "Without You" (Nilsson), 428  
 "Wonderland by Night" (Bert Kaempfert), 67  
 "Wooly Bully" (Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs), 168





- "Words Get in the Way" (Miami Sound Machine), 558  
"Wrapped Around Your Finger" (Police), 533  
"Ya Ya" (Lee Dorsey), 75  
"Yeh Yeh" (Georgie Fame), 160  
"You Are Everything" (Stylistics), 421  
"You Are the Sunshine of My Life" (Stevie Wonder), 457  
"You Belong to Me" (Duprees), 86  
"You Haven't Done Nothin'" (Stevie Wonder), 466  
"You'll Never Find Another Love Like Mine" (Lou Rawls), 487  
"Young Blood" (Coasters), 20  
"Your Cheatin' Heart" (Ray Charles), 92  
"You're All I Need to Get By" (Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell), 319  
"[You've Got] The Magic Touch" (Platters), 7  
"You've Got Your Troubles" (Fortunes), 185  
"You Wear It Well" (Rod Stewart), 448
- Great Misses  
"1900 Yesterday" (Liz Damon's Orient Express), 396  
"Abracadabra" (Steve Miller), 519  
"Achy-Breaky Heart" (Billy Ray Cyrus), 602  
"Afternoon Delight" (Starland Vocal Band), 486  
"Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing" (Donny and Marie Osmond), 490  
"Ain't That a Shame" (Pat Boone), 3  
"All Over the World" (Electric Light Orchestra), 514  
"An Open Letter to My Teenage Son" (Victor Lundberg), 292  
"Anyway You Want It" (Journey), 511  
"Ariel" (Dean Friedman), 493  
"A' Team" (Ssgt. Barry Sadler), 217  
"Baby Don't Forget My Number" (Milli Vanilli), 573  
"Baby Face" (Wing and a Prayer Fife and Drum Corps), 483  
"Baby I Love Your Way/Freebird Medley" (Will to Power), 573  
"Baby Makes Her Blue Jeans Talk" (Dr. Hook), 518  
"Baby Talks Dirty" (Knack), 511  
"Bad Blood" (Neil Sedaka and Elton John), 477  
"Ballad of a Teenage Queen" (Johnny Cash), 30  
"Ballad of Davy Crockett" (Bill Hayes), 3  
"Ballad of Davy Crockett" (Fess Parker), 3  
"Ballad of Davy Crockett" (Tennessee Ernie Ford), 3  
"Ballad of Davy Crockett" (Voices of Walter Schumann), 3  
"Ballad of the Green Berets" (Ssgt. Barry Sadler), 206  
"Bang Shang A Lang" (Archies), 333  
"Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley" (C Company featuring Terry Nelson), 405  
"Beach Baby" (First Class), 467  
"Beach Boys Medley" (Beach Boys), 515  
"Beep Beep" (Playmates), 40  
"Billy, Don't Be a Hero" (Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods), 464  
"Blame It on the Rain" (Milli Vanilli), 573  
"Blob" (Five Blobs), 40  
"Bongo Rock" (Preston Epps), 48  
"Bossa Nova Baby" (Elvis Presley), 106  
"Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" (Neil Sedaka), 483  
"Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft" (Carpenters), 493  
"Candy Man" (Sammy Davis Jr.), 437  
"Cars" (Gary Numan), 511  
"Cheeseburger in Paradise" (Jimmy Buffett), 497  
"Chewy Chewy" (Ohio Express), 333  
"Chick a Boom" (Daddy Dewdrop), 402  
"Cinnamon Cinder" (Pastel Six), 95  
"Clapping Song" (Shirley Ellis), 163  
"C'mon and Swim" (Bobby Freeman), 138  
"Convoy" (C.W. McCall), 483  
"Copacabana" (Barry Manilow), 497  
"Coward of the County" (Kenny Rogers), 507  
"Da Doo Ron Ron" (Shaun Cassidy), 493  
"Daisy a Day" (Jed Strunk), 458  
"Dance [Disco Heat]" (Sylvester), 497  
"Dark Lady" (Cher), 463  
"Dawn of Correction" (Spokesmen), 194  
"Deck of Cards" (Wink Martindale), 51  
"Delilah" (Tom Jones), 308  
"Delta Dawn" (Helen Reddy), 461  
"Desiderata" (Les Crane), 417  
"Devil Went Down to Georgia" (Charlie Daniels Band), 505  
"Dirty White Boy" (Foreigner), 506  
"Disco Duck" (Rick Dees), 487  
"D.O.A." (Bloodrock), 397  
"Do It [Til You're Satisfied]" (B.T. Express), 467  
"Don't Give In to Him" (Gary Puckett and the Union Gap), 341  
"Don't Let the Rain Come Down" (Serendipity Singers), 124  
"Don't You Care" (Buckingham), 268  
"Do the Clam" (Elvis Presley), 163  
"Do the Freddie" (Freddie and the Dreamers), 169  
"Down by the Lazy River" (Osmonds), 428  
"Do Ya Think I'm Sexy" (Rod Stewart), 501  
"Dust in the Wind" (Kansas), 493  
"Earth Angel" (Crew Cuts), 3  
"Easy Livin'" (Uriah Heep), 449  
"Elusive Butterfly" (Bob Lind), 207



- "Escape [The Pina Colada Song]" (Rupert Holmes), 507  
 "Eternal Flame" (Bangles), 573  
 "Eye of the Tiger" (Survivor), 519  
 "Feelings" (Albert Morris), 477  
 "Fly, Robin, Fly" (Silver Convention), 481  
 "Fox on the Run" (Sweet), 481  
 "Freeze" (Tony and Joe), 38  
 "Georgia on My Mind" (Michael Bolton), 591  
 "Gimme Dat Ding" (Pipkins), 384  
 "Ginger Bread" (Frankie Avalon), 35  
 "Gonna Fly Now" (Bill Conti), 493  
 "Good Girls Don't" (The Knack), 506  
 "Good Morning Starshine" (Oliver), 349  
 "Goody Two Shoes" (Adam Ant), 521  
 "Gypsies, Tramps, and Thieves" (Cher), 415  
 "Gypsy Woman [She's Homeless]" (Crystal Waters), 595  
 "Half Breed" (Cher), 461  
 "Hanky Panky" (Madonna), 588  
 "Happening" (Supremes), 268  
 "Have You Never Been Mellow" (Olivia Newton-John), 469  
 "Having My Baby" (Paul Anka), 466  
 "Heartache Tonight" (Eagles), 506  
 "Heartbeat, It's a Lovebeat" (DeFranco Family), 461  
 "Hearts" (Marty Balin), 515  
 "Him" (Rupert Holmes), 511  
 "Hip to Be Square" (Huey Lewis and the News), 559  
 "Hocus Pocus" (Focus), 461  
 "Honey" (Bobby Goldsboro), 305  
 "Hooked on a Feeling" (Blue Suede), 463  
 "Hotblooded" (Foreigner), 497  
 "Hot Child in the City" (Nick Gilder), 497  
 "Hot Diggity [Dog Diggity Boom]" (Perry Como), 8  
 "Hot in the City" (Billy Idol), 519  
 "How to be a Millionaire" (ABC), 558  
 "Hummingbird" (Seals and Croft), 457  
 "I Ain't Got Time Anymore" (Glass Bottle), 408  
 "I Am Woman" (Helen Reddy), 450  
 "I Can't Drive 55" (Sammy Hagar), 539  
 "Ice Ice Baby" (Vanilla Ice), 591  
 "I Dig Rock and Roll Music" (Peter, Paul, and Mary), 287  
 "I'll Play for You" (Seals and Croft), 471  
 "I Love" (Tom T. Hall), 463  
 "I'm Gonna Be Strong" (Gene Pitney), 149  
 "I'm In You" (Peter Frampton), 493  
 "I'm Telling You Now" (Freddie and the Dreamers), 160  
 "I'm Your Boogie Man" (K.C. and the Sunshine Band), 493  
 "In a Gada Da Vida" (Iron Butterfly), 326  
 "In the Way" (Village People), 505  
 "In the Year 2525" (Zager and Evans), 349  
 "I Saw Him Standing There" (Tiffany), 568  
 "I Think We're Alone Now" (Tommy James and the Shondells), 265  
 "It Must Be Him" (Vicki Carr), 286  
 "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me" (Billy Joel), 514  
 "Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polkadot Bikini" (Brian Hyland), 62  
 "I've Gotta Be Me" (Sammy Davis Jr.), 339  
 "I've Got the Music in Me" (Kiki Dee), 467  
 "I've Never Been to Me" (Charlene), 518  
 "I Was Made for Dancin'" (Leif Garrett), 501  
 "Jim Dandy" (Black Oak Arkansas), 463  
 "Julie, Do Ya Love Me" (Bobby Sherman), 389  
 "Jungle Fever" (Chakachas), 434  
 "Just Dropped In [To See What Condition My Condition Was In]" (Kenny Rogers and First Edition), 304  
 "Kung-Fu Fighting" (Carl Douglas), 467  
 "Last Game of the Season [The Blind Man in the Bleachers]" (David Geddes), 481  
 "Let's Do the Freddie" (Chubby Checker), 169  
 "Lipstick on Your Collar" (Connie Francis), 47  
 "Little Children" (Billy J. Kramer), 130  
 "Little Old Lady from Pasadena" (Jan and Dean), 138  
 "Little Space Girl" (Jesse Lee Turner), 48  
 "Live and Let Die" (Guns and Roses), 600  
 "Loco-Motion" (Grand Funk Railroad), 463  
 "Long Haired Lover from Liverpool" (Little Jimmy Osmond), 443  
 "Long Tall Sally" (Pat Boone), 9  
 "Love Means You Never Have to Say You're Sorry" (Sound of Sunshine), 408  
 "Lucretia MacEvil" (Blood, Sweat, and Tears), 392  
 "Make Your Own Kind of Music" (Mama Cass), 367  
 "Maniac" (Michael Sambello), 528  
 "Mary Had a Little Lamb" (Paul McCartney), 447  
 "May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose" ("Little" Jimmy Dickens), 196  
 "Melody of Love" (Four Aces), 3  
 "More, More, More" (Andrea True Connection), 483  
 "Morning After" (Maureen McGovern), 461  
 "Mr. Custer" (Larry Verne), 64  
 "Mr. Jaws" (Dickie Goodman), 477  
 "Mr. Roboto" (Styx), 523  
 "Muskrat Love" (Captain and Tenille), 487  
 "My Back Pages" (Byrds), 268  
 "My Ding-a-Ling" (Chuck Berry), 449  
 "My Melody of Love" (Bobby Vinton), 467



