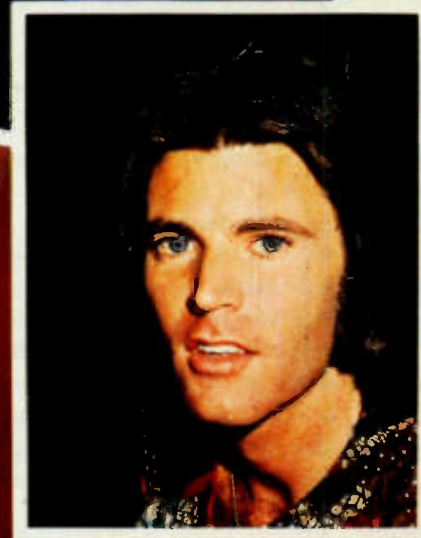


THE
RADIO
ONE

Story of Pop

THE FIRST
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF POP
IN 26 WEEKLY PARTS



PART 4

MARC BOLAN: from the Underground to Solid Gold

LITTLE RICHARD: Wild Man of Rock

25p

RICK NELSON: The boy next door grows up

EVERY THURSDAY

PLUS: Filmstar Presley. Birth of Pop. The Hit Makers and more

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By the mid-'50s the nature of music was changing. The first wave of rock & roll was ending and the initial excitement of the raw beat and lyric was becoming muted – slowly rock was being distilled into pop. This week's issue, in conjunction with the Radio One programme, chronicles the full cycle. On the radio you will hear how Bobby Darin's first records were produced to sound like the product of a 'white Little Richard'. You will also hear how black music was used (in some cases abused) in a variety of ways to form first rock & roll and later the stirrings of straight pop music, and how black music was 'under-the-pillow' listening for thousands of white kids-drawn to the compulsion of its beat, who then invaded downtown record stores to buy the releases of small local companies. Through the words of the people involved at the time you will hear the chain of events that led to Alan Freed pushing, shouting and hustling the music to the general public.

In this issue we tell you how Chicago – Mecca for thousands of poor blacks from the South – changed the country blues into urban blues – music that reflected the city's own heartbeat. One of the results of all this was Little Richard – profiled in this issue and heard on the programme – who took the clay of black music and moulded it into something essentially his own.

At much the same time two young white men – Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller – were helping to change the sound of music both black and white by fusing elements from both. They became – as we relate in a profile feature, and Radio One illustrates in sound – two of the most successful songwriters/producers of the last 20 years; helping to form a music that was neither wholly black nor rock & roll – but which was to set the style of the pop music that we know today. Leiber and Stoller's work for the Drifters was the ultimate commercialisation of black music, moving it firmly into the domain of the general public, and breaking ground for the 'pop boom' that was to come. Also in these pages we show how pop was born and who the first stars were. We look at the complete commercialisation of Elvis Presley in Hollywood; show that the work forged in the mid-'50s is alive today in superstars like Marc Bolan; and also backtrack slightly in our continuing story of country music, indicating the immense influence it has had on pop through the years.

**Although the radio programme and this publication have been linked for readers in the UK, we have taken care to ensure that readers abroad will find this publication complete in itself.*

How to obtain future copies: The Radio One Story of Pop is on sale in 26 weekly parts. The best way to make sure you do not miss any of the future parts is to ask your newsagent to keep a copy for you each week or deliver it to you. When you place a regular order in this way you are not putting yourself under any long term obligation. With two weeks' notice you can cancel your order at any stage. But the great advantage of placing a regular order is that you run no risk of missing one of your weekly parts.

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Little Richard

The man who put the Bop in

A-Wop-Bop -A-Loo-Bop -Lop-Bam-Boom



Redferns

Some people like rock. Some people like to roll. But Little Richard was something else. He had a bounce and flash that made even Elvis look slow, and a voice with more speed than a runaway express train; sweeping all the pale imitations before him into oblivion.

These days Richard has become a pale imitation of himself, dressing his band in grey, himself in gay, and losing touch with the audience almost every time. Typically he once threw Jimi Hendrix out of his band for wearing brightly coloured shirts, but there was a time when he was the biggest ball of energy around.

Richard was two years late crossing the Atlantic because his label, Specialty, didn't initially have an international distribution

deal. So Britain got 'Rip It Up' from Bill Haley and 'Long Tall Sally' from Pat Boone, of all people, in 1956, which in no way prepared for the arrival of the real thing.

Little Richard's first American hit had been 'Tutti Frutti' in 1955, followed in 1956 by 'Long Tall Sally' and then 'Rip It Up'. He finally crashed into the British charts in February 1957 with a mammoth double-sider, 'Long Tall Sally'/'Tutti Frutti'. Either could have been the 'A' side for there was little to choose between them – what was going for them they both had – and from the moment Little Richard opened his mouth or fingered a piano key, it was clear that unlike Haley or Boone he was not wholesale.

Behind him the tempo was hard and furious, but he upped it, thrashing his keyboard double-time as if his body clock was synched in twice as fast as everyone else's. All the while he bellowed, roared, screamed,

and sometimes even sang. Tarzan had nothing on Richard. This vocal overkill meant you could hardly catch the words, and truthfully at first it seemed these were only gibberish. But 'awopbopalooopalop-bamboom' had meaning for all who wanted to understand. Here was a private language that conveyed nothing to squares and straights. Here was the language of rock & roll.

For all those who sent that record high into the charts a subsequent view of Little Richard was no kind of let-down, since his appearance was as outrageous as his music. He showed up first on album sleeves and in the music press, most often in a stance midway between an Al Jolson impersonation and a back-flip demonstration, only crazier than both – feet apart, knees bent and together, torso leant back, arms in a hands-up position: preparing perhaps to

spring upon the piano keys. Whatever the purpose of the stance it was impossible to describe the set of Richard's limbs with greater accuracy owing to the nature of his clothes, which were unusual.

His jacket fell clear of his body way down towards his knees, whilst the trousers hung like giant gaberdine flags. His tailor must've been on a percentage from the mill. A shiny pompadour hairstyle made his head appear larger than it actually was, and his facial expressions would emphasize its roundness; these expressions switched between terror and serenity as his eyes revolved at all times like dark marbles on white saucers. As a final stroke he grew above his top lip a moustache so thin it might have been traced with a sharp pencil. It was hard to believe he was real. Then *Don't Knock The Rock* was at last put out, and it was all true. In the scene where he appeared onstage, a dance-floor fist fight broke out which turned into a mass brawl. That figured.

Richard actually toured Britain with those package shows that played one-nighters up and down the country; fifteen minutes to race through your hits – half an hour if you had top billing – and wherever you went on the backing was Sounds Incorporated. He didn't cause any fights, but he was pretty wild all the same. He would come on in that same baggy suit and start right into one real hairy rocker – 'Rip It Up', 'Lucille', 'Good Golly Miss Molly' – it didn't matter which – and straightaway the audience would be up and jumping and shouting and screaming – then he'd do another, then another, then some more. He didn't bother with a piano stool; instead he would stand twisted away from the keys, face on to the auditorium, jerking his hands up and down to one side. Then, without missing a chord, he'd cock one leg up onto the instrument and raise another cheer playing that way.

The Hammy Stripper

He'd be breaking sweat by now, so he'd shake off his jacket and tug out his shirt tails, making like a hammy stripper. The crowd would shout and whistle and stamp and cat-call, and thus encouraged he would tread coyly to the stage edge – the back-up boys not for one moment letting up on the rooty riffs – and step carefully out of his pumps. Then he'd pull off his socks, unbutton his shirt and take that off too – so you could see he was in fine shape physically, looking brown and sexy with the glistening sweat and all. Next he would make ready to toss these garments (the shirt, the pumps, the socks) to the front stalls, with the calculated result that everyone who wanted to be in line for a memento of the wild man had worked down into the aisles dividing the expensive seats – thus causing plenty of concern amongst the stewards who weren't at all used to this kind of havoc and seemed mostly to be O.A.P.'s fattening their pension. And who was this mad coon anyhow?

The shoes he wouldn't throw too far: they'd most likely hurt someone, and even if he wasn't going to wear them again he

probably didn't like to think of them getting scuffed. The socks he just dangled and dropped, since not even *he* could make too much production about sweaty hose. (His keenest fans liked to imagine they were silk and monogrammed, but losing two pairs a night – early and late houses – he doubtless sent out to the nearest store for nylon.)

Finally, he swung the shirt lassoo-style so no one was quite sure at which point of the arc he would let go, and thus where it would land. At best it would float out above the stretching crowd – caught brilliant white in the spotlight before dropping to be snatched and torn and taken home and pinned up: 'A Piece Of Little Richard's Shirt, Slough Adelphi, October 23rd'. He'd hitch up his trousers after, just to show that was the finish of that part of the act.

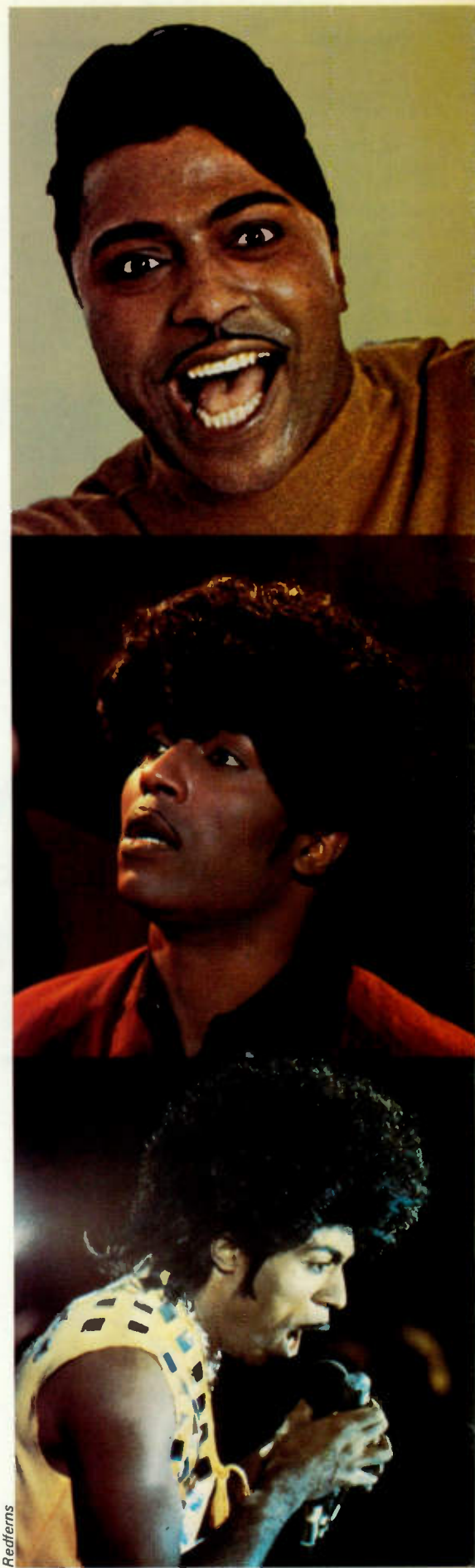
Too Much

The band was still at it, by this time working up some kind of a sweat themselves, and Richard would dive straight back in with 'Ready Teddy' or 'Jenny Jenny' or 'She's Got It' – 'Ruby lips, shapely hips, when she walks down the street all the cats flip, she's got it . . .' Whichever, he'd be tearing his throat and lungs apart and beating away on that rock-crazed grand.

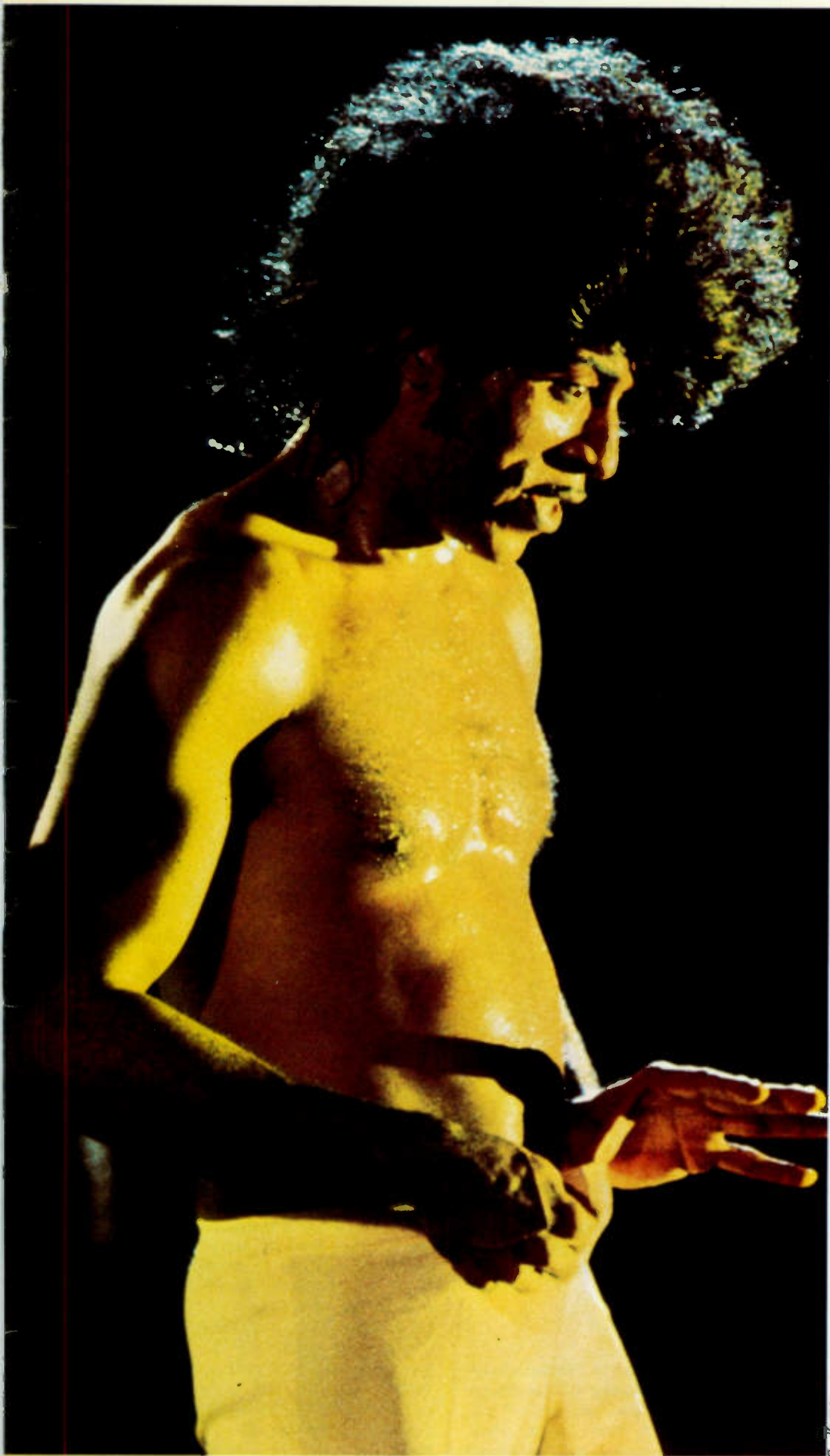
What next Richard? Climb up on the piano, trailing mike wires, sing and shout and go a little crazier up there! Then jump off. . . . But he's fallen, collapsed, he can't get up! The music's suffocated and stopped, helpers are rushing onto the stage from the wings with robes and towels and damp cloths and all kinds of stuff. Wow, he really drove himself to that, he just crazied himself right into the ground. Why don't they put the poor guy on a stretcher or something instead of just crowding him? That's no way to treat a guy who's nearly dead or in a coma or unconscious at the very least. Then "Oooo mah soooooooul" the invalid squeals in a soaring falsetto, and the sonofabitch is on his feet shoving the other comedians away, throwing off the robes and the towels and the damp cloths, and the audience – never once caring that he's made monkeys of them all – lift the roof off with a colossal roar of delight.

Even Richard couldn't follow that, so he'd finish the number as soon as he could and they'd bring the curtain down. Of course he would have to come out again otherwise no-one would have gone home. So he did, wrapped in a big white robe like a contender who'd gone 15 rounds with the champ and got his arm raised when it was over. Richard was simply the best.

The fact is he hadn't made it to the top overnight. He was only 20 when 'Tutti Frutti' sold a million, but he'd already been around for a while. He'd sung in church during his early teens and been a blues singer at 15, recording for RCA in what they called a 'cry' style. He sang gospel blues for Specialty before he started into rock & roll (keeping the catch in his voice), then laid down everything he was going to do in a spell that lasted only nine months. They spread it thin though, so it lasted through into his retirement.



The different moods of Little Richard.



In front of an incredulous audience Little Richard strips; turning himself on as he tears his shirt into shreds and flings the pieces to the audience.

Richard, the story goes, did a deal with God when he was in trouble, and when He came up with His end, Richard kept his word too, threw a bunch of jewellery into the sea, and quit rock & roll. He played gospel instead. It was hard to believe. He served the Lord in this manner for several years, but then he made a come-back. The new songs weren't as good as the old ones, but no one cared. It was the old ones the people wanted to hear – 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Long Tall Sally', 'Keep A Knockin'' and 'Miss Ann'. He came on just as strong as ever and for all that religion he was still vain and worldly and profane. Still Little Richard.

Laughs and Jeers

He was yet to clean up totally however and make the big killing. He had to wait until someone decided it was time for a real rock & roll revival. That happened at the tail end of the '60s. The idea was that the kids were so full of everything *new* that had come along since the Beatles first kicked things around in 1963, that at least they must have forgotten what came before and at most never known. After all, a 17-year-old who was digging Cream in 1968 could scarcely have been out of nappies in rock & roll's heyday. Right boys? Right boss! So they wheeled out Bill Haley and Jerry Lee Lewis and Bo Diddley and Chuck Berry and Fats Domino and natch Little Richard, and stuck them up in front of the long-hairs and said do the old songs. And they did.