- "Name Game" (Shirley Ellis), 154  
"Never Gonna Give You Up" (Rick Astley), 568  
"New York's a Lonely Town" (Tradewinds), 160  
"Night Chicago Died" (Paper Lace), 467  
"Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia" (Vicki Lawrence), 457  
"No, Not Much" (Four Lads), 6  
"No No Song" (Ringo Starr), 469  
"Once You Understand" (Think), 432  
"One Tin Soldier" (Coven), 417  
"Paper Roses" (Anita Bryant), 60  
"Patches" (Dickey Lee), 89  
"Percolator Twist" (Billy Joe and the Checkmates), 81  
"Play that Funky Music" (Vanilla Ice), 591  
"Play that Funky Music" (Wild Cherry), 486  
"Please Mister Please" (Olivia Newton-John), 472  
"Popcorn" (Hot Butter), 449  
"Pop Muzik" (M), 505  
"Pressure" (Billy Joel), 520  
"Puppy Love" (Donny Osmond), 434  
"Puppy Love" (Paul Anka), 57  
"Purple People Eater" (Sheb Wooley/Ben Colder), 34  
"Quick Joey Small [Run Joey Run]" (Kasenetz/Katz Singing Orchestral Chorus), 330  
"Rapper" (Jaggerz), 376  
"Relax" (Frankie Goes to Hollywood), 547  
"Respect Yourself" (Bruce Willis), 561  
"Rhinstone Cowboy" (Glen Campbell), 472  
"Rock-A-Hula Baby" (Elvis Presley), 79  
"Rock Me Amadeus" (Falco), 558  
"Rubber Ball" (Bobby Vee), 71  
"Run Joey Run" (David Geddes), 477  
"San Franciscan Nights" (Eric Burden and the Animals), 284  
"Saturday Night" (Bay City Rollers), 478  
"Seasons in the Sun" (Terry Jacks), 463  
"See the Funny Clown" (Bobby Goldsboro), 116  
"Sex as a Weapon" (Pat Benatar), 558  
"Shannon" (Henry Gross), 483  
"She's About a Mover" (Sir Douglas Quintet), 164  
"Shop Around" (Captain and Tenille), 484  
"Short Shorts" (Royal Teens), 30  
"Should've Never Let You Go" (Neil and Dara Sedaka), 514  
"Silly Love Songs" (Wings), 483  
"Simon Says" (1910 Fruitgum Co.), 299  
"Sister Christian" (Nightranger), 537  
"Sky Pilot" (Eric Burdon and the Animals), 317  
"Smoke on the Water" (Deep Purple), 461  
"Smokin' in the Boys Room" (Brownsville Station), 462  
"Somebody's Watching Me" (Rockwell), 533  
"Sometimes When We Touch" (Dan Hill), 493  
"Standing on the Corner" (Four Lads), 9  
"Stars on 45" (Stars on 45), 515  
"Star Wars/Cantina Band" (Meco), 493  
"Steal Away" (Robbie Dupree), 514  
"Streak" (Ray Stevens), 464  
"Stupid Cupid" (Connie Francis), 38  
"Sugar Shack" (Jimmy Gilmer/Fireballs), 105  
"Summertime, Summertime" (Jamies), 38  
"Surfer's Stomp" (Marketts), 81  
"Sweet and Innocent" (Donny Osmond), 405  
"Sylvia's Mother" (Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show), 439  
"Tainted Love" (Soft Cell), 519  
"Tall Paul" (Annette), 45  
"Tears in Heaven" (Eric Clapton), 600  
"Teddy Bear" (Red Sovine), 487  
"Teen Angel" (Mark Dinning), 55  
"Thank God I'm a Country Boy" (John Denver), 471  
"The 'A' Team" (Ssgt. Barry Sadler), 217  
"The Blob" (Five Blobs), 40  
"The Candy Man" (Sammy Davis Jr.), 437  
"The Clapping Song" (Shirley Ellis), 163  
"The Devil Went Down to Georgia" (Charlie Daniels Band), 505  
"The Freeze" (Tony and Joe), 38  
"The Happening" (Supremes), 268  
"The Last Game of the Season [The Blind Man in the Bleachers]" (David Geddes), 481  
"The Little Old Lady from Pasadena" (Jan and Dean), 138  
"The Loco-Motion" (Grand Funk Railroad), 463  
"The Morning After" (Maureen McGovern), 461  
"The Name Game" (Shirley Ellis), 154  
"The Night Chicago Died" (Paper Lace), 467  
"The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia" (Vicki Lawrence), 457  
"The No No Song" (Ringo Starr), 469  
"The Rapper" (Jaggerz), 376  
"The Streak" (Ray Stevens), 464  
"The Unicorn" (Irish Rovers), 307  
"The Way of Love" (Cher), 434  
"They're Coming to Take Me Away" (Napoleon XIV), 225  
"Thunder Island" (Jay Ferguson), 493  
"Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree" (Dawn), 457  
"Tiger" (Fabian), 47  
"Timothy" (Buoys), 402  
"Tiptoe Through the Tulips" (Tiny Tim), 317  
"Torn Between Two Lovers" (Mary MacGregor), 490