Chuck Berry was just about the only one who hadn't lost it. In fact he was almost better than ever. Bill Haley, well he'd been no kind of teenager back in 1955; Jerry Lee didn't bother to hide his preference for country; Bo Diddley was a one-song man; and Fats Domino had never been a genuine rock & roller anyway, but was a New Orleans rhythm and blues artist from way back. They were getting fat fees though, so it goes.

None of that counted for anything set beside what had happened to Little Richard. Instead of the monstro wild man of rock & roll was someone who only resembled a star when the sequins on his go-go tunic twinkled. He did his strip just like before – only this time it was a cheap drag act. Those that didn't laugh jeered. It seemed he didn't care too much about his songs any more – anything would do. So he even did Presley stuff. Although he could still thrash his piano, he preferred shimmying at the front of the stage or on the grand's top, from where he'd once fallen in epic mock exhaustion. For this reason he employed a stand-in pianist. American audiences seem to have tolerated this somewhat better than the British fans, who prefer Chuck Berry these days.

Richard said: "I am still the greatest. I am the King of Rock & Roll." But his most loyal subjects have turned away to watch their memories instead.

NEXT WEEK IN ROCK:
The rise of Roy Orbison from rockabilly to the 'Big O'.

The Birth of Pop: A paler shade of black

On the theory that lightning never strikes twice, that rock & roll was only a passing fad, the major record companies at first viewed Bill Haley's antics as the craze they were. Before long, however, the continuing success of people like Haley, Fats Domino, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, and the many black vocal groups – not to mention the emergence of Elvis Presley from Sam Phillips' Sun label – forced the 'majors' to re-assess their approach.

No longer could this lucrative new trend be left in the crusading hands of the 'independents' – often with their roots in the 'hillbilly' or 'race' markets – who had been the pioneers of rock & roll. Now was a time for the 'majors' to take a safer course, to 'broaden the appeal' of the music, and to promote 'pop' instead of rock.

The creation of pop by the 'majors' and some of the more commercially-minded independents consisted of two main strands. Initially, there was the watering down of rock & roll material into more 'acceptable' forms. Later on, and most important, was the signing and promoting of young 'teenage' performers such as Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers and Rick Nelson, whose music was a subtle and sophisticated dilution of rock & roll, but usually highly original and inventive. Usually it was both, and the prime example was Pat Boone.

Charles Eugene 'Pat' Boone was always destined to be a soft 'country-ish' crooner. Although born in Florida, his family had



moved to Nashville before he was two, and 15 years later he had his own radio programme on Nashville's WSIX station. He sealed his credentials by marrying Shirley Foley, daughter of the country star, Red Foley.

'April Love'

In 1954, Boone moved to Denton where he began studying at the North Texas State Teachers' College by day, and performing in local clubs by night. That summer, after winning a TV talent contest, he was signed to Randy Wood's Dot label, based in Gallatin, Tennessee.

Boone was essentially a 'charmer', and more than surprised when asked to cover

Otis Williams and the Charms' up-tempo 'Two Hearts, Two Kisses' for his debut record. He didn't take many sales away from the original, but the policy of 'whitening' and softening the black music was continued. His follow-up, 'Ain't That A Shame', was written and recorded by Antoine 'Fats' Domino (on the Los Angeles label, Imperial). It was Fats' ninth Gold Disc and Boone's first, spending 14 weeks in the Top Ten in 1955. Inspired by this success, he went on to 'whiten' the Flamingos' 'I'll Be Home' and Little Richard's 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Long Tall Sally'.

Despite the criticism Boone's records drew from rock & roll purists – notably DJ Alan Freed who refused to play what he called 'watered-down steals from the new



Mick Wells

Bing Crosby – he went on sterilising black music for Dot, and didn't record an original song until 'Don't Forbid Me' in 1957. From then on, Boone dropped his mask and quickly reverted to what he'd always been – a latter-day crooner – with such records as 'Love Letters In The Sand' and 'April Love'.

But Boone's success encouraged a spate of cash-in imitations. ABC-Paramount launched Steve Lawrence, who covered quite a few R&B or R&R songs – notably Buddy Knox's hit, 'Party Doll' – without success. Cadence produced a better-class Steve Lawrence in the young Andy Williams, who successfully covered Charlie Gracie's rock & roll song 'Butterfly', putting himself at no. 1 in both the American and British charts. But like Lawrence he quickly reverted

to what came naturally with such hits as 'Are You Sincere?', 'Lonely Street' and 'The Village Of St. Bernadette'. In 1960 he moved from Cadence to Columbia, where he has been making straightforward hit records ever since.

Columbia had had little success with their 'Pat Boone' singer, Marty Robbins. He was a country singer of some stature – a member of the Grand Ole Opry since 1953 – and recorded 'Singing The Blues' and 'Knee Deep In The Blues' (both successfully covered by Guy Mitchell and Tommy Steele), as well as two of his own songs: 'A White Sport Coat' and 'The Story Of My Life', which were both hits for him. However, he soon went back to country music and scored a number of hits, including 'El Paso' and 'Devil Woman'.

The only two creditable successes to come from the 'crooners-in-disguise' stable were Bobby Darin and Paul Anka. Being teenagers they were easier to disguise than Boone, Lawrence, Williams or Robbins, and for a time they were successfully passed off as part of the new teenage wave.

Darin was simply a younger Italian-American crooner, born Walden Robert Cassotto in East Harlem, New York. At the Bronx High School of Science he met Don Kirschner (later to create the Monkees and the Archies), and the two of them teamed up writing and singing commercials on a New Jersey radio station. This led Darin to a contract with Decca, and a cover of Lonnie Donegan's big hit in America 'Rock Island Line'.

'Dream Lover'

Not long afterwards, Darin moved to Atco, a subsidiary of Atlantic in New York, and at this stage seems to have been trying hard. With the use of an echo chamber, a pounding piano and a swooping voice – all very reminiscent of Jerry Lee Lewis – he recorded his own song 'Splish Splash'. It seemed almost a parody of rock & roll, especially with the amusing lyrics, but was nonetheless an extremely effective and enjoyable record. That one sold over 1,000,000 in 1958, as did his next (again his own song) 'Queen Of The Hop'. Two more of his songs followed – 'Mighty Mighty Baby' and 'Early In The Morning' (also recorded by Buddy Holly) – before 1959, the turning point in his career.

With two records in quick succession, Darin catapulted himself from pastiche rock & roll to pure pop music, and from pure pop to his Italian-American heritage, crooning. The records were 'Dream Lover' and 'Mack The Knife'. 'Dream Lover' stands as a very strong candidate for the perfect pop record. Beautifully and professionally executed, with Darin's singing at its best, it encapsulated the main anxiety of every teenager:

*'Every night, I hope and pray
A dream lover will come my way
Girl to hold in my arms
Know the magic of her charms
Because I want, / a girl to call / my own
I want a dream lover
So I don't have to dream alone'*

'Dream Lover' sold well over 1,000,000 copies and would have been voted record of the year but for Darin's next record, 'Mack The Knife', an updated version of the 1929 German song from Berthold Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. It seems inconceivable that the two records could have come from the one performer, at least in the same year! 'Mack The Knife' sold over 3,000,000 copies, a good enough reason for Darin to abandon pop altogether in favour of standards – 'Beyond The Sea (La Mer)', 'Clementine', 'You Must Have Been A Beautiful Baby', 'Up The Lazy River' – all in the classic 'swing' style of the late '40s and early '50s.

Paul Anka made no pretence at pastiche rock & roll, but came straight out with one of the classic pop songs of all time, 'Diana'. Although only 15, Anka was really in the tradition of the crooners, his label, ABC-Paramount compromised by using an orchestra to simulate the rock & roll beat, effectively making his rather straight songs appear to be rock & roll pop. Promoted as a 15-year-old genius (setting a new mould in pop music that is still with us), Anka's 'Diana' made no. 1 on both sides of the Atlantic late in the summer of 1957. In America it was there for just one week, but in Britain it had a much bigger impact and held top position for an amazing nine weeks.

Following an enormous hit is always difficult, even more so for a 15-year-old genius, and Anka's next three records all failed to recapture the spirit of 'Diana'. (But because of his enormous following in Britain, two of them – 'I Love You Baby' and 'All Of A Sudden My Heart Sings' – did manage to make the Top 10.)

One of Anka's greatest assets was that he wrote his own songs, and eventually one of them, 'You Are My Destiny' brought in his second Gold Disc. Others – all in the same teenage crooner style – quickly followed: 'Lonely Boy', 'Put Your Head On My Shoulder', 'Puppy Love' and 'My Home Town'. (He also wrote Buddy Holly's biggest and semi-posthumous hit, 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore').

The use of crooners and country singers in the rock & roll or pop idiom was really only a stop-gap measure by the big companies until they found their own answers to the rock & roll singer of the time, Elvis Presley. Again they used two methods: there was the straight carbon copy Elvis (such as Conway Twitty and Neil Sedaka), or there was the teenage performer whose music was subtly different from Presley, yet still (almost) rock & roll. The search for the new Elvis went on so long that pretenders to his throne were still being churned out long after 'The King' himself had sold his crown to motion pictures, which had songs every bit as dreadful as the scripts.

Capitol Records, envious at RCA Victor's success with Presley, even ran a competition to find 'the answer'. The winner, or solution, was Eugene Vincent Craddock from Virginia. Vincent is considered by many as pure rock & roll, probably rightly so, and probably because his music became the prototype of rock & roll using just guitars and drums, no brass at all. Vincent's major

hit record was 'Be Bop A Lula', which he co-wrote with his manager 'Sheriff' Tex Davis, in 1956. But he had surprisingly little success after that.

Legendary Names

Closely identified with Vincent was Eddie Cochran. The two were close friends, and were touring England together in 1960 when they were involved in a road accident which killed Cochran and injured Vincent. Cochran's early death earned him legendary status, and it partially rubbed off on Vincent – who died in 1971 of a perforated ulcer. In fact their music was quite similar – especially in the emphasis on abbreviated guitar chords – although Cochran's was undoubtedly much superior.

Like Vincent, Cochran is revered by rock & roll purists, but his records were really authentic pop, quite artificial and contrived rock & roll with staccato guitars and forced, gruff singing. Their instrumental simplicity and lyrical expression of universal teenage discontents, however, make them landmarks in pop music.

After various records under various names, Cochran signed to Liberty, not long after it had been formed, in Hollywood, by Al Bennett. His first release on the label, 'Sittin' In The Balcony' sold over 1,000,000 copies in 1957, as did those two classics 'Summertime Blues' and 'C'mon Everybody' the following year.

Cochran's records were characteristically based on a staccato, three-chord riff with occasional pauses for a short phrase either spoken gruffly or in a deep voice, as in 'Summertime Blues'. The simple instrumentation – an insistent bass line, a snare beat and high-hat cymbal – was usually all done by Cochran himself, who pioneered the use of multi-track dubbing. He also part-wrote most of his songs and had a reputation for being a crack guitarist, a reputation he never quite lived up to on record.

Although Vincent and Cochran could be considered rivals to Presley, they weren't in the same mould and weren't promoted as ersatz Elvis. Conway Twitty unfortunately was, and took a lot of punishment for it. His real name was Harold Jenkins and he wasn't too wild about having his name changed to Twitty by his manager, Don Seat. (He must have been even less enthusiastic when he was satirised as Conrad Birdie in the musical *Bye Bye Birdie*).

Conway 'Birdie' Twitty

He was country-orientated and went first to Sam Phillips' Sun Records in Memphis – the mecca of all aspiring rock & roll singers since the rise of Elvis Presley. Although turned down, he recorded a demo of a song he and Roy Orbison had written, 'Rockhouse'. With a new manager and a new name, Twitty got himself a contract from Mercury, the Chicago-based major, which had relatively little success in rock & roll. The six records Twitty made with Mercury didn't change their (or his) fortunes, and late in 1958 he signed with MGM. His first release was a song he and drummer Jack



Above: Pat Boone, everything that teenage love was meant to be in the late '50s. Opposite page. Above: the unchanging face of Andy Williams. Below: Roy Orbison, with hair as it was in those days.

Nance had written in just seven minutes. 'It's Only Make Believe', and it sold well over 1,000,000 copies. Other hits followed before Twitty faded from the charts, most notably 'Mona Lisa' and 'Lonely Blue Boy'.

Pure Pop

Neil Sedaka came from the classic New York pop background. Born in Brooklyn of East European immigrant parents, he was a school-friend of Carole King's and won a scholarship to the famous Julliard School of Music to study classical piano. However, teaming up with Howard Greenfield he began writing hit songs such as 'Stupid Cupid', 'Falling', 'Frankie' (all Connie Francis), 'Since You've Been Gone' (Clyde McPhatter), and 'I've Waited So Long' (LaVern Baker).

Signed by Steve Sholes of RCA Victor Sedaka's first release 'You Mean Everything To Me' did little, and his second, 'The Diary', was only a minor hit. But the wild rocker

'I Go Ape' brought him a Gold Disc in 1959. He had written that with Greenfield, and the pair went on to produce a string of hits including 'Oh! Carol' (another million-seller), 'Calender Girl', 'Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen', 'Breaking Up Is Hard To Do' and 'Next Door To An Angel'.

All Sedaka's records were characterised by the multi-dubbing of his boy soprano voice which, his critics said, was the only way of disguising the fact that although he could write songs, he couldn't sing them. Whatever the truth, the production on Sedaka's records was pure pop, and he was one of the first to channel the energies of rock & roll into pop, just as Conway Twitty had been one of the first to channel the elements of rock & roll into melodramatic ballads (to be perfected later by Roy Orbison).

While singers like Conway Twitty, Neil Sedaka and Eddie Cochran were important in the birth of pop music, they didn't have much lasting musical influence. But others



Redferns



Syndication International

such as Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers, and perhaps even Rick Nelson can be said not only to have helped give birth to pop, but also to have determined how it grew up.

Everly Brothers

What they all had in common was that the songs they sang were brilliant in capturing the thoughts and emotions of teenagers. The Everly Brothers in particular, had remarkable songs provided for them by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, who managed to perfectly articulate teenage feelings. Their songs were performed by the Everlys with pure conviction, and the whole package was so perfect it couldn't fail – and it didn't.

In fact the combination of the Everlys with the Bryants is probably one of the most successful in pop history. They were brought together by Archie Bleyer's New York label, Cadence, after the Everly Brothers had signed a management deal with Wesley

Rose (of the Acuff-Rose music publishing company in Nashville).

The Everly Brothers came from Brownie, Kentucky. Their parents, Ike and Margaret, were well-known country singers and this influence has always shown in their sons' music. They had first signed to Columbia (who released a single 'The Sun Keeps On Shining'/'Keep A Lovin' Me') before going to Cadence. The unique sound the Everlys produced was a combination of their guitar sound and their harmonised voices. The two sounds complemented each other perfectly, and the result was pure adrenalin, it generated real excitement.

The first Bryants/Everlys record on Cadence was 'Bye Bye Love' which sold over 1,000,000 in 1957. Their next five records were all Bryants/Everlys and all sold over 1,000,000: 'Wake Up Little Susie', 'All I Have To Do Is Dream', 'Bird Dog', 'Problems' and 'Poor Jenny'/'Take A Message to Mary'. Don Everly's own song 'Till I Kissed You' made it seven Golds straight on Cadence.

When Warner Brothers started their own record label in 1960, the Everly Brothers were their first big signing, and their debut record 'Cathy's Clown' – written by them both – gave them their eight Gold Disc and their best-ever seller. 'Walk Right Back' (a Sonny Curtis song) made it nine in a row the following year.

Poor Little Fool

Rick Nelson's songs echoed the sentiments of those the Everlys sang, but while theirs were exciting, his were subdued. The music gently rocked along at medium-pace with Nelson almost speaking the words over it in an understated, emotionless way tending to indifference.

Nelson didn't have the musical heritage the Everlys had, but his parents were in showbiz with a successful radio show which was transferred to the TV screen. Rick and his brother Dave were also in the series, and they usually ended up with Ricky singing (pre-dating *The Partridge Family* by 15 years). When he was 16, he signed to the Los Angeles label Verve, who issued 'A Teenager's Romance'/'I'm Walkin''. The 'B' side, a steal from Fats Domino, sold 1,000,000, which did Nelson a lot of good and no harm to the Man himself, who'd also sold 1,000,000. Fats Domino's label, Imperial, which was also based in Los Angeles, immediately bought up Nelson's contract (presumably to prevent him stealing any more of Fats' thunder), and as it turned out, the two of them were to provide Imperial with the bulk of their income for quite some time. Nelson's next eight records all sold over 1,000,000 (Fats had 12 Golds altogether, not to mention countless other hits), from 'Stood Up' in 1957 through 'Waitin' In School', 'Be Bop Baby', 'Poor Little Fool', 'Lonesome Town', 'Believe What You Say', 'It's Late', 'There'll Never Be Anyone Else

But You' through to 'Travellin' Man'/'Hello Mary Lou' in 1960.

Pure Excitement

But if any one performer could lay claim to being the single most influential pop singer it would be Buddy Holly. His career is difficult to assess in the face of his legendary status: to criticise is to commit sacrilege; and like Vincent and Cochran he is considered by some not pop at all, but pure rock & roll. In fact, he was pure pop.

After an unsuccessful liaison with Decca's subsidiary label Coral, Buddy Holly travelled just across the Texas border from his home town of Lubbock to Clovis in New Mexico where Norman Petty had his studios. Petty had already had one success (Buddy Knox's 'Party Doll') and one failure (Roy Orbison), but with Holly he knew he was onto something special. He even negotiated separate contracts with Decca for Holly (on Coral) and the Crickets (Brunswick), and from then on steered a careful path with Holly's separate recording careers. Holly's solo efforts were much softer and more introspective – nearer pop than rock – while his records with the Crickets took a stronger, perhaps even more cynical, view of relationships.

Holly and the Crickets made some of the most devastating records of all time with Petty, whose production (and playing) of the 'Tex-Mex' sound was completely innovative at the time. The distinctive Holly voice filled out by the Crickets was quite hard-edged – something which was reflected in the instrumentation: the throbbing, simple bass lines, the cardboard box drumming, and the tough jangling chord-structured Holly lead guitar work.