- “Transfusion” (Nervous Norvus), 10  
 “Tumbling Dice” (Linda Ronstadt), 497  
 “Turn Me Loose” (Fabian), 46  
 “Tutti Frutti” (Pat Boone), 6  
 “Undercover Angel” (Alan O’Day), 493  
 “Unicorn” (Irish Rovers), 307  
 “Way of Love” (Cher), 434  
 “We Built this City” (Jefferson Starship), 558  
 “We Didn’t Start the Fire” (Billy Joel), 573  
 “We Love You Beatles” (Carefrees), 129  
 “We May Never Pass This Way Again” (Seals and  
 Croft), 461  
 “When a Man Loves a Woman” (Michael  
 Bolton), 599  
 “Which Way You Goin’, Billy?” (Poppy Family), 380  
 “Who’s in the Strawberry Patch with Sally”  
 (Dawn), 461  
 “Xanadu” (Olivia Newton-John/Electric Light  
 Orchestra), 514  
 “Yellow Rose of Texas” (Mitch Miller), 4  
 “Yogi” (Ivy Three), 63  
 “You Light Up My Life” (Debbie Boone), 493  
 “You Needed Me” (Anne Murray), 497  
 “Young Love” (Tab Hunter), 16  
 “[You’re] Having My Baby” (Paul Anka), 466  
 “You Turn Me On” (Ian Whitcomb), 172  
 “Yo-Yo” (Osmonds), 414  
 “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy” (Ohio Express), 314  
 “Great Pretender, The,” 31  
 Green, Al  
     “Call Me [Come Back Home],” 458  
     “I’m Still in Love with You,” 445–446  
     “Let’s Stay Together,” 423–424  
     “L-O-V-E [Love],” 470–471  
     “Tired of Being Alone,” 411–412  
     “You Ought to be with Me,” 450–451  
 “Green Onions,” 86–88  
 “Green River,” 353–354  
 Greenwich, Ellie, 117, 366  
 “Groovin’,” 269–270  
 guitars, electric, 165, 171  
 Guthrie, Woody, 169–170, 531
- ## H
- Hail, Hail, Rock and Roll*, 22  
 haircut bands, 552  
 Hall, Roy, 22  
 Ham, Pete. *See* Badfinger  
 Hammer, Jack, 28  
 Hampton, Lionel, 47  
 “Happy,” 447–448  
 “Happy Together,” 260–261  
 “Hard Day’s Night,” 135–136  
*Hard Day’s Night* (album), 135, 141  
 Harris, R. H., 23–24  
 Harris, Richard, 312–314  
 Harrison, George, 360–361. *See also* Beatles  
 Harry Belafonte, 14–15  
 Hart, Bobby, 239  
 Hatch, Tony, 275  
 Hatfield, Bobby. *See* Righteous Brothers  
 Hayes, Isaac, 415–416  
 Hazlewood, Lee, 206  
*Head*, 290  
 “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” 376–377  
 “Heartbreak Hotel,” 7–8  
 “Heart of the Matter,” 586–587  
 “Heat Wave,” 104  
 heavy metal, 329, 429–430  
 Hecht, Don, 17–18  
*Hellfire*, 27  
 “Hello Goodbye,” 293–294  
 “Hello Stranger,” 101  
 “Help!,” 176–177  
*Help!* (feature film), 176  
 Hendrix, Jimi, 326–328  
 Henley, Don  
     “Heart of the Matter,” 586–587  
     “The Boys of Summer,” 545–547  
 Henry, Clarence “Frogman,” 15–16  
 Hensley, Virginia Patterson. *See* Cline, Patsy  
 Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, 194–195  
 Hermann, Dave, 516  
 Herman’s Hermits  
     “Listen People,” 207–207  
     “There’s a Kind of Hush,” 264  
 “He’s a Rebel,” 90–91  
 “He’s So Fine,” 97–98  
 Hewson, Paul, 562  
 “Hey, Jealous Lover,” 26  
 “Hey, Jude,” 319–321  
 “Higher and Higher,” 286–287  
 hillbilly music, 5  
 Holland, Brian. *See* Holland-Dozier-Holland  
 songwriting team  
 Holland, Eddie, 299. *See also* Holland-Dozier-Holland  
 songwriting teamx  
 Holland-Dozier-Holland songwriting team  
     departure from Motown, 263  
     and the Four Tops, 140, 167, 180–181, 237–238,  
     249–250  
     and Freda Payne, 380–381  
     and Martha and Vandellas, 143  
     and Marvin Gaye, 152



- and the Supremes, 137, 148, 166, 328–329
- Hollies
- formation of group, 232
  - songs
    - “Bus Stop,” 232–233
    - “Carrie-Anne,” 280–281
    - “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother,” 376–377
- Holly, Buddy
- biographical information, 22–23
  - and the Crickets, 22–23
  - influence on popular music, 22
  - “Peggy Sue,” 26–27
  - plane crash, 27
  - thoughtful lyrics of, 19
- “Holly Holly,” 366–367
- Honeydrippers, 49
- “Honey Love,” 39
  - “Honky Tonk Women,” 352–353
  - “Hooked on a Feeling,” 336–337
- Horizontal*, 292
- Horton, Gladys, 76
- Hot 100, *Billboard’s*, 617–618
- Hot Buttered Soul*, 416
- “Hotel California,” 492–495
  - “Hot Fun in the Summertime,” 354–355
  - “Hound Dog,” 9
  - “House of the Rising Sun,” 138–139
  - “How Can I Be Sure,” 285–286
  - “How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You,” 152–153
- Huff, Leon, 448–449
- Human Beinz, 300
- Hynde, Chrissie, 511–512
- “I Am, I Said,” 402–403
- Ian, Janis, 277
- “[I Can’t Get No] Satisfaction,” 172–173
  - “I Can’t Help Myself [Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch],” 167
  - “I Can’t Stand the Rain,” 462–463
  - “I Can’t Stop Loving You,” 83
  - “I Couldn’t Live Without Your Love,” 228–229
  - “I’d Die Without You,” 605–608
  - “[I Don’t Know Why I Love You] But I Do,” 15
  - “I Fall to Pieces,” 38, 74–75
  - “I Feel Fine,” 149–150
  - “I Got You Babe,” 173–175
  - “I Got You [I Feel Good],” 195
  - “I Guess Things Happen That Way,” 35–36
  - “I Hear a Symphony,” 190–191
  - “I Heard It Through the Grapevine,” 331–332
  - “[I Know] I’m Losing You,” 421–423
  - “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” 89–90
  - “I’ll Be There,” 389–390
  - “I’ll Cry Instead,” 141–142
  - “I’ll Take You There,” 436–437
  - “I’m a Believer,” 247–248
  - “Imagine,” 416–417
  - “I’m Gonna Make You Love Me,” 335–336
  - “I’m Gonna Make You Mine,” 359
  - “I’m In Love Again,” 17
  - “I’m Losing You,” 421–423
  - “I’m Not in Love,” 471–472
  - “I’m Not Your Steppin’ Stone,” 248
  - “I’m On Fire,” 550–551
- Impressions, 34
- “I’m Still in Love with You,” 445–446
  - “I’m Walkin’,” 16–17
  - “In’ Crowd,” 155–156
  - “In Dreams,” 97
  - “I Never Loved a Man [The Way I Love You],” 264–266
- Ink Spots, 31
- “In My Room,” 107–109
  - “Inner City Blues [Make Me Wanna Holler],” 417–418
- innovation, lack of, in contemporary music, 610–611
- “Instant Karma,” 379–380
- instrumental rhythm and blues, 88
- instrumentals, 194–195
- “In the Midnight Hour,” 183–184
- In the Wee Small Hours*, 29
- Introducing the Beatles*, 122, 129
- “In Your Eyes,” 557–559
  - “I Only Have Eyes for You,” 48
  - “I Only Want to Be with You,” 119–120
- Isaak, Chris, 590–592
- “I Saw Her Again,” 224–226
  - “I Saw Her Standing There,” 114–115
  - “I Say a Little Prayer,” 318–319
  - “I Second That Emotion,” 290–291
  - “Israelites,” 350–352
  - “It Don’t Come Easy,” 405
  - “It Happened Today,” 45
  - “It’s All in the Game,” 36
  - “It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s Man’s World,” 216–217
  - “It’s Just a Matter of Time,” 44
  - “It’s Not for Me to Say,” 21
  - “It’s Not Unusual,” 167–169
  - “It’s the Same Old Song,” 180–181
  - “I’ve Gotta Get a Message to You,” 323–324
  - “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” 29
- Ivy, Quin, 212–213
- “I Walk the Line,” 13
  - “I Wanna Be Loved,” 47
  - “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” 113–114
  - “I Want to Know What Love Is,” 543–545





- "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," 9
- "I Want You Back," 369-370
- "I Was Made to Love Her," 274
- "I Wish," 489-490
- "I Wish It Would Rain," 299-300
- "I Wish You Love," 120

## J

- Jackson 5. *See also* Jackson, Michael
  - formation of group, 369-370
  - songs
    - "ABC," 378-379
    - "I'll Be There," 389-390
    - "I Want You Back," 369-370
    - "Never Can Say Goodbye," 400-402
    - "The Love You Save," 383-384
- Jackson, Michael. *See also* Jackson 5
  - albums, 521
  - autobiographical nature of songs, 522-523
  - Pepsi commercial, 521-522
  - songs
    - "Billie Jean," 521-523
    - "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," 506-507
    - "Got to Be There," 418-419
- Jagger, Mick, 164, 188-189
- "Jailhouse Rock," 24-25
- "Jamaica Farewell," 15
- Jamaican music, 350, 406-407, 535
- James, Mark, 336-337
- James, Tommy, 334-335, 386
- James Brown Live at the Apollo*, 84, 145-146
- Jardine, Al. *See* Beach Boys
- jazz, 132-133
- "Jimmy Mack," 266-267
- Joel, Billy, 608-610
- John, Elton
  - albums, 433, 585
  - biographical information, 432-433
  - and John Lennon, 517-519
  - personal problems, 584-585
  - songs
    - "Blue Eyes," 519-520
    - "Empty Garden," 517-519
    - "Levon," 432-433
    - "Sacrifice," 584-586
    - "Someone Saved My Life Tonight," 473-474
    - "Your Song," 394-395
- John, Little Willie, 10-11
- "Johnny B. Goode," 32-33
- Johnny Cash, 13
- Johnny's Greatest Hits* (Johnny Mathis), 21
- Johnson, Enortis, 8
- Johnston, Tom, 503-504
- Joker's Wild, The*, 26
- Jones, Brian, 301-302
- Jones, Jesus, 595-597
- Jones, John Paul, 430
- Jones, Tom, 167-169
- Joplin, Janis, 325
- Jordanaires, 67
- Jr. Walker and the All Stars
  - "Shotgun," 161-162
  - "What Does It Take," 348-349
- "Jumpin' Jack Flash," 315-316
- "Just a Dream," 46
- "Just My Imagination," 396-397