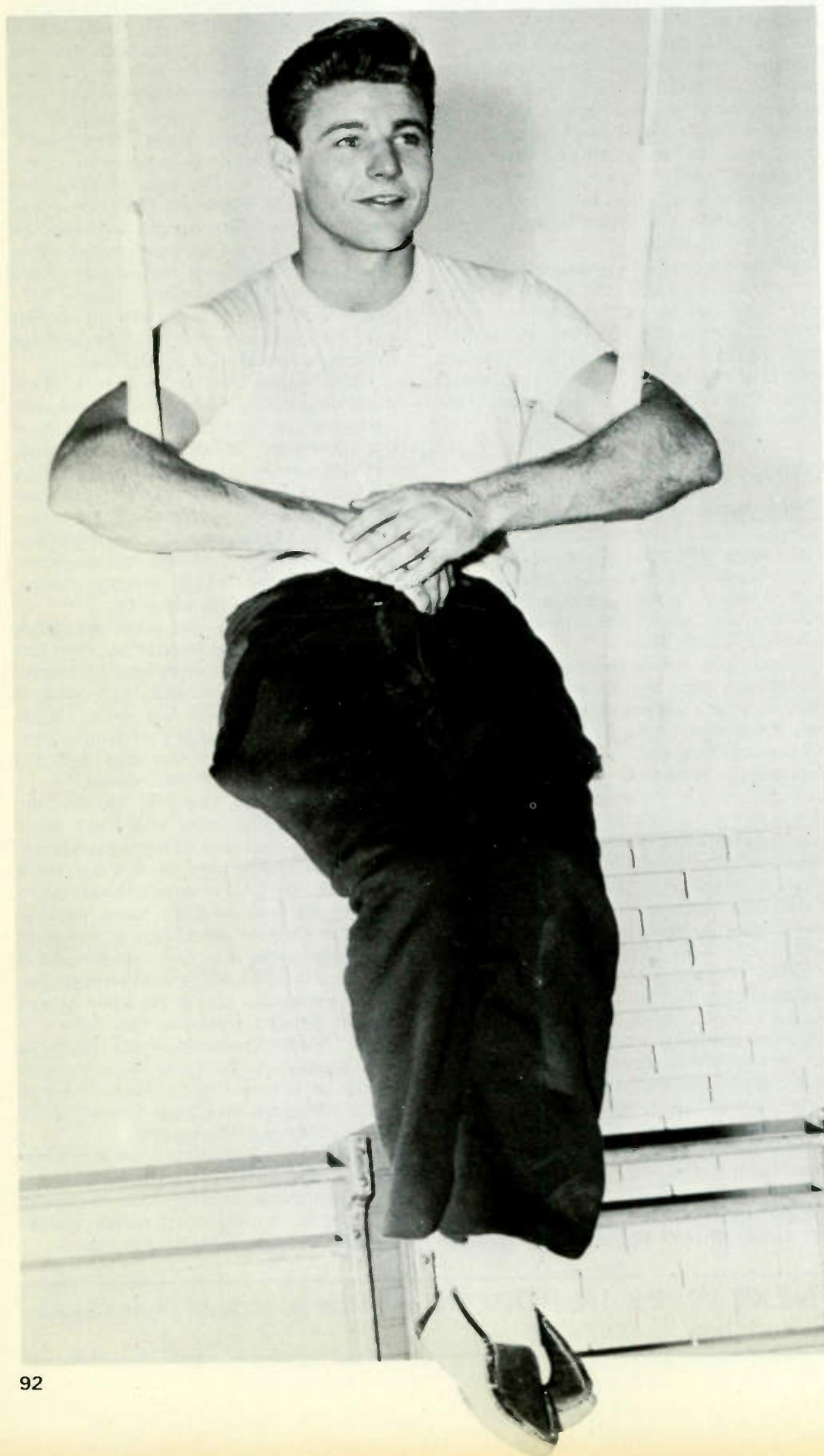
This combination was most effectively used on 'Peggy Sue' (written by Petty and Cricket Jerry Allison). Holly's voice is heard over just the insistent and rapid pulse of bass-and-drum. When the guitar break suddenly comes, its tight, scorching electric sound jangles the nerves and sets the adrenalin pumping: pure excitement.

'Peggy Sue' and 'That'll Be The Day', the first song they recorded with Petty, were probably the best they did, and the nearest to rock & roll along with 'Oh Boy' and 'Rave On' which, like a lot of other Crickets tracks features Petty himself on piano. At their best, the Crickets were rock, at his worst Holly was insipid pop. Towards the end of 1958 and in 1959, Holly was veering closer and closer to that end of the scale. One of the last things he did was Paul Anka's 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore', which featured a much more controlled Holly voice, trying to smooth or at least disguise his hard-edged sound, and pizzicato strings as well as the more traditional sweeping ones.

Holly's death in a plane crash in Iowa on February 3rd 1959, leaves open the question of which direction he would have gone in. As it is, his too short career was an invaluable midwife in the birth of pop.

NEXT WEEK IN POP: The teenage sounds of high school – and their 'teenage' singers.

RICKY NELSON: The boy next door grows up



In the winter of 1956 in Los Angeles, a young kid was driving his date home one evening when an Elvis Presley record came on the radio. The girl got all excited and swooned over Elvis, saying that he was the greatest. "He's not so much. I'm making a record too," replied our hero. It was a lie — and a corny one at that — but unlike most teenagers in that familiar situation, Eric Hilliard Nelson had some hope of making it come true. "I went to see my Dad and said 'I want to make a record. The only song I know is 'I'm Walkin'''."

Dad didn't own a record company but he was Ozzie Nelson and his son was 'little' Ricky Nelson, and they did both appear in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, a weekly TV series that at its peak was watched by 18 million Americans. In 1944, four years after Rick — he dropped the 'y' in 1961 — was born, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson began *The Adventures* as a nationally syndicated, family oriented, situation comedy, radio show. In 1948, Rick and his brother David joined the show, playing themselves. In 1952 the show was transferred to TV where it was to run for 14 years. Thus by 1956, Rick — at 16 the all-American teenager — had been a star for eight years and it seemed a fair bet that he could sell a few records — and it would be good for the image — after all rock & roll was all the rage.

So Rick Nelson made his record. But *Ozzie and Harriet* was a family show so a ballad, 'A Teenager's Romance' (a 'we're only teenagers but we can love' type of song) was dug up, and 'I'm Walkin'' put on the flip. Seven days later, after the two sides had sold a million copies between them, Rick Nelson was a rock & roller.

In contrast to Presley who was *dirty* and a hillbilly to boot, Rick had a clean image and perfect diction. He was more than just a good image to sell records with; in Ed Ward's phrase "he had the soul of a rocker." After his first record there were very few 'A Teenager's Romances'.

Rick wasn't an Elvis or Carl Perkins or a poor white Southerner. He was a middle-class American teenager, like most of his audience, but he rapidly evolved a vocal style that fitted both his image and his material without betraying either. On the rockers — 'I'm Walkin'', a version rather

Keystone

than a cover of the Fats Domino hit, 'Be Bop Baby', 'Milk Cow Blues', 'Stood Up', etc. — he developed a clear but clipped singing style, while for the slower paced songs — 'Never Be Anyone But You', 'Hello Mary Lou', 'Travellin' Man', 'Ever-lovin'', etc. — he opted for a would-be husky and seductive voice. Also, he had a great band: James Kirkland (later Joe Osborne) on bass, Ritchie Frost on drums, Gene Garth (later Ray Johnson) on piano and the great James Burton on lead guitar. Burton, who joined the Rick Nelson band from that of Dale Hawkins, was an amazingly fluent guitarist in the Carl Perkins mould. More than anyone he kept alive — in his session work and his stuff with first Rick Nelson and later Elvis — the southern rockabilly rock & roll tradition.

Rick also had the sense to choose good songs. Up to around 1959, when in common with many rock & rollers he turned increasingly to soft rockers, he had relied heavily on the songwriting team of Dorsey and Johnny Burnette. After leaving Memphis and failing to make it in the rock & roll trio that they formed, these two came to Los Angeles to sell their songs. Later, Johnny Burnette went on to record success with 'You're Sixteen' and 'Dreamin'', but before that, they jointly and separately wrote for Rick Nelson songs like, 'It's Late', 'Waitin' In School' and the great 'Believe What You Say'.

Hard Times

Ironically, although 'Ricky' Nelson is now remembered as a soft rocker, and despite the fact that his records consistently made the charts — even the occasional biggie like the double-sided hit, 'Hello Mary Lou'/'Travellin' Man' — he never had the impact of, say, Bobby Vee. Before 1959 he had been unique — a rock & roller who loved God, Mom and apple pie, and could be seen doing so once a week on TV — but after '59 he was just one of many. Accordingly his career started to slow down. In 1958 he had appeared in Howard Hawks' classic film *Rio Bravo*. He was much more than adequate in his role as Colorado, the young gunslinger, but he made no further progress in movies. The fates seemed against him; even the song, 'Restless Kid' that he had commissioned from Johnny Cash for the movie wasn't used. Added to this was the fact that life as a 'Teenage Idol' was getting difficult — the Nelsons had to erect an electric fence around their home to keep off the fans.

All these problems came together in 1961, when with the release of the 'Rick Is 21' album Ricky changed his name to Rick. But just as Mary Pickford's audience had refused to accept their idol as anything other than the girl with golden curls, so Ricky Nelson's audience seemed to be unable to accept him as Rick.

In 1963 he switched labels, moving from Imperial to Decca, and even tried ballads such as 'Fools Rush In' and 'The Very Thought Of You' with some limited success, but to no avail. The direction his

career was going was apparent, especially in the years 1965–68, when he had no hits at all. Like the majority of early rock & rollers his days seemed over. He was a has-been at 28.

Then in 1969, almost from the grave, he re-appeared with of all things a Dylan song, 'She Belongs To Me'. He quit the night-club circuit, and after a successful debut at the Troubadour Club began playing the rock circuit with the Stone Canyon Band as a back-up group. The name change of 1961 had finally become a

reality, but surprisingly there was no real change in his music, the excrescencies of post '63 had gone, and in their place was a return to the music of his roots.

Rick had always liked country music and always appreciated a good song — as early as 1959 he had recorded Hank Williams' 'I Can't Help It' — and amidst the plethora of underground music in 1967 had released a gem of an album, 'Country Fever'. The next surprise came when he started writing his own songs — he even put out an album 'Rick Sings Nelson' —

Far left: The young Ricky Nelson. Below: Rick Nelson as we know him today.



Popperfoto

one track of which, 'Easy To Be Free' edged into the Top 50 in 1970.

He wasn't an overnight success by any means, but his music was getting better. The Stone Canyon Band, under the able leadership of Tom Brumley, was becoming a real unit, and the albums and performances were being well reviewed. He was still playing the old songs, notably 'Believe What You Say', which 10 years after it was written, took on a new meaning and became almost his theme song, and - 'Easy To Be Free' - the key expression of the Rick Nelson message of gentle and honest individualism. However, he kept himself carefully apart from the growing band of rock & roll revivalists. He didn't want to go back, but to develop, not seeing that developing necessitated going back and facing his past. By 1972 Rick had produced some nice albums, especially 'Rick Nelson In Concert' and 'Rick Sings Nelson' but he seemed to be losing direction, becoming just another nice countryfied rocker.

Then at a charity show in Madison Square Garden the rock & roll revival movement caught up with him and forced him to think about his situation. He had been booed off stage, but why? 'Garden Party', the song he wrote about the experience, was his attempt to come to grips with both it and himself. In 1962 he had recorded 'Teenage Idol', a plaintive and rather bitter plea for understanding:

*'Some people call me a teenage idol,
Some people say they envy me,
But I guess they've got no way of
knowing
How lonesome I can be.'*

But in 'Garden Party', 10 years later he had finally thought the whole matter out:

*'I went to a Garden party to reminisce
with my old friends,
A chance to share old memories and
play our songs again.
When I got to the Garden party, they
all knew my name
But no one recognized me, I didn't
look the same.*

*But it's all right now, I've learnt my
lesson well,
You see, you can't please everyone,
so you've got to please yourself.*

*I played them all the old songs,
I thought that's why they came,
But no one heard the music, I didn't
look the same.
I said hello to Mary Lou, she belongs
to me
But when I sang a song about a honky
tonk, it was time to leave.*

*Someone opened up a closet door and
out stepped Johnny B Goode,
Playing guitar like a ringing a bell
and looking like he should.
If you've gotta play Garden party,
I wish you a lotta luck,
But if memories were all I sang
I'd rather drive a truck.'*



Rick on stage in Los Angeles

'Garden Party' gave Rick Nelson his first no. 1 for 11 years, his tenth Gold Disc, and an obvious boost to his career. But more than that it gave him direction. That direction was as much in the music as in the words of the song. The bass line is almost exactly the same as that in 'Never Be Anyone Else But You'. Rick Nelson in 'Garden Party' re-affirmed his past, making use of it rather than recreating or avoiding it. Looking as pretty as ever and with a new Stone Canyon Band behind him (but still with Tom Brumley)

Rick Nelson has continued to steadily play away at his audience, slowly winning more and more fans who are able to accept him singing 'Hello Mary Lou', 'She Belongs To Me', and 'Honky Tonk Women'.

Ricky Nelson has grown up.

**NEXT WEEK IN PRO-
FILE:** Brenda Lee and
Connie Francis, the first
ladies of pop.



From left to right: Val Doonican; Tom Jones; and Engelbert Humperdinck – all scoring with smoothed-over versions of country music.

Syndication International/Redferns

Country goes Pop

*'We got chicken every Sunday
And the preacher comes around
And every Saturday morning
Daddy takes us into town
We go to the picture show,
Have picnics on the ground
Well if that's the lower class
Then I'm glad that's what I am'*

(Dolly Parton, 'Chicken Every Sunday', 1971)

Country music's first deep impact on the world of pop was during the late '50s, and the advent of white rock & roll – completely dominated by poor Southerners – was one of the few periods in recent history when the threats to the Southern way of life looked like upsetting the apple cart. It was the age of the 1954 Education Act (reversing the 1896 Plessy vs Ferguson decision to allow segregated schooling), the age of Little Rock (1956). The tensions of this time were reflected in the young whites' switch to rock & roll and the black sounds of the Blues. Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, the Everly Brothers, Carl Perkins, Marvin Rainwater and Conway Twitty fused the sounds of Hank Williams and Arthur Crudup to produce the synthesis of rock & roll. For people in Britain at the time, it was not really an introduction to country music as such,

since the 'A' sides of their records tended to stress the blackness of the new music – 'Heartbreak Hotel', 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On', 'Blue Suede Shoes' and 'Jailhouse Rock' all followed the traditional 12-bar structure of the Blues, and it was these that caught the imagination of young people across the globe. The 'B' sides were very often more countryish in their feel, but they remained as merely the flip sides of the rock & roll hits – numbers like Presley's 'I Forgot To Remember To Forget Her' or Jerry Lee's 'You Win Again' and 'Fools Like Me'.

Of all the first generation rock & rollers, it was probably the Everly Brothers who were closest in feel to traditional country music, but even *their* songs, written in the main by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, were aimed almost exclusively at the teenage market. 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' became, admittedly, something of a pop country classic, but even this followed the well-worn, and eventually overworked pop sequence of C-Am-F-G7 chord changes.

It was not until the early '60s that Nashville, the home of Country, made its real presence felt in Britain. Apart from the rock & rollers, others did have hits with country classics in the '50s, but in general they were given a very commercial rock &

roll/pop sound and consequently any ethnic origins they may have had were obliterated – in particular the string of Connie Francis 'country' hits in 1959/60 – numbers like 'Everybody's Somebody's Fool' and 'My Heart Has A Mind Of Its Own' – and other odd-bods like Guy Mitchell's 'Heartaches By The Number'.

In the '60s, though, the conditions were different. Rock & roll appeared to have died a short, nasty death, and a gaping hole was left in the heart of pop music with nobody really having a clear idea of the way forward. For a time, there was a sharp rise in the popularity of genuine country music – even if none of the more authentic records ever made the charts. The James Asman column in the *Record Mirror*, with its emphasis on the 'trash' aspects of commercial country music (he spent more columns berating the mutants like Jack Scott and later Frank Ifield than he did in actually talking about the people he liked), built up a large readership, and its angle fitted in well with the move amongst various people for a more authentic and non-commercial approach.

Some of this did rub off in the charts. Between 1960 and 1962, Jim Reeves, Hank Locklin, Johnny Horton, Marty Robbins and Don Gibson all had hits. This was a significant move forward for country

music in Britain – as an example of the change in attitude, it can be noted here that Don Gibson's 'Oh Lonesome Me'/'I Can't Stop Loving You' single, which made the top of the US charts in 1958, didn't register in Britain at all; in 1962, though, his vastly inferior 'Sea Of Heartbreak' made the Top 20 with ease.

The climate seemed right for the long overdue acceptance of country music – apart from Don Gibson, Marty Robbins was beginning to sell well with his gunfighter songs ('El Paso' was a biggish singles success) and, perhaps most surprising of all, Hank Locklin had a smash with 'Please Help Me I'm Falling'. This combined many of the ingredients of the classic country record – the marked Southern accent of the singer, exploring the paradoxical aspects of some doomed love affair. 'Please Help Me' sings Hank, because 'I'm falling in love with you'. Naturally, the object of his affection 'belongs to another' and, if the relationship developed, it would be nothing less than sinful.

Ironically, it was an old R&B singer who cashed in most on the potential of the country sound. Ray Charles was not the first black singer to record a straight country tune – Solomon Burke had had an American hit a year before in 1961 with 'Just Out Of Reach' – but Ray's 'Modern Sounds Of Country And Western' album in 1962 was the real breakthrough. It was a mammoth seller, and the singles from the first album, 'I Can't Stop Loving You' and 'You Don't

Know Me' were two of the biggest hits of the year.

Ray's success encouraged home-grown singers to try their luck with country. In particular, Frank Ifield had a staggering run of four no.1's with Anglicised, ossified, country classics – 'I Remember You', 'Love-sick Blues', 'The Wayward Wind' and 'I'm Confessin''. With a yodel from Slim Whitman, and a collection of songs from Nashville, Frank did very nicely thank you out of his flirtation with country, and it was an important precedent for other British singers who couldn't find an identity of their own. To be fair, it wasn't all a one way traffic – at the same time as Ifield was making his fortune, a cockney ex-*Oh Boy* star, Joe Brown, was assimilating the country influence into his own sound. The combination was a good one, and the two or three hits he enjoyed, including 'Pictures Of You' and 'That's What Love Will Do' were some of the best British sounds before the onslaught of the Beatles in 1963.

The run of country successes was savagely curtailed with the advent of British rock in the 1963/5 period. Only one name really survived, that of Jim Reeves. After his death in 1964, Reeves' records sold astronomically well, and he was quickly established as the first major country star in Britain. He'd been around, of course, for years, and in the US had had a run of hits back to the mid-'50s. But, his voice had been rougher in those days, and the more 'genuine' sounds of 'Bimbo' and 'Mexican

Joe' never meant a thing in Britain. His first British success was in 1960 with 'He'll Have To Go' which had all the hallmarks of a great country song:

*'Put your sweet lips a little closer to the
phone
And let's pretend that we're together all
alone
I'll tell the man to turn the juke box way
down low
And you can tell your friend there with you
he'll have to go'*

At the time, it would seem that Jim Reeves would have remained yet another one-hit wonder, but in 1963 and 1964 he became a constant seller with a string of records ever more removed from the real roots of his native country sound. 'I Love You Because' stayed in the charts for 26 weeks in 1964 – a feat only beaten by 'Stranger On The Shore' – and its stunning success afterwards encouraged a very one-dimensional approach to country music in Britain. Reeves' hits had none of the tensions that characterise the best of country, and the consequences were disturbing.

This was not really evident until the noise of the British rock boom died down a little after the mid-'60s. The resultant gap was filled by those who had read the signs of the Jim Reeves successes. In 1967, Engelbert Humperdinck – previously a non-starter as Gerry Dorsey – began a highly lucrative career with his flabby treatment of old



Don Gibson – some surprising country hits.



Jim Reeves – who became a star after his death.

MARC BOLAN

Overnight success in ten years

As Marc Bolan declared in 'Children Of The Revolution', T. Rex's eighth consecutive Top 10 monster in just under two years, he's got corkscrew hair and he ain't no square – as neat a nutshell description of the man as you'll find. An immensely shrewd and sharp-eyed operator, over the years he's unerringly homed-in to the main chance.

He'll tell you exactly how and why he's successful, he'll give you the most accurate assessment of what the scene's all about. Like Paul McCartney, he understands pop. Armed with this essential talent, a sure sense of style, apparently boundless confidence, and the sort of startlingly ambiguous looks that go infinitely further than the wicked choirboy concept, he has made it as he always thought he would.

Marc was born Marc Feld on September 30th 1947 in Hackney, North London, the traditional home of the working-class cockney sparrow. At an early age he was admiring the flash and the cool of the older boys on the scene, and quickly turned on to the music they were digging. Particularly, he found a hero in Cliff Richard – a rocker, at least in the early days, and most importantly a British rocker, he showed that you didn't need to have a mean biker image to make it in rock music. Richard's appeal was sensual, but a very clean sort of sensual.

By the time the Mod craze reached its height Marc was right there in the middle of the scene, and he received his first taste of the spotlight when *Town* magazine featured him as the 'King of the Mods', the sharpest figure, supposedly, in what was at the time a very cool, sharp scene indeed.

Marc's parents weren't quite sure what to make of their son's activities at the time. He wasn't working, he listened to music, he hung out. Why didn't he get a job like a good boy? Marc tells that he came home after one day's modelling with more money than his father made in a month, and handed over the cheque – just to show that if he wanted, he could make money easily enough. No sweat or drudgery for him. It was during the same year according to Marc's official biography, that he entered show business. He did it by starting to hang around the cradle of pre-Beatles British rock, a coffee bar in Soho called the Two I's. Tommy Steele,

Marty Wilde, the Drifters (later the Shadows), and just about every other rocker you could think of has cut his teeth down in that basement.

The Two I's role was taken over by the Marquee – and indeed, by the time Marc started going there it wasn't quite the place it had once been – but if there was one particular place you went if you wanted to be discovered by a record producer or manager, that was it. However, it wasn't until three years later that Marc finally scored the hoped-for crock of gold with a recording contract. He hasn't said much about the intervening years except – and it's a key part of the Bolan myth – that he spent five months living with a wizard in Paris. Learning all the time.

Marc made his first record under the guiding hand of Jim Eanimes, a London-based American record producer who got Decca to put out 'The Wizard', a Bolan composition. Decca, for their part, suggested that Marc should re-christen himself Bolan. 'The Wizard' wasn't a hit. Neither were 'Hippy Gumbo' or 'The Third Degree', though they did attract a certain amount of attention and his name got around. Then came a pause in the proceedings, which ended when Marc started recording again as the front-man with John's Children.

Love 'n' Peace

John's Children caused quite a commotion during the three months that Marc stayed with them. They had some publicity shots taken without any clothes on in the middle of bushes, and managed to get their first single, 'Desdemona', banned by the BBC because of a line saying 'lift up your skirts and fly'. It was a minor hit.

Marc was chief songwriter, lead singer, and guitarist in the band. It was 1967, the year of the flower children – beads, incense, love-ins and a new sense of wonder and romanticism filling the air – and John's Children were, sure enough, right there with their fingers on the button, thanks to Marc. Some measure of his importance in the band can be gauged from the fact that after he'd departed they went on recording his songs. Despite this they never had a real hit, and quickly disappeared.

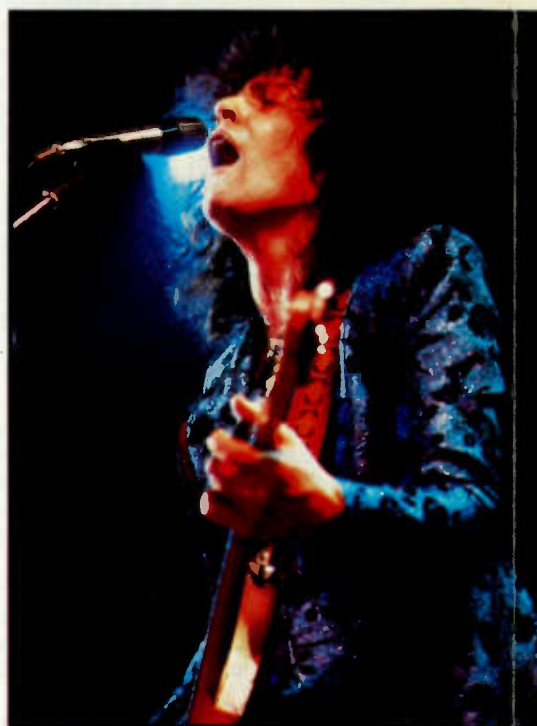
Marc surfaced again in 1968 as the main ingredient in Tyrannosaurus Rex, which started as a five-piece, but almost as soon as it was born contracted to an



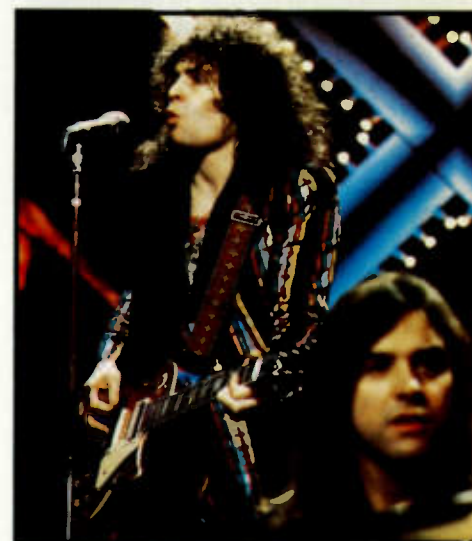
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acoustic duo. Marc sang and played his £14 Spanish guitar, and Steve Peregrine Took kept up a pattering beat on his hand drums. Took derived his colourful name from a character in Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, an enormously popular and influential work that was required reading for anyone with a vaguely hippie cast of mind.

The setting for the Tolkien books was a fictitious land called Middle Earth, which also happened to be the name of the most popular social centre for the beautiful people in London, and the springboard for a high proportion of the new rock music. Two DJs, regulars at the club, gave their seal of approval to Tyrannosaurus Rex and were their first patrons.

John Peel and Jeff Dexter were probably the most influential arbiters of the new music. Peel's *Perfumed Garden* show on Radio London and, later, his *Top Gear* and *Night Ride* on the BBC, were the first and best of the 'underground' shows, and Marc and Steve, the two archetypal flower people, were given massive promotion and exposure.

The Great Leap Forward

Peel went out of his way to get bookings for the band in clubs all around the country. Jeff Dexter, known as 'The Blond Bombshell', was Bolan's double in all but hair – his long and wispy – but the two of them lived around Ladbroke Grove in London, hung around the same scenes in wildly colourful clothes, wore girls' buckle shoes, and were both short.

Peel and Dexter ensured that Tyrannosaurus Rex became a household name on the underground scene – but the hippies were hardly good consumers, and didn't have much money to spend on records. Tyrannosaurus Rex's fey, magical image was fine for the times, but their music didn't compare with the heavy stuff from the West Coast, or bands like Pink Floyd and the Crazy World of Arthur Brown in Britain. They lost out on that level, and the pop market at the time was too conservative to take Tyrannosaurus Rex's whimsical acoustic rock with its Eastern overtones. At this time the band's most successful record was 'Deborah', their first single, which managed the lower half of the charts in '68.

Despite the 'gentle vibes' tone of the band, Marc still preserved a liking for the more traditional brand of flash he'd gone for as a Mod, and this was reflected in the choice of material for their first album, 'My People Were Fair And Had Sky In Their Hair'. This album included songs like 'Mustang Ford' and 'Hot Rod Mama' – pure '50s Chuck Berry in inspiration – alongside the more fanciful 'Child Star', 'Chateau In Virginia Waters' and 'Frowning Atahuallpa' ('My Inca Love'). Marc's tumbling cascades of word and melody managed to combine, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, the tastes of the speedy city ace kid, and the strange enchanted nature boy.

It was in the direction of old-time rock

that Tyrannosaurus Rex was edging over the next two years. They were one of the most prolific of recording bands, and the more they did the more it became apparent that Marc was Tyrannosaurus Rex. Steve Took had little to do but sing harmonies and provide a simple beat, while Marc was getting into the techniques of recording, pouring out a never-ending stream of songs, becoming a more than fair guitar player – and was *the* figure that came over.

Steve finally decided to call it a day, and split from Marc after a relatively successful first American tour. He retreated from the world of pop back into the freak scene around Ladbroke Grove, playing with such people as the Pink Fairies. Marc began looking for a replacement, and he finally met him in a macrobiotic restaurant. Micky Finn impressed Marc by owning a large and powerful motorbike, and altogether cut a considerably heavier dash than Steve.

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It was around this time that Marc had started working with David Bowie, another ex-Mod and scene king who was interested in making it as a pop star. There were many similarities – Bowie was something of a poet, supremely into the nuances of style, and also intent on dissolving the traditional barriers between masculine and feminine. Bowie and his wife Angela, and Bolan and his wife June seemed to be heading the same way. Bolan played a fair electric guitar on David's 'Prettiest Star', the follow-up to 'Space Oddity'; but though he was for several weeks the best-selling poet in the country with his *Warlock Of Love* book, as an artist he was working on a lighter, less obsessive level than Bowie.

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Bolan: in the early days; as a sharp Mod; the '70s star.

Camera Press

John Kingaby

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Nevertheless, these successes were somehow dispiriting. They showed one thing very clearly – that the country song has a strongly universal appeal. But they also showed something else just as clearly – that the actual country singers, those of the American Bible Belt – were not themselves winning much else apart from royalty cheques from their songs. Only odd names made the grade, and the case of Johnny Cash is a typical example of this. Johnny Cash's success came, like Jim Reeves', very belatedly. Without a shadow of doubt, his most productive period was with Sun Records in the mid-'50s when his records displayed an intense, and occasionally magnificent sense of the dramatic. But records he made at this time, like 'I Walk The Line' and 'Folsom Prison Blues', were hardly played in Britain. His eventual successes have been with novelty songs: 'A Boy Named Sue', '25 Minutes To Go'; or with slick versions of other people's songs – 'A Thing Called Love' and 'It Ain't Me Babe'.

All Down To Timing

The question does need asking – why is this the case? At first glance, there seems to be no logical answer. On purely commercial grounds, a case could be made that Cash's late '50s hits in the US – like 'Ballad Of A Teenage Queen', 'The Ways Of A Woman In Love' and 'Guess Things Happen That Way' – possessed greater hit potential than any of his subsequent British hits. And yet they didn't sell, whereas 'A Boy Named Sue' did.

It seems to boil down to timing. Country songs have made their biggest impact on the British charts between 1960 and 1963 on the one hand, and 1967 and 1969 on the other. In other words, a pattern has formed – country songs are making the charts when rock music as a whole goes through its intermittent periods of crisis. Only quite recently, with rock again at the crossroads, Faron Young sold thousands of copies of 'Four In The Morning', and Peters and Lee made no. 1 with 'Welcome Home' – a record that owes everything to the Ray Charles country & western combination.

This is not to say that country music is intermittently popular – it is to say that country music is intermittently *noticed*. Take the Faron Young record – there would seem to be no logical reason why this record should sell so well, and thousands of other country records don't even make the grade. But, somewhere, some DJ must have decided in a bored moment to give the record a spin and set the ball rolling.



The intense and dramatic Johnny Cash.

To put the argument in a nutshell – country music is only given a fair chance when pop music in Britain is in the doldrums – it is used, arbitrarily and haphazardly, as a substitute. Its real potential is consequently crushed, and it is even more frustrated by the legacy of Jim Reeves, forever labelling the music as a high-class form of muzak.

In the meantime, back in the South, the genuine form continues to flourish. Merle Haggard, Tom T. Hall, Jerry Reed, Dolly Parton and Tammy Wynette have all emerged over the past five years as living proof of the continuing validity of country music. They have met rock & roll head on, and more recently they have confronted the newer breed of West Coast musician using their music after Dylan's lead in 1968 – and they have assimilated all of this to suit their own needs. Their positive responses – witness the *Area Code 615* musicians – only emphasise the living nature of their music, and they are able to move forward regardless because of the strength of their

musical roots, springing from the strongest base in the history of rock. Their cohesion, coupled with their evident musical openness and flexibility, has rendered their songs as almost the 'natural' form for working-class music. Potentially this strength is universal.

That this potential isn't realised in Britain is painfully obvious. 'Please Help Me I'm Falling', 'Four In The Morning' and 'El Paso' are the tips of a neglected and unexplored iceberg. Merle Haggard should have had half a dozen Top 10 hits by now, and Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner should have had a couple of no. 1's – and yet the British will remain unaware of their songs until some local singer with a nice face and a pleasant voice decides to make his fortune. Probably in about two years' time.

NEXT WEEK IN POP INFLUENCES: The business of honesty and sincerity.

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NEXT WEEK IN POP INFLUENCES: The business of honesty and sincerity.

MARC BOLAN

Overnight success in ten years

As Marc Bolan declared in 'Children Of The Revolution', T. Rex's eighth consecutive Top 10 monster in just under two years, he's got corkscrew hair and he ain't no square – as neat a nutshell description of the man as you'll find. An immensely shrewd and sharp-eyed operator, over the years he's unerringly homed-in to the main chance.

He'll tell you exactly how and why he's successful, he'll give you the most accurate assessment of what the scene's all about. Like Paul McCartney, he understands pop. Armed with this essential talent, a sure sense of style, apparently boundless confidence, and the sort of startlingly ambiguous looks that go infinitely further than the wicked choirboy concept, he has made it as he always thought he would.

Marc was born Marc Feld on September 30th 1947 in Hackney, North London, the traditional home of the working-class cockney sparrow. At an early age he was admiring the flash and the cool of the older boys on the scene, and quickly turned on to the music they were digging. Particularly, he found a hero in Cliff Richard – a rocker, at least in the early days, and most importantly a British rocker, he showed that you didn't need to have a mean biker image to make it in rock music. Richard's appeal was sensual, but a very clean sort of sensual.

By the time the Mod craze reached its height Marc was right there in the middle of the scene, and he received his first taste of the spotlight when *Town* magazine featured him as the 'King of the Mods', the sharpest figure, supposedly, in what was at the time a very cool, sharp scene indeed.

Marc's parents weren't quite sure what to make of their son's activities at the time. He wasn't working, he listened to music, he hung out. Why didn't he get a job like a good boy? Marc tells that he came home after one day's modelling with more money than his father made in a month, and handed over the cheque – just to show that if he wanted, he could make money easily enough. No sweat or drudgery for him. It was during the same year according to Marc's official biography, that he entered show business. He did it by starting to hang around the cradle of pre-Beatles British rock, a coffee bar in Soho called the Two I's. Tommy Steele,

Marty Wilde, the Drifters (later the Shadows), and just about every other rocker you could think of has cut his teeth down in that basement.

The Two I's role was taken over by the Marquee – and indeed, by the time Marc started going there it wasn't quite the place it had once been – but if there was one particular place you went if you wanted to be discovered by a record producer or manager, that was it. However, it wasn't until three years later that Marc finally scored the hoped-for crock of gold with a recording contract. He hasn't said much about the intervening years except – and it's a key part of the Bolan myth – that he spent five months living with a wizard in Paris. Learning all the time.

Marc made his first record under the guiding hand of Jim Econimedes, a London-based American record producer who got Decca to put out 'The Wizard', a Bolan composition. Decca, for their part, suggested that Marc should re-christen himself Bolan. 'The Wizard' wasn't a hit. Neither were 'Hippy Gumbo' or 'The Third Degree', though they did attract a certain amount of attention and his name got around. Then came a pause in the proceedings, which ended when Marc started recording again as the front-man with John's Children.