## K

- Kador, Ernie, 73
- Kaempfert, Bert, 158-159
- K-Doe, Ernie, 73
- Keene, Bob, 43
- Keisker, Marion, 12
- Kendricks, Eddie, 396-397. *See also* Temptations
- Kern, Jerome, 41
- "Kicks," 210-211
- "Kind of a Drag," 252-253
- King, Ben E.
  - "Spanish Harlem," 71-72
  - "Stand by Me," 73-74
- King, Carole, 289
- Kinks
  - "Don't Forget to Dance," 527-528
  - "Lola," 391-392
  - "You Really Got Me," 148-149
- Kirshner, Don, 51, 68
- "Kiss and Say Goodbye," 484-485
- Kornfeld, Artie, 288

## L

- "La Bamba," 42-43
- LaBostrie, Dorothy, 6, 128
- "Lady Jane," 227-228
- "Lady Madonna," 305-306
- Landau, Jon, 542
- "Last Time," 163-164
- "Last Train to Clarksville," 239
- "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)," 382-383
- "Layla," 443-445
- "Lay Lady Lay," 356-357



- "Leader of the Pack," 146–147  
 Led Zeppelin, 429–430  
 Lee, Brenda, 79–80  
 Lee, Peggy, 11  
 Left Banke, 242–243  
 Leiber, Jerry. *See* Leiber and Stoller  
 Leiber and Stoller  
     and Ben E. King, 71–72  
     and the Drifters, 58, 63, 138  
     and Elvis Presley, 9, 25, 33  
 Leigh, Carolyn, 30  
 Lennon, John. *See also* Beatles  
     albums, 469–470  
     death of, 517–518  
     drug use, 259  
     emotions expressed in lyrics, 141–142  
     "fat Elvis period," 176–177  
     politics of, 321–322  
     songs  
         "#9 Dream," 469–470  
         "Imagine," 416–417  
         "Instant Karma," 379–380  
         and Yoko Ono, 346–347, 349–350  
 Lennon-McCartney songwriting team, 129, 195–197  
 Lennox, Annie, 554–555, 602–603  
 "Let It Be," 377–378  
*Let It Be* (album), 346, 349  
 "Let's Hang On!," 193–194  
 "Let's Live for Today," 275–276  
 "Let's Stay Together," 423–424  
 "Letter," 282–283  
 Lewis, Barbara, 101  
 Lewis, Jerry Lee  
     biographical information, 27–28  
     "Great Balls of Fire," 27–28  
     "Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," 21–22  
 Lewis, Rudy, 137–138  
 Lewis, Smiley, 40  
 "Light My Fire," 271–273  
 "Lightning Strikes," 203  
 "[Lights Went Out In] Massachusetts," 291–292  
 "Like a Rolling Stone," 177–179  
 "Lion Sleeps Tonight," 77–78  
 "Listen People," 207–207  
 "Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You," 261–262  
 "Little Bitty Tear," 38  
 "Little Darlin'," 44, 45  
 "Little Girl," 220–221  
 "Little Queenie," 33  
 "Little Red Corvette," 523–525  
 Little Richard  
     biographical information, 6  
     gospel singer influences on, 5–6  
     sexual references in lyrics, 30–31  
     songs  
         "Good Golly Miss Molly," 30–31  
         "Long Tall Sally," 8–9  
         "Tutti Frutti," 5–7  
 Little Willie John, 10–11  
 Live-Aid, 534  
 Living Colour, 573–575  
 Loggins, Kenny, 505  
 "Lola," 391–392  
 "London Calling," 14  
 London music scene, 113  
 "Lonely Teardrops," 41–42  
 "Long Tall Sally," 8–9  
 "Losing My Religion," 592–595  
 "Lovable," 24  
 Love, Darlene, 100  
 Love, Mike. *See* Beach Boys  
 "Love and Marriage," 26  
 "Love Child," 328–329  
 "Love Is Alive, 485–486  
 "[Love Is] the Tender Trap," 26  
 "L-O-V-E [Love]," 470–471  
 love songs, 586–587  
 "Love You Save," 383–384  
 Lovin' Spoonful  
     history of band, 185  
     songs  
         "Darling Be Home Soon," 256–257  
         "Do You Believe in Magic," 185–186  
         "Summer in the City," 223–224  
         "You Didn't Have to Be So Nice," 197–198  
 "Lowdown," 487–489  
 "Low Rider," 478–479  
 Lulu, 284–285  
 Lydon, John, 515  
 Lynne, Gloria, 120  
 lyrics, interpretation of, 566–567

## M

- "MacArthur Park," 312–314  
 Mack, Ronnie, 102  
 "Mack the Knife," 50–51  
 Madonna, 547–548  
 "Maggie May," 410–411  
*Magical Mystery Tour*, 176, 294  
 "Magic Carpet Ride," 329–330  
 "Make the World Go Away," 38  
 Mama Cass. *See* Mamas and Papas  
 Mamas and Papas, 224–226, 276–277  
 Manhattans, 484–485



- Mann, Aimee, 557  
 Mann, Barry, 186  
 Mann and Weill, 211  
 Marchan, Bobby, 46  
 Marilee Rush and the Turnabouts, 316–317  
 Marsh, Dave, 542  
 Martha and the Vandellas  
   “Dancing in the Street,” 143–144  
   “Heat Wave,” 104  
   “Jimmy Mack,” 266–267  
 Martin, George, 186–187  
 Marvelettes, 76–77  
 “Massachusetts [The Lights Went Out In],” 291–292  
 Matadors, 70  
 Matassa, Cosimo, 6, 46  
 Mathis, Johnny  
   biographical information, 20–21  
   distinct voice of, 52  
   songs  
     “It’s Not for Me to Say,” 21  
     “Misty,” 51–52  
     “Wonderful! Wonderful!,” 20–21  
 May, Billy, 26  
 “Maybelline,” 4–5  
 Mayfield, Curtis, 34  
 McCartney, Linda, 409  
 McCartney, Paul, 293–294, 377–378, 409.  
   *See also* Beatles  
 McDonald, Michael, 504–505  
 McFarlane, Elaine “Spanky,” 276–277  
 McGlown, Betty. *See* Supremes  
 McGuinness, Paul, 562–563  
 McLaren, Malcolm, 514  
 McLean, Don, 27  
 McPhatter, Clyde, 38–40, 57–58  
 McVie, John, 482–484  
 Medley, Bill. *See* Righteous Brothers  
 Meek, Joe, 92  
*Meet the Beatles*, 122, 129  
 Melanie, 382–383  
 Mellencamp, John Cougar, 530–532  
 Memphis, 591  
 Memphis soul, 88, 446  
 Mersey sound, 131–132  
 “Message,” 498  
 MFSB organization, 448, 485  
 MG’s, Booker T. and the, 86–88  
 Michaels, Lee, 413–414  
 “Midnight Confessions,” 322–23  
 Miller, Mitch, 14, 21  
 Mills Brothers, 31  
 Miracles  
   formulaic approach to music, 183  
   songs  
     “I Second That Emotion,” 290–291  
     “Ooo Baby Baby,” 164–165  
     “Shop Around,” 69–70  
     “Tears of a Clown,” 392–393  
     “Tracks of My Tears,” 182–183  
     “You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me,” 94–95  
 “Misty,” 51–52  
 Mitchell, Guy, 14  
 Mitchell, Willie, 424, 462–463, 470  
 “Modern Love,” 528–530  
*Modern Sounds in Country-Western Music*, 83, 86  
 mods, 156  
 Modugno, Domenico, 36–37  
 “Money Honey,” 39  
 Monkees  
   as American Beatles, 239  
   live performances, 248  
   media criticism, 261–262  
   songs  
     “A Little Bit Me, A Little Bit You,” 261–262  
     “Daydream Believer,” 290  
     “I’m a Believer,” 247–248  
     “I’m Not Your Steppin’ Stone,” 248  
     “Last Train to Clarksville,” 239  
     “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” 279  
 Monterey Pop Festival, 325  
 Montgomery, Bob, 22–23  
 Moonglows, 106  
 Moore, Scotty, 10  
 “Morning Side of the Mountain,” 36  
 Morrison, Jim, 271–273  
 Morrison, Van. *See also* Them  
   albums, 423  
   biographical information, 198–199  
   songs  
     “Brown-Eyed Girl,” 283–284  
     “Domino,” 395–396  
     “Wild Night,” 423  
 Morton, George “Shadow,” 144  
 “Mother-In-Law,” 73  
 “Mother’s Little Helper,” 226–227  
 Motown Records  
   artists  
     Marvin Gaye, 107  
     Mary Wells, 127–128  
     Miracles, 69–70  
     Stevie Wonder, 203–204, 385, 453  
     Supremes, 136–137, 190  
     Temptations, 384–385  
   charm school, 161  
   demise of, 378–379, 385