Love 'n' Peace

John's Children caused quite a commotion during the three months that Marc stayed with them. They had some publicity shots taken without any clothes on in the middle of bushes, and managed to get their first single, 'Desdemona', banned by the BBC because of a line saying 'lift up your skirts and fly'. It was a minor hit.

Marc was chief songwriter, lead singer, and guitarist in the band. It was 1967, the year of the flower children – beads, incense, love-ins and a new sense of wonder and romanticism filling the air – and John's Children were, sure enough, right there with their fingers on the button, thanks to Marc. Some measure of his importance in the band can be gauged from the fact that after he'd departed they went on recording his songs. Despite this they never had a real hit, and quickly disappeared.

Marc surfaced again in 1968 as the main ingredient in Tyrannosaurus Rex, which started as a five-piece, but almost as soon as it was born contracted to an

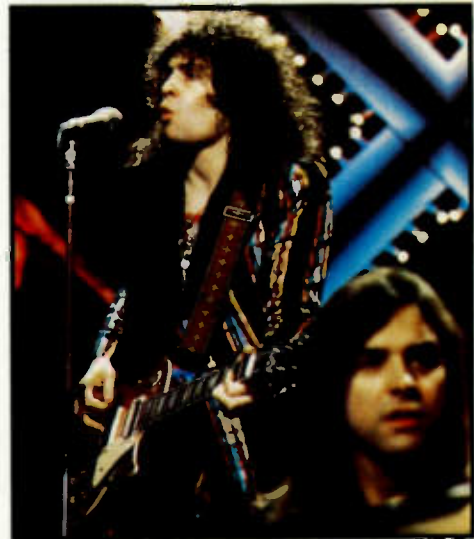
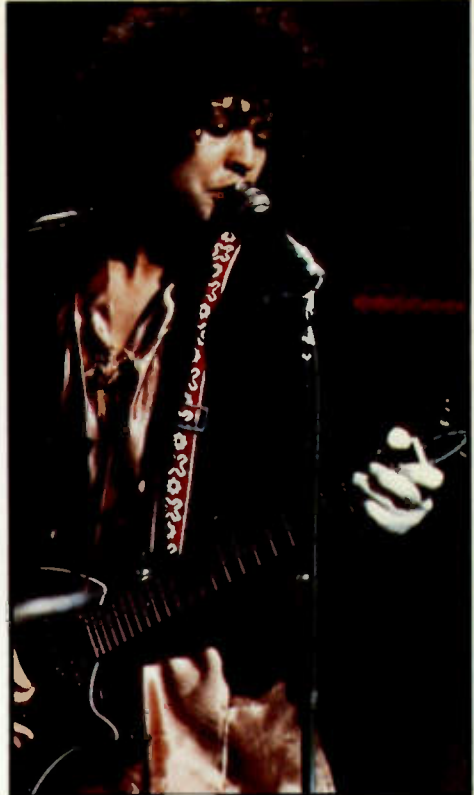




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acoustic duo. Marc sang and played his £14 Spanish guitar, and Steve Peregrine Took kept up a pattering beat on his hand drums. Took derived his colourful name from a character in Tolkien's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, an enormously popular and influential work that was required reading for anyone with a vaguely hippie cast of mind.

The setting for the Tolkien books was a fictitious land called Middle Earth, which also happened to be the name of the most popular social centre for the beautiful people in London, and the springboard for a high proportion of the new rock music. Two DJs, regulars at the club, gave their seal of approval to Tyrannosaurus Rex and were their first patrons.

John Peel and Jeff Dexter were probably the most influential arbiters of the new music. Peel's *Perfumed Garden* show on Radio London and, later, his *Top Gear* and *Night Ride* on the BBC, were the first and best of the 'underground' shows, and Marc and Steve, the two archetypal flower people, were given massive promotion and exposure.

The Great Leap Forward

Peel went out of his way to get bookings for the band in clubs all around the country. Jeff Dexter, known as 'The Blond Bombshell', was Bolan's double in all but hair – his long and wispy – but the two of them lived around Ladbroke Grove in London, hung around the same scenes in wildly colourful clothes, wore girls' buckle shoes, and were both short.

Peel and Dexter ensured that Tyrannosaurus Rex became a household name on the underground scene – but the hippies were hardly good consumers, and didn't have much money to spend on records. Tyrannosaurus Rex's fey, magical image was fine for the times, but their music didn't compare with the heavy stuff from the West Coast, or bands like Pink Floyd and the Crazy World of Arthur Brown in Britain. They lost out on that level, and the pop market at the time was too conservative to take Tyrannosaurus Rex's whimsical acoustic rock with its Eastern overtones. At this time the band's most successful record was 'Deborah', their first single, which managed the lower half of the charts in '68.

Despite the 'gentle vibes' tone of the band, Marc still preserved a liking for the more traditional brand of flash he'd gone for as a Mod, and this was reflected in the choice of material for their first album, 'My People Were Fair And Had Sky In Their Hair'. This album included songs like 'Mustang Ford' and 'Hot Rod Mama' – pure '50s Chuck Berry in inspiration – alongside the more fanciful 'Child Star', 'Chateau In Virginia Waters' and 'Frowning Atahuallpa' ('My Inca Love'). Marc's tumbling cascades of word and melody managed to combine, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, the tastes of the speedy city ace kid, and the strange enchanted nature boy.

It was in the direction of old-time rock

that Tyrannosaurus Rex was edging over the next two years. They were one of the most prolific of recording bands, and the more they did the more it became apparent that Marc was Tyrannosaurus Rex. Steve Took had little to do but sing harmonies and provide a simple beat, while Marc was getting into the techniques of recording, pouring out a never-ending stream of songs, becoming a more than fair guitar player – and was *the* figure that came over.

Steve finally decided to call it a day, and split from Marc after a relatively successful first American tour. He retreated from the world of pop back into the freak scene around Ladbroke Grove, playing with such people as the Pink Fairies. Marc began looking for a replacement, and he finally met him in a macrobiotic restaurant. Micky Finn impressed Marc by owning a large and powerful motorbike, and altogether cut a considerably heavier dash than Steve.

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It was around this time that Marc had started working with David Bowie, another ex-Mod and scene king who was interested in making it as a pop star. There were many similarities – Bowie was something of a poet, supremely into the nuances of style, and also intent on dissolving the traditional barriers between masculine and feminine. Bowie and his wife Angela, and Bolan and his wife June seemed to be heading the same way. Bolan played a fair electric guitar on David's 'Prettiest Star', the follow-up to 'Space Oddity'; but though he was for several weeks the best-selling poet in the country with his *Warlock Of Love* book, as an artist he was working on a lighter, less obsessive level than Bowie.

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Bolan: in the early days; as a sharp Mod; the '70s star.

Camera Press

John Kingsby

number soared up the charts to become Marc's first big hit, the rightness of his tactics was proved.

It was the start of what the papers called 'T. Rextasy'. Wild scenes started to take place in the ballrooms as the 'Bopping Imp' stood revealed as the 'Electric Warrior' and put a spell on the young girls. Marc used the voices of Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan — ex-members of an American pop band called the Turtles — to add the authentic feel to his records. Bill Legend had joined the band on drums, there was a new contract with Fly Records, and the old image was supplanted by the new raunchy, rocky Marc with the band somewhere in the background.

Easy Action

As hit followed hit, it seemed that Marc was everywhere. He was the face, he was quoted everywhere, and he was claiming to be as big as the Beatles had been five years before. The records came in quick succession. 'Get It On' and 'Jeepster' kept the name up front through 1971, the year in which the 'Electric Warrior' album was released. This album marked the high point of T. Rex as a rock band — you could see how far Marc had travelled from Tyrannosaurus Rex by the song titles — 'Lean Woman Blues' (recorded by Elvis and Jerry Lee Lewis in the '50s), 'The Motivator' (Chuck Berry was 'motor-vating over the hill' with 'Maybellene' in 1955), and updated variations on the theme with 'Life's A Gas' and 'Rip Off'.

Having conquered the charts, Marc's next step was to set up his own record company, the T. Rex Wax Co., which had its first hit with 'Telegram Sam' early in 1972. There were those who thought that Marc was more concerned with his image than with producing his best music. Marc, meanwhile, was doing well enough for 'Metal Guru' and 'Children Of The Revolution' to follow their predecessors into the charts as if by automatic feed.

Towards the end of 1973 it seemed as if Marc was losing some of his enthusiasm for rock and his career in it. He'd starred in *Born To Boogie*, a film by Ringo Starr, and seemed less inclined to take his position as a teen hero seriously. 'The Groover' failed to sell as well as earlier singles, and 'Tanx', his summer album, wasn't as well received as it might have been a year earlier. The hysteria was dying down; the only big target left for Marc was to make it in America.

Like his early hero, Cliff Richard, he hadn't cracked it there when many less spectacular British bands had. Maybe, like Cliff, he was a little too clean, a little too level-headed, to make it as a rocker in the place where it all began.

NEXT WEEK IN SUPERSTARS: Alice Cooper — is he the leader of our first, post-Charles Manson nihilistic rock band?



MARC BOLAN

Born 30th September 1947, the second son of Simeon Feld. Of Jewish/English stock, Marc was a non-starter academically.

1962: Spotlited in *Town* magazine as a Mod-cult leader. Frequented the 2'1's coffee bar. Spent 5 months living in Paris with a wizard. Developed an interest in mysticism and white magic. Returned to London and tried to break into the music business.

1965: Met Jim Econimedes, an American record producer. Signed with Decca. Recorded 'Wizard' and roused minor interest.

1966: 'Hippy Gumbo' on Columbia. Still not a big hit.

1967: The year of flower power. Marc formed John's Children and recorded 'Desdemona' (Track) which was banned by the BBC. Met Steve Took and formed the five-man Tyrannosaurus Rex.

1968: Recorded 'Deborah' (Regal Zonophone), which was a minor hit in April. In July, 'My People Were Fair' reached no. 5 in the album charts. Released 'Prophets, Seers & Sages' (R.Z.) in November.

1969: A reasonably successful tour of America. 'Unicorn' (R.Z.) released in July. Steve Took left.

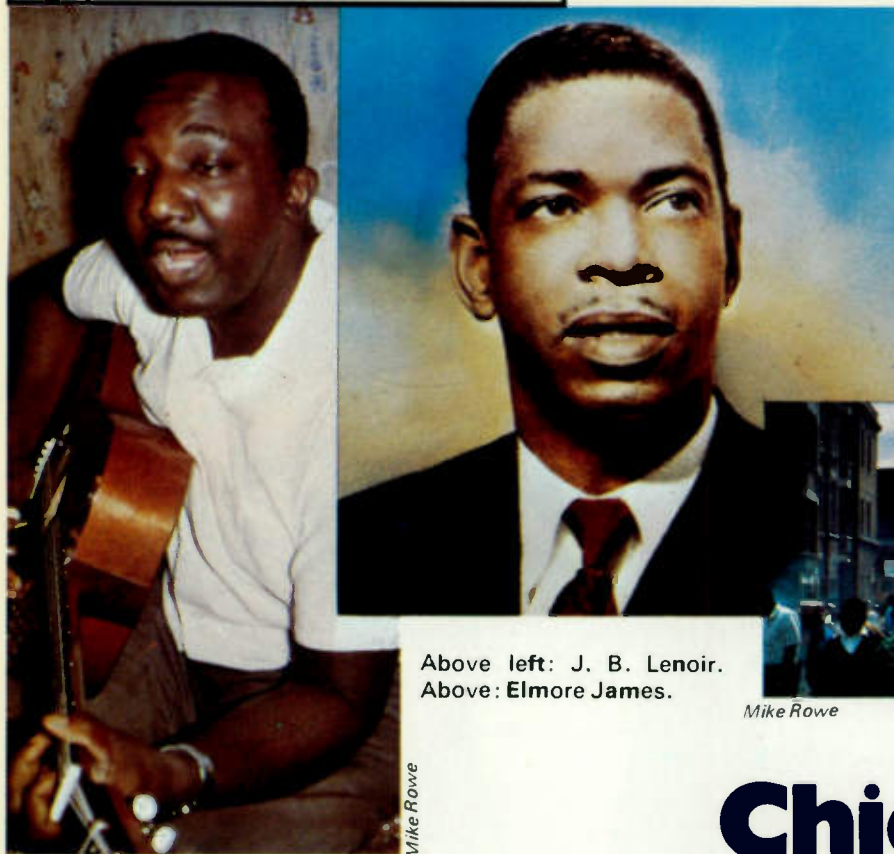
1970: 'A Beard Of Stars' in April under the new name of T. Rex with Micky Finn. Also (with R.Z.) he cut 'One Inch Rock', 'Pewtor Suitor', 'King Of The Rumbling Spires' and 'By The Light Of The Magical Moon'. In December he changed labels to Fly, recorded the

monster hit, 'Ride A White Swan' which jumped into the no. 2 position.

1971: This was a year of hits for Bolan. In February, 'Hot Love' (Fly) got to no. 1, and in July, 'Get It On' followed it there. In November the album 'Electric Warrior' was released and besides reaching no. 1, was also one of EMI's biggest sellers. This was followed in December by 'Jeepster' (Fly), which got as far as no. 2.

1972: Marc began to record under his own label of T. Rex Wax Co. In January, 'Telegram Sam' was released. In April, they re-released the double album 'Prophets, Seers & Sages' and 'My People Were Fair'. The 'Bolan Boogie' album came out in May along with the single, 'Metal Geru'. In July, 'The Slider' came out, which stopped at no. 5. 'Children Of The Revolution' was released in October and it went to no. 2, as did 'Solid Gold Easy Action', which came out in December. In this hit-dotted year, Marc also made the film *Born To Boogie*, which was filmed 'live' at Wembley.

1973: 'Twentieth Century Boy' was released in March and got to no. 3. In April, 'Tanx' was released, and in June, 'The Groover' — they both stopped at no. 4. In July, he went on a major American tour. The US rock papers were yet again disappointed by T. Rex, who failed even to win an encore at Santa Monica, California, in August. Marc has his share of American glitter fans, but more substantial Stateside success appears to be beyond him.



Above left: J. B. Lenoir.
Above: Elmore James.



Left: Maxwell Street,
Chicago.

Chicago Bound...

The Blues are as much a geographical matter as a rainstorm. When black population statistics started turning themselves inside out in the '40s, and farmworkers swept out of the South to become factory-workers in the North, the Blues were profoundly affected.

At first the Southern emigrants arrived in Cleveland, Detroit, and the other industrial centres of the North—but most of all Chicago—as strangers in a strange land, country folk disorientated by the speed and noise and complexity of city life. The blues they had brought with them—for many of the North-bound opportunity-seekers were musicians—were in those early days a reassuring reminder of home, a Southern breeze amidst the city odours of railroad and stockyard. For a time, the music of the new city-dwellers was little more than the music of down home, transplanted.

No New Thing

But that soon changed—for there was intense pressure on all sides. First, the new Chicagoans quickly picked up city ways and styles, and looked to their music-makers to echo them with more sophisticated blues. And then, the Blues were no new thing in Chicago in the '40s—the city had been a home for the music for 20 years, and had developed its own approaches. There was all the potential of a terrific clash of ideas. It didn't quite work out that way, but the skirmishing certainly had a fruitful effect on what finally appeared, the classic Chicago Blues of the '40s and '50s.

The established scene was tightly-knit and had thrived on success. Almost all the pre-war blues-recording business had operated out of Chicago, and during the '30s a style of urban band music had come into being, spearheaded by singers and composers like Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Boy Williamson I, Washboard Sam, Tampa Red and Walter Davis. Parallel evolutions took place in St. Louis, where the singer/pianist Peetie Wheatstraw—'The Devil's Son-in-Law'—was celebrated; and Indianapolis, home of pianist Leroy Carr and the 'How Long Blues'. The fashion grew for bands with piano, guitar, bass and drums, with frequent additions of harmonica, brass or reeds. One record company, Bluebird, had most of the significant musicians under contract, and its house style was so consistent that later writers could term it the 'Bluebird beat'. It was, in short, a blues factory. Many artists wrote songs for their acquaintances and sat in on each other's sessions. Out-of-town musicians, dropping by for one-off recording dates, were given back-up bands selected from the company's regular address-book. It was an efficient business, calculated to keep the public supplied with a sound to which it had grown accustomed. If the records became a little stereotyped, at least they were predictably sound merchandise.

Into this tight little world of dog-scratch-dog burst, in the '40s, a crowd of younger players from the South. Though many of these had been reared on the Chicago output of the '30s, they didn't much copy it, but arrived with country sounds—bottleneck guitar-playing, hollering styles of singing—that the more sophisticated resident musicians of Chicago had long deserted. And,

since they'd brought their audience with them, and were scuffling to play in the mushrooming club scene for prices that the established musicians scorned, they made themselves heard and felt.

Bye Bye 'Bluebird Beat'

Some of the older men resented this; others were generous to the up-and-coming stylists, and almost all the younger musicians acknowledge the help and tuition they were given by Big Bill and Sonny Boy Williamson. In time the new style might have merged somewhat into the old, but another circumstance spelled the decline of the '30s fashion: the big recording companies dropped out of the running. The war and a recording ban imposed by the musician's union created a gulf, and by the later '40s only a few faint echoes of the 'Bluebird beat' were being heard. The new audience had no worries: as well as their own musicians, they'd brought their own entrepreneurs. The war was not a year over when the first of the small independent labels was born, and in next to no time there were plenty.

The great moment was perhaps in 1947, when a young Mississippi singer/guitarist, Muddy Waters, cut an emphatically down-home-sounding record, 'I Can't Be Satisfied'/'I Feel Like Going Home'. All there was on the disc was a howling bottleneck guitar, a string bass, and a whooping, out-in-the-sticks Mississippi vocal. By the standards of the old-timers who wore sharp suits and were always on time with their union dues, it was ridiculously primitive; but the sales figures showed that the young men would soon be wearing sharp suits too.



Mike Rowe



Sylvia Pitcher

From left to right; another view of Maxwell Street; Howlin' Wolf; Muddy Waters. Bottom right: Jimmy Dawkins.