distinctive sound produced by, 160–161  
phenomenal success of, 335  
Motown sound, 166, 167  
“Mr. Tambourine Man,” 171–172  
“Mrs. Robinson,” 310–311  
Mullen, Larry, 562  
musical forms, trends in, 49–50  
music videos, 579  
“Mustang Sally,” 250–251  
“My Baby Left Me,” 9–10  
“My Girl,” 154–155  
“My Guy,” 127–128  
“My Prayer,” 31  
Mysterians, 239–240  
“Mystic Eyes,” 198–199  
“My World is Empty Without You,” 205–206

## N

narcissism, in songwriting, 451  
NASA Voyager program, 32  
Nash, Graham, 281. *See also* Hollies  
Nash, Ruby, 96  
“Natural Woman [You Make Me Feel Like A],” 289–290  
“Needles and Pins,” 125–126  
“Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu” (“Volare”), 36–37  
Nelson, Benjamin Earl. *See* King, Ben E.  
Nelson, Willie, 479–480  
“Never Can Say Goodbye,” 400–402  
Neville, Aaron, 248–249  
Neville Brothers, 249  
Nevins, Al, 68  
New Orleans, 45, 62, 571  
“New Orleans,” 65–66  
new romantics, 552  
new wave, 556–557  
New York club scene, 501  
Nichols, Mike, 311–312, 342  
Nietzsche, Jack, 125  
“Night Moves,” 490–492  
“Nightshift,” 548–550  
“Night Train,” 84–85  
Nilsson, Harry, 357–358  
Nirvana, 598–599  
“Nobody But Me,” 300  
Noga, Helen, 20  
“No Matter What,” 393–394  
“No Myth,” 581–584  
Noone, Peter, 264  
“Nowhere Man,” 210

## O

O'Brien, Mary. *See* Springfield, Dusty  
O'Connor, Sinead, 579–581  
*Odessa*, 344–345  
“Oh, Pretty Woman,” 142–143  
“Oh Girl,” 435–436  
O'Jays, 448–449  
Oldham, Andrew, 315  
Oldham, Spooner, 304–305  
“On Broadway,” 99–100  
“One,” 600–602  
“One Fine Day,” 102–103  
“One I Love,” 566–568  
“One Mint Julep,” 31  
“One Nation Under a Groove,” 498–500  
“One Night,” 40–41  
*One Night with You* Elvis television special, 40–41  
“Only the Lonely,” 61–62  
“Only You,” 31  
Ono, Yoko, 346–347, 349–350, 379–380  
“Ooo Baby Baby,” 164–165  
Orbison, Roy  
    family tragedies, 142–143  
    songs  
        “Crying,” 75  
        “In Dreams,” 97  
        “Oh, Pretty Woman,” 142–143  
orchestras, 158–159  
Orioles, 31  
Orlando, Tony, 387–388  
Osmond, Donny and Marie, 401  
Osmond Brothers, 401  
“Our Day Will Come,” 96  
“Out of Sight,” 145–146  
Outsiders, 211–212  
overdubbing, 38  
“Over My Head,” 482–484  
Owens, Shirley, 68

## P

Pacemakers. *See* Gerry and the Pacemakers  
Page, Jimmy, 430  
“Paint It, Black,” 215–216  
Palmer, Earl, 16  
“Papa's Got a Brand New Bag,” 181–182  
“Papa Was a Rolling Stone,” 449–450  
“Paperback Writer,” 217–218  
Parents Music Resource Center, 566



- Parker, Colonel Tom, 7, 24–25, 40
- Parliaments, 499
- Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme*, 311
- Paul Revere and the Raiders, 210–211
- Payne, Freda, 380–381
- payola scandal, 192
- Peebles, Ann, 462–463
- “Peggy Sue,” 26–27
- Penn, Dan, 304–305
- Penn, Michael, 581–584
- “Pennies from Heaven,” 45
- Penniman, Richard. *See* Little Richard
- “Penny Lane,” 257–258
- Percy Faith, 55–56
- Pet Sounds*, 214, 233, 244
- Petty, Norman, 23
- Peyton, Lawrence. *See* Four Tops
- Philadelphia International Records, 448–449
- Phillips, John, 225, 226. *See also* Mamas and Papas
- Phillips, Michelle. *See* Mamas and Papas
- Phillips, Phil, 48–49
- Phillips, Sam, 7, 11, 13, 35
- Pickett, Wilson
- “In the Midnight Hour,” 183–184
  - “Mustang Sally,” 250–251
- “Piece of My Heart,” 325
- Pilgrim Travelers, 23
- “Pink Houses,” 530–532
- plagiarism, 97–98
- Plant, Robert, 49, 430
- Plastic Ono Band, 379–380
- Platters
- contribution to doo-wop, 31
  - songs
    - “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” 41
    - “Twilight Time,” 31–32
- “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” 279
- “Please Mr. Postman,” 76–77
- “Please Please Me,” 117–119
- P.M. Dawn, 605–608
- Police
- albums, 525–527
  - songs
    - “Every Breath You Take,” 525
    - “Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic,” 514–517
- Pomus, Doc, 63
- pop charts. *See* pop music charts; Top 40
- pop music
- commercialization of, 476–477
  - derivative nature of, 98
  - historical continuity of, 570
  - impact on American culture, 317–318
  - influences on
    - California beach culture, 107–108
    - disco and punk, 507–508
    - drugs, 241–242
    - FM radio, 225
  - movements, 552
  - ’60s songs rerecorded in ’80s, 561–562
  - ’60s *vs.* ’70s, 467–468
- pop music charts
- album charts *vs.* singles charts (1977), 491–492
  - failure to recognize black musicians, 50
  - mishandling of alternative rhythm and blues, 498
  - R&B, 569
  - relevance of today’s, 619
  - singles on today’s, 617–618
- Presley, Elvis
- change in style after military service, 67
  - impersonators, 122
  - as lounge singer, 357
  - motion picture career, 25
  - songs
    - “Are You Lonesome Tonight?,” 66–67
    - “Jailhouse Rock,” 24–25
    - “One Night,” 40–41
    - “Suspicious Minds,” 357
  - 1968 television special, 40–41
- Pretenders, 511–512
- Primes, 124
- Primettes, 136
- Prince
- albums, 539
  - movies, 539–540
  - as R&B artist, 524
  - songs
    - “Little Red Corvette,” 523–525
    - “Purple Rain,” 538–540
- “Prisoner of Love,” 101–102
- “Problems,” 20
- Procul Harum, 279–280
- protest singers, 171
- protest songs, 255–256
- “Proud Mary,” 339–340
- “Psychotic Reaction,” 240–242
- pub scene, English, 501
- punk bands, 525
- punk rock, 221, 500–502, 507, 514–515
- “Purple Rain,” 538–540





## Q

"Queen of the Hop," 51

## R

racial categories in music industry, 605

radio, 223–224, 225, 597–598

Raeletts, 85–86

Raiders, Paul Revere and the, 210–211

"Rain," 218–219

"Rain, the Park, and Other Things," 288–289

"Rainy Night in Georgia," 375

Raleigh, Ben, 21

Ram, Buck, 32

Randle, Bill, 45

rap music, 606–607, 612, 619

Rascals, 307–308. *See also* Young Rascals

Rastafarians, 352

Rawls, Lou, 23

Ray Charles Singers, 85–86

Ray Conniff Orchestra, 21

R&B. *See* rhythm and blues

RCA Records

and Elvis Presley, 7, 12–13, 40

and Harry Belafonte, 15

and Little Richard, 6

"Reach Out I'll Be There," 237–238

recording industry, 3, 14

Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), 566

recording process, 472

Redding, Otis

death in plane crash, 302–303

mass appeal of, 303

songs

"Respect," 251–252

"[Sittin' On] The Dock of the Bay," 302–403

"Try a Little Tenderness," 251–252

"Red Red Wine," 535–537

"Red Roses for a Blue Lady," 158–159

Reed, Lou, 458–459

"Reelin' in the Years," 459–461

"Reet Petite," 42

Reeves, Martha. *See* Martha and the Vandellas  
reggae, 536

Reid, Vernon, 573–575

R.E.M.

albums, 593–594

formation of group, 592–593

songs

"Losing My Religion," 592–595

"The One I Love," 566–568

"Remember [Walkin' in the Sand]," 144

"Respect," 251–252, 268–269

"Respect Yourself," 420–421

Revere, Paul, 210–211

"Revolution," 321–322

*Revolver*, 231

rhythm and blues, 3–4, 155–156, 569

RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America), 566

Richards, Keith, 164, 188–189

Richardson, J. P., 43

Richie, Lionel, 549

Ricketts, David, 559

Riddle, Nelson, 26, 29

riffing, 570

Righteous Brothers

"Unchained Melody," 175–176

"[You're My] Soul and Inspiration," 208–209

"You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," 151–152

"Right Here, Right Now," 595–597

"Rikki Don't Lose That Number," 464–466

"Riot in Cell Block #9," 33

"River of Dreams," 608–610

Robbins, Marty, 14

Robertson, Robbie, 368

Robins, 33

Robinson, Ray Charles. *See* Charles, Ray

Robinson, Smokey. *See also* Miracles

biographical information, 94–95

impact on popular music, 291

and Mary Wells, 127

songs

"Cruisin'," 507–508

"I Second That Emotion," 290–291

"Tears of a Clown," 392–393

as songwriter, 183, 223–224

rockabilly, 7, 10

rock and roll

American *vs.* British, 113

and Buddy Holly's death, 27

as catalyst for social unrest, 362

comparison of '50s and '60s styles, 113

and Elvis Presley, 8, 12

history of, 7, 181–182

impact of previous work on contemporary artists,  
590–591

introduction of lead-vocal harmony, 20

and Memphis, 591

references to drugs in lyrics, 215

resegregation of, in late '50s, 19

rockers, 156

rock music



contrasted with rock and roll, 242  
 impact of technological developments on, 472  
 '70s style, 487  
 "Rock Steady," 410  
 Rodgers, Nile, 530  
 Rokes, 276  
 Rolling Stones  
   comeback, 315  
   early history, 163  
   image of, contrasted with Beatles, 173  
   lyrics, 226–227, 228  
   passion for rhythm and blues, 215–216  
   public appearances, 172, 254, 403–404  
   songs  
     "19th Nervous Breakdown," 209–210  
     "Brown Sugar," 403–404  
     "Dandelion," 287–288  
     "Get Off Of My Cloud," 188–190  
     "Happy," 447–448  
     "Honky Tonk Women," 352–353  
     "[I Can't Get No] Satisfaction," 172–173  
     "Jumpin' Jack Flash," 315–316  
     "Lady Jane," 227–228  
     "Mother's Little Helper," 226–227  
     "Paint It, Black," 215–216  
     "Ruby Tuesday," 254–255  
     "She's a Rainbow," 300–302  
     "The Last Time," 163–164  
     "Tumbling Dice," 438–439  
     "Wild Horses," 407–408  
   songs not in Top 40, 408  
   songwriting, 216  
 Ronettes  
   "Baby I Love You," 116–117  
   "Be My Baby," 104–106  
   biographical information, 116–117  
 Ross, Diana. *See also* Supremes  
   and Motown Records, 205  
   solo career, 363  
   songs  
     "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," 387  
     "Love Child," 328–329  
 Rotten, Johnny, 515  
 Roy Orbison, 61–62  
 45 RPM singles, 619–620  
*Rubber Soul*, 210  
 "Ruby," 70–71  
 Ruby and the Romantics, 96  
 "Ruby Tuesday," 254–255  
 Ruffin, David, 299

"Runaround Sue," 75–76  
 "Runaway," 72–73  
 Rupe, Art, 6  
 Rush, Marilee, 316–317

## S

"Sacrifice," 584–586  
 Safka, Melanie, 382–383  
 Salt 'n' Pepa, 612–614  
 San Francisco music scene, 224–225, 339, 403  
 "Satisfaction," 172–173  
 "Save the Last Dance for Me," 63  
 Scaggs, Boz, 487–489  
 scat, 570  
 "School Day," 18–19  
 "School's Out," 441–443  
 "Sea Cruise," 45–46  
 Seal, 597–598  
 "Sea of Love," 48–49  
 Searchers, 125–126  
 "Searchin'," 33  
 Sebastian, John, 257. *See also* Lovin' Spoonful  
 Seger, Bob, 490–492  
 Selvin, Ben, 48  
 Sex Pistols, 514–515  
 "Sexual Healing," 520–521  
*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 258  
*Shaft*, 415  
 sham rock, 45  
 Shangri-Las  
   "Give Him a Great Big Kiss," 156–157  
   "Leader of the Pack," 146–147  
   "Remember [Walkin' in the Sand]," 144  
 Shannon, Del, 49, 72–73  
 "Sh-boom," 44, 45  
 "She'd Rather Be with Me," 270–271  
 Sheeley, Sharon, 44  
 "She's a Rainbow," 300–302  
 "She's a Woman," 150–151  
 "She's Got You," 81–82  
 "Ship of Fools," 564–566  
 Shirelles, 68  
 Shondells, Tommy James and the, 334–335  
 "Shop Around," 69–70  
 "Shopping for Clothes," 34  
 "Shotgun," 161–162  
 Shuman, Mort, 63  
 "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours," 385–386  
 Silhouettes, 28–29  
 Sill, Lester, 33  
 Simon, Carly, 451–452



- Simon, Paul. *See* Simon and Garfunkel
- Simon and Garfunkel  
and Mike Nichols, 342  
solo careers, 343  
songs  
    “Mrs. Robinson,” 310–311  
    “The Boxer,” 342–343  
    “The Dangling Conversation,” 235–236  
Top 40 hits, 235–236
- Simpson, Valerie, 309, 387
- Sinatra, Frank  
albums, 26  
career, 25–26, 243  
songs  
    “All the Way,” 25–26  
    “Somethin’ Stupid,” 260  
    “Summer Wind,” 243  
    “Witchcraft,” 29–30
- Sinatra, Nancy  
    “Somethin’ Stupid,” 260  
    “These Boots are Made for Walking,” 206
- “Since I Don’t Have You,” 44–45  
“Since You’ve Been Gone,” 306–307  
singer/songwriter teams, 452  
“Singing the Blues,” 14  
singles  
    charts, relevance of, 617–618  
    45 RPM, 619–620  
    twelve-inch, 498
- “[Sittin’ On] The Dock of the Bay,” 302–403  
“Sixty Minute Man,” 38  
ska, 351, 535  
skiffle, 113  
“Skinny Jim,” 38  
Skyliners, 44–45  
slap-back echo, 13  
Sledge, Percy, 212–213  
Sloan, P.F., Phil “Flip,” 275–276  
Sloan-Barri songwriting team, 275–276  
“Sloop John B,” 213–214
- Sly and the Family Stone  
    “Everybody is a Star,” 374–375  
    “Everyday People,” 338  
    “Family Affair,” 418  
    “Hot Fun in the Summertime,” 354–355  
    “Thank You [Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin],”  
        373–374
- “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” 598–599  
Smith, Huey “Piano,” 46  
“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” 31, 41  
Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, 392–393. *See also*  
Miracles; Robinson, Smokey  
“Smoky Joe’s Cafe,” 33  
“Smoky Places,” 80–81  
“Society’s Child,” 277  
“Someday Never Comes,” 439–441  
“Someday We’ll Be Together,” 363–364  
“Someone Saved My Life Tonight,” 473–474  
“Somethin’ Else,” 44  
“Something,” 360–361  
“Something in the Air,” 362–363  
“Somethin’ Stupid,” 260  
*Songs for Swingin’ Lovers*, 29  
*Songs for Young Lovers*, 29  
songwriting teams, 99  
Sonny and Cher, 173–175  
“Son of a Preacher Man,” 337–338  
soul, Memphis, 446  
“Soul and Inspiration,” 208–209  
soul music, 24, 250–251, 411, 487. *See also*  
    gospel music
- Soul Stirrers, 23  
Soundscan, 617  
“Spanish Harlem,” 71–72  
Spanky and Our Gang, 276–277
- Spector, Phil  
    and the Crystals, 90–91, 100  
    and the Platters, 41  
    production techniques, 104–105  
    and the Righteous Brothers, 151–152, 208–209  
    and the Ronettes, 116–117
- Spencer Davis Group, 253–254  
“Splish, Splash,” 51
- Springfield, Dusty  
    songs  
        “I Only Want to Be with You,” 119–120  
        “Son of a Preacher Man,” 337–338  
        “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me,” 219–220  
    television appearances, 119–120
- Springsteen, Bruce  
    albums, 481, 542  
    and Mike Appel, 541  
    songs  
        “Born in the U.S.A.,” 540–543  
        “Born to Run,” 480–482  
        “Dancing in the Dark,” 537–538  
        “I’m On Fire,” 550–551  
        “Streets of Philadelphia,” 614–615  
    songwriting, 542–543  
    Top 10 singles, 537–538  
    stadium concerts, 501
- Stafford, Terry, 122  
“Stand by Me,” 73–74  
Standells, 221–222  
“Standing in the Shadows of Love,” 249–250  
Staple Singers