Sylvia Pitcher



The Urban Blues

By 1950, Muddy had added the harmonica genius Little Walter Jacobs to his recording group, and the classic form of the Chicago blues band was half set. Harmonicas and guitars led the way, and every club echoed to duos and trios using those instruments. So did the streets. Every Sunday morning in and around the famous open-air market on Maxwell and Halsted Streets, which the singers called 'Jewtown', groups jockeyed for position to play for nickels and dimes from passers-by. As one-time bluesman Johnny Williams remembers it: "We musicians lined all up and down the street. This was where the music world began, right there on Maxwell, among us. Which was mostly where they turned pro, right from there on Maxwell Street every Sunday."

Chess and Checker

There was Floyd Jones, singing thoughtful blues about rising prices – his cousin Moody Jones, playing a big washtub bass – harp-player Snooky Pryor – mandolinist Johnny Young. These four, with Johnny Williams on guitar, provided a group from which various trios made some of the earliest records of the new sound. Pryor's shrill harp over boogie guitar rhythms, Floyd Jones' falsetto whooping – both exciting novelties characteristic of the pushy, experiment-minded independents now fighting for the market.

One such company, however, soon emerged leader: Chess. Even more than Sam Phillips' Sun Records in '50s Memphis, Chess dominated the scene around it, acquiring virtually all the most popular artists, and keeping them. Run by the brothers Len and Phil Chess, themselves

emigrants, from Poland, it had fingers in all the juiciest pies. Chess owned the Macomba, a popular club. Chess ran WVON, the premier black radio station in Chicago. Chess had secure links with the big distributors. Chess attracted Southern record talent from companies like Sun. (Howlin' Wolf was a Sam Phillips artist before ever he met the Chess brothers.) Chess, in fact, had the artists, the means of giving them airplay, and an efficient distribution network that covered every centre of blues-purchasing. The company also developed an ear-catching 'house sound' for its records – a dramatic echo – and by-and-large it took a deal of trouble with its product. The care paid off; the classic blues of the '50s by Muddy, Wolf, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Jimmy Rogers – all on Chess or its sister-label Checker – were not only sizeable hits, but performances of lasting quality.

The typical band sound jelled in the early '50s, when Muddy – always the leader – had a five-piece group: himself and Jimmy Rogers on guitars, Otis Spann on piano, Little Walter on harp, and a drummer. *This* is the Chicago sound that has meant so much to pop music since, because it was this group, or ones similar to it, that embryo musicians were listening to in those blues-discovering early '60s, on famous sides like 'Got My Mojo Working', 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Just Make Love To Me'. Everything was there: Muddy's slide guitar vying with Rogers' flat-picked patterns, Spann filling in the spaces with his sturdy piano, and the drummer slapping out the back-beat rhythms that gave post-war Chicago blues a punch never felt in the more even rhythms of the '30s. And through it all sounded the

big organ chords and daring take-off solos of Little Walter, who elevated blues harmonica to the front-line instrument.

Muddy's chief rival, from about the mid-'50s, was Howlin' Wolf. Like Muddy a Mississippi Delta emigrant, Wolf had an even fiercer allegiance to the raucous sounds of their youth – a bull of a singer, who stalked the clubs like a King and howled to match his title. 'Smokestack Lightning' (1956) was his first big hit, but his records maintained an astonishing standard for a decade, and not even Muddy has left so fine a collection of double-header singles: 'Back Door Man', 'Spoonful', 'The Red Rooster' – many of them were old country themes from Mississippi, dressed up by Chess' jack-of-all-trades, bassist/singer/composer/arranger Willie Dixon, and admirably suited both to Wolf's thunderous voice and to the brash bands that supported him. 'Goin' Down Slow', with Dixon's memorable narration at the beginning:

'Now looka here! I did not say I was a millionaire . . . but if I'd have kept all the money that I'd already spent, I'd have been a millionaire *long* time ago. And women? Ummm *hmmm* . . .'

– followed by Wolf's blistering entry, is one of the great blues experiences.

Then there was Sonny Boy Williamson. (Actually 'Rice' Miller, but usually known – to distinguish him from the earlier John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson – as Sonny Boy Williamson II.) He had a softer manner, a confiding tone – singing, you might almost say, out of the corner of his eye. His harp-playing had a similar sly way with it; allusive and delicate, crying and pleading, where

Little Walter or Shakey Horton declaimed and boomed. He wrote strange songs with titles like 'Unseeing Eye' or 'Your Funeral And My Trial', though his best-known pieces were rather untypical – the stomping 'Don't Start Me To Talkin'' and the moody 'Help Me', with an organist droning the 'Green Onions' chords in the background. He took to the concert circuits of the '60s enthusiastically, and was a frequent visitor to Britain, playing in many clubs and recording with the Yardbirds and other British bands. His was a wondrous figure – harlequin suit of black quartered with grey, bowler hat and a goatee beard. He always claimed he wanted to take out citizenship papers in Britain, but in 1965 he died at home in Arkansas.

The Big Four

The last of Chess' 'Big Four' was Little Walter, who died in 1970. In fact, there was a time when he outsold all the rest, when he was waging a solo career playing the infectious 'Juke' and other superb harmonica blues both vocal and instrumental. Unlike his fellows, he used a quiet and late-nightish band – just a couple of guitarists and a drummer – which threw the limelight straight on himself as a soloist. He could withstand it, but the many harp-players who followed him were a little more cautious, and employed stronger back-ups. They still made good harp records though. There was Junior Wells, who had a lovely way of soaring suddenly to crystal highs. Billy Boy Arnold – no very impressive musician, but he made some catchy records like 'I Wish You Would' and 'I Ain't Got You', which went down well in the British R&B boom of the '60s. (The Animals recorded one, the Yardbirds the other.) Shakey Horton was scarcely a follower of Little Walter, but a very accomplished contemporary; singularly unsuccessful on his own records, but capable of forceful appearances on other people's, his solo on Jimmy Rogers' 'Walking By Myself' practically defines the instrument's possibilities.

Another musician who ought to somehow find a place in the 'Big Four' is Elmore James. With a power even Muddy and Wolf hardly equalled, Elmore screamed his blues across a frantic background of saxes and his own slide guitar – his records often sound on the verge of falling apart from the pressure that is thrust on to them. 'Dust My Broom' was his definitive record, and the one by which countless R&B bands have commemorated him since his death in 1963; but scarcely lesser works were 'The Sun Is Shining' and 'It Hurts Me Too'.

You would need to carry on much further to exhaust the '50s roster. The high-voiced J. B. Lenoir, who wrote many good songs and sang them with an irrepressible moody swing... Jimmy Rogers, whose magnificent series of '50s sides were perhaps the finest examples of Chicago *group* blues, freed

from the dominating presence of a Muddy or Wolf... Jimmy Reed, the drawling 'mushmouth' singer of 'Honest I Do' and 'Baby What You Want Me To Do', a specialist in knocked-out boogies and piercing one-note harp solos... Otis Rush, Buddy Guy – but here we step into a rather different area.

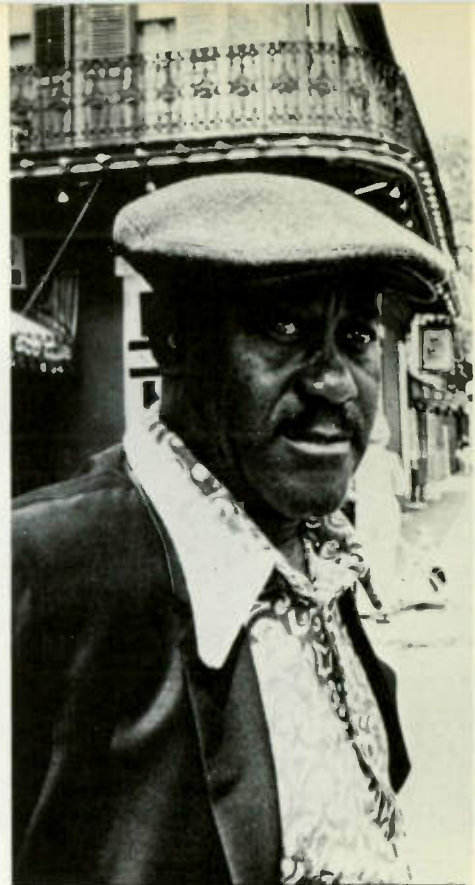
Most of the players so far can be thought of as South Siders – because it was in Chicago's South Side ghetto that they worked, and in an identifiable South Side style that they played – there was music too in the separate, tougher West Side, music with a harder, less down-home approach. Often it was produced by young men who couldn't afford regular bands and so put out their music with few resources. Besides, being younger, they were influenced by B. B. King – then exceedingly popular on a West Coast label – and by the jazzy chords and wide-open spaces in his guitar-playing.

So there arose on the West Side a blues style instantly distinguishable from its mellower predecessor. Most of it appeared on a label called Cobra, which recorded Buddy Guy, Otis Rush and Magic Sam in boxy-sounding studios that compressed the music into a tenement symphony of guitars, lurching saxes and high-pitched, impassioned singing. Otis Rush's incomparable 'Double Trouble' – 'some of this generation is millionaires, and I don't even have decent clothes to wear' – was the standout, but Magic Sam's 'All Your Love' wasn't far behind. Guy went over to Chess to cut the demented 'First Time I Met The Blues', and more recently he's joined Junior Wells as an established act. Magic Sam was another casualty of Chicago's hard life, and he died in 1971. Rush continues, inexplicably, to be one step behind real success.

The Real Thing

But it's the West Side style that has taken over Chicago Blues, and most of the artists currently active in the city, like the fine singer/guitarists Jimmy Dawkins and Luther Allison, are children of that locality. Theirs is a style naturally closer to the blues that blacks still listen to, the soul blues of B.B. – and because of their alliance with King, they find more favour on white circuits too. Muddy still performs as much as he cares to, a Grand Old Man; so, perhaps, does Wolf. Both have recorded 'London Sessions' albums with rock musicians. Most of the other South Siders, however, have found the going tough and the atmosphere unsympathetic. Johnny Williams bears quoting again for a typical 'traditionalist' view of today's idiom: "All they got to do is sing good and chord loud. Sing good and chord loud – you got it made. But I still say this: this will wear out. One day it will. And it's comin' right back to the real thing, comin' back to music."

But of course it isn't – not in the sense Williams dreams of. Chicago's blues have



Valerie Wilmer

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Latest Hits: "My Love Will Never Die" - "Violent Love" - "Love That Woman"

RHYTHM & BLUES AGENCY 8721 SOUTH LAUREL, CHICAGO, ILL.

Mike Rowe

Top: Snooky Pryor. Bottom: Otis Rush and his orchestra on their first Texas tour.

always echoed the tempo of the city, and the only blues that can survive in Chicago nowadays are those that match its speed and noise with their own. *Those* blues hang on, and in many clubs the visitor today can still find them and tune direct into the mood of the city. For it's the clubs, not the records, that have been the backbone of the scene. The classic records of the '50s are venerable vault masters now, but so long as the clubs retain the Blues as a music belonging to, and really inseparable from, their immediate neighbourhood, Chicago will remain *the* Blues City.

NEXT WEEK IN BLACK MUSIC: Blues – West by South-West. How the Blues came to echo across the waters of Frisco Bay.

Talking 'bout my generation

Every week, two of the songs that have gone to make pop history.

TUTTI FRUTTI

*A-bop-bop-a-loom-op
A-lop bop boom!
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
A-bop-bop-a-loom-op
A-lop bop boom!*

*I got a gal her name's Sue
She knows just what to do
I got a gal her name's Sue
She knows just what to do
I've been to the east,
I've been to the west
But she's the gal I love the best*

*Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
Tutti Frutti au rutti
A-bop-bop-a-loom-op
A-lop bop boom!*

*I got a gal her name's Daisy
She almost drives me crazy*

Easily the most common complaint from the older generation about rock music was 'you can't hear the words'. They mistakenly thought that the lyrics were important. If your ear was tuned to the music you *could* hear what the singer was saying, but mostly it was irrelevant anyway. Little Richard took meaningless words to the extreme, even inventing an entire new vocabulary in which the *sound* rather than the meaning of what he was singing was the important factor. To hear Little Richard scream 'A-BOP-BOP-A-LOOM-OP-A-LOP BOP BOOM' was to know instantly that three minutes of pure excitement was about to burst on the ears. It was a clarion call to uninhibited enjoyment, enforced by a totally meaningless litany of 'TUTTI FRUTTI' – pronounced 'tooty frooty O rooty' – that finally brought you to a verse – if that's what it can be called – that was banal in the extreme. But banality and triteness didn't matter; what mattered was the manner of the delivery and that was highly-charged sexuality interspersed with screams, shouts, whoops and staccato, machine-gun explosions of sound. The song's story was non-existent, the words mainly jibberish, but the overwhelming message was sex. Sue knows just what to do and she isn't just talking about crochet.

Little Richard's whole act was outrageous, aggressive and sexually assertive, and his songs were perfectly modelled for his barn-storming style. This was mainly due to the fact that he had a hand in their writing. Under his real name of Richard Penniman



Barry Thorpe

*I got a gal her name's Daisy
She almost drives me crazy
She's a real gone cookie
Yes siree
But pretty little Suzie's
the gal for me.*

LONG TALL SALLY

*Gonna tell Aunt Mary
'Bout Uncle John,
He says he has the blues
But he has a lot of fun.*

*Oh baby,
Yes baby,
Woo baby,
Havin' me some fun tonight.*

*Well long tall Sally
Has a lot on the ball,
And nobody cares
If she's long and tall.*

*Oh baby,
Yes baby,
Woo baby,
Havin' me some fun tonight.*

*Gonna have some fun tonight,
Gonna have some fun tonight,
We're gonna have some fun tonight,
Well everything will be alright.
We're gonna have some fun tonight
Gonna have some fun tonight.*

*Well I saw Uncle John
With long tall Sally
He saw Aunt Mary comin'
And he ducked back in the alley.*

*Oh baby,
Yes baby,
Woo baby,
Havin' me some fun tonight.*

NEXT WEEK:

'Summertime
Blues' and
'Happy
Birthday
Sweet
Sixteen'

he was partly responsible for both 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Long Tall Sally' and other great shouters. His thumping piano and frantic clammering made his songs not meaningless, as adults thought, but instantly understandable not just to teens in America and Britain, but all over the world; the fact was that you didn't have to understand the *meaning* of his words, but their *intent* and the way they were used like an additional instrument firmly wedded to the music. Thus teens in Europe and Asia could instantly comprehend the songs.

English-speakers might understand the adulterous nature of Uncle John's relationship with Long Tall Sally, but foreigners didn't need to register this. The *sound* carried all they ever needed to understand about Little Richard's work. The 'ohs' and 'woos' and 'yeahs' became international rock call-signs to be used time and again through the years and re-discovered with a new force when the Beatles (influenced by Little Richard) incorporated 'yeah-yeah-yeah' in their early singles. What else do you need to say to get the people dancing? 'A-BOP-BOP-A-LOOM-OP-A-LOP BOP BOOM'!

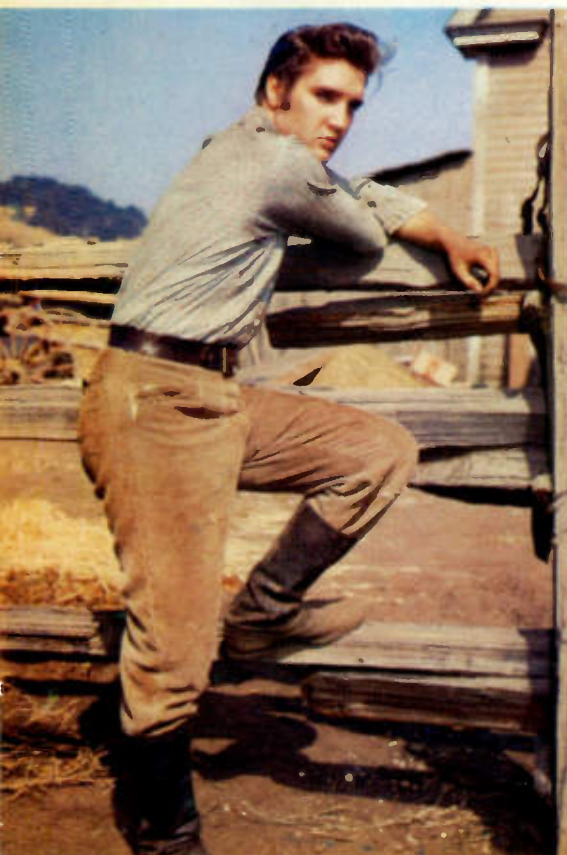
'Tutti Frutti' by R. Penniman, D. La Bartrie and Joe Lubin. By kind permission of Burlington Music.

'Long Tall Sally' by R. Penniman, E. Johnson and R. Blackwell. By kind permission of Southern Music. Both lyrics, copyright Vencie Music, Cal., USA.

Presley: Movie Star

'Thick-lipped, droopy-eyed, and indefatigably sullen, Mr. Presley, whose talents are meagre but whose earnings are gross, excites a large section of the young female population as nobody else has ever done, and I approached his movie with a certain amount of middle-aged trepidation. Unhappily, my fears were well founded . . .'

That was how one film critic (John McCarten of *The New Yorker*) reacted in 1956 to *Love Me Tender*, the 21-year-old Elvis Presley's first venture into movies. He was not alone. Most of McCarten's colleagues shared his 'middle-aged trepidation', although one or two, like the unflappable *Monthly Film Bulletin*, had a kind word to say about Presley's appearance, while lambasting the rest of the film.



The opinions of the critics, however, proved more than usually irrelevant. Presley's several million fans, augmented by more conventional film-goers curious to see what made the Pelvis tick, boosted it into one of the biggest box-office successes of its year. It was followed by *Loving You* and *Jailhouse Rock*, and by the end of 1957 Presley was among the top ten stars of the year.

Swooning Girls

Since then, Presley has made another 30 films at the rate of two a year, including latterly a couple of full-length documentaries showing him on tour and in performance. For 10 years, his films consistently pleased his fans and made money, and he even survived the Beatles boom, blithely going his own way and taking his myriad disciples with him. In the mid-'60s his screen image, perhaps partly through his own indifference, began to falter, and while the fans continued to care for their idol, they stopped going to see his films. In Britain, two of

his later vehicles, *Live A Little, Love A Little* and *Change Of Habit*, were even totally ignored by the distributors, although *Change Of Habit* did find its way to the BBC - to become the first American film to have its British premier on TV. The ratings, however, reflected the box-office.