- "I'll Take You There," 436–437  
 "Respect Yourself," 420–421  
 Starr, Ringo, 405. *See also* Beatles  
 "Stay with Me," 431–432  
 Steely Dan  
   albums, 497  
   formation of group, 496  
   inscrutability of lyrics, 465  
   songs  
     "Deacon Blues," 496–498  
     "Reelin' in the Years," 459–461  
     "Rikki Don't Lose That Number," 464–466  
 Steppenwolf  
   history of group, 329, 330  
   songs  
     "Born to Be Wild," 317–318  
     "Magic Carpet Ride," 329–330  
 stereophonic recording, 472  
 Stewart, Dave, 554–555  
 Stewart, Jim, 86–87  
 Stewart, Rod, 431  
   "[I Know] I'm Losing You," 421–423  
   "Maggie May," 410–411  
 Stewart, Sylvester. *See* Sly and the Family Stone  
 Stigwood, Robert, 291–292  
 Stillman, Al, 21  
 Stills, Stephen, 255–256  
 Stipe, Michael, 566–567, 592–595  
 Stoller, Mike. *See* Leiber and Stoller  
 Stone, Sly, 373  
*Stone Alone*, 163  
 "Stop! In the Name of Love," 160–161  
 Stordahl, Axel, 26  
 "Strawberry Fields Forever," 259–260  
 "Streets of Philadelphia," 614–615  
 "Stroll," 44  
 Strong, Barrett, 299  
 Strummer, Joe, 14  
 Stubbs, Levi. *See* Four Tops  
 "Subterranean Homesick Blues," 169–171  
 "Such a Night," 39  
 "Summer in the City," 223–224  
 Summer of Love, 278, 279, 325  
 "Summertime Blues," 37–38, 43  
 "Summer Wind," 243  
 "Sunday Will Never Be the Same," 276–277  
 Sun Records  
   and Chuck Berry, 4  
   and Elvis Presley, 7, 11  
   and Johnny Cash, 13, 35  
 "Superstition," 453–454  
 Supremes  
   breakup of group, 363–364  
   change of group name, 246  
   competition with Temptations, 335–336  
   earnings of, 191  
   marketing of, by Motown, 190  
   meeting with the Beatles, 166  
   quality of recordings, 229–230  
   songs  
     "Baby Love," 148  
     "Back in My Arms Again," 165–166  
     "I Hear a Symphony," 190–191  
     "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me," 335–336  
     "Love Child," 328–329  
     "My World is Empty Without You," 205–206  
     "Someday We'll Be Together," 363–364  
     "Stop! In the Name of Love," 160–161  
     "Where Did Our Love Go," 136–137  
     "You Can't Hurry Love," 229–230  
     "You Keep Me Hangin' On," 245–247  
   "Suspicion," 122  
   "Suspicious Minds," 357  
   "Sweet Emotion," 476–478  
   "[Sweet Sweet Baby] Since You've Been Gone,"  
     306–307  
   Syndicate of Sound, 220–221  
   synthesizer bands, 553  
   synth-pop movement, 552–553, 554

## T

- T. Rex, 428–429  
 "Take a Chance on Me," 495–496  
 "Take Me to the River," 500–503  
 Talking Heads, 500–503  
*T.A.M.I./TNT Show*, 181–182  
 Tarriers, 15  
 Taupin, Bernie, 432–433, 473–474, 519  
 Taylor, James, 451–452  
 Taylor, Mick, 352–353  
 Taylor, R. Dean, 328  
 Taylor, Zola, 31  
 "Teach Me Tonight," 47  
 Tears for Fears, 551–553  
 "Tears of a Clown," 392–393  
 "Tell It Like It Is," 248–249  
 "Telstar," 91–92  
 Tempo Toppers, 6  
 "Temptation Eyes," 397–398  
 Temptations  
   competition with Supremes, 335–336  
   songs  
     "Ain't Too Proud to Beg," 222–223  
     "Ball of Confusion," 384–385



- "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me," 335-336  
"I Wish It Would Rain," 299-300  
"Just My Imagination," 396-397  
"My Girl," 154-155  
"Papa Was a Rolling Stone," 449-450  
"The Way You Do the Things You Do," 123-125
- "Tender Trap," 26  
Terrell, Tammi, 308-309  
"Thank You [Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin]," 373-374  
"Thank You Girl," 129  
"That'll Be the Day," 22-23  
"That's All Right, Mama," 9  
"That's the Way of the World," 475-476  
"The Ballad of John and Yoko," 349-350  
The Band, 367-369  
"The Bells," 39  
"The Boxer," 342-343  
"The Boys of Summer," 545-547  
"The Dangling Conversation," 235-236  
"The Dock of the Bay," 302-403  
"The Good Life," 103  
"The 'In' Crowd," 155-156  
*Their Satanic Majesties' Request*, 301  
"The Last Time," 163-164  
"The Letter," 282-283  
"[The Lights Went Out In] Massachusetts," 291-292  
"The Lion Sleeps Tonight," 77-78  
"The Love You Save," 383-384  
Them, 198-199  
theme albums, 29-30  
"Theme from a Summer Place," 55-56  
"Theme from *Shaft*," 415-416  
"The Message," 498  
"The Morning Side of the Mountain," 36  
"The One I Love," 566-568  
"The Rain, the Park, and Other Things," 288-289  
"There's a Kind of Hush," 264  
"These Boots are Made for Walking," 206  
*The Times They Are a Changin'*, 170  
"The Way You Do the Things You Do," 123-125  
Thiele, Bob, 23  
"Think," 314-315  
"This Bitter Earth," 47  
"This Guy's In Love With You," 309-310  
"This I Swear," 45  
"This Magic Moment," 57-58  
Thomas, B.J., 336-337  
Thomas, Irma, 128-129  
Thornton, Big Mama, 9-10  
*Thriller*, 521  
Thunderclap Newman, 362-363  
"Ticket to Ride," 165  
"Tighter, Tighter," 386  
Tijuana Brass, 310  
Til, Sonny, 31  
"Til Tuesday, 555-557  
"Time of the Season," 340-341  
"Time Won't Let Me," 211-212  
Tin Pan Alley, 48, 285  
"Tired of Being Alone," 411-412  
toaster, 537  
toasting, 351  
"To Be Loved," 42  
Tokens, 77-78  
"To Love Somebody," 281-282  
*Tommy*, 427  
Tommy James and the Shondells, 334-335  
Top 40  
    commercialization of, 476-477, 598  
    quality and relevance of, 598  
    recycling of past styles, 603  
    '80s and '90s artists not on lists, 617  
    '60s vs. '70s, 467-468  
Tornadoes, 91-92  
Tosches, Nick, 27  
"Touch the Hem of His Garment," 24  
Toussaint, Allen, 73, 128  
Townshend, Pete, 362, 412-413, 426-428.  
    *See also* Who  
Toys, 192-193  
"Tracks of My Tears," 182-183  
trad jazz, 114, 188  
"Trains and Boats and Planes," 229  
transistor radios, 223-224  
"Treasure of Love," 39  
trends  
    in American music, 49-50  
    dance records, 77  
    girl groups, 76, 97  
    influence on recording industry, 3  
"Try a Little Tenderness," 251-252  
Tufano, Dennis, 252-253  
"Tumbling Dice," 438-439  
Turnabouts, Marilee Rush and the, 316-317  
Turner, Sonny, 41  
Turtles  
    breakup of group, 331  
    songs  
        "Elenore," 330-331  
        "Happy Together," 260-261  
        "She'd Rather Be with Me," 270-271  
"Tutti Frutti," 5-7  
twelve-inch singles, 498  
"Twenty Flight Rock," 38  
"Twilight Time," 31-32  
two-tone music, 535-536