Yet if it's true to say that Presley has failed to find a screen persona strong enough or sufficiently charismatic to make him an enduring motion picture star, it is probably true to say that collectively his films have played a powerful role in securing his present position as the elder statesman of pop, a mature swinger still capable of filling an arena or two with sobbing women.

No other pop idol, except perhaps Frank Sinatra, can claim to be as durable; and Presley is, remarkably, the only rock star of the '50s to have achieved a significant success in films. He did so by ignoring the usual precepts of Hollywood film (and image) making, and having his films tailor-made to suit one body of undivided opinion: his fans. He employed competent and uncomplaining artisan directors, such



Top left: Elvis striding out in *Viva Las Vegas*. Centre top: guitar-playing scene from *Girls, Girls, Girls*. Top right: Elvis as Pacer Burton in *Flaming Star*. Bottom left: the well-known petulant lip in *Love Me Tender*. Bottom right: a 1957 Presley portrait.

All pics from Kobal Collection.

as Norman Taurog; filled subsidiary roles with decent character actors, (Dean Jagger, Wendell Corey, Arthur O'Connell, etc.), while reserving the star part exclusively for himself (the exception to this is *Love Me Tender*, in which Richard Egan had a role of equal stature); allowed plenty of screen time for the one essential ingredient, his songs; and ensured that there were always shoals of pretty young girls on hand to swoon in his path.

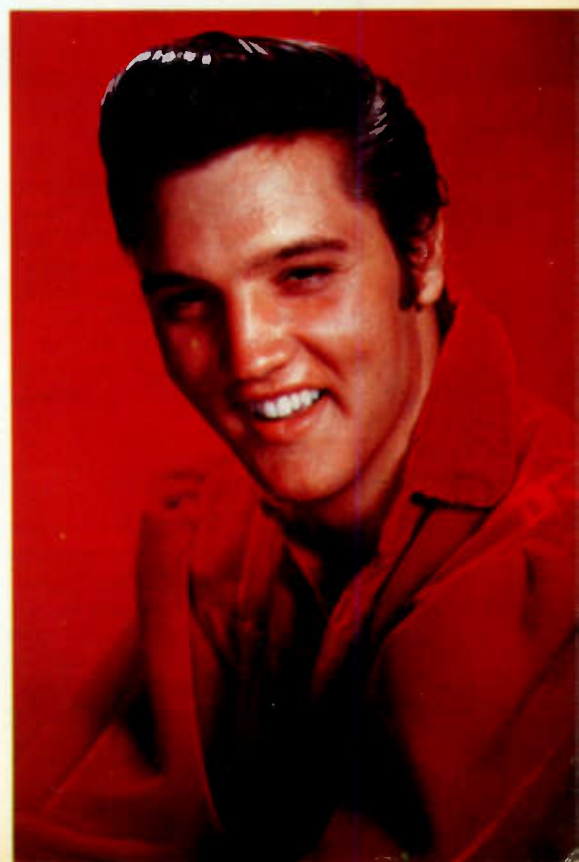
Primitive Passions

At their best, Presley's films reveal a pleasant, if limited, acting talent. At their worst, they do no more than string together a set of ill-staged rock songs and ballads on a plot-line of unspeakable banality. The latter, unfortunately, far outnumber the former, which is a pity since Presley has on occasion reacted encouragingly to good directors out to make something more than a formularised vehicle – notably Michael Curtiz with *King Creole* (1958), Don Siegel with *Flaming Star* (1960), and, best of all perhaps, Gordon

Douglas with *Follow That Dream* (1962).

Presley's celluloid image has, with variations, been principally that of the inarticulate rebel, the precocious hill-billy or country boy, orphaned and misunderstood, outwardly sullen but concealing primitive passions which often break out into violence or get sublimated into rock music. Occasionally, the character has been invested with unlikely talents (in *Wild In The Country* (1961), he portrays a rural literary genius – 'a frightening notion' said Alexander Walker at the time), but more frequently he has been the man of action (pilot, racing driver, rodeo rider) struggling to redress a set-back in his fortunes. Usually, too, he has had to contend – successfully, of course – with critics of his singing style and his peculiar brand of sex appeal, a common theme of the early rock & roll films.

Romantically, the Presley image has wavered between adolescent gigolo and the boy next to the boy-next-door, reflecting his attraction to mature women as well as young chicks; a kind of junior Valentino with Oedipus appeal. Along with



a bevy of unknown (and mostly forgotten) starlets, the Presley films inevitably feature an established actress in a seductive or motherly role, including Elizabeth Scott, Carolyn Jones, Dolores del Rio, Hope Lange, Angela Lansbury, Lola Albright, Barbara Stanwyck, Julie Adams, and Joan Blondell, to name the more able talents.

And So To Hollywood

Presley's shrewd, paternalistic agent, Colonel Tom Parker, made the young idol available to Hollywood at the height of his recording career, negotiating a number of deals without committing him to one particular studio. His debut for 20th Century-Fox, in *Love Me Tender*, was not altogether typical of what was to come. A serious, violent Western melodrama set at the time of the American Civil War, it allows Presley to die, although he reappears at the end as a ghost superimposed over a tombstone, singing one of his four songs.

Loving You set a more familiar pattern, with Presley playing a hillbilly singer promoted to TV stardom by a press agent (Elizabeth Scott) despite official hostility. The critics set a pattern of their own by disliking it intensely, although one conceded that it had 'a certain documentary interest . . . for its sidelights on a contemporary phenomenon.'

Jailhouse Rock was marked by further bouts of violence (including a scene showing Presley, a convict, being flogged by a warder) and weird staging of the rock & roll title number, with Elvis gyrating to a backdrop of prison bars and a husky chorus of fellow-cons. Henry Fielding of the *Daily Herald* was worried in case the film caused teenage riots in the way that Bill Haley's movies had done.

King Creole, set in New Orleans with Presley as a failed student turned cabaret-singer, made a better impression, although the continuing fisticuffs met with general disapproval. 'For the first time in my screen career,' said Elvis, after symbolically lopping off his sideburns, 'I'm playing somebody other than Elvis Presley' – which may explain why the film wasn't all that popular. Michael Curtiz lent expert direction to the film, and Paul Dehn, among others, got quite excited: 'His very singing has improved with his other attainments, and the voice, which used to suggest a repeatedly butted goat's, is now beginning to sound more like that of a new-born lamb.' *The Bulletin*, however, thought it 'the most unattractive Presley vehicle so far.'

G.I. Blues

There followed a crisis in Presley's fortunes when he failed to get exemption from military service. Colonel Parker, however, looked after his interests for the critical two years. His record releases were staggered and some inspired publicity kept the 'King of Rock' in the public eye. Appropriately, his next film – the first of

Norman Taurog's nine Presley films – was a service farce called *G.I. Blues* (1960), with Juliet Prowse as the love interest and Elvis 'front and centre and singing' throughout the inadequate plot. Before long the Presley film career was back in top gear, and was to stay there for another half-dozen years.

The critics began to administer grudging praise to the occasional Presley vehicle. One of these was *Flaming Star* (1960), a Western with pretensions to Greek tragedy, lifted out of the rut by Don Siegel's direction and an effective comeback performance by Dolores del Rio, ably supported by veteran John McIntyre. Elvis, playing a brooding half-breed, was 'still basically not an actor,' as one reviewer put it, 'but no longer a joke as a screen personality.'

Wild In The Country (1961), with Elvis as a rural delinquent with latent literary talent 'walking around with a cupful of anger, trying not to spill it' (script by Clifford Odets), gave Presley-knockers a fresh opportunity to wheel out their jokes; but an unusually attractive female cast (Hope Lange, Tuesday Weld, Millie Perkins) drew some admiration as well. The less demanding *Blue Hawaii* (1961), a smooth musical comedy with Angela Lansbury and a bumper crop of 14 songs, proved, however, to be the biggest money-spinner of the period.

Pleasant Presley

Of all Presley's movies, the critics' choice would undoubtedly be *Follow That Dream* (1962), a genuinely entertaining comedy with Elvis as an amiable hick innocently overcoming evil-doers at every turn in his bid to find a settled home for his father and his adopted siblings. It remains Presley's pleasantest performance, and the one critics constantly referred back to whenever they wanted to bemoan the falling standards of his later vehicles.

A folksy, somewhat bloody prizefight saga, *Kid Galahad* (1962), gave Presley a chance to repeat his likeable-oaf performance; and a witty script delivered with enthusiasm by Charles Bronson, Gig Young and Lola Albright helped the film along. But *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, made the same year, outshone it with its disarming gaiety and lively numbers (including 'Return To Sender'); Presley looked particularly happy as a carefree fishing-boat proprietor. *It Happened At The World's Fair* and *Fun In Acapulco* were popular, if routine, Presley vehicles of 1963. In the former he has his heart-strings tugged by a precocious child; in the latter he alternates between trapeze-artist and lifeguard, and is pursued by a lady bullfighter, but is wooed and won by the delectable Ursula Andress. *Viva Las Vegas* (1964) substituted Ann-Margret for Ursula Andress, and contains a celebrated rendering by Presley of 'The Yellow Rose Of Texas', but is otherwise similar fare. And *Kissin' Cousins* (1964), a return to hillbilly land, is notable only in that Elvis plays a dual role – in which at one point he is seen fighting 'himself'.

Roustabout (1964) on the other hand, with its carnival setting and Elvis as a tough, embittered, itinerant orphan, a karate expert who rides a reckless motorcycle and sings to a hard-strummed guitar, is archetypal Presley, complete with older woman (Barbara Stanwyck), loving doll (Joan Freeman), and the Jordanaires to breathe life into some less than memorable numbers.

Fading Fast

Tickle Me, a parody Western, and *Harum Scarum* (*Harem Holiday* in Britain), with Elvis as a desert ballad singer, kept the pot boiling throughout 1965, but Presley's films were fading fast in both quality and popularity. *Frankie And Johnny* (1966), a reminder of Presley's earlier, more primitive moods, marked a brief, enjoyable return to form; but *Paradise – Hawaiian Style* (1966) failed to repeat the success of *Blue Hawaii*. The next three years produced a string of undistinguished (and barely distinguishable) musical comedies with a variety of settings: *Spinout* (1966 – *California Holiday* in Britain); *Easy Come, Easy Go* (1967); *Double Trouble* (1967); *Clambake* (1967); *Stay Away, Joe* (1968) with veteran actresses Joan Blondell and Katy Jurado; *Speedway* (1968) with Nancy Sinatra; and *Live A Little, Love A Little*.

In 1969 came abortive attempts to change the lightweight image, first with *Charro*, a melodramatic and rather absurd Western featuring Presley as a reformed outlaw, tough and unshaven but hopelessly inexpressive; then with *Change Of Habit*, in which he plays a doctor involved with a trio of nuns (of that type known only to Hollywood, Mary Tyler Moore among them). Sandwiched in between was a more familiar vehicle, *The Trouble With Girls*, but it was no more successful.

Elvis Presley's film career might best be described as an idol in search of an image – in the end, a lost cause, but a relatively unimportant one when you remember that while the movie star has waxed and waned, the pop idol is still up there on the platform, doing his thing to packed nightclub audiences as triumphant as ever. The most vivid demonstration of this, ironically, is given by the two documentary portraits of the man himself in performance, *Elvis – That's The Way It Is* (1970), directed by Denis Sanders, and *Elvis On Tour* (1972), directed by Pierre Adidge and Robert Abel. Here is the proof, if any were needed, that while Presley may have failed to gain the throne of Hollywood, he is still king (of what?) in his own country.

NEXT WEEK IN POP CULTURE: The Coffee Bar Culture meant a place to go to for the young, but dens of vice to the older generation.

Leiber & Stoller: The hit makers

The world-wide success of Stealer's Wheel and 'Stuck In The Middle With You' marked the re-emergence of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller as a powerful force among today's most creative 'back-room' men. Stealer's Wheel had potential, but it took grand masters like Leiber and Stoller to show them where it was and how to use it.

The first independent producers in the history of rock, Leiber and Stoller were largely responsible for ushering out the simplicity of an era in which records were made by pulling groups off the street into a studio where they mouthed 'doowop, doowah' into a microphone for three minutes. They were the first to bring satire and social conscience to rock & roll, at a time when the music was chiefly concerned with songs about a boy who just had to have a girl. They may even have been the first blue-eyed soul brothers, writing and producing records for a score of bluesmen from 1949 onwards. It was then that Leiber (from Baltimore) met Stoller (from New York) in Los Angeles. Two 17-year-old blues fans, they pooled their skills and began writing blues — plain, low-down blues with plenty of ditto marks under the first line of each verse.



Barrie Wentzell

In 1954, they formed their own label, Spark, and among the artists they signed none were more important than the Robins whose records, including 'Framed', 'Riot In Cell Block Number 9' and 'Smokey Joe's Cafe', were historic in the development of groupdom. Their influence continued to grow into the '60s, when groups like the Beach Boys and Sly and the Family Stone politicized their recordings, using the same tune or theme as 'Riot In Cell Block Number 9' to convey an equally inflammatory message. 'Smokey Joe's Cafe', the last record by the Robins on Spark, was one of the first in a long series of Leiber and Stoller's morality plays in which the characters shirked their responsibilities, got drunk, went to jail, treated sex in naturally good-humoured terms, and encountered prejudice every day of their lazy, promiscuous lives. It's all about the atmosphere in a sleazy bordertown cafe-cum-bordello, and the behaviour of the hot-blooded owner whose use of cutlery isn't confined to eating beans:

*'From behind a counter I saw a man,
A chef-hat on his head and a knife in his
hands
He grabbed me by my collar an' began to
shout:
"You better eat up all your beans and boy
then clear right on out."'*

On the strength of records like these, the burgeoning Atlantic label signed Leiber and Stoller to an independent production pact late in 1955. They folded Spark and headed for New York, taking the Robins with them. Three members of the group stayed put in L.A. but, quickly augmented, the group was re-named the Coasters. Leiber and Stoller went on to write and produce for many of Atlantic's greatest performers (Joe Turner, Ruth Brown, Clyde McPhatter), but if they had never made a record with anyone else, they would always be remembered for the Coasters. Together, this combination created an astonishing slew of 18 hit records. Consider just part of the list: 'Searchin'', 'Young Blood', 'Idol With The Golden Head', 'Charlie Brown', 'Along Came Jones', 'Yakety Yak', 'Poison Ivy', 'Run Red Run', 'Little Egypt' — all these and more still receive regular radio-play as 'golden oldies'.

The Coasters were carefully moulded to match the musical expectations of producers who required a vehicle for their own very special genius of creating novel, dramatic, and humorous songs. The group managed to maintain their popularity without reflecting stylistic change and yet, because they worked on many different levels, their records still sound fresh and alive today.

To have sustained a series of successful

records in which humour was the most vital ingredient speaks volumes for the imagination of Jerry Leiber, whose flair for the vernacular of youth was extraordinarily acute. Apart from a succinct wit and a vividness of expression – how about ‘You’re going to need an ocean of calamine lotion’ (‘Poison Ivy’) or ‘My heart’s like this freight train, full of fire and smoke’ (‘Keep On Rollin’) – he was a walking glossary of rock & roll jive talk: the Coasters swore by the Pretty Lord, motivated groovy, flipped their lids and hung out in way-out pads with their crazy chicks, mammas or boppers. In short, they had their finger firmly on the pulse of late ‘50s Teenage America. But the comedy also had a sting in it, often a stoic pay-off which distinguishes the Coasters’ troubled race. It was the joke that depressed groups of people tell against themselves, plus an irreverence towards canons which White America valued above all others. Conformity, authority, duty towards parents, the piety of the honest, the hard work ethic – all these were questioned with a mordant wit which went largely unnoticed at the time. Ignored perhaps, for their impiety had a blasphemous tinge to it. Blacks from the South (the Coasters) and other racial minorities (Leiber and Stoller are Jewish) were not expected to criticise the system.

Ups and Downs

By maintaining their independence from Atlantic, Leiber and Stoller served many other companies throughout the ‘50s and early ‘60s including MGM, Jubilee, Wand, Big-Top, United Artists and RCA Victor. At RCA they worked with Presley, but ‘The King’ had already passed his peak. The urban blues satire at which they were so brilliant would only have mis-cast Elvis, the atmosphere at RCA’s offices was not conducive to works of incisive wit, and they were further handicapped by the need to operate within the limits of Presley’s stodgy film-scripts. Despite these constraints, they wrote and produced some of Presley’s better post-Sun records: ‘Jailhouse Rock’, ‘Trouble’ (‘My daddy was a green-eyed mountain jack’), and ‘Santa Claus Is Back In Town’ contain a number of magnificently earthy lines.

Leiber and Stoller were indubitably wizards; but just how lucky they were to work with accomplished artists like Presley, the Coasters and the Drifters is best illustrated by the fact that few of the innumerable records they wrote or produced for other artists meant anything in terms of artistic merit. Sammy Turner’s ‘Lavender Blue’ was exceptional, as were Ben E. King’s hits. But Ben had been lead with the Drifters and his solo successes, including the very beautiful ‘Stand By Me’, were in the same sort of passionate, latin-flecked soul bag. Apart from a couple of discs for the Exciters and Peggy Lee, most of Leiber and Stoller’s other early ‘60s productions were also commercially unfortunate. Inventive perfectionists when fired by artists of exceptional ability, they could do next-to-nothing

for the plethora of mediocre, middle-of-the-road talents with which they were involved outside of Atlantic.

They soon tired of the rubbish they were lending their names to and, in 1964, after a fresh but abortive attempt to start independent labels of their own, a chance meeting with George Goldner led to the formation of the Red Bird/Blue Cat labels, to which they signed a host of young songwriters and producers including Jerry Goffin and Carole King, Mick Venet, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weill, George ‘Shadow’ Morton and Artie Ripp. Renowned for his mid-‘50s hits with Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers, Goldner took charge of promotion and the Red Bird complex enjoyed 25 hits inside two years. Of these the Shangri-Las, the Dixie-Cups, the Jellybeans, and the Adlibs are most fondly remembered. Leiber and Stoller took little part in the creative end of the business; for them it was chiefly bubblegum pop music for which they had no affection at all. Weary of being administrators, they sold the entire set-up to Goldner and went back to the Coasters.

The reconciliation, in 1967, took place on Columbia, whose carefully promoted

**NEXT
WEEK
IN THE
MUSIC:
Chuck
Berry,
one of
the great songwriters of rock.**



Syndication International

aura of sophistication did not, at that time, extend to black acts. Columbia’s treatment of Leiber and Stoller was unarguably one of the greatest tragedies in the history of pop music. What the CBS dinosaur could have achieved behind the world’s best producers, an institution like the Coasters, and some positively brilliant records like ‘D.W. Washburn’ (as perfect as any pop record could be, but Columbia didn’t push it so Leiber and Stoller gave the tune to the Monkees), ‘Soul Pad’ and ‘Down Home Girl’ is difficult to contemplate. Clearly all concerned were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Their masterpieces rendered useless by apathetic exposure, Leiber and Stoller terminated the Columbia agreement, retired from the studios for 3 years, and set about investing their wealth by purchasing large and durable music publishing concerns. In 1970, they also bought the world-famous Starday/King company which gave them the opportunity to record, market, and promote whatever they wished. Promptly, they re-signed the Coasters and released ‘Love Potion Number 9’, a song which they had originally written for the Clovers over 10 years before. It made the Top 50, but it

smacked of work for old-times’ sake – an undistinguished effort from so highly regarded talents. Nevertheless, Leiber and Stoller were back making records and fresh offers flooded in. Stealer’s Wheel is the first of their new ventures, and one which suggests that they’ve moved on to fresh and exciting ways in which to divest their creative energies. It’s good of its kind, but it doesn’t sparkle in the way Ben E. King used to, and it hasn’t got *that* wit.

Beyond all this, Leiber and Stoller were producers in the full sense of the word. Until they joined Atlantic, groups indulged in an undisciplined kind of quadruple counterpoint, while the best quartets purveyed a tightly polished, if traditional, ‘barber shop’ style. The Coasters disregarded all precedent. Leiber and Stoller wrote music specifically for each member of the group and taught each how to sing his part. They would manufacture crispness by cutting up a tape to remove consonants like ‘s’ from the end of words, speed the tape up for novel effect, or slow it down to ensure that the bass voice came over with the right touch of indolence. And on almost every side. King Curtis would thread in with a breath-taking saxophone solo playing, much of the time, as Leiber and Stoller hummed the rhythm they were after in his ear. It was unknown to produce a black group – indeed anybody – in this lavish, extraordinarily attentive fashion. In doing so, Leiber and Stoller created some of the most brilliant, dynamic and ingenious of all pre-1960 records.

Greatest Record

Turning their attentions away from the Coasters, they were put in charge of Atlantic’s other fine black group, the Drifters. The liaison soon produced what is arguably the greatest record with which they were ever involved. ‘There Goes My Baby’ (1959) combined a gospel-rooted voice (that of Ben E. King) with a latin rhythm section and neo-classical strings right out of Rimsky-Korsakov. It sounded like two records playing at once, and it sold a million. The combination of such electric ingredients unleashed a trend as significant as the invention of the electric guitar. By imposing themselves upon another black group, Leiber and Stoller gave the pop music industry entirely new ideas about itself. ‘You can’t use strings with those guys’ had been the unspoken cry. After ‘There Goes My Baby’ black groups rarely recorded without strings again, while latin rhythms permeated the whole of pop music from Burt Bacharach – who learned a good deal by sitting in on Drifters sessions – onwards. In keeping with the general softening of rock & roll, succeeding Drifters hits – ‘Save The Last Dance For Me’, ‘Please Stay’, ‘Up On The Roof’, ‘On Broadway’ – were less intense and often decidedly lush. But they were sensationally popular and, perhaps as important, they are likely to have sparked off Phil Spector, who was apprenticed to Leiber and Stoller at the time.

POP FILE

... the Who's Who of Pop. Week by week the A-Z of who did what and when.



S.K.R.

BLUE MINK was formed in London in 1969, when Alan Parker, Herbie Flowers and Roger Coulam decided to form a working unit on hire for sessions. Someone suggested they should make an album, for which Roger Cook and Madeline Bell were brought in on vocals. This session produced 'Melting Pot', a big hit in 1969, which they followed with 'Good Morning Freedom' and 'Banner Man' - all catchy middle-of-the-road numbers.

GRAHAM BOND, saxophonist and organist, was one of the first jazz musicians to move into the early British R&B scene, playing with Alexis Korner. In 1963 he formed the Graham Bond Organisation, a major influence on countless British musicians. The original line-up was Graham, Ginger Baker (drums), Jack Bruce (bass) and Dick Heckstall-Smith (sax). Many names, including John McLaughlin and Jon Hiseman, passed through the Bond band, which produced two pioneering albums 'The Sound Of 65' and 'Let's Get ORGANISED'. Bond split the band in 1968, and recorded two albums in the States before playing in Ginger Baker's Airforce for a while in 1971. He has now somewhat lost his funky roots, is heavily into white magic, and has released an album called 'Holy Magick' for Mercury.

GARY 'U.S.' BONDS began singing in his local church in Jacksonville, Florida. After 10 years as a professional singer, he hit the charts in Britain and the US with 'New Orleans' and 'Quarter To Three' in 1961; two hard-rocking, stomping numbers with a drunken party atmosphere that have since become classic recordings.



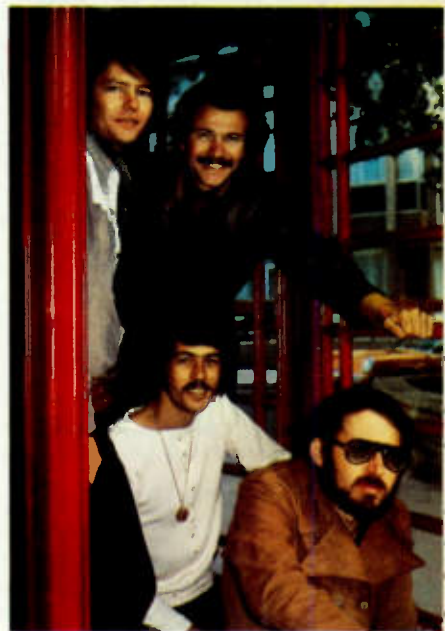
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THE BONZO DOG BAND (originally the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band) started out as a comedy jazz group recreating the sounds of the '20s in light-camp fashion. After a long spell of work in North of England night-clubs, they were invited to appear in the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour* with singer Vivian Stanshall

doing a Presley send-up. Those who had bought the group's first album 'Gorilla' (1967) knew there was more to them than that, and the rest of the country soon found out via 'The Doughnut In Granny's Greenhouse' and a hit single 'Urban Spaceman', which was produced by Paul McCartney. Inspired by Stanshall's attraction to the days of Empire, his perceptive comments on the British character, and the weird imaginations of Neil Innes and Rodney Ruskin-Spear, the Bonzos recorded two more albums, 'Tadpoles' and 'Keynsham' before splitting up. A whimsical British counterpart to Zappa's Mothers, the Bonzos brought a bizarre sense of humour, a rare element of intelligent comment, and theatrical antics into rock. Unfortunately none of the band has had the same impact since.

BOOKER T AND THE MG'S, led by Booker T. Jones, worked as backing-group to most of the Stax/Volt artists, as well as recording in their own right. Their major hit was 'Green Onions' (1962), although they have recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest. Born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1944, Booker T started work as a staff musician for Stax Records in 1959, and worked with the Markeys. The MG's (standing for Memphis Group) were the rhythm section of that group: Steve Cropper (guitar), Donald 'Duck' Dunn (bass), Al Jackson (drums) and Booker T (organ). The artists they have backed include Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, and Rufus Thomas. Steve Cropper has also part-written many 'soul' classics including 'In The Midnight Hour', 'Knock On Wood', '634-5789', and 'Mr Pitiful', and together with Booker T has produced many Stax sessions.

BREAD started out as Elektra Records' studio musicians, and intended their group to be wholly studio-based. The reception for their first album in 1969, and a hit single 'Make It With You', changed the minds of David Gates (guitar, bass, vocals), James Griffin (guitar), Mike Botts (drums), and Rob Royer - who has now been replaced by organist/guitarist Larry Knechtel. All four have been playing for years, and between them have backed, at one time or another, Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Clarence 'Frogman' Henry, Glen Campbell, Duane Eddy, and Merle Haggard. As Bread, they have produced light rock with tight harmonies and excellent musicianship, a good example of 'grown-up rock' that would have been impossible a few years ago.



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BIG BILL BROONZY, born in Mississippi in 1893, recorded hundreds of blues sides in Chicago in the '20s and '30s. After his Carnegie Hall concert in 1938, his audience was increasingly white rather than black. Especially popular with students in Europe, Broonzy was one of the first bluesmen to become a cult name in the early '60s, before young white musicians 're-discovered' Robert Johnson and Leadbelly. Broonzy was recording and touring right up to his death in August 1958.

ARTHUR BROWN, ex-philosophy student of Reading University, stunned British audiences in 1967 by appearing on stage with a painted face and fluorescent robes, while a crown of fire burnt on his head. But he wasn't just another gimmick-merchant: he proved his writing ability with his first record 'Give Me A Flower', his big hit in 1968 'Fire', and his first album 'The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown'. While everyone else was into peace and waving flowers in the sunshine, Arthur presented the other side of acid experience, screaming "I am the God of Hellfire, and I bring you FIRE!" He eventually began to believe he was just that, his group split while on tour in the US, and he's never been quite the same since. Others have now taken Arthur's stock-in-trade of nightmare, electronics and theatrics further, but Britain retains a soft psychedelic spot for Arthur and his surreal imagination, and Kingdom Come drew healthy crowds until he split from the group in July 1973. Kingdom Come – Phil Shutt (bass), Andy Dalby (lead guitar), Leslie Adey (light-show) and Guy Evans (drums) – will continue without him, while Arthur heads for a solo career.

JOE BROWN started playing guitar in the skiffle era, and got his break as resident accompanist to singers auditioning on a TV show *Boy Meets Girl*. His second record 'Darktown Strutters Ball' was a minor hit, and Joe and his group the Bruvvers played on TV with stars such as Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, Johnny Cash and Cliff Richard. After switching from Decca Records to Pye, Joe topped the charts in 1962 with 'A Picture Of You' which he followed with 'It Only Took A Minute' (no. 6, 1962) and 'That's What Love Will Do' (no. 3, 1963). In the days when three-chord strummers were sneered at, Joe was a rocker who really could play, as he is still doing today.



Fleetway Studio

JACK BRUCE won a scholarship to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music when he was 17, but was more interested in playing bass with Glasgow jazz groups. After playing with Alexis Korner, Jack was in the Graham Bond Organisation with Ginger Baker before joining John Mayall's Bluesbreakers where he played with Eric Clapton for six weeks. After a short spell with Manfred Mann he joined Eric and Ginger to form Cream. Many of Cream's best numbers, including 'Sunshine Of Your Love', 'Tales Of Brave Ulysses' and 'Politician', were co-written by Jack and poet Pete Brown. Jack has made three albums since Cream, led his own group featuring Graham Bond and Chris Spedding, and has now teamed up with Leslie West and Corky Laing to form West, Bruce and Laing. At his best, Jack combined jazz ideas, improvisation, and inventive runs with a hard, propelling beat – a perilous path on which many a rock bassist has come to grief.

BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD was formed in 1966, and built up a big reputation around Los Angeles before their third single 'For What It's Worth' brought them a nationwide audience. After an unsuccessful first album, they recorded 'Buffalo Springfield Again', which was a big hit in the US and stirred underground interest in Britain. Just as they were about to become one of the biggest names in the States the group split. Guitarist Steve Stills formed Crosby, Stills and Nash – which soon added Neil Young, Springfield's lead guitarist. Rhythm guitarist Richie Furay, and bassist Jim Messina, formed a country-rock band, Poco. A third album, released 'posthumously' and called 'Third Time Around' stands as a memorial to what many feel could have been the major group of the late '60s.

SOLOMON BURKE, like many black singers, started off singing in church. By the age of 12 he was known as 'Wonderboy Preacher' and had his own church, Solomon's Temple, in Philadelphia, from where he broadcast his own radio show. Signed to Atlantic in 1960, his first release 'How Many Times' was a hit, and was followed by classic recordings such as 'Just Out Of Reach', 'If You Need Me' and 'Everybody Needs Somebody To Love'.



Redferns

JOHNNY BURNETTE, born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1938, worked alongside Elvis Presley for Crown Electric Company before either of them were famous. After four years of singing and recording both solo and with his brother Dorsey, Johnny hit the charts in 1960 with 'Dreamin'', and in 1961 with 'You're Sixteen' and 'Little Boy Sad'. He also wrote Rick Nelson's fourth million-seller, 'Believe What You Say'. He died on August 14th, 1964, after a fishing accident.

PAUL BUTTERFIELD was born in Chicago in 1941, and grew up in that city like many a bluesman before him, with one difference. Butterfield is white, and in 1965, when he formed the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, white American kids did not play blues. Butterfield took his wild, raucous band, with him on harmonica, into the folk clubs and introduced this audience to the songs of Elmore James, Muddy Waters, Little Walter and Willie Dixon. His first two albums 'The Paul Butterfield Blues Band' and 'East West' were massive sellers, and a big influence on the white blues scene. Like John Mayall in Britain, Butterfield is noted for his single-minded dedication to his music, and for introducing fine guitarists – Mike Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop. Elektra have released a double album 'Golden Butter' containing some of his best performances for that label, which he has now left.

GLEN CAMPBELL was born in Delight, Arkansas, and by the age of six was playing guitar in his uncle's Western group. In 1960 Glen and his wife moved to California, where he played in a number of rock groups and became a sought-after session guitarist working with Presley, Rick Nelson and many others. In 1961 he scored his first solo success as a singer on the C&W charts with 'Turn Around Look At Me', but it was not until 1967 and 'Gentle On My Mind' that Glen became a big name. Since then he has had hits with 'By The Time I Get To Phoenix', 'Wichita Lineman', 'Galveston', and a revival of 'All I Have To Do Is Dream' with Bobbie Gentry. An underrated guitarist as well as leader of easy-listening country music, Glen has 10 Gold Discs and five Grammy Awards.



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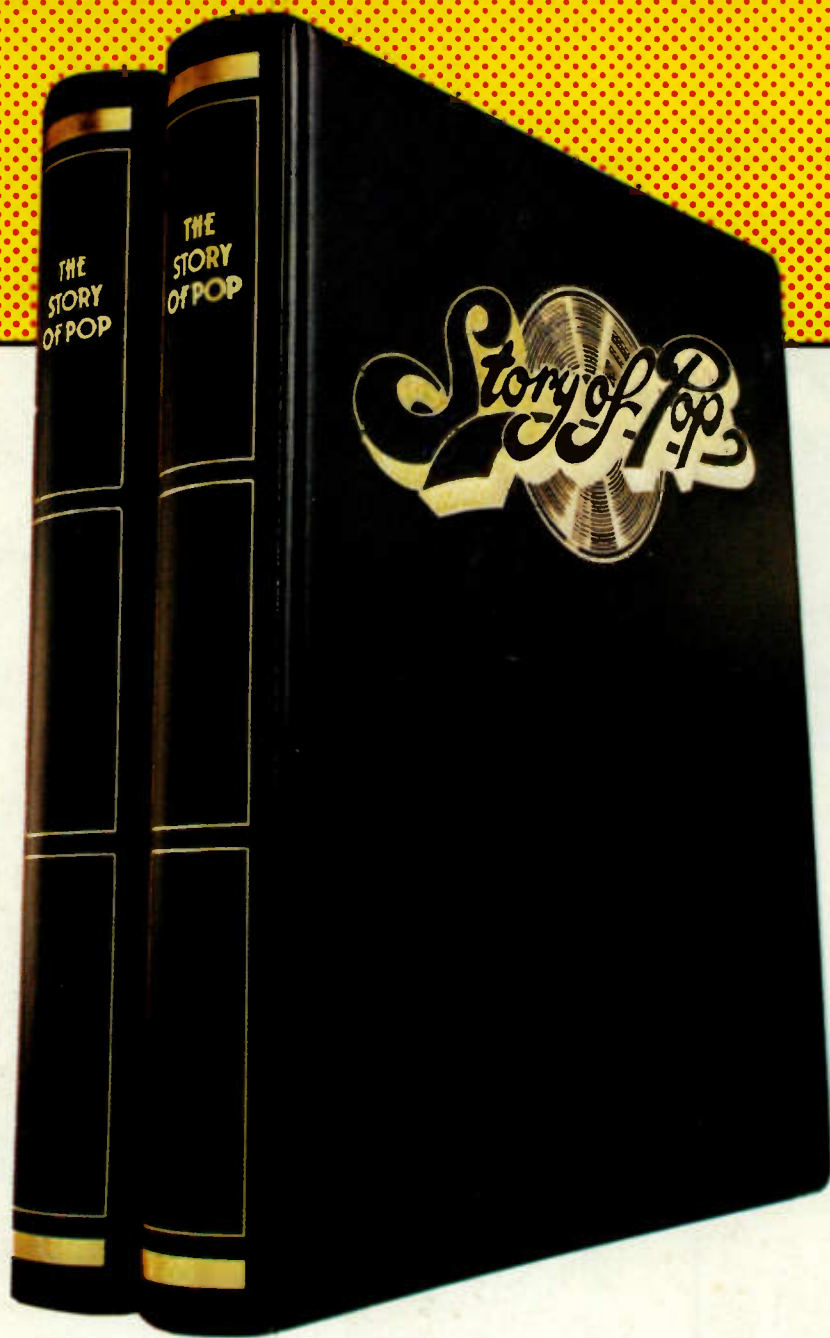
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