## U

- U2  
 albums, 563–564  
 history of group, 562–563, 600  
 songs  
   “One,” 600–602  
   “With or Without You,” 562–564
- UB40, 535–537
- “Unchained Melody,” 175–176
- “Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey,” 409
- “Under the Boardwalk,” 137–138
- “Unforgettable,” 47
- “Until You Come Back to Me [That’s What I’m Gonna Do],” 461–462
- “Up Around the Bend,” 381–382
- “Up on Cripple Creek,” 367–369
- “Up on the Roof,” 92–93
- Upsetters, 6, 30. *See also* Little Richard
- “Uptight [Everything’s Alright],” 203–205

## V

- Valens, Richie, 42–43
- Valenzuela, Richard, 42–43
- Valli, Frankie, 93, 273. *See also* Four Seasons
- Vandellas. *See* Martha and the Vandellas
- Van Heusen, Jimmy, 26
- Verrett, Harrison, 16
- videos, music, 579
- Vincent, Gene, 43
- Vincent, Johnny, 46
- “Vision of Love,” 587–590
- vocal groups  
   black, 31, 603  
   white, 45
- “Voices Carry,” 555–557
- “Volare,” 36–37
- Voyager program, 32

## W

- Waits, Tom, 49
- “Wake Up, Little Susie,” 20
- “Walk Away Renee,” 242–243
- Walker, Jr.. *See* Jr. Walker and the All Stars
- “Walkin’ After Midnight,” 17–18
- “Walkin’ To New Orleans,” 62
- “Walk Like a Man,” 93–94
- “Walk on By,” 130
- “Walk on the Wild Side,” 458–459
- Wallinger, Karl, 564–566
- wall of sound, 105
- War, 478–479
- Ward, Billy, 38, 39
- “Warm and Tender,” 21
- Warwicke, Dionne  
   biographical information, 95–96  
   British imitators of, 115  
   songs  
     “Alfie,” 271  
     “Anyone Who Had a Heart,” 115–116  
     “Don’t Make Me Over,” 95–96  
     “Trains and Boats and Planes,” 229  
     “Walk on By,” 130
- Washington, Dinah, 46–47
- “Waterloo,” 466–469
- Waters, Muddy, 5
- “We Are the World,” 15, 556
- Webb, Jim, 313–314, 333
- “We Can Work It Out,” 195–186
- “We Gotta Get Out of This Place,” 186
- Weil, Cynthia, 186
- Weill, Kurt, 51
- Weiss, Betty and Mary. *See* Shangri-Las
- “Welcome to the Boomtown,” 559–560
- Wells, Mary, 127–128, 308
- Weston, Kim, 308
- Westover, Charles. *See* Shannon, Del
- Wexler, Jerry  
   and Aretha Franklin, 266, 295–296  
   and Wilson Pickett, 183–184
- “What a Difference a Day Makes,” 46–47
- “What a Fool Believes,” 503–505
- “What a Wonderful World,” 570–573
- “Whatcha See Is Whatcha Get,” 406
- “What’d I Say,” 49–50
- “What Does It Take,” 348–349
- “What’s Going On,” 398–400
- “Whatta Man,” 612–614
- “When a Man Loves a Woman,” 212–213
- “When Sunny Gets Blue,” 21
- “Where Did Our Love Go,” 136–137
- “While You See a Chance,” 512–514
- Whipped Cream and Other Delights*, 194–195
- White, Maurice, 475–476
- “White Christmas,” 39
- Whiteman, Paul, 41
- “Whiter Shade of Pale,” 279–280
- Whitfield, Norman, 222, 223, 299, 331–332, 384–385, 450
- Who



- "Behind Blue Eyes," 426-428  
"Won't Get Fooled Again," 412-413  
"Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On," 21-22, 28  
"Who'll Stop the Rain," 375-376  
"Why," 602-603  
"Wichita Lineman," 332-333  
"Wicked Game," 590-592  
"Wild Horses," 407-408  
"Wild Night," 423  
*Wild One, The*, 38  
Williams, Andy, 98-99  
Williams, Dave, 22  
Williams, Mentor, 457  
Williams, Otis. *See* Temptations  
Williams, Paul, 457. *See also* Temptations  
Williams, Tony, 31, 41  
"Will You Love Me Tomorrow?," 68  
Wilson, Brian. *See also* Beach Boys  
    mental problems, 244-245  
    as songwriter/producer, 179-180, 233-234  
Wilson, Jackie  
    biographical information, 42  
    death of, 287  
    songs  
        "Doggin' Around," 58-59  
        "Lonely Teardrops," 41-42  
        "[Your Love Keeps Lifting Me] Higher and Higher," 286-287  
Wilson, Mary. *See* Supremes  
"Winter Dance Party" tour, 43  
Winwood, Steve, 253-254, 512-514  
"Wishing Well," 568-570  
"Wish Someone Would Care," 128-129  
"Witchcraft," 29-30  
"With or Without You," 562-564  
"Without Love [There is Nothing]," 39  
*With the Beatles*, 129  
Wonder, Stevie  
    albums, 463, 464, 490  
    biographical information, 203-204  
    car accident, 489  
    songs  
        "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," 464  
        "I Was Made to Love Her," 274  
        "I Wish," 489-490  
        "Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours," 385-386  
        "Superstition," 453-454  
        "Uptight [Everything's Alright]," 203-205  
    as songwriter, 204-205  
"Wonderful! Wonderful," 20-21  
*Wonderful Wonderful* (album), 21  
"Wonderful World," 60-61  
"Won't Get Fooled Again," 412-413  
Woodstock, 354-355, 355, 382-383  
"Words," 304  
"Working My Way Back to You," 207-208  
World Party, 564-566  
"Would I Lie to You?," 553-555  
"Wouldn't It Be Nice," 233-234  
Wright, Gary, 485-486
- ## Y
- "Yakkety-Yak," 33-34  
Yardbirds, 241  
"Yellow Submarine," 230-231  
"Yesterday," 186-188  
"You Always Hurt the One You Love," 16  
"You Better Move On," 82-83  
"You Can't Catch Me," 33  
"You Can't Hurry Love," 229-230  
"You Didn't Have to Be So Nice," 197-198  
"You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," 219-220  
"You Don't Know Me," 85-86  
"You Keep Me Hangin' On," 245-247  
Young, Neil, 255-256  
"Young at Heart," 26  
"Youngblood," 33  
Young Rascals. *See also* Rascals  
    "Groovin'," 269-270  
    "How Can I Be Sure," 285-286  
"You Ought to be with Me," 450-451  
"You're All I Need to Get By," 400  
"You Really Got Me," 148-149  
"[You're My] Soul and Inspiration," 208-209  
"You're So Vain," 451-452  
"[Your Love Keeps Lifting Me] Higher and Higher," 286-287  
"Your Song," 394-395  
"You Send Me," 23-24  
"You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," 151-152  
"You've Really Got a Hold on Me," 94-95  
"You Win Again," 36
- ## Z
- Zimmerman, Robert. *See* Dylan, Bob  
Zombies, 340-341



U.S. \$19.95  
Can. \$28.95

Music



**FORTY YEARS OF**  
**American**  
**Hit Radio**

Starting in 1955, America began tracking its favorite songs on the Top 40 charts. More than a record of our collective music tastes, the charts became snapshots that reveal who we are. Now THOMAS RYAN, a music reviewer, percussionist, and obsessive vintage vinyl collector, takes us through all forty years, providing a wealth of insight based on exhaustive research.

Arranged chronologically, *American Hit Radio* puts 1,250 of the Top 40 songs in perspective, spotlighting 500 with carefully crafted essays describing the artists' backgrounds and inspirations, the cultural context of the songs, and how the song styles and statements relate to the music scene before and since. From Fats Domino to Nirvana, popular music reflects the radical changes we have experienced as a country and a culture. *American Hit Radio* explores where our music has taken us in the last half-century—what we have left behind, what persists, and why.

Whether the song is "Maybelline" or "Billie Jean," popular music is something we all share. *American Hit Radio* is more than an enjoyable popular music survey, it's a vivid cultural history of the American psyche.

ISBN 0-7615-0230-0



9 780761 502302 5 1995

PRIMA PUBLISHING

World Radio